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THE RELIGIOUS LITERATURE OF *THE BURNING BUSH*

ABSTRACT

The doctoral thesis which I have entitled *The Religious Literature of The Burning Bush* is meant to be an endeavour that is equally aimed towards historiographical recovery, aesthetic and theological re-evaluation of the *oeuvre* of the main representatives of the group *The Burning Bush of the Virgin Mary*. The movement that bore this name sprang as a consequence of the privileged encounter between clerical and lay intellectuals, who became part of an intellectual and spiritual meeting which was formed at Antim Monastery in mid-twentieth century Bucharest - 1954/46 (the year it was initiated) - 1948 (the year it was outlawed)/ 1952-1958. The meetings functioned on the model of the Junimea meetings at Iasi, but the difference was that the critical spirit of Junimea was replaced with the irenic spirit given by the Christian spirit that animated the members of the group. This religious spirit infuses people with the understanding that the world exists in the mysterious light of The Burning Bush.

The necessity of tackling the present topic was determined by the significance of this literary form - religious literature - and by the peculiar solutions proposed by the writers of *The Burning Bush*. For this reason, the analysis has sought to secure the position occupied by religious literature among the interests of interwar writers, as well as determine its specific nature.

Another reason for choosing this theme consisted in the urgency of analysing the religious literature of the movement, of offering new data about this lyrical formula, as well as of drawing attention to writers and works abandoned or ignored by literary history and literary criticism. Thus, our enterprise seeks to recover a cultural segment that may complete the existing picture of interwar and early post-war religious literature.

On the other hand, I have decided to study the literature of the BB because it represents one of the first forms of resistance through faith and culture in the face of the totalitarian communist regime of post-1945 Romania. The fact that this theme arouses considerable and constant interest is made evident through the revival of the spiritual flow of the movement, through the recently published critical studies or through the fact that the works of representative writers of the movement have been republished by the scholar Marius Vasileanu as eight volumes so far, part of the

collection “The Archive of The Burning Bush”. Although the interest for the movement *per se* has always existed, relatively few studies have been published on the literature of the writers who participated at the meetings of Antim. In this sense, the present thesis fills a gap in the critical landscape of interwar literature.

The hypotheses at the foundation of this research centre around the desire to turn the hermeneutic perspective towards multiple planes: literary, cultural and theological, in order to discover the unity of spiritual, cultural and artistic vision that is found in the works of Sandu Tudor, Alexandru Mironescu, Vasile Voiculescu, Paul Sterian and Ion Marin Sadoveanu. In this sense, the hypotheses have been confirmed by the raptors and papers I have published, among which I mention “Ranforsarea canonului interbelic in poezia lui Daniel Sandu Tudor” (“The Strengthening of the interwar canon in the poetry of Daniel Sandu Tudor”), published in the annals of the Dunarea de Jos University of Galati and “Paul Sterian si cautarea patetica a eului” (“Paul Sterian and the pathetic quest for the self”), published in the journal *Arhipeleag XXI* press. I have selected the works that are representative for their authors’ creation as a whole, or for their connection to The Burning Bush. I have insisted upon those written as a consequence of the writers’ participation at the meetings of Antim or upon the recently republished texts which have aroused discussions or simply those whose intrinsic value may greatly enrich contemporary readers.

The originality of the approach consists in the restoration of the political, religious, cultural and literary context in which the Antim Group existed, using methods from the sphere of literary historiography which deal with the work as a testimony to the epoch in which it was written. In addition, I have made use of an applied and detailed analysis of the prominent works in order to account for the artistic universe of the above-mentioned writers. Both the analysis and the interpretation presuppose an intrinsic approach, paying close attention to the internal structures of texts (meanings, formal modes, rhetorical and stylistic techniques), as well as an extrinsic one, capturing the relationship between biography and the *oeuvre* and predominantly using the method of biographical criticism.

In this manner, I have repositioned the Group of The Burning Bush in the transliterary diorama with the intention of restoring the picture of a unique moment in our culture.

At the same time, the present doctoral thesis seeks to assess and reassess works that are less known, both in the context of religious literature and in that of interwar or

post-war literature, as it is well known that the writers of The Burning Bush were incarcerated, their works were forbidden and censored and, consequently, they were ignored by post-war criticism and history. Such examples would be Sandu Tudor's *Poemele isihaste (Hesychastic Poems)*, Vasile Voiculescu's *Calatorie spre locul inimii (Journey to the Place of the Heart)* or Al. Mironescu's *Poemele filocalice (Philocalic Poems)* etc.

The main objectives aim to discover, classify and analyse the elements of novelty that mystical-religious literature brings through its message and its specific forms. Through documentation in archives and libraries, I was able to reach the general objectives and particularize the proposed specific ones, as the thesis brought new data and less-known perspectives on the works and writers studied.

The thesis is structured into eight chapters which aim, in light of the proposed objectives, to decode the phrase 'religious literature' and its development in light of the socio-political and cultural context of the birth and dissolution of The Burning Bush phenomenon. In this sense, I have conducted analyses and case studies on the works of Daniel Sandu Tudor, Alexandru Mironescu, Vasile Voiculescu, Paul Sterian and Ion Marin Sadoveanu, authors interpreted in the contextualizing area of religious writing.

Thus, in the first chapter entitled "Literatura Religioasa" ("Religious Literature") I have attempted to define the operational terms that I have brought into the exegesis and to establish the differences of level between religious imaginary/language and that which is specific to religious/ religiously inspired literature. I have resorted to the diachronic presentation of the concept of 'religious literature', dwelling upon landmark moments and representative writers in the field. It must be stated that literary reality has led me to the conclusion that interwar poetry in general and poetry generated by the "Antim Monastery Group" in particular have religious-mystical undertones and modern fundamental aesthetics. From this perspective, the literature of The Burning Bush represents a lofty pinnacle in the history of our literature. The terminological imprecisions that I have signalled, presented and criticized are illustrative of the difficulty in defining such a complex literary phenomenon. Ion Pillat, one of the first anthology authors of religious literature, groups together the 115 authors of religious poetry, under the title *Poezia credinței (Poetry of Faith)*, which is perhaps a more felicitous phrase for a lyrical form that is unconstrained by the dogmatic rigours that church and ecclesiastical literature presuppose.

If we accept the presupposition that religious literature is the literature of Biblical motives, of ethnosophical localisations, of the decantation of metaphysical thrill or of religious mystery, it becomes evident that it is an essential part of Romanian culture and literature, that it was born out of the experience of the sacred and out of the transcendence of certain lay experiences and feelings, that it infiltrated itself via popular forms, first in the works of Medieval writers etc. As such, through mythological inspiration, Biblical or/and Christian feeling, it can be circumscribed to an arsenal of themes, motives, images and symbols of unquestionable status. We are thus confronted with an explicit, manifest religious literature that invokes the Biblical text, the sacred works of the Church Fathers and/or, at a different level, an immanent, implicit religious poetry that stems from a Confessive-Christian vision of the world.

In order to clarify the concepts, I have used in the textual analysis, I considered that it was useful and necessary to survey the theoretical and definitional options of a few theoreticians, critics and Romanian literary historians interested in this type of literature.

I have arrived at the conclusion that religious literature, which consists of poetry, novels, meditation, confession etc., is a spontaneous composition, a fruit of artistic imagination, of sensibility and of absolute creative freedom, without the control of dogmas or of ecclesiastic discipline. In my opinion, the literary work is not consubstantial to religion; in order to be functional at a literary level, religious symbols, which literature resorts to, are transfigured and detached from their dogmatic or cultic coating in order to be strongly subjectivized (expressivized).

In the work entitled *Poezia Religioasă Română Modernă (Modern Romanian Religious Poetry)*, Bartolomeu Anania rightly decried the absence of a monographic study on Romanian religious literature.

I considered that such a study, coupled with similar ones from domains related to the category of the religious would prove to be a doctoral endeavour of utmost usefulness in terms of forging the conceptual distinction between religious-nonreligious or religious-mystical. One study of invaluable help was Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*, in which the author makes useful dissociations between the religious and the non-religious in literature. Just like the mystic, the artist gains access to the transcendent through inspiration. If the mystic is a silent contemplative of the godhead, the artist/ poet communicates to his brethren, through the transfigured word, the glimmer of absolute he could access. If the mystic is dominated by the conscience

of transcendence and the meaning of his existence is the union with God, the artist, in turn, experiences the absolute for just one moment, as he lives in the contingent world and is fascinated with the rhythms, forms, colours and beauties of the phenomenal world.

While both the mystic and the artist make use of symbols and images in order to convey their spiritual experiences to their brethren, the symbolism and imagery of the mystic are conventional, whereas those of the poet are characterized by expressiveness and originality. In other words, the language of mysticism is to a great extent “transitive” in order to centre the interest of the reader on referential reality, that absolute reflexivity which the mystic tries to express, while the language of the poet is “reflexive”, imagining a world that requires the sensitive readers’ unveiling and reconstruction. The former proposes a world of absolute reality, the latter envisages a possible, imaginary world.

All of the above reveal the obvious differences between religious and mystical poetry, as signalled by Eugen Dorcescu in *Poetica nonimanenței* (*The Poetics of Nonimmanence*), a study which deals predominantly with the distinction between the two lyrical types which consists in the field and intensity of the present feeling, with mystical poetry being the direct, lived experience of mystery. If mystical poetry may also be religious, religious poetry is not necessarily mystical. Mystical poetry is a continuation of religious poetry, prolonging different experiences, of various intensity, such as adoration, beatitude or ecstasy.

As far as the present thesis is concerned, I accept the validity of the opinions of those who have invoked the existence of some functional stylistic landmarks affiliated to religion and characterized by a series of features that may individualize them and endow them with a unique status in Romanian literature. In the Eastern cultural space, the phrase *religious literature* belongs to the category of “religious writing”, a term coined by Gheorghe Chivu in his study *Scrisul religios, componentă definitorie a culturii vechi românești* (*Religious Writing, A Key Component of Old Romanian Culture*) in which the author refers to a series of factors that are illustrative through the place, importance, circulation of religious writing and especially through the spirit (*Geist*) and respectively, the attitude that such a literature illustrates.

In the study *Civilizație și cultură. Considerații asupra limbajului bisericesc actual* (*Civilization and Culture. Considerations on the Contemporary Ecclesiastical Language*), Gheorghe Chivu notices that the modern Romanian literary language

allows for a functional variation that is specific to church writings and it is individualized through myriad peculiarities. This style, which we could call, by extension, church style, is not only found in translations of the *Bible*, in books of worship, but also in some works of fiction in which biblical elements are used stylistically; more specifically, in order to create a certain atmosphere, a specific type of sonority or to evoke a certain epoch. Since church language maintains the phenomena attached to older stages in the evolution of language, it also maintains the letter and spirit of the sacred text. It is a counterpart to lay language.

Therefore, I embrace Gh. Chivu's perspective on the existence of a religious style in the Romanian language, seen as a basic functional style of Romanian literary language, characterized through a series of phonetic, morphosyntactic, lexical and stylistic features meant to individualize it and provide it with a special status in the field of Romanian stylistics.

Despite having ancient roots, our religious poetry is relatively recent. It stems from the hesychastic tradition or from the folkloric underlayer, with its roots in sacred books (artistically recapturing themes, motives, images, symbols), and in folk literature from which the religious sentiment transpires. The beginnings of written language and the formation of literary language are closely linked to sacred Christian texts such as *Biblia de la București (The Bucharest Bible)*, *Cazania lui Varlaam (Varlaam's Book of Sermons)*, *Psaltirea lui Dosoftei (Dosoftei's Psalm Book)*. These are only a few examples of church texts that have contributed to the development of Romanian thought and poetic language. In the context of Romanian spirituality, it is significant that the first poets were churchmen endowed with poetic grace, among whom metropolitans Varlaam, Dosoftei or Simion Ștefan are the most well-known. For example, Dosoftei's *Psalm Book* is not merely a translation, but also a profoundly original work, whose language springs from the spoken language of the people. Starting with the sixteenth century, religious poetry has circulated particularly in the shape of carols and star songs.

As a testimony and faithful offspring of our old written culture, *the religious text* lodged itself in Romanian literature, starting in particular with mid-twentieth century, as an example of continuity and stability in a culture that was feverishly looking for its own modern literary forms. In the same epoch of rapid change of cultural and mentality models, *religious writing* had proven to be a remarkable spring

of inspiration, a reservoir of stylistic devices and a rhetorical model to which cultured authors adhered either voluntarily or involuntarily.

I may conclude that I did not have a proper mystical-religious literature until the interwar period. The small number of prayers, hymns or psalms were a result of the influence of French Romanticism rather than a religious or mystical proneness of the Romanian poetic spirit. Therefore, we may truly speak of religious poetry only starting with the first decades of the twentieth century, in the works of poets whose works have a lyrical structure and a poetic vision that is adequate to the mystical-religious field. Thus, we opted for the generality induced through the phrase *religious literature* assumed in spirit (*Geist*), as a definitional component of religious writing.

By “contextualizing”, in the case of the writers of *The Burning Bush*, extratextual reality, the political context, the historical reality of Romania around the period of the instauration of communism, all help explain the origin of the group and its opting for a literary genre, an alternative and compensatory one when faced with oppression and aggression. In the study about *The Burning Bush* written by the late venerable metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală, the author considered the Antim Monastery movement to be a necessary preparation for entering the Great Communist Darkness, which would last for nearly fifty years in Romania, as the mysterious key to Christian survival was withdrawing and hiding away in the sacrament of the Lord’s Prayer.

The pulpit literature (sermons, types of catechism etc.), cloister literature, theological and philocalic writings, hymns and the prayers by Daniil Sandu Tudor and Paul Sterian confirm a thematic and poetic variety which my doctoral research attempted to account for. In modern poetic terms, “the intertexts” of *The Burning Bush* represent a reality that resists all conventional taxonomies.

In the second chapter, **The Socio-political and cultural context of the apparition and dissolution of the spiritual phenomenon of The Burning Bush**, I analysed the impact level of the factors that generated and influenced the advent and existence of such a complex cultural and spiritual epiphenomenon. I have started from the “spirit of the age” that postulated a growing interest for spiritual matters and extended my interest towards presenting the religious intertwining of the predominant literary movements of the age (sămănătorism, poporanism, orthodoxism), with the inherent employment of publications as well as lay and religious figures who influenced the ideas of the age, such as Nichifor Crainic or Nae Ionescu.

It is my view that there are two competing directions at play which define the cultural spectrum of the epoch: traditionalism and modernism, with echoes in autochthony and Europeanism. As Eugen Lovinescu stated in *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* (*The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*), the two forces of literature - the novelty-creating spirit and the conservative spirit - persist and centre themselves around two movements and two main publications, *Gândirea* (*The Thinking*) and *Sburătorul* (*Hyperion*).

From a political standpoint, the end of World War II in Europe (May 1945) did not bring about peace by guaranteeing the political independence of every state, but instead brought a new occupation through the so-called “liberation armies”. According to Stalin’s vision, those who ensured military occupation were the ones to introduce their own political model. The immediate consequence of demarcating the spheres of influence was the instauration of communist regimes with the help of the Red Army in Central and Eastern European states.

The devastating effects of World War II were strongly felt between 1945-1950, but also in the ensuing period, especially on a spiritual level. At the end of the universal conflict, the Soviet Union occupied the greatest part of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the Baltic Peninsula. In the occupied states, the U.S.S.R. offered active aid to the leftist, pro-communist regimes, which acceded to power with the help of the Red Army.

As far as Romania is concerned, the Soviet Union imposes Petru Groza’s communist-dominated government at the command of Andrei I. Vișinski. On August 21st 1945, King Michael I launched “a royal strike”, refusing to further promulgate the government’s decrees and laws. Between the 7th and 18th of May the trial of Ion Antonescu and of his main collaborators takes place. Ion Antonescu was sentenced to death and executed on the 1st of June 1946. During the trial, the communists associated the historical parties with Antonescu’s government in order to discredit and blame them. On the 30th of December 1947, King Michael I was forced to abdicate and go into exile. Thus, the last obstacle that stood in the way of a complete instauration of communist power in Romania was removed.

After 1947, Romania evolved on the orbit of ideological and economic influence of the U.S.S.R., entering the stage of Stalinist communism. The latter brought with it persecution and martyrdom.

On the literary plane, the post-war period is one of changes and reversals of value. The influence of politics and ideology upon literature is so profound that art in general and literature in particular become tools of “class struggle” and instruments of provocation. “Socialist realism” becomes the new predominant aesthetic formula.

The period 1950-1960, which Marin Preda called “the besetting century”, brings about a reversal of values and of axiological criteria, “placing the equals sign between literary, political, government and communist ideologies”.

According to critic and literary historian Alexandru Piru, who selected literary generations according to age, themes and critical authority, at the beginning of the post-war era, three generations coexisted: writers over 60, educated at the beginning of the century (George Bacovia, Tudor Arghezi, Mihail Sadoveanu, Ion Agârbiceanu, Gala Galaction), writers between the ages of 40 and 60, most of them modern (Lucian Blaga, Alexandru Philippide, Vasile Voiculescu, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Ion Pillat, George Călinescu, Tudor Vianu) and the young generation of writers under 40, who had only recently made a name for themselves, inspired by the models of the interwar generation (Nicolae Labiș, Nichita Stănescu, Marin Sorescu, Ștefan Augustin Doinaș).

The political climate would change the taste of the readers, but also the literary orientation, artistic and thematic sensibility, subjects and artistic language, while also partially reforming the modernist canon. The newly installed power purged political and literary figures. Right-wing writers, members of the *legionari* (Members of the Iron Guard) or philo-Germans are labelled as collaborators and are eliminated from public life and arrested (Nichifor Crainic, Vasile Voiculescu, Daniile Sandu Tudor), while others decide to side with the new political regime (G. Călinescu, Tudor Arghezi or Mihail Sadoveanu), all the more considering that the new political power is interested in using literature and the arts as a means of propaganda, of disseminating the ideas that legitimate it. Shortly thereafter, the political sphere controls literature by means of censorship and the *Securitate*, subjugating it to its propagandistic aims (in 1948 the number of banned books reaches 8000, and in 1949 the General Direction of the State’s Publications, that is “Cenzura” (“Censorship”), is founded. Writers living in that age such as Mihai Beniuc, A. Toma, Nicolae Tăutu, Maria Banuș, Victor Tulbure, Dan Deșliu, Eugen Frunză, Victor Eftimiu and others publish works that are commissioned by the party and which answer the ideological demands of the time.

However, opportunities for an authentic type of literature still arise, as some works escape the vigilance of censorship either due to the literary prestige of their author, or the wish of the authorities to reconstruct their image and credibility in front of the intelligentsia, a social class whose loyalty they sought.

This was the case of poets such as Tudor Arghezi, who published the volumes *1907* and *Cântare omului (Ode to Man)* in 1955 and 1956, or novelists such as G. Călinescu - *Bietul Ioanide (Poor Ioanide)*, 1953, Marin Preda - *Moromeții*, 1955, Titus Popovici - *Străinul (The Stranger)*, 1955 or Eugen Barbu - *Groapa (The Pit)*, 1957.

After the fall of communism, any classification of post-war works brought to the forefront the negative role of the political factor, as the latter indisputably left a mark on the evolution of literature, both on a thematic level and on the level of expressiveness. In this sense, Ion Simuț proposes a classification of works from the communist period legitimized through the relation between the respective work and the totalitarian regime: the “opportunistic literature” of writers aligned with the communist ideology, the “escapist literature” which attempts to elude censorship through symbolic fiction or the “subversive literature”, which does it through the transfiguration of reality with hidden, allusive approaches and the “literature of dissent and exile”, exemplified by the writers who overtly contested the regime, or who chose to go into exile.

Such is the criteria with which critic Eugen Negrici also operates, when he speaks of the “subjugated literature” of communism, on the one hand, and the “tolerated literature” of the writers who do not transgress aesthetical canons and manage to stay true to the literality of the text, despite all the ideological and political barriers.

In this period and in this political and ideological context, members of two cultural groups were framed in a Stalinist type of trial: “the Noica-Pillat lot” and “the Teodorescu Alexandru and others lot”. In the case of the Noica-Pillat lot, the main charges were the popularization of certain literary or philosophical texts: Noica’s philosophical essay, *Povestiri despre om (Stories on Man)* and Dinu Pillat’s novel *Așteptând ceasul de apoi (Waiting for the Twelfth Hour)*, as well as the texts of their exiled friends, Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade or Vintilă Horia.

After a brief trial that lasted only two weeks, in February 1960, the 25 defendants received very harsh punishments, up to 25 years of prison for C. Noica and Dinu Pillat.

Starting with the 14th of June 1958, Roman Braga, Sofian Boghiu, Felix Dubneac, Benedict Ghiuș, Alexandru (“Codin”) Mironescu, Arsenie Papacioc, George Vășii, Șerban Mironescu from the Alexandru Teodorescu lot were arrested. The arrests continued on the 29th of July 1958 with Dan Grigore Pistol and Nicolae Rădulescu and on August 5th, Gheorghe Dabija and Vasile Voiculescu were arrested as well. Dumitru Stăniloaiie was incarcerated on the 4th of September, and Emanoil Mihăilescu on the 18th of September. Other notable figures that were arrested include Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania, Grigorie Băbuș, Arsenie Boca, Nicolae Bordașiu, Roman Braga, Nichifor Crainic, Gheorghe Dabija, Anton Dumitriu, Paul Constantinescu, Constantin Joja, Alexandru Elian, Antonie Plămădeală, Ion Marin Sadoveanu, Andrei Scrima, Paul Sterian, Vladimir Streinu, Petroniu Tănase, Vasile Vasilache and many others.

As a result of Sentence 125 of the 8th of November, Folder 2164/1958, decreed by The Military Tribunal of Region Military II, *The Antim Monastery Group* was sentenced to prison, with its participants accused of “crimes against the social order and intense criminal activity against the working class and the revolutionary movement”, which would lead to the dissolution of the movement.

In the next chapter, **The History of The Burning Bush Movement**, I offered necessary coherence to the existing data (from journal entries, memoirs, testimonies, political files, *Securitate* notes etc.) about the forming, functioning and dissipation of The Burning Bush. During the dramatic years of the political regime change and instauration of communism, the Antim movement represented a bastion for traditional cultural values. Lay men of culture, but also men of the cloth, between whom personal bonds as well as cultural and religious affinities were formed, united into a movement of resistance through culture and faith.

I sought to give coherence to the little data about the forming and functioning of The Burning Bush, a group whose juridical status was that of cultural association, a status obtained by Sandu Tudor in 1946. I paid special attention to the 1943 Cernauti Symposium held under the patronage of metropolitan Tit Simeleu, a great Romanian orthodox scholar. The latter advised Sandu Tudor to start an organization that would fight for the preservation of traditional orthodox values. Undoubtedly, the advent of *The Burning Bush* represents an important moment for Romanian spirituality after Paisie Velicovschi’s Monastery of Neamt movement (1722-1794) and that of St. Hierarch Calinic at Cernica Monastery (1787-1860).

The association went through multiple stages:

- 1- the early stage, marked by literary circles and the Cernăuți symposium (1943-1945);
- 2- the consolidation stage of the religious-spiritual and cultural-literary program within the monastery (1945-1948);
- 3- the wandering stage, when the monk group is moved to Neamț Monastery at the order of Patriarch Justinian, and the Bucharest meetings take place clandestinely in various monasteries (Schitul Maicilor, Plumbuita) or private lodgings (Alexandru Mironescu, Constantin Joja, Olga Greceanu); it is in this period that Sandu Tudor is first detained (1949-1952);
- 4- the persecution stage; the meetings are held clandestinely in the lodgings of Alexandru Mironescu, Vasile Voiculescu or Barbu Slătineanu, until the arrest of the whole lot (1952-1958).

From a legal standpoint, the association operated between 1946 and 1948, when it was outlawed. This was the confusing period of regime change and Antim represented a bastion of cultural and religious faith. The nucleus of the group was made up of lay intellectuals: Vasile Voiculescu, Alexandru Mironescu, Paul Sterian, Ion Marin Sadoveanu, Serban Cioculescu, Alexandru Elian, Vladirmir Streinu, but also clerics such as Vasile Vasilache, Benedict Ghius, Sofian Boghiu, Adrian Fageteanu, Andrei Scrima etc. After the association was banned, Antim would still be the meeting place of the main members until 1952, but it would no longer have a public character. Starting with 1952, some of the lay members of the group were banned from publishing, but would still meet in private lodgings in order to read their work. In 1958, the activity of the group completely stopped when its most important members were arrested.

The content *per se* of the thesis is fuelled by an analysis of the literary works of The Burning Bush, especially of the works in which the influence of hesychasm may be appropriated in the attempt to give shape to what Valeriu Anania called “literatura RA” (“BB literature”). This set of analyses makes up **chapters IV-VIII**.

Chapter IV is dedicated to the life and works of Sandu Tudor, the leader of the group, a complex and controversial figure. I evoked both Tudor the journalist, who is in charge of a few publications and is a feared polemicist of his age, as well as Tudor the essay writer. Surely, Tudor’s poetic creations took pride of place. If the volume *Comornic*, the only one published in his lifetime, may draw the impression

that he is solely a minor poet who imitates Bacovia or Minulescu, the prayer hymns showcase a fundamentally different lyrical tone. His authentic poetry can be found especially in *Imnul acatist la Rugul Aprins al Maicii Domnului (The Prayer Song on The Burning Bush of the Virgin Mary)* and in the mystical, hesychastic poetry written at Rarau or in prison, published posthumously under the title *Poezii isihaste (Hesychastic Poems)*. Sandu Tudor remains the central figure of the group both as a leader, as well as the only one of the “Alexandru Teodorescu and others” lot who died at Zarca Aiudului as a martyr, confessing his existential and religious creed.

Chapter V refers to Alexandru Mironescu, an author who is less known nowadays. Although he was banned from publishing in 1949, he persisted in writing essays or poetry, novels and drama until his death in 1973 (with the exception of the six years of imprisonment), so he is one of the few writers who had closet literature during communism. I was drawn to his activity as an essay writer, journal of ideas, especially the volume *Floarea de foc (The Fire Flower)*, written in prison, memoirs, but also the poet whose ecstatic visions were reunited in the posthumous volume *Poeme filocalice (Philocalic Poems)*.

Chapter VI is dedicated to the group’s most important writer, Vasile Voiculescu. The analysis was primarily focused on the works which transposed into creation the teachings inspired by Orthodox-mysticism, internalized during the meetings of The Burning Bush. As the indictment before the arrest states, mystical poems represent an essential part of his *oeuvre*. Scholars such as Zoe Dumitrescu - Busulenga or Valeriu Anania stress the fact that, out of all the lay members of the BB, Vasile Voiculescu was the one who delved the deepest into mystic orthodox teachings, projecting them both into his life and into his post-WW2 works. In the case of Voiculescu, the distinction between religiously-inspired poetry, which often presupposes merely a simple versification of themes and biblical motives, and mystical poetry, which entails spiritual assent, repentance, contemplation and a glimpse of God is evident if we look at angel poems or poems from the last part of his life. Thus, the analysis was centred on *Sonete (The Sonnets)* in order to grasp the stages of love as ages of spiritual development whose end is the mystical union with Divinity. The analysis was also focused on the volume *Calatorie spre locul inimii (Journey to the Place of the Heart)*, an artistic rendering of hysichastic teachings about the plunge of the mind into the heart, about the marriage of reason and feeling as a premise of hysichia. And because prose represents an essential part of Voiculescu’s

works, I have analysed *Zahei Orbul (Zahei the Blind Man)*, a novel which displays all the features of hagiographic narrative.

Chapter VII is an analysis of the work of Paul Sterian. A complex interwar figure, he stood out as an active publicist of his age, wrote poetry, reports and literary reviews, but also economic articles. In 1931, he published the avantgarde manifesto “Poezia agresiva sau poemul-reportaj” (“Aggressive Poetry or the Poem-as-Report”) in the magazine *unu*. He would also be one of the founding members of the group “Criterion”, alongside Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian and Mircea Vulcanescu. He is the author of many poetry volumes, of which the most important one is *Acatistul Sfintei Cuvioase Paraschiva cea Noua* (The Prayer Song of St. Paraschiva the New), his first piece of writing in which he imitates the byzantine canons of the species and *Razboiul nevazut. Viata de indumnezeire a sfantului parintelui nostru Paisie cel Mare* (*The Unseen War. The Holy Life of Our Holy Father Paisie the Great*), a text in which he lyricizes the hesychast teaching about the stages of the spiritual life in its ascent to perfection.

In **the last chapter** I tackled the personality and work of Ion Marin Sadoveanu, playwright and drama critic, novelist and publicist. Although the religious aspect is not a feature of his prose work, as the writer is a realist and a moralist, he took part in the Antim meetings, where it is said he discovered hesychia - V. Anania, *Rotonda plopilor aprinsi* (*The Rotunda of the Poplars*) - and gave lectures on the history of drama in the Middle Ages. The volume *Cantece de rob* (*Slave Songs*) brings together the poems of a pious man waiting to meet with God.

Consequently, I have realigned the literature of *The Burning Bush* writers with an ideology, an imaginary and an aesthetics specific to the resurrection of traditionalism and to the recurrence of modernism preoccupied with the bipolar redefinition of Man. By choosing to write about the five authors, I sought a recognition of the option through which the heritage of modernism may also be simultaneously embraced alongside traditional “axiological enhancements”, which are primarily religious, and the purposeful assumption of other fundamental values of the twentieth century, before the Foucaultian death of modern man.

It is worth noting that my desire is to retrace, recover and repair the paths towards a rebirth of hesychia, in the manner of *The Burning Bush*, with everything that is secondarily related to the proneness towards reason and science in Alexandru Mironescu’s ideal version, with the devotion towards progress in faith displayed by

the pious, venerable Daniil Sandu Tudor and with the valorisation and betterment of the human condition after the meaning-giving model offered by Vasile Voiculescu, Ion Sadoveanu or Paul Sterian.

Thus, even if the bird flew away from within itself, “Man”, as he was projected at *The Burning Bush* meetings, did not die; he is present among us, thanks to the religious literature that Daniil Sandu Tudor and Paul Sterian envisaged as a reflex of the worship order (prayer songs, hymns and sermons) and as a “gift of silence” beyond the waves of the Styx which separates the profound self of Vasile Voiculescu, Alexandru Mironescu, Ion Marin Sadoveanu from the politically and ideologically controlled world of the communist Hades.

As could be noted, the object of the doctoral study was the recovery, reanalysis and rereading of *The Burning Bush* as architext, especially the exegetical forging the literature of the five aforementioned authors (Daniel Sandu Tudor, Alexandru Mironescu, Paul Sterian, Vasile Voiculescu and Ion Marin Sadoveanu), considered to be representative for the central axis of the group - hysichia.

I opted for a dioramic perspective, being convinced that the lives and works of these authors were influenced by the Christian atmosphere and the apostolic spirit from the Antim monastery. In this sense, I have sought diversity without losing the unity of artistic vision in the works studied. The works were studied both from a literary and theological perspective. *Auri sacra fames!* Religious ideas and the structures of the religious imaginary represent the main source and resource for the *Burning Bush* group.

Such a complex and complete approach cannot elude the advantage given by intertextuality, which enabled me to reconstruct the religious texts of *The Burning Bush* - “the religious works”, be they prayer songs, hymns, poems with or without angels, novels, essays etc. - and place them into a modern dialogue with interwar and post-war literature, making them essential pieces in this encounter, albeit sadly ideologically mutilated and strongly axiologically damaged.

Implicitly, I intended to establish the parallax under which I may include the accomplishments and echoes of the religious and mystical poetry of *The Burning Bush* and, subsidiary, I established the rightful place for these creations within the dynamics of the vernacular cultural and literary phenomenon.

Due to systematization reasons, thematic equilibrium and idea constraints, I projected and finalized the research into eight chapters, atomized into subchapters

continuously refuelled with the synergy of the spiritual experiences of *The Burning Bush*.

Following the advice of my thesis supervisor, I paid close attention to what was conserved at a literary level, beyond the irregularities, antagonisms, atrocities and paradoxes of the twentieth century - which include liberalism and totalitarianism, communism and suppressed freedom; Nazism and Stalinism; the crises of humanism and humanitarianism; the monads of the new order; the reversal of the traditional axis of values etc. The authors studied strengthened my conclusion that, beyond any axiological obturations, the religious alternative found in the literary architext of the Antim Monastery Group, with its irenic soothing manages to pull through. Considering the complexity of the matters analysed and discussed, I suggested an inter- and/or transdisciplinary approach that is tolerant towards diversity of option and literary, cultural, philosophical, politological and theological vision.

The axioms of transdisciplinarity, in the version offered by the “manifesto” put forth by Basarab Nicolescu in 1996 (and translated in 1999) invalidates the failure of modernist projects, be they older and recent, to build homogeneous structures, ignoring the diversity of cultural realities that attest the existence within the same epoch of multiple worlds, each with its own general norms of existence that are inadequate in the context of others, and especially inadequate in the face of those that claim hegemonic rights. Communism, Nazism and Globalism have forced the limits of discontinuity, without considering the fact that the universe in which we live is not a homogeneous one, but a multi-layer(ing) axiological reality, with each cultural continent or spiritual plane having its own functioning dynamics that is structurally different and tolerant, on a case by case basis, towards neighbouring ones.

The charge that can be made against the previous century is not that it did not consider the historical effects of discontinuity, a phenomenon that entails the existence, within worlds and beyond them, of a non-resistance zone that cannot be captured by the experiences, representations, descriptions, images or formalizations of our imaginary. This zone is ontologically translucent, of absolute transparency of the human condition, associated by Basarab Nicolescu to the sacred, a division that makes the flow of virtualized or classic information possible, crossing all the levels/layers of the universe in which we live, ensuring their coherence, self-consistency and tolerance.

This sacred dimension of human beings, as a response to “the death of man” (postulated by Michel Foucault), is assigned by Basarab Nicolescu to “Hidden Third”, which plays a vital role in the interaction between the transdisciplinary “Object”, constituted by the movement of *The Burning Bush of the Virgin Mary*, accepted as the “sum” of religious, ideological, literary, cultural etc. levels of reality and its complementary zone of “non-resistance” and its transdisciplinary “subject”, embraced in this case as the “sum” of aesthetic levels of perception and its complementary area of “non-resistance”.

The “phenomenon” is subtle and inaccessible to those unidirectionally, disciplinary or expansionistically engaged, which results in the failure of impressionistic, thematic, secularized/ secularizing criticism. The spiritual phenomenon of *The Burning Bush* allows, through the zone of “absolute transparency”, for the communication between the “flow of information that traverses the external world” and “the flow of conscience that traverses the inner universe”, an epiphenomenon whose physiognomy and physiology we are invited to analyse in a natural way, without inferiority or superiority complexes.

The general conclusions of the research may be the following:

- Religious literature represents a key component of modern Romanian literature, even if it does not fit into the functioning mechanism of the canon, in the sense that there is no history of religious literature/ poetry, but only chrestomathies interested in religious themes.
- The religious themes and structures of the religious imaginary represent the main source and resource of the BB literature, as the religious is fully found in the literary architext of the Antim group
- The Antim meetings were not just simple symposiums or seminars, but a school of Christian education, morals, culture and literature which formed, shaped and unpervertedly maintained the taste for art and literature of those attending the conferences
- The religious and mystical literature cultivated at the BB represents the fulfilment of a much sought-for integrating spiritual dimension in Romanian modern culture. The journals, testimonies, declarations from the *Securitate* folders and of the prosecution of those who survived the communist purge decisively plead for the idea that the BB group represents the unique encounter between the Romanian intelligentsia and the Orthodox Church.

Without the presumption of an exhaustive approach, I consider that it is adequate to mention that the main theme of the research and the works involved in the corroboration of the BB phenomenon remain an open subject that generates new perspectives and represents a perennial motif of reflection for literature, theology and for those interested in the fate of literature under communism. I intend to continue the research, bringing into the discussion other authors of *The Burning Bush*, such as Andrei Scrima or Valeriu Anania.

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