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**ROMANIAN INTERWAR WRITERS'
CONTRIBUTIONS IN SOCIALIST REALISM**

- Summary -

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Abstract

Keywords: committed literature, ideology, schematism, uniformity, new man, revolutionary transformation, the socialism builder, Marxist-Leninist, the Communist Party

After December 1989, there were a number of studies and research on the socialist realism literary critics and historians as: Ana Selejan, Eugen Negrici, Nicolae Manolescu, Alex. Stefanescu, Sanda Cordoș, Vasile Spiridon, M. Nițescu, Alex Goldiș, Andrei Terian, Nicolae Mecu etc. They revealed an, up until then, unknown field of Romanian literature written in the period of socialist realism. The one that stood carefully and objectively on the writings of this stage of Romanian literature was Ana Selejan. So, in volumes as **Literatura în totalitarism** (I-VI, 1999-2010), **Adevăr și mistificare în jurnale și memorii apărute după 1989** (2011) and **Glasul PATRIEI. Un „cimitir al elefanților” în comunism** (2012) by Ana Selejan, and also Eugen Negrici's comments (in **Poezia unei religii politice. Patru decenii de agitație și propagandă**, 1995 and also in **Literatura română sub comunism 1948-1964**, 2010), among young, socialist realist theme passionate authors who debuted after 1948, I discovered the interwar writers who contributed to the literature based on the principles of communist ideology.

Subjected to a pertinent critical analysis, their socialist realist literary works must be set true value in Romanian literature landscape. Moreover, the literary profile of interwar authors who have compromised and collaborated with the totalitarian regime must be updated with the work from socialist realism period. In Romanian dictionaries and histories of literature, the focus is on their work from interwar period and possibly on the one that follows totalitarianism, vaguely reminding of socialist realist creations.

Here is the reason why I stopped on this theme: the need to make interwar authors' contribution to the promotion of interwar socialist realist themes known, among all literary genres: lyric, epic and dramatic. Of course, the crucial role of socialist realist literary critics and commentators in directing literature in relation to the Communist Party directives cannot be forgotten.

What I want to prove is that interwar poets, novelists, playwrights and literary critics gave up to or embraced without much insistence socialist realist themes. Thousands of pages have been written in order to lead the masses in *building new life*.

I tried to highlight those aspects of literature from 1948-1966, which lead it into the pattern of socialist realism. For examples, I have used princeps editions and when it was not possible, I have used the more recent editions. The theme of the paper was addressed first in terms of theory, and then I have analyzed the socialist realist literature. The research methods with my later approach relied on was: investigation, analysis, case study and comparison. As main strategy I can mention systematizing information and structuring it based on a logical plan.

This study can be viewed as a challenge to the contemporary reader who does not know or knows very little about interwar authors' socialist realism activity. Surely the paper may be supplemented by other examples of collaboration.

My thesis was divided into five parts, each with chapters detailing the subject. The first part, called **Socialist Realism. Overview** has three chapters: Ch. I. **Recent Theoretical Boundaries**; Ch. II. **Interwar Writers' Adhesions to *the Method of Methods***; Ch. III. **Current State of Socialist Realism Research**. In the first chapter I have presented several theoretical approaches to the definition of socialist realism. I have use the following critics' studies: Ana Selejan, M. Nițescu, Eugen Negrici, Sanda Cordoș, Vasile Spiridon, Alex. Ștefănescu, Dumitru Micu, Nicolae Manolescu and Ion Simuț.

After analyzing the information on socialist realism provided by these authors, I concluded that the only clear definition, formulated by a Romanian researcher of this literature current, is that given by Ana Selejan. The researcher argues that socialist realism is, on the one hand, an ideologization doctrine of the literature, and on the other hand, the first state literary current in the creation history, which aimed to the transmission of Communist Party ideology. In 1934, at the Union Congress of Soviet writers, socialist realism was decreed as the only direction and creational option in a socialist state. It is a creational *method* was also called *the method of methods*.

Other historians and literary critics have regarded socialist realism as a pamphlet (Eugen Negrici), likened it to a *daily exercise of piety* which consists of beads and uttering formulas of praise, as an *import technology* (Alex. Ștefănescu) or as a *literary and ideological orientation*, which was aimed at presenting reality in its revolutionary development (Dumitru Micu).

For the second chapter, I have consulted magazines such as: **Contemporanul, Viața românească, Gazeta literară, Scânteia, România literară**, of which I retained ten interwar authors' articles (by Eugen Jebeleanu, Zaharia Stancu, Maria Banuș, Ion Călugăru, Mihai Beniuc,

Cezar Petrescu, Lucia Demetrius, Radu Boureanu, Otilia Cazimir and Demostene Botez), which shows that after 1948 they practiced a propagandistic literary activity. Through adherence to *the method of methods* writers undertook to produce a new literature for the masses, which should contribute to their enlightenment. New literary guidance has been imposed through interwar writers' opinions who claimed those thematic directions in their articles, the creator and creational role in building socialism, sympathy for the Soviet Union and its representatives, bourgeois literature disapproval.

Through the last chapter (**Current State of Socialist Realism Research**), I have sought to introduce how much literary critics and historians have objectively stopped on socialist realism after 1989, identifying literary creation themes and motifs during Communist Party ideology dominated period. I stopped on the following literary researchers who contributed to the knowledge of the socialist realist literary phenomenon in Romanian literature: Ana Selejan, Eugen Negrici, M. Nițescu, Sanda Cordoș, Vasile Spiridon, Alex. Ștefănescu, Dumitru Micu and Nicolae Manolescu. From exposition, it is noted that Ana Selejan has the most important contribution to the elucidation of socialist realism, through the large number of volumes published after a thorough research, using all possible sources for identifying relevant examples for the theory supported: **Tradarea intelectualilor** (1992, second edition, 2005), **Reeducare și prigoană** (1993, second edition, 2005), **Literatura în totalitarism 1949-1951. Întemeietori și capodopere** (vol. 1, 1994, edition II, 2007), **Literatura în totalitarism 1952-1953. Bătălii pe frontul literar** (vol. 2, 1995, second edition, 2008), **Literatura în totalitarism 1954. Anul „gloriosului deceniu”** (vol. 3, 1996, second edition, 2009), **Literatura în totalitarism 1955-1956. Clasicizarea realismului socialist** (vol. 4, 1998 second edition, 2010), **Literatura în totalitarism 1957-1958** (vol. 5, 1999), **Literatura în totalitarism 1959-1960** (vol. 6, 2000), **devăr și mistificare în jurnale și memorii apărute după 1989** (2011) and **Glasul PATRIEI. Un „cimitir al elefanților” în comunism** (2012).

In the second part of the thesis, which I called **Interwar Poets Contribution to the Development of Socialist Realism**, I stopped on the socialist realist poetry written by interwar authors. First, I have presented an inventory of interwar poets and approximate number of volumes that they have published during 1948-1966, poetic embodiment of Marxist-Leninist theory and artistically, of the socialist realism method. I found that socialist realism poetry is

rising, as demonstrated by the more than 170 books published in the mentioned period, belonging to 33 Romanian interwar poets with contributions to socialist realism.

As testimony to the public recognition of their contribution to the development of socialist realist poetry are the awards and distinctions given to interwar authors such as: Mihai Beniuc, T. Arghezi, Cicerone Theodorescu, Miha Dragomir, Maria Banuș, Eugen Jebeleanu, Demostene Botez and Radu Boureanu.

Because socialist realist literature was a commanded literature, the literary themes and motifs are the imposed ones. In order to establish the existing literary themes and motifs in socialist realist literature, I have consulted the following books by Ana Selejan: **Literatura română contemporană. Sinteze** (2003) and the 6 volumes from **Literatura în totalitarism** (1949-1960), published between 1993-2000, in the first edition, and 2007-2010 in the second edition. Thus, only two thematic directions were mentioned: actuality and progressive history and, as literary motifs frequently encountered in socialist realist poetry, I have mentioned: the party, the plan, the field, the channel, the furnace, the new man, the wealthy, the imperialism, May 1st, August 23rd, The Great Revolution, the peace, the illegal fight, the collectivization, communist personalities like Stalin, Lenin, etc.

Following the analysis of literary texts, I noticed that the working class struggle against the bourgeoisie and the enemies of the country occupies a leading position in the poetry of the time. The peace, the guiding role of the party or painting *the new man* is also not neglected. The presentation of the past marked by injustices endured by peasants and workers aimed at emphasizing the qualitative leap offered by the socialist revolution, the one that kicked off *the new life*. Interwar poets wrote poems dedicated to prisons and camps, the Great Socialist Revolution from October, the Grivița railway workers strike and August 23rd. They denounced the imperialist war and the crimes of fascism.

In the last chapter of the second part, called **Poetic Profiles**, I have presented 15 medallions of interwar poets who contributed to the socialist-realist lyrics: A. Toma, Mihai Beniuc, T. Arghezi, Radu Boureanu, Maria Banuș, Dumitru Corbea, Demostene Botez, Eugen Jebeleanu, Geo Dumitrescu, Miha Dragomir, Cicerone Theodorescu, Gellu Naum, Dimitrie Stelaru, Cristian Sârbu, Tudor Măinescu. Their ordering was performed according to the contribution they have made through considerable number of editorial apparitions. For the profiles, I have turned to

literary criticism books, histories and monographs, but also to articles in the press, which I mentioned in **Notes**.

In the third part of the paper, **Interwar Prose Writers in the Socialist Realist Epic Exercise**, I have analyzed socialist realist prose written in the period 1948-1966. During this time, good for socialist-realist fiction, a lot of writers, regardless of age, situated in various stages of epic maturity consecration, entered the book market with at least one volume. Socialist realist prose editorial landscape of this period is very rich and varied challenging the one of poetry. Not all editorials were written by the maiakovskian motto, so that only some of them are exponential for socialist realist prose.

Interwar generation editorial share is comparable to the younger generations'. Cataloging interwar novelists, I have established a number of 45 writers had over 167 editorial apparitions. Aside from literary works published for the first time, I have also noticed reprints of novels or short stories. Base publishers for prose of the mentioned period are: **Editura de Stat Pentru Literatură și Artă**, **Editura Tineretului**, **Editura literară militară**, and magazines where realist socialist prose works are published are: **Viața românească**, **Contemporanul**, **Steaua**.

To encourage socialist realist fiction, during 1948-1966 have been awarded numerous prizes and awards to several writers. They were popularized by the media, led by cultural magazines as **Scântea** or **România liberă**. Among the distinguished interwar novelists are: Mihail Sadoveanu, followed by Camil Petrescu, Zaharia Stancu, Ion Călugăru, Geo Bogza, I. Ludo and Ion Pas.

The period of socialist realism is defined by an authoritarian partisan ideology that essentially changes the Romanian prose universe. To comply with the communist ideology, the writers are forced to reflect in their writings the Marxist-Leninist theses, forming the new man, preserving the Stalinist dictatorship. After censorship, class struggle is transformed into a literary conflict, promoting only the working class that is in a false progress. It also criminalizes the bourgeoisie and the wealthy.

As poetry, mainly there are two thematic directions that provide a socialist prose of the time and also historical fiction. Socialist prose of the time is concentrated around two main themes: firstly, writers have presented the collectivization of agriculture, showing Romanian peasant struggle regarding the transformation of socialist village; secondly, they describe industrialization by bringing to the fore the problems of workers in factories, their struggle

against reactionary elements represented by the decadent bourgeoisie. Among the writers who have served the interests of the party through works that met these themes, I noticed Mihail Sadoveanu (**Mitrea Cocor**), Ion Călugăru (**Oțel și pâine**), Lucia Demetrius (**Primăvara pe Târnave**), Geo Bogza (**Sfârșitul lui Iacob Onisia**).

Socialist-realist prose also addresses the theme of war in the Romanian people past with focus on the working class and illegals (**Desculț** by Zaharia Stancu, **Oameni sub patrafir, Întâmplări din pragul veacului, Sub pajura împărăției** by Tiberiu Vornic, **Zilele vieții tale, Lanțuri** by Ion Pas, **Domnul general guvernează, Stare de asediu, Regele Palaelibus, Salvatorul, Ultimul batalion** by I. Ludo, **Nicoară Potcoavă** by Mihail Sadoveanu, etc.). Historical fiction topics and their treatment reflect very clearly the changes that have occurred in the party propaganda options system, lasting nearly half a century. The past has been and will always be considered the ideological struggles pretext and communist regimes have consistently relied on the *ministry of truth* which had to continuously invent the past. Addressed alongside are other literary areas as: hydropower and working sites, social environment, experience and individual transformations (**Lumina primăverii** by Ion Călugăru, **Ion Sântu** by Ion Marin Sadoveanu, etc.).

Respecting the structure of the second part, in the final chapter of the third part I have made ten literary medallions of representative interwar socialist realist prose writers, as follows: Mihail Sadoveanu, Zaharia Stancu, G. Călinescu, Camil Petrescu, Cezar Petrescu, Ion Călugăru, Ion Pas, Geo Bogza, Cella Serghi, I. Ludo.

Socialist-realist prose is seen as rooted in reality as most writers come from among working people. Literary critics of the time thought they created a literature that reflected the profound transformations undergone by our country on its way to socialism, a literature that could be called an active factor of these transformations.

In the fourth part, **Playwrights**, I have showed that there were also interwar playwrights, even famous ones, who wrote in the spirit of socialist realism, contributing to progressive literature development. Unlike the poetry and the prose, during 1948-1966, there were few interwar playwrights whose writings were published. I identified a total of 11 authors which have published only 69 works. As any service to the new guidelines was rewarded, also the dramatic works of six interwar writers were awarded, ones which were in line with socialist realism.

Since the end of the fifth decade of the last century, the drama is the link of the literature that addressed all the problems faced by Romanian society at the time. Depending on the reflected reality, there are many themes and motifs, not different from those of poetry and prose. As main thematic directions can also be mentioned the socialist actuality represented by the collectivization and revolutionary changes in the industry that are found in writings such as: **Cumpăna**, **Vadul noou**, **Oameni de azi** and **Vlaicu și feciorii lui** by Lucia Demetrius, **Iarbă rea** and **Recolta de aur** by Aurel Baranga, **Ziua cea mare** by Maria Banuș, etc. History theatre during 1948-1966 has as protagonists personalities from the history whose aspirations are consistent with the ones of the people. In this connection may be mentioned works as: **Bălcescu** by Camil Petrescu, **Haiducii** by Victor Eftimiu, **Povestea unirii** by Tudor Șoimaru, **Rapsodia țiganilor** and **Cuza Vodă** by Mircea Ștefănescu etc.

Both playwrights representing the 50's and 60's generation and also the previous generation displayed their works in an optimistic tone, showing people involved in the construction and improvement of socialism process.

Although the purpose of literature was the same, one can make a definite distinction between literary genres. Epic genre and lyrical genre include literary texts for reading, which have a confidential note. The same can be said about dramatic works, but only when read. However, they are designed to be represented on stage, in front of the public. Therefore, their reception is a public one, as a group.

I believe that the true value of a comedy scene lies in the interpretation, in the actors' talent transposed in feelings they provoke in the hearts of the audience. Also, the reputation of performers contributes to the positive feedback for the performance and playwright.

In this part of the thesis I have also developed literary profiles for interwar playwrights representative in the development of socialist realist drama. I stopped on Mircea Ștefănescu, Al. Kirițescu, Tudor Mușatescu and Victor Eftimiu. According to the directives of the totalitarian regime, they created a *new drama* where they tried to present as many aspects of social and historical context of the socialist revolution, capturing the specific contradictions and conflicts.

The last part of the thesis, the fifth, I entitled: **Interwar Analysts in Socialist Realist Landscape**. I have structured it in four chapters as follows: Ch. I. **Socialist Realist Literary Critique's Mission and Issue**; Ch. II. **Leading Ideologists and Critics**; Ch. III. **Interwar Commentators in Marxist Analytical Landscape**.

To determine the mission and the issues of socialist realist literary criticism, I analyzed the **Literatura română contemporană. Sinteze** (2003) volume and critique volumes 1-6 by Ana Selejan, **Literatura în totalitarism**. The author believes that in the postwar period, steering critique removes the aesthetic foundation in creating literary words, being replaced by the ideological, thesist and programmatic ones. Socialist realist critique is based, since 1948, on the critique ideology of Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea.

Socialist realist critics' objectives were subordinated to Marxist-Leninist theory, also respecting the Communist Party directives to build the new socialist life. Ideological critics have acquired the role of mentors, educators and recreators of literary works written in the spirit of socialist realism. However, dissatisfaction with the critiques and literary criticism has permanently existed, because it was assumed that party spirit was not sufficiently committed. Thus, it was felt that through criticism the ideas of writers were not transmitted, not verifying the usefulness of literary message in the class struggle.

I have found that in literary criticism and theory field, the number of volumes published by the interwar authors during 1948-1966 is much lower than in poetry, prose or drama, which is thanks to the party program that provided a *verbal critique*. In the mentioned period there are 10 authors of books of literary criticism which published 29 volumes. Critics' and literary historians' work was rewarded with a few prizes (only five).

To demonstrate the involvement of literary criticism in socialist realist literary phenomenon, I stopped to literary critics and historians as: G. Călinescu, Tudor Vianu, Șerban Cioculescu and Perpessicius. They debuted with the aesthetics formula, denying the possibility of scientific criticism. Despite the ruthlessness they showed at a time from being subjected to processes of contestation, switching sides, they ended up compromising by publishing articles promoting progressive ideas of the ruling single party.

Therefore, this thesis started with the intention of highlighting the extent to which interwar writers have contributed to the development of socialist realist literature. The general conclusions of the paper point out that no genre of literature was ignored in order to bring to the readers' attention some unknown or less known aspects on interwar people collaborationism.

For this, I have not neglected volumes of literary criticism and history, militant articles or literary writings from 1948-1966. Referring the variety of bibliographic sources, the reader may

form a conclusive opinion on the process of reception of socialist realist literature, both in the 50's and 60's, but also in the present.

I have paid special attention to the selection of socialist realist literary works, and also critique texts. To organize the manufactured material, I have used the process of systematization. I have started from the suggestions offered by literary criticism and tried to reveal new facets of literary writings analyzed. Each part is followed by bibliographical notes and comments that bring additional information to fulfill the work.