

TRANSLATING IDEOLOGY INTO LITERARY TEXTS

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The reading efforts voiced by the authorised opinions of *Viața Românească* (*Romanian Life*) make no exception to the generalising ideological trend of the year 1958, by contributing to legitimating a typologising mythology in the creating essence of contemporary texts, via articles by important contemporary critics. Insertions of the criterion of aesthetic value seize up the dictatorship of ideology, veiled and subtly omnipresent, in some articles, representative for the aesthetic recovery of significant texts, at the same time marking a moment of the ideological "defrost". Despite all this, the dominant tone of the critic's voice resonates with the political one, the layout of the fictional universe doubling the doctrinaire, including the point of view of typologies. On the other hand, "the communist mythology has achieved the profoundly dialectic performance of proclaiming, with equal intensity, the decisive role of *the masses, the party and the ruler, everybody's role, of an elite and of a single being, a shift proven inevitable along with the affirmation of the totalitarian option*" (Boia 1998: 15).

Al. Oprea's analysis in the first issue of *Viața Românească* (*Romanian Life*) (January 1958), suggestively entitled "Human and social typologies in contemporary prose", speaks about structuring a configuration of the "new character", discussed in opposition to the prose prior to August 23 as a moment of reference:

The frequent character types in our prose before August 23 have been discussed. Were we to be asked about our favourite heroes we would undoubtedly answer: the misfit intellectual and the peasant. We know the peasant typology in several stages. First, a simple character, framed in a calm narration, as in Slavici's first short stories and in Creangă's stories (...). Then we meet the modern appearances of the Romanian peasant, developed in two directions: in the first one he seeks to save his human background in the face of the brutal advance of capitalism, by retreating in the midst of nature, in a sacerdotal communion with the ancient landscape and history (see Mihail Sadoveanu's works), and in the second, the peasant entering the circuit of capitalist life, enslaved by the fabulous power of money (see Slavici's *Moara cu noroc / The Lucky Mill*, etc.), or of land, seen as a means to fortune (see Rebreanu's *Ion / John*). As for the misfit intellectual, despite the impressive number of books which feature him as a main character, we actually find one typology, that of the *fallen*. Remember the endless list of heroes, from Eminescu's Dionysus, a bohemian spirit, a fantastic dreamer, with no links to the practical reality, to Camil Petrescu's Ladima, featuring moments of bleak revolt against society, but who finally embraces the thought of suicide as redemption (...). There is a category of characters which we will search in vain through the typologies of Romanian prose so far, and that is the positive hero. Literary portraiture lacks faces of the middle class

(Oprea 1/1958: 143-144) (our translation).

The compensatory universe of the “new character” brings in opposition new patterns of creation to the typological profile, which can ultimately be framed within the ideology pattern, a general filter through which the types already in existence are critically selected.

Thus,

proudly opposing the environment, the Istratian heroes – outlaws not only in feudal, but also in contemporary times – follow a path of profound individualism. They know only archaic forms of protest and combat, and they find their freedom in a false freedom of rambling. There is no need to prove that this type of bohemian character wears the well-known shoes of the Romantic hero”

(Oprea 1/1958: 149) (our translation).

The country of individualism marking the stance of human “inadaptability” represents a character type deviation, both political as well as fictionally imaginary, from the norms of isocracy/collectivism, further analytically identified in Camil Petrescu’s texts, which are now losing value:

Gelu Ruscanu’s tragedy is the tragedy of the intellectual fascinated by the absolute. As any other petit bourgeois, he cannot understand that truth is only material when compared to issues of time and space. The pixies’ is the dance of the abstract ideas which maim any human contemplating it. As for Danton’s tragedy, it appears that his individualism houses a desire to bring together a petit bourgeois ideal and the contemporary rough cause, the Revolution demanding full dedication”

(Oprea 1/1958: 149) (our translation).

Not even contemporary authors, such as Francisc Munteanu, escape the range of critic “revision”, accused of presenting “misfit” characters, with “petit bourgeois” individual ideals: they reiterate the status of “romantic heroes who have blinded the world for almost two centuries, as their aura creates the most controversial and disputable attitudes in readers and authors alike.” (Oprea 1/1958: 154)

But, significantly, there is another way of approaching the texts by the same authors: the political ideology of “making a character” is subtly replaced by the ideology of “making a text”, with implicit aesthetic ambitions. It is the case of Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu’s study, „Fr. Munteanu: *Statuile nu râd niciodată*” (*Statues never laugh*), in no. 2/February of *Viața Românească* (*Romanian Life*), which critically approaches the narrative laboratory from the point of view of the fictional creation of discourse. Frequently, politics leaves room for aesthetics, in order to capture the functioning of the “nude prose”: “To narrate directly the things you know, to release life within the book, to let it flow as it pleases, without intentions of literaturising” (Crohmălniceanu 2/1958: 131). Francisc Munteanu’s books are viewed through the eye of the literary analyst, not at all rigidly ideological, in order to be integrated into a narrative typology, from the point of view of its value, thus rebuilding the “effect of the real”: “This kind of prose undoubtedly possesses certain direct qualities. The horror of literaturising confers a certain feeling of authenticity. The text, imbued with live material, with facts and details, which can only be gathered by reality, in this random and mottled mix, communicates the feeling of life experience” (Crohmălniceanu 2/1958: 131).

Yet, the impulse of relating to the contemporary contextual and political events reactivates the necessary link to the ideology of “character making”, according to contemporary “directives” of the critics’ discourse:

The novel rebuilds the very thick atmosphere of the immediate years after the liberation. The struggle with the very inertia of the working class is captured well enough, as they

are still captives of the cheap demagoguery related to daily needs, milk, goods from the cooperative system, rations of production. The psychological reflexes of this struggle are especially portrayed, frequently bringing the communists to face situations both difficult and unpleasant”

(Crohmălniceanu 2/1958: 132).

The final part of the study is especially eloquent, as it is oriented towards what the book “lacks”, but it does not drift towards politics, but rather towards the aesthetic:

He is not preoccupied, for example, by the problem of the narrator. (...) It is obvious still, that the feeling of authenticity gets tangled up in these conventions of prose, which the author applies undisturbed, creating weird transitions from the narration of the present, with the intention of presenting the direct facts, to narrating past events in the present. Thus, the scenes portrayed before our eyes acquire a terrible aspect of the *literary*. (...) All the symbols of the *statues that never laugh*, untraced in the novel, but suggested through the title and the ending of the book, seem to try and give a forced external moral to the narration. I would say it does not begin or end naturally, leaving certain situations unanswered and creating the impression of a slice of life. The unfinished destinies (Walter’s, Clara’s, the baron’s) have actually been configured and their abandon is strictly formal. (...) You get the feeling that the writer wants to obtain a piece of paper with the edges naturally cut by using scissors. Even a literary *documentation* breaks through every now and then, full of details collected not from life, but from a lexicon

(Crohmălniceanu 2/1958: 132) (our translation).

Crohmălniceanu continues the trend of critical argumentations, previously started in the direction of validation of authenticity, as an “effect of the real”, in the following issue of *Viața Românească (Romanian Life)*, by fighting against “schematics as a literary disease”, using counter-examples. *Nopti înfrigurate / Chilly Nights*, the text selected as a basis of the demonstration, belongs to Aurel Mihale, whom the critic uses to plead for writing as therapy:

One of the most powerful elements is the contact with the lived reality, the use of schematics being, in my humble medical and literal opinion, a social disease of imagination. The author stops describing the things he knows and has experienced, and begins to depict other imaginary ones, not even using his own mind, but an abstract one, impersonal and dogmatic. A demonstration of the success of such a treatment can be found in Aurel Mihale’s latest book, *Nopti înfrigurate / Chilly Nights*.

(Crohmălniceanu 3/1958: 94).

Seen as a “collection of stories about the last war, attributed to some direct participants”, the book presents a “nude narration”, “without literaturising pretence, based on rebuilding facts and the emotional reactions experienced by the narrator, and communicating them to the author, who seems to have transcribed them as exactly as possible in his notebook” (Crohmălniceanu 3/1958: 94). If Crohmălniceanu talks mostly about strategies of narrative fiction, his moderated political discourse on literature is counterbalanced, in the same issue of *Viața Românească (Romanian Life)*, by Oprea’s virulent answer, focused on the syndrome of character complexity. His study explicitly mingles the two argumentative halves necessary for any contemporary critical discourse: overbidding the political stakes and reflecting it in the contemporary act of creation, sometimes doubled by the necessary “reviews” of literary origin. The final part uniformly groups the whole emotional scaffolding:

How fundamentally can the social and human forms change under the beneficent influence of the storms of history! Gone are the days when people expected the happiness of mankind from its Romantic heroes, fascinated by their pathetic perorations about *absolute justice, eternal truth*. In time, people noticed that these *unique* beings, with rare, noble feelings, are only good at chatting – which is their second nature – and at impudently displaying their bloated *ego*, just like at a vendor stand – essentially being pathetic and incapable creatures. Then the crowds themselves, despised by the Romantics because of their *fadedness*, without a *conscience*, began struggling to find the way to the clearings of history. And to their amazement, the common people gradually realized that they can be Heroes as well. Meanwhile, seeing their relaxed existence troubled by these social earthquakes, our *complex* beings started to stir – part of them resolutely going so far as to sell their *generous* conscience to the retrogressive forces of mankind. Only the truly noble and pure descended from their rostrum of Luciferic isolation and mingled with the masses, seeking a cure for their individualist vices, fighting side by side with the common human being, whose qualities they began to admire and long for. The halo of old heroes is fading. The age of new heroes has just begun”

(Oprea 3/1958: 155-156) (our translation).

Such an uncompromising conclusion needs a solid ideological basis at the level of the literary field, and here the theoretical “revisions” are initiated, occupying the first half of the analysis. The first support point is offered by Călinescu’s view on the “complex character”, which combats, in a famous article, Camil Petrescu’s thesis on its nature:

G. Călinescu debates in that article exactly what the complex hero means. Solely the boyard, according to Duiliu Zamfirescu, a representative of the *upper class* can be complex? False, Călinescu answers, the boyard can only be *stylish*, a mere *mannequin*, devoid of feelings and real thoughts. Only the townfolk, as opposed to the peasants, rudimentary beings by definition, are *heavy with conscience issues* – the thesis of Eugen Lovinescu and Camil Petrescu? False, Călinescu answers, we cannot mistake complexity for finesse”

(Oprea 3/1958: 148) (our translation).

The pattern of the hero in the modern inter-war prose is dissolved, and the following verdict is reached: “Uniform heroes, consistent with themselves are being watched with suspicion while, on the contrary, heroes torn apart between contradicting traits cause sincere admiration” (Oprea 3/1958: 148). “The dogmatic babble” of the modern spirit

chose fluidity and unpredictability in the mentalities of the heroes, chose the *practical psychology* (this term being especially trendy). All of which meant strict determination, distinction, clarity, predictability, rejecting dogmas preventing the creators from rendering the motion of life itself. In return, the cult of the unsure, of matchless compositions, of contradicting characters, was being upheld”

(Oprea 3/1958: 148) (our translation).

In contrast, the pattern of the “new character”, traceable in Soviet literature, “keeping away from the abstract and aggressive individualism of the modern Occidental literature”, sets off to rebuild the ancient humanist ideal:

because our century is not only that of the hysterical turmoil of the souls of petit bourgeois in the face of contemporary social earthquakes, but also that of realising the ancient aspirations of the humanists: the versatile blossoming of the man freed from moral and social slavery, equality in rights of the whole colonial system – the contemporary force of the ancient idea of peace

(Oprea 3/1958: 151) (our translation).

Better yet, such a critical discourse, virulent in the face of any attempt at aesthetic readings, lays bare the “old interpretative tactics”, by taking on, theoretically speaking, Lenin’s “philosophic” model and the ideology concepts of Socialist realism. It is not a random fact that issue no. 4 of *Viața Românească* (*Romanian Life*) programmatically opens up with Horia Bratu’s article, “Lenin și critica literară/ Lenin and literary criticism”, canonically orienting the whole analytic profile of the magazine. The act of dissolving aesthetic criticism is consciously assumed, but motivated in detail at an ideological level. “Lenin’s principle of partiality” is converted in an axiom of the literary laboratory, ensuring the necessary objectivity of the fictional universe:

The principle of the partiality of literature, ensuring the large possibilities of the objective creation, offers a vast area for building innovation and for developing artistic styles. Those who only feel emotional adhesion for the fight of the oppressed masses, those lacking an objective understanding of the scientific processes of social development, cannot portray a vast, versatile and historic representation of real life, especially in a period in which life faces direct combat. That is why the literature inspired by the Russian common people or by the French utopian socialism was fully idealistic and poverty-inspired. That is why, at the moment of defeating the revolution in 1905, Russian symbolism, already socially colourful, but lacking a sturdy philosophical position, becomes mystical, deceptive, anti-realistic, in the era following the revolution

(Bratu 4/1958: 5) (our translation).

The idea of politics definitely favours an attitude of criticism, abruptly associating it with a stereotypical canonical status, which does not allow any other deviations from the norms. The final part of the study concludes the demonstration of the utilitarian-militant mission of the literary critic, who has to double and direct, from the shadows, the creating trends of the author:

The Marxist literary critic does not walk the *path* of literature, he does not trace the evolution of literary events, he does not reconstitute the event, and he experiments. Moreover: he guides. (...) Literary criticism remains a continuous dialectic interrogation and self-negation, it highlights not only the work, but the meaning itself of developing literature, it lives very intensely the literary contradictions, the series of progress which it realizes

(Bratu 4/1958: 12) (our translation).

Surpassing the stage of “interpretative rhetoric or technique”, the critical discourse has the role of unifying fiction with the socialising reality, by acting like Lenin in the sense of consonance “with the main object of creation, the masses.” According to “the social-historic practice”, a permanent means of comparison and relation, the interpretative act of creation irrevocably detaches itself from

the old concept of criticism based on four fundamental postulates: 1. the idea of recoil, of detachment, historically and literally, without which a judgement of value is impossible; 2. the particular elements, detachment from the social and historical dialectic and placement on the so-called *point of view from Sirius*; 3. the idea that there is a truth one can establish on one’s own, eternally valid and not a conclusion mistakenly drawn from collective debates; 4. the idealist consideration of the literary work as self-sufficient unity. In the Marxist view of criticism, literature and literary criticism express a solidarity which is present at any given moment. As a leading force and as history’s laboratory, the party is the means for literature to get its bearings, its active perspective, the *keywords*

based on the exam of objective necessities. In order to root this idea even deeper, so that it may bear rich fruit, in order to contribute to the translation of these enlightened ideas into facts as practical and lively as possible, the literary critic has to formulate the progress of our literature in clear sentences, to reveal the essence of this progress

(Bratu 4/1958: 12) (our translation).

Sources

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