

THE CAPITAL'S MIRAGE

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Abstract: The study debates the dramatic wish of the famous members of the Literary Circle of Sibiu, Ion Negoïtescu and Radu Stanca, to find the Ideal Town where they are able to point out their gift and culture. Several names of towns cross their „ episolray novel” : Vienna, Paris and most of all, Bucharest, which is seen from different angels by the two friends. Unfortunately, because of the uprising communism the two friends idea becomes a mirage.

Keywords : ideal town, Sibiu literary circle, communism, Bucharest, exile

In 1978 Albatros Publishing House prints a book written by I. Negoïtescu and Radu Stanca, intitled *An Epistolary Novel*. The book is built as a dialogue in letters between the two writers. Both Negoïtescu and Stanca were members of the „Literary Circle of Sibiu”, one of the most important groups in Romanian literature during the XXth century. Founded in the years of the second World War in Sibiu, after the Vienna Diktate (1), when the University of Cluj had to move to Sibiu, the Literary Circle of Sibiu was a group who promoted the aesthetic literature opposed to the propagandistic literature of war. Their ideas took the form of a letter published in 1943 in „Viaţa”, written by I. Negoïtescu and signed by Victor Iancu, Corneliu Regman, Ovidiu Drimba, Ion Oana, Radu Stanca, Romeo Dăscălescu, Ştefan Aug. Doinaş. Not only because he is the author of this letter, which is the literary manifesto of the Circle, Ion Negoïtescu is the proeminent personality of the group. Poet, esseist, literary critic and historian, Negoïtescu expressed the programatic desire of the members of the circle to connect their work to the European values and to the European literary tradition opposed to the „exaltation of the rural and ethnic values” (2) promoted in the literature of Transilvania. „The idea of integrating in a broader, European, even universal tradition is not artificially added to the texts through which the members of the Circle legitimised themselves. The harmonisation with the continental cultural tradition is visible from the first pages of the Manifesto of The Circle (1943) ”.(3) The interlocutor of Negoïtescu in the pages of *An Epistolary Novel* is Radu Stanca, poet and playwright. Together with Ştefan Aug. Doinaş, Radu Stanca is the most important poet of the Circle. In fact „the novel” is a „pseudo-novel” made from the letters between Negoïtescu and Stanca, written starting with 1945 and finishing with 1961, the year of Radu Stanca’s death. Negoïtescu calls the selection a “bildungsroman”, a novel of the intellectual formation.(4) This is the silent surface of the book. The context is, seen from the perspective of 2011, more troubled. 1978, the year when the book is published is a year of increasing power for Nicolae Ceauşescu whose dictatorship becomes stronger and stronger. We almost in the middle of what is called in the Romanian historiography as *national-communism*, a form of Asiatic communism imported by Ceauşescu in Eastern Europe. Are Negoïtescu’s and Stanca’s European ideas, elaborated before the instauration of communism and promoted clear and subtle in *The Epistolary Novel* suitable with the communism with strong nationalist features of Ceauşescu’s social and cultural policy starting

with 1971? No connection, their position are clearly opposite. And then how could a book like *The Epistolary Novel* be published at a well known publishing house like “Albatros”, in a number of 13.500 copies that sounds huge for the Romanian literary market of 2013? The answer is to be found in the biography of Negoïtescu, a strong and sad lesson of a great intellectual surviving in the dark age of communism. First, Ion Negoïtescu had a bourgeois education, connected to the values of the European culture and society. Then, and extremely bad in communism, because it was punished by law, he was a homosexual. In 1977, a year before *The Epistolary Novel* was published, he signed a letter of solidarity with Paul Goma, the most well known Romanian dissident writer. Shortly, after this the Securitate arrested him for homosexuality, Negoïtescu wrote a text expressing his adhesion to Ceaușescu. These type of savage harassment, specific for the Securitate brought him closely to commit suicide. As Elisabeth Axmann Mocanu writes : „I visited him then, looking for him, in the ruined Bucharest, at one of his relatives to whom he found refuge. He was laying in bed, after another tentative of suicide, more dead than living.” It is very possible that the printing of *The Epistolary Novel* was, in 1978, a sign of the communist power to show the great freedom that define Romania, where „the mistake” of someone like Negoïtescu could be forgiven if the one who made it was sorry, in public, for it. These and other like these are the circumstances that defined the entire life of almost all the members of the Literary Circle of Sibiu. Some of them signed, finally the pact with the regime and became collaborators of the Securitate. This image of a „ruined Bucharest” after the earthquake of 4 March 1977 can be the starting point of what I called in the title *the Capital’s Mirage*, a Capital Mirage which is closely connected to the permanent harassment suffered by the members of the Circle after the instauration of communism.

If we follow a historic perspective, we can separate the *Epistolary Novel* in two parts : the letters between 1945-1947 and the letters between 1948-1961. In 30th December 1947 , king Mihai is obliged to abdicate and the communist regime is insaturated. How can this separation become clear in a book published in communism , edited by writer who was not at all a friend of the regime? One sign is, in fact, the Capital’s mirage, the desire of two young writers , one living in Sibiu, the other in Cluj, to live in the Capital. The usually called Capital is, between 1945-1947 Bucharest but till late, even in 1948, Negoïtescu and Stanca dream not only of Bucharest but also of Vienna or Paris. After 1948, the two almost stop to discuss about any perspective to live in other town than Sibiu and Cluj. When finally moving in Bucharest, in 1954, Negoïtescu do not tell Stanca that he lives in Bucharest only after he is in Bucharest. The dreams of youth are replaced by the „real politik” of telling things only after they are done. Trying to define the „dreamy period”, I think that we can separate three attitudes regarding the perspective of the Capital. First, there is what we can call the *salvation city* . On 30th of July Radu Stanca writes „ At autumn, I have to find my luck in Capital. (...) It is, for me, the only solution.” More than this, in the same letter, Stanca tries to convince Negoïtescu to move to Bucharest, too. „For you, I am sure, this move would be a real comeback. You would be, at an instant, in the center of the literary life.” . To increase the disappointment for the place, Sibiu and the region, Transilvania, where he lives, Radu Stanca writes: „ When I think what beautiful things we can do there (in Bucharest) , I am really sorry when I see your trying to remain in this province, Ardeal, where even the air of our time as students is not the same.” The letter of answer of Negoïtescu is skeptical regarding Stanca’s

enthusiasm about the Capital : „ At Bucharest, in this poverty what can we hope? (...) Than, do you think that the agitated and crowded Bucharest is good for your health?” As a matter of fact, Stanca never lived in a Capital. He remained in Sibiu for almost the rest of his life, moving in Cluj in the last year of his life. Opposite to the image of the salvation city, we have the *rejecting city*. In 23rd of August Negoïtescu writes to Stanca : „Bucharest frightens me with its air of intellectual suffocation and especially with its unbearable atmosphere of peripheral Paris.” Joking, we may say that it is better a peripheral Paris, like in 1946, than a peripheral Moscow like after 1948. The third image of Bucharest is the *neutral city*, a place where both Stanca and Negoïtescu go to solve different things like, for instance, the health problems of Stanca or the attempts of Negoïtescu to receive money in order to publish the never published, till the Revolution, „Euphorion” review. Between 1945-1947, both Negoïtescu and Stanca dream of living in other Capitals , Vienna or Paris.” I tell you that I prefer Vienna (with all the war and the poverty). Many times I dreamt to have my permanent residence in the capital of Austria...” In the same way, the two friends dream to live in Paris.

The border is 1948. Coming back from Bucharest, adds at the end of a letter : My address is now like that : Sibiu, Str.Lenin (ex- Şaguna) nr.8, dry sign of the new reality. In 22 of december I. Negoïtescu writes about „the dance of the university chairs”, and the fact that very young students become associate professors while the former professors like Blaga „are in air”. A mixture of youth, hope and unconsciousness make the author of the letter be somehow happy about this changes which meant, in fact, the comunization of the Romanian Universities.

Between 1948 and 1961 the Capital is no more a place seen as a hole. More important it seems that the visits in the only Capital which can be seen, Bucharest, are more important for the people who can be met there. I. Negoïtescu writes to Radu Stanca in 26 of January 1951 : „At Bucharest, I met Vianu, Chinezu, Cioculescu and Ion Barbu. Depressing atmosphere”.

An Epistolary Novel shows us two writers looking first for the Ideal Town and then only for a place to live. The strength is still in the cultural debate of the two friends, mostly of Negoïtescu who seem to have an extraordinary power of a survivor. Both for Ion Negoïtescu and for Radu Stanca the only place that was felt like a real residence is Sibiu, „Jena of our youth”. Otherwise, both of them seem to live, after the happy period of their studies, in a never ending exile.

Notes:

1. 30th of August 1940
2. The letter, written by Ion Negoïtescu, under the name Damian Silvestru, was published in „Viaţa” at 27th of May 1943.
3. The manifesto is the expression of several highly educated students
4. An Epistolary Novel (I. Negoïtescu-Radu Stanca), Bucureşti, ed. Albatros, 1978

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