

Regaining Memory and Identity in Post-Communism - Monica Lovinescu's Case Study

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Abstract: *Monica Lovinescu has played a recovery role in the Romanian literature by promoting the authentic Romanian problems, related to the reconstruction of a past seen through the eyes of a mature narrator. The burning subject is directed especially towards the totalitarian period, but also to the reconstruction of the identity and the reassembling of its own history in the form of fiction, in which the reality intermingles with the criticisms and the imagination. The recovery of an exiled writer is quite different, this one recording, besides the general history, the events and the personal states that influenced the departure from the birth country, but also the way he adapted himself later, and this step also implies an activation of the affective memory. The process of the identity construction is complex and diversified, including identity references such as religion, ethnicity, language or family, and Monica Lovinescu belongs to the Romanian exile, to the Romanian literature but also to the radio station "Free Europe", where she activated, the recovery of Monica's past in post-communism having been done through the memorialistic writings.*

Key words: *exile and exiled, recovery of identity and memory, reconstruction of the past, identity path, memorialistic writings.*

”Those exiled feel their home country needs to be rebuilt at least at its cultural level, within the guest country”.¹⁸² On the reconstruction of the past Maria S. Draga mentions in the book *Towards an Aesthetics of Cultural Identity*: “the narrative process of the memorialist literature of Monica Lovinescu is built in such a way that it helps it being narratively known, and it contributes to the *reconstruction of identity*.”¹⁸³ Glodeanu anticipates the struggle between literature and the communist regime since “from now on, be careful how the 1980’s and the 1990’s follow, and we approach to our present days. Who’s going to win? The soft or the hard ones?”¹⁸⁴ She also notices that “after 1989, the chronicles will especially focus upon the memorialist literature, and that of

¹⁸² N. Mihaela Burlacu, *Monica Lovinescu. O voce a exilului românesc*, Ed. Institutul European, Iași, 2014, p.11.

¹⁸³ S. Maria Draga, *Condiția postmodernă. Spre o estetică a identității culturale*, Ed. Universității din București, 2003, p.50.

¹⁸⁴ Gheorghe Glodeanu, *Incusuni în literatura diasporei și a disidenței*, Ed. Libra, București, 2009, p. 238.

regaining the totalitarian experience.¹⁸⁵” The memorialist literature as a means to recall the past is a proper area of manifestation for writing therapy, Alina Crihană thinks in „Dileme și (re)construcții identitare...”, but also some means of protecting one against the terror of the past as the “orientation of the Romanian intellectuals (especially writers) towards memorialist literature is seen as a compensating act, limited by the need to get rid of the personal demons in the past, but also by the new expectations’.¹⁸⁶ Turning towards that past does not only represent an element of the commitment that was made ‘within the new context of the aesthetical revisionism centred upon the deconstruction / demystification of the resistance by culture, but also as a must for their identity deep reconstruction.¹⁸⁷”

By analysing the memorialist stories published by the Romanian writers within the after-totalitarian regime, by also using her observation spirit, Alina Crihană comes to the conclusion that these “represents as many attempts to fight an obsessive history (...), and also the results of the effort to reconstruct oneself within a history that aspires to credibility.¹⁸⁸”

In his *Echinox Papers*, Horvath Andor writes an article on the image of the author after the communist period where he sees that in order to regain history it is essential to “remember, tell stories that are also fictional”. Once consumed by raising its character of exteriority, history needs to be learned once more even by those who already lived it.¹⁸⁹” Horvath Andor also notices that in this fascinating time “the author is in the spotlight. What was his status in the communist period? And how has he changed after the falling of the communist regime?¹⁹⁰”, he tries to explain by reaching the conclusion that “when writes speak of the others, they even indirectly, talk about themselves.¹⁹¹”

Authors have preferences and distastes regarding the after-communist discourse, and the presence of fiction in the memorialist works is a constant feature that guides them to recreate the past. From the way in which the writer recalls history, their faith in the entire regime can be spotted as an essential part

¹⁸⁵ Ibidem, p.11.

¹⁸⁶ Alina Crihană, *Dileme și (re)construcții identitare în povestirile vieții*, Ed. Muzeul Național al literaturii române 2003, p.62.

¹⁸⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem, p.63.

¹⁸⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris, Éd. Seuil, 2000, p. 512-513 apud Horvath Andor, *Autorul în discursul postcomunist, Caietele Echinox, 2001, vol.1*, Ed.Dacia, Cluj Napoca, pp. 173-177.

¹⁹⁰ Horvath Andor, *Autorul în discursul postcomunist, în Caietele Echinox, 2001, vol.1. Postcolonialism și Postcomunism*, Ed. Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, pp. 173-177.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem.

of it. The status of the writer in communism was limited, but now after the revolution, the writer becomes free again, and if during communism they spoke of resistance by culture, now they speak of regaining the past and avoiding all kinds of obstacles. What the memorialist writing shows is also influenced by the psychological state of the author who remembers the past, therefore the process presupposes regaining images and sentences as a puzzle. In this very way, Monica Lovinescu wrote her diaries by keeping observations to a minimum in such a way that she essentializes the content.

In his study on Romanian Literature after Ceaușescu, Dan C. Mihăilescu considers that „today nobody doubts that memories meant and is our supreme cultural revolution after 1989¹⁹²” and that what was intended in the first place was to “regain the censored past by interdiction, limitation or transformation.”¹⁹³

Virgil Ierunca in *Chaotic Voices (Voci în Vacarm)*, in dialogue with Vasile Gogea considers the necessity to reconstruct the identity routing based on memories as essential as ‘we need to assist nowadays to a phenomenon of regaining all that was dragged through the mud, indented, and, up to a given point, even damaged the memory of the entire people’.¹⁹⁴

In his opinion, an important place in the exile memorialist literature have the books that tell stories about the experiences in prison during the communist regime, that were published only in exile and then reprinted after the communist period in Romania as “an important contribution would be to reconsider this group of confessions so that the entire memory of the Romanian phenomenon should not be indented”.¹⁹⁵ But the most important is to reveal what kind of an information they contained, an issue that Virgil Ierunca clarified as he said that those memories contained “what people could not say in Romania, but those who lived a tragic experience before going into exile said¹⁹⁶” by also taking part in creating a “huge file of memory”, as he also thought.

Vasile Gogea also considers that „republishing books written in exile, forbidden, lost, and regained in the country could contribute to rediscovering an absent chapter in the history of the Romanian culture in the final years, or could it also open way of development?”¹⁹⁷ The Romanian territory is open to regaining the history that we know or we do not know, kept in written literature

¹⁹² Dan C. Mihăilescu, *Literatura Română în Postceaușism. Memorialistica sau trecutul ca reumanizare*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2004, p.9.

¹⁹³ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁴ Vasile Gogea, *Voci în vacarm*, un dialog cu Monica Lovinescu și Virgil Ierunca, Ed. Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2010, p.18.

¹⁹⁵ Vasile Gogea, op.cit., p.18.

¹⁹⁶ Ibidem, p.17.

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem, p.16.

outside the borders or as underground press 9samisdat). The regaining is compulsory in order to attain to evolution. Communism is one of the themes that writers also analysed after things calmed down. The works of Monica Lovinescu also contain critical opinions, confessions that reconstruct some relevant episodes in order to reconfigure the image of those times. The communist period is also considered within the books about it, containing episodes from diaspora, critical opinions, but also the way in which Romania is seen, literary and socially, by diaspora.

Dan Culcer presents in the journal *Asymetria* an article on resistance and reconstruction in the after communist period, where he considers personal past as a characteristic of the status of the exiled, as “the elements that we cannot take with us when we leave belong to identity”.¹⁹⁸ As an essential rule in order to realize the reconstruction, after the revolution in 1989, we should mention that “political issues cannot be let in the hands of the so called professional politicians, in the majority of cases patent nobodies, ungrammatical, and rude.¹⁹⁹” The reconstruction of the society should be our “mutual concern: the urge to hope again, the reactivation of the social imagery, dreaming eyes open, work.²⁰⁰” Those exiled cannot but believe that leaving into exile was their way of resistance against pressure, reconstruction starting for them from the fact they were born in Romania, but they also have a new status from the “legal, social, and literary” point of view in the adopting country as it supports them in adjusting to their new life and promoting them to be successful. It is also the case of Monica Lovinescu who became a myth of the “Free Europe” out of what was initially an alienated individual with a broken identity. Now it is obvious that exile offered them a chance to remark, and it was precisely what they needed not to remain unknown, a path towards personal and literary fulfilment. The reasons for choosing the definitive exile possibly regarded, in Culcer’s opinion, the moral punishment of the Romanian politics that does not properly consider literature. Because of the difficulty of coming back to Romania, they choose a definitive exile to France in a familiar country, because staying in Paris is easier now when they are known there than in their own country.

Ion Simuț publishes in *România Literară* an article where he asks: “What happened to Romanian literature in the after communist period?”. In this way, he considers it necessary to figure some general coordinates of the after communist literature; one of them says that the “Romanian writer gathered one’s freedom

¹⁹⁸ Dan Culcer, *Rezistență și Reconstrucție. Cuvinte pentru urmași*, în *Asymetria*, revistă de cultură critică și imaginație, 18 August, 2006 poate fi accesat online la adresa <http://www.asymetria.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=163>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰⁰ Ibidem.

that one did not have in the communist period²⁰¹”, and another informs us that we got as Romanian citizens “the freedom of opinion and the freedom of speech and expression in public or in written”.²⁰² The after communist period comes with a new approach of the social life, but especially of literature as he mentions that “from the opinion that communist Romania was equivalent to a Siberia of the spirit, step by step people reached the certainty that we need a new literature.²⁰³” Ion Simuț also wonders: What could be recovered without reticence? And he also finds a possible answer: “First, the literature of the exile. Then, the unpublished pieces of literature, as it was, not only memories and diaries, but also poetry written in prison or subversive fiction²⁰⁴”, and the part that could be recovered seems to him the larger the more he keeps the distance from the remembered event.

Sălcudeanu reaches the conclusion that „Monica Lovinescu remains an institution. Not one that activated a tough right wing, ideologically supported by neo-communism.²⁰⁵” In the epilogue to the book *Etică și echitate postcomunistă*, where passages for the present study are taken from, Nicoleta Sălcudeanu thinks that “the institution M.L.” is the image of subjectivity if not of subjectivism, an “eclipse of objectivity”²⁰⁶ „N. Manolescu thinks that writers are of two kinds, red and white, the devoted ones and those who resisted to communism”.²⁰⁷ In the after-communist period, art is no longer white or red, as the writer has the freedom of choice, “any writer is free to immediately choose one’s side, as one’s political energy is to be consumed outside of the literature one writes”.²⁰⁸ A sharp issue is that to understand what Monica Lovinescu did in the after communist period, as she recovered after abuse, what she published, and what connections she had with Romania.

Simona Mitroiu thinks that the process of identity construction is complex and diversified as it contains identity references such as religion,

²⁰¹ Ion Simuț, *Ce s-a întâmplat cu literatura română în postcomunism-Simptomatologie generală*, în *România Literară*, nr.6., 2008 poate fi accesat online la adresa [http://www.romlit.ro/ce_s-a_ntmplat_cu_literatura_romn_n_postcomunism](http://www.romlit.ro/ce_s-a_intmplat_cu_literatura_romn_n_postcomunism).

²⁰² Ibidem.

²⁰³ Ibidem.

²⁰⁴ Ibidem.

²⁰⁵ Nicoleta Sălcudeanu, *Revizuire și revizionism în literatura postcomunistă*, Cap. „Etică și echitate postcomunistă”, Ed. Muzeului Național al literaturii române, cofinanțat prin „Programul Operațional Sectorial Dezvoltarea Resurselor Umane”, 2007-2013, p. 187.

²⁰⁶ Ibidem, p.196.

²⁰⁷ Nicolae Manolescu, *Albii și roșii*, în vol. *Decalogul criticii literare*, Ed. Aula Brașov, 2005, pp. 53-54, apud N. Mihaela Burlacu, op.cit., p. 41.

²⁰⁸ Ibidem.

ethnicity, language, family, “as well as several places in memory to which the individual relates especially in his hard times.”²⁰⁹ Simona Mitroiu considers identity reconstruction to be in a tight relation to memory, relating it to the present, and to the opinion changes that appear as it passes by. She also thinks that “identity presupposes both the reference to a set of references relevant to personal identity, as well as to one of collective references that are shared with the other members of the community.”²¹⁰ She also notices that what we live when we remember our personal past is in reality “a reconstruction of our past in relation to the present, but meanwhile to all the moments in time that followed the remembered moment”.²¹¹ In her opinion, identity takes the place of memory as the place where certain marks by which the individual will guide later on as the “feeling of belonging resists to the passing of the time and because of certain places of the specific memory that build identity.”²¹² Monica Lovinescu belongs to the Romanian exile, the Romanian literature, and to „Free Europe” radio where she worked. She inherits her tenacity and the critical spirit from her father, and her smoothness and passion for French from her mother. There are also the past fears that follow the both, the image of communist terror that haunts them in the after communist period too, and Romania does not seem to offer them but temporary opportunities. Yet, as Silvia Constantinescu mentions, the two are permanently in the spotlight of the press that worships them so much that even their mistakes are praised in some ways.

An entire book on the image of the writer in exile appeared in the after communist period – *Întrevederi...* by Nicolae Florescu and the *Întoarcerea proscrisilor* that follows the criteria of some „reconstructive-memorialistic coordinate”. It is otherwise the „first book that Monica Lovinescu realized in order to be published in Romania after 1989²¹³”; it contains “dialogues with her friends, and not anybody”. It also states that “the evidence and confessions are here more relevant than in any other book”.²¹⁴ Glodeanu thinks that the appearing of the book *Întrevederi...* is possible because the recorded confessions are “more transient than ink”, and “the book becomes a real recording of the

²⁰⁹ Simona Mitroiu, *Lupta pentru identitatea omului. Memorie și identitate colectivă*, în *Analele Universității Constantin Brâncuși* din Tg. Jiu, Seria Litere și Științe sociale, nr.3, 2010, p.121.

²¹⁰ Ibidem, p.125.

²¹¹ Ibidem.

²¹² Ibidem, p.130.

²¹³ Nicolae Florescu, *Întoarcerea Proscrisilor. Reevaluări critice ale literaturii exilului*, București, Ed. Jurnalul Literar, 1998, p.182.

²¹⁴ Ibidem.

past”²¹⁵. „By completing the dialogues in *Unde Scurte*, the series *Întrevederi...* realised by Monica Lovinescu succeeds in bringing new information regarding the work and biography of some relevant personalities of the Romanian exile²¹⁶”, he objectively adds. The complete title is *Meetings with Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionescu, Ștefan Lupașcu, and Grigore Culcer (Întrevederi cu Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionescu, Ștefan Lupașcu și Grigore Culger)*. This book reconstructs the image of the writers in exile as it results from the confessions of the writer. About Mircea Eliade she says that he never entered a studio and he was frightened by the microphone, that he recorded all his interviews at home in Paris or at her house.²¹⁷ He is seen as being “brilliant as always, with a whole bunch of ideas at hand.²¹⁸” to him literature and philosophy are way of being into the world, and they are necessary to him, while Eugen Ionescu is happy with his literary career though it seems imprecise from what he says (“I despise success, but I would have died without not having success, as some clerk in a Parisian banlieue.²¹⁹” On Ștefan Lupașcu, Claude Mauriac wrote that he was a “Descartes of our times²²⁰”, and on Grigore Culcer, Monica Lovinescu says that “he recoups for Romania by his affinities to Apunache²²¹”, the successor of Urmuz who did not know his predecessor and he remained as unknown as he was by his successors.²²²”

Mircea Angheliescu, in his article (On literary exile) *Despre exilul literar*, notices that „there was a common feeling that from the exile and the radio of the democratic world (Free Europe and the others), official forgery in Romania could be denounced and controlled.²²³” It was precisely the case of Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca, as „their radio broadcast, articles, notes, and reviews in the exile journals (*Caiete de dor, Revista Scriitorilor Români, Ethos*) were for many years the voices of authority that censored the cultural disaster in our country.²²⁴” In Angheliescu’s opinion exiled are like the “sun flower”. Their intellectual and spiritual eyes are always focused on their friends. They designate the work of art as an ambassador to represent them in front of the

²¹⁵ Gheorghe Glodeanu, op.cit, p.304.

²¹⁶ Ibidem, p.314.

²¹⁷ Monica Lovinescu, *Întrevederi cu Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionescu, Ștefan Lupașcu și Grigore Culcer*, Ed.Cartea Românească, București, 1992, p.7.

²¹⁸ Ibidem, p.8.

²¹⁹ Monica Lovinescu, *Întrevederi cu Mircea Eliade...*, ed.cit., p.151.

²²⁰ Ibidem.

²²¹ Ibidem, p.171.

²²² Ibidem, p.172.

²²³ Mircea Angheliescu, *Despre exilul literar*, în *Revista 22*, Ed. Grupul pentru Dialog Social, 20-01-2004, <http://revista22online.ro/757/.html>.

²²⁴ Ibidem.

interdictions and dangers.²²⁵" The reconstruction of the past of Monica Lovinescu in the after communist period is done by means of memorialist literature, and the couple Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca seem not to have any serious issues in Paris during the time of exile, but they have a fruitful influence.

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²²⁵ Jean-Pierre Maconta-Mboukou, *Les littératures de l'exil*, Paris, 1993, p. 231 apud Mircea Anghelescu, loc.cit.

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