

## ABOUT POLITICAL CENSORSHIP

Nicoleta Sălcudeanu

Main Researcher II, "Gh. Șincai" Institute of the Romanian Academy, Tîrgu Mureș

*Abstract: After the fall of Communism it was given a considerable importance to the ethical criterion in evaluating contemporary literature. Romanian society and with it the whole cultural world were trying to identify and fix their ideological wounds accumulated nearly half a century of totalitarianism. The noble intention of clarifying the immediate past, absolutely legitimate, has however slipped into a vigilante attitude that significantly exceeded the cultural boundaries tending to a politicized vision of opposite sign and even to retaliation. Distance between good intentions and abuse is often almost invisible. So there appeared the "blacklists", informal but no less stigmatizing. The phenomenon is not new in Romanian culture. Depending on the regimes with authoritarian tendencies there were, repeatedly, censorship campaigns and were launched more or less official blacklists designed to block public access to those who are at a point in political disgrace. Political interference in literature is not so new, how else is not new nor the purge occurring after December 1989.*

*Keywords: Communism, literature, freedom of press, purges*

After the fall of Communism it was given a considerable importance in assessing the ethical criterion of contemporary literature. Romanian society and, with it, the cultural world have tried to identify and repair their ideological sequels gained after almost half a century of totalitarianism. The noble intention of clarifying the recent past, absolutely legitimate, have unfortunately skidded slightly to a judgmental impulse that went beyond the cultural sphere, sliding towards a politicized vision and even to revanchism. Distance between Good Intent and abuse is often almost invisible. So there arose "blacklists", informal but no less stigmatizing, containing the names of people of culture and writers counted - more or less arbitrary - of being "collaborationists". The phenomenon is not new in Romanian culture. Depending on the political regimes with authoritarian tendencies, there have been several campaigns of "purification" (carlist, antonescian, legionnaire etc.). It is known from past experience (not too happy) that once cracked the aesthetic purity, interpretation of literary work will open imprudently towards interferences, towards extremely turbulent policies, whose virulence is manifested especially in the fall of a regime. What, by more or less legitimate "resistance through culture", in communism, had been driven out the door, behold, in full post-communism it returns through the window and not anyhow, but with unprecedented vehemence. A key role in this "crusade" of moral ablution will have, as an initiator of the politicization of the critical act, what was called "the Parisian group" whose nucleus was represented by two critics from Radio Free Europe, Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca. How will it be acquired, perfected and used, after the fall of communism, that, up to that point, legitimate ideological retaliation, can be seen today. For starters there are purges, excommunications, "disclosures" of course symbolically, and the tone is not different from that encountered by media during communism. The resemblance is striking even. A jdanovism turned upside down, in which temperance seems to have become a negligible size. But what is surprising is that even now, more than twenty years after the fall of communism,

**Section: LITERATURE**

Romanian intellectual attitude seems not to abandon the frontline attitude, the political virulence, and that instead of a natural order of rational dialogue, flexible and, importantly, pluralist. After the unleashing of anger and revenge in the 50s, after the realist socialist aggression, after, finally, setting up a democratic system in Romania, one has said that lists of purge, prohibition of publication, anathema and "unmasking" are simply impossible to conceive if not, then anachronistic. It would have thought that abuse in the so ethereal domain of culture, is no longer possible. But abuse is modeled and modulated by time: from economic censorship to the bureaucratic one, from lists of purges dictated from high chancelleries, not only Romanian, to tacit ones.

An appeal to history is never useless, because the best developer of "Les Liaisons Dangereuses" is memory. According to *The Chronology of the Romanian Literary Life*, on 18 September 1944, "is published Law nr. 486 regarding the purging treatment applied on public institutions, which will come into force on October 8, 1944"<sup>1</sup>. Opportunistic reactions appear very soon. Important to note is that the most effective vehicle for the rise of a certain current of opinion is the press. Already the day after publication of the law, the newspaper "Freedom" appears an article, *Cuvânt la o anchetă. Scriitorii despre societatea lor (Word to an investigation. The writers about their society)*, signed "st. b. ". "Debate" is thus launched. On 20 September, two days later, Dan Petrașincu published the article *Mentalitatea de la „Societatea Scriitorilor Români” (The mentality of "Romanian Writers Society")*, "Criticizing the lack of interest and opportunism of some members, docility towards dictatorship, without disregarding the need cleansing"<sup>2</sup>. Let us not forget that the 1944 purges were not made by communists, those will come later, these ones aimed collaborators with past extreme right-wing regimes. But it is noteworthy how opportunism is controlled by another opportunism. Another observation would be that the timeliness reaction of cultural circles, in this case of the writers, is outstanding against the backgrounds of other less visible circles. Therefore cultural territory was a battleground for all political regimes, especially those totalitarian. Turning on 22 September, we have already an attempt to strengthen censorship, with the sign reversed this time, in an unsigned article, *Libertate și scandal (Freedom and Scandal)*, in the same newspaper, "Libertatea" ("Freedom"): "Freedom of the press must not provide, through a degrading performance, an argument to its opponents. Until there will be established clear rules in this matter, until it will be drawn a precise line to avoid scandal and licenses, until finally it will be legislated, and will be separated light from mist, Censorship and the Commission shall require journalists to watch sternly at the gates of the temple: printing adventurers, and speculators of printed word have no place in it"<sup>3</sup>. A Manichean attitude, widely publicized, can not stir than Manichean reactions open to arbitrariness and revenge.

There are also more nuanced voices warning of the danger. On the same day 22 September, in „Curierul” (“The Courier”), it appears the article *Epurația (The Purge)*, signed by Augustin Popa: "Permanent entries in newspapers, which put to the wall institutions and people, can be troublesome not only for those affected, but for delicate souls who are not feeling well to surgery and disdain scalpel. However, they are a necessary evil, providing useful material to the legislator. But here, it requires a severe discrimination. Because not everything is written comes from love for the people and truth. But under the innocent lamb fur can hide the sometimes the predatory greed of the wolf, desire for revenge and petty interests. The phenomenon must be condemned and stigmatized harshly. Purifiers themselves must be pure. Otherwise, they will be found as guilty before history as sinners are put in the

---

<sup>1</sup>*Cronologia vieții literare românești*, Perioada postbelică, I, 1944-1945, coordonator Eugen Simion, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 37.

pillory. The latter led our past to the disaster today, the former even poison our springs, the rivers of Future”<sup>4</sup>.

These words would have sounded equally wise and in the 90s of last century, after the fall of the communist regime. About the Jacobinism of that time, against those declaring themselves "apolitical", speaks with great justification, in a volume of confessional dialogue, Eugen Simion: „As I wrote before: Romanian intelligentsia has reworked the script exactly like Orwell ... I remember how, after two or three weeks after the revolution in December, I heard at a meeting of the Steering Committee of the Union of Writers the first voices claiming that they are more equal than others. At first it seemed like a joke, then, before I woke up, camps were already in existence. I remained, astounded, at the middle. It was not long and I found myself among the enemies of democracy. A journalist asked my condemnation to death. My former friends and colleagues from “România literară” (“Literary Romania”, the magazine where we published by 25 years weekly) branded me as a hardened “apolitical”. I remember that my charges were brought, that I live in an "apolitical corral". I was, in their imagination, one of those detestable individuals who do not understand calls of the new times ... ”<sup>5</sup>. The victim of the predatory wolf animated by the "longing for revenge and sordid private interests”, about which wrote, in 1944, the journalist from „Curierul”, It could be, as in the memorable expression of Professor Eugen Simion, "A man who goes in the sense of values, without transforming all these into an instrument of moral repression against others”<sup>6</sup> Or, what else can become "revisions" politically contaminated than "an instrument of moral repression against others" in total disregard of plurality or a crass ignorance of it?

Going back to 1944, it takes place, on September 24, the General Assembly of the Romanian Writers' Society, where is elected as president Victor Eftimiu. On 25 September in „Dreptatea” (“The Justice”), in the article, signed as „I. P.”, *D. Victor Eftimiu – președinte al S. S. R.-ului. Noul președinte vorbește ziarului „Dreptatea” (Mr. Victor D. Eftimiu - President of SNS community. The new president speaks to the newspaper "The Justice")*, is reproduced the motion passed "by acclamation" by the assembly of the writers: "Romanian Writers' Society, through its new trustees starts the path of total renovation. Without abdicating from his artistic creed, Romanian writer meant to leave isolation until today and become a social fighter, a light, a guiding of the nation, earning thus its rightful place in the new organization of the world. This mission he can not exercise but only in the frame of the ideas of freedom of the great Russian democracy, which gave to the intellectual worker every opportunity to live with dignity and to manifest as leader of the people”<sup>7</sup>. Beyond the words, inevitably pompous and ridiculous, who are not absent in the cultural communications "to the country", after 1989, the path of total renovation was done by *purges*. And these were soon to be wrought by those who were very apologetic about "living in dignity”. As shown in *The Speech-program of Mr. Victor Eftimiu*, point 1 made reference to „Purification of the society by the fascist elements, as well as those that undermine the prestige and the concept of writer today”<sup>8</sup>. Excommunication of this kind were made often in the postwar Romanian Writers Union, they do it today. On 7 October 1944, in the newspaper „Scânteia” (“The Spark”), the unsigned article *What did Romanian writers in wartime* „unmasks” as well as a long list of

---

<sup>4</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> Eugen Simion, *În ariergarda avangardei. Convorbiri cu Andrei Grigor*, Ediția a II-a, adăugită, Curtea Veche, București, 2012, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>*Cronologia...*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibidem*, pp. 54-55.

intellectuals as D. Caracostea, Liviu Rebreanu, Al. O. Teodoreanu, Gala Galaction, Ion Vinea, Brătescu-Voinești and the list is long. *Purge* is on everyone's lips. It is required the suppression of the newspaper „Universul” (“The Universe”) (*Nu suspendare... ci suprimare/ Not suspension, but suppression*, N. D. Cocea, „Tribuna poporului”, 16 octombrie), „besides the purge of people is required also the purge of textbooks alături” („Scânteia, 16 octombrie). On 22 October, a single voice, that of Ștefan Aug. Doinaș, in nr. 2 of „Națiunea română” (“Romanian Nation”), in the articol *Epurație în artă (Purges in Art)*, denounces the phenomenon denounces phenomenon considering it as a political tulle: „ those urging and yelling for purges are precisely the most labile elements of the Romanian writing, occasional elements and pale, who are trying in this way to make a trampoline for political jumps”. Also says Doinaș: „ In this world of values purges can not be done every moment by anyone, on the basis of a simply political label”<sup>9</sup>. Anyway what is following is the purge triggered by the journalists' union, and then, with a first group, on November 7, that from the Romanian Writers Society. The purges are successive, on several groups of undesirables. It would be funny if it were not dramatic the way on which, on November 13, a certain Victor Ilin, from „Scânteia”, in the article *Trădarea cărturarilor (Betrayal of Scholars)*, reverses nonchalantly the meaning of the term that Julien Benda gave in *La trahison des clercs*, and with a threatening, vehement tone, he argues that the traitors are just writers who are not involved in politics. The “apoliticals” so to speak. Everything's old and new everything.

The idea of purification is not, as we know, only the preserve of communists. What they have in common, all the types of purges, is displaying or even assuming an ethical idealism animated by the “spirit of justice”. It starts from the need to do justice, to correct injustice done. But these inevitably could be made by the production of other injustices, on which mundane human weakness, vanity, and revengeful spirit are not always strangers. Lustration, excommunication, denouncement, however just or unjust they are, belong or should belong exclusively to the secular world. But in the world of „ delicate ideas”, these are included in the register of barbarism. A barbarity not necessarily in its toughest sense of the word, but a symbolic one, no less guilty, even if kills in effigy. And crime is committed depending on what side of the fence we are at a time. In other words, every time we will be, compulsory, on the other side, at least that would be the ideal position of a genuine intellectual. Only that in the case of culture we talk about a patrimonial litigation that transcends the interests of a group. *Grosso modo* speaking, it's like, depending on location, we would tear down, even symbolically each other statues, ignoring the fact that they belong to all. Cultural world is or should be eminently one of pluralism and diversity. Here we cannot apply neither the laws of trenches, nor those of the prosecutors. Ideally, the main moral attribute of this world should be comprehension and tolerance.

There was not a commissioner of the purges Virgil Ierunca but, symbolically, an indirect agent of them he was. This time from anticommunist positions. Leftist, in the country, in the exile he became a fervent and providential, anticommunist. Has fought passionately and uncompromisingly against the abuses of power in Bucharest. But he did not spare any writer in the country, more or less collaborationist. Those prone to slippage and ideological transactions he warned and fined them promptly. It represented a milestone in the moral disaster that the Communist ideology have triggered upon the Romanian culture. With the good will and dedication, man at the microphone of the RFE was, in troubled times, a lively and effervescent conscience. But intransigence is not always synonymous with justice, and good faith do not necessarily prevent abuse. The only apparent fault of Virgil Ierunca

---

<sup>9</sup>*Ibidem*, pp. 84-85.

would be the forced revitalizing of a mechanism, not quite infallible, forced to oscillate only between the cardinal directions of a kind of political schematism. In addition, what, in conditions of oppression and totalitarian assault, appears to be justified, even necessary, the termination of those conditions can become a toxic tool. As an interpreter of literature and philosophy, having a special aesthetic sensibility, the value judgment of the critic from Paris worked mainly in ethical parameters. But, being in exile, circumstances did not permit him a flawless perception on all disposals of moral springs under totalitarianism, being away from experiencing the forms of persecution. As informed as he was, he would need infinite imagination to imagine the arsenal of methods of coercion that the regime skillfully handled, which they relate to individual freedom and sometimes life. Assuming the pamphlet approach, obviously passionate and subjective, Ierunca sometimes forgot that in terms of scale 1-1, the distance between the Academy and the Prison was very tiny, and from the Academy to the Jail the distance could be reached in a jiffy, and vice versa... Virgil Ierunca did not know or did not want to know that the duplicity of some disowned intellectuals saved them and also saved, largely, the continuity of culture and higher education. Duplicitous or not, some like G. Călinescu, Tudor Arghezi or Tudor Vianu represented for many a breath in the middle of the vacuum, even so, with their human imperfections.

There is no doubt that Virgil Ierunca, through his uncompromising relentless militancy, kept away Romanian intellectuals from many slippages and opportunism or, when appropriate, he fined them. But the fact itself to exercise a sort of moral police in critical garb, implies a punitive attitude which cannot be accomplished but only roughly in the frames of objectivity. In broadcasts as „Povestea vorbii” (“The Story of Talking”) and „Antologia rușinii” (“The Anthology of Shame”), Virgil Ierunca keeps an inventory of dishonor, a list of shame, directed to those who are considered figures of imposture in the Communist Party. Honor, defined in terms of Ierunca, it was credible strictly in the conditions in which Ierunca was living, namely in a normal, democratic climate. But on this side of the Iron Curtain honor was hatch in completely different colors. „The Anthology of Shame”, presented on radio and published in magazines in exile, reprinted in the country in lamentable conditions, in 2009<sup>10</sup>, It can be regarded as a proposed "rehabilitation" of the cultural climate by the same logic that of the lists of purge. From this point of view, as proved those lists that preceded it, it is perfectly useless, it has not drained anything simply because such lists can neither influence any canon, nor the history of culture. If we admit that, morally, the anthology could be fair, while admitting that it would be infallible, meaning that each protagonist is judged with the same measure and, of course, none of them is omitted, from a cultural perspective it has no relevance. This does not mean that a moral directory of slippages would be unnecessary, on the contrary, even imperfect it represents a *memento*, more than necessary, to the extent that moral relativism is no less pernicious than purism. From this point of view „The Anthology of Shame” It is a document that is strictly History and which only framed in time and correlated with all other documents of the era may have some relevance. But making it a weapon to destroyed opponents today it is both childish and immoral, as immoral is to ignore and reject it with pip.

If the revisionist movement is or is not a purely literary movement, of an aesthetic approach origin It is a superfluous question that obviously contains its answer. Nobody can revise anything by extra-aesthetic means.

---

<sup>10</sup> Nicolae Merișanu, Dan Taloș, editori, *Antologia rușinii după Virgil Ierunca*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2009.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Cronologia vieții literare românești*, Perioada postbelică, I, 1944-1945, coordonator Eugen Simion.

Merișanu, Nicolae, Taloș Dan, editori, *Antologia rușinii după Virgil Ierunca*, Editura Humanitas, București, 2009.

Simion, Eugen, *În ariergarda avangardei. Convorbiri cu Andrei Grigor*, Ediția a II-a, adăugită, Curtea Veche, București, 2012.