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The Self-Portrait of Censorship in Socialist Romania

Abstract: Censorship in socialism was a long-lasting institution. Frightening and invisible, it harboured, in fact, various institutions and underwent different historical phases. It prescribed attitudes and themes by partially or totally suppressing them. What was incriminated at some point could be accepted a few years later. A theme, however, has always been taboo: censorship itself, political power's discretionary and abusive act of limiting the freedom of expression in literature. Based on archival documents (mainly from the National Archives of Romania), this paper aims to reconstruct the way in which the Censorship removed fragments or whole texts in which it could see (or appeared to see) its own image. The reports of the censors may be seen as self-portraits, including the points of collision and the lines of tension between literature and power.

Keywords: Aesthetic Freedoms; Censors; Censorship; Ideology; Prohibition; Propaganda; Subversion; Totalitarian Communist Regime; Victim; Romanian Writer.

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DOI: 10.24193/cechinox.2020.39.02

Still entrenched in the Romanian collective memory, censorship accompanied the totalitarian communist regime from its arbitrary establishment, with Soviet help, in 1947 to its very end. In diverse historical periods it functioned in various ways: it could be institutionally organised or act insidiously, adjusting its behaviour and the intensity of its practices according to the ever-changing directions and directives imposed by communist power and mirroring the dynamics of literature.

Thus, between 1949 and 1977, there was a single political control institution: the General Directorate for Press and Printing (GDPP), which was renamed, in 1975, as the Committee for Press and Printing (CPP). Patterned after a Soviet model, this committee brought together several institutions of ideological and political control which formed now a single, centralised entity with a very strict hierarchy. It worked together with other central bodies of the communist party, sharing responsibility but having decision-making power: with the Ideology and Propaganda Department of the Romanian Communist Party's Central Committee and, above all, with the Council of Socialist Culture and Education (which had replaced the old Ministry of Culture and the Arts).

After 1977, the committee shared the main tasks of the former specialised censorship institution GPPP/CPP with the Central Book Publishing Administration. Political control was thus multi-layered.

According to official documents, the censorship institution GPPP/CPP was abolished in 1977. Far from being a sign of liberalisation, the annihilation of the official censorship institution marked just a change of strategy in the party's policy on censorship. The dismantling of GPPP /CPP proved to be a masterstroke. Not only did it not eliminate censorship but, paradoxically, it actually strengthened it, expanding its sphere and becoming more powerful in many respects. It continued to exert its function insidiously, as classical censorship was replaced by another, ubiquitous form of censorship. In the absence of a specialised censorship institution, control was to be exercised through various party bodies or so-called community organisations and other political readers, whose ideological vigilance could ensure the maintenance of untainted communist values in literature and art, in all publications, generally. Writers were now much more at the disposal of their "official readers", who had multiplied. The border between what was allowed and what was prohibited had also become more diffuse. Arbitrariness had increased.

During its official period of activity (1949-1977), to which this article refers, the censorship institution functioned according to its own elaborately developed regulations, which were applied with maximum rigour. The rules were coherent and the principles were relatively stable, as they were derived from party dogma. The purpose of those ever-expanding rules and of the often redundant procedures employed by the institution of censorship was two-fold: on the one

hand, to protect the totalitarian communist regime, by prohibiting sentences and phrases deemed to be subversive, and, on the other hand, to consolidate the regime by spreading propaganda and by subjecting literary works to disfiguring surgical excisions, meant to turn them into products that were compatible with communist ideology. Censorship mutilated art, trying to shape it politically, by persuasion. Triumph was not ensured by the – humble, as censors saw it – success in rejecting the texts and performances that were incompatible with the utopian agenda of the communist party, but, on the contrary, by the publication of literature that was not hostile or that was actually favourable to the regime. The two axial roles – prohibitive and formative – that defined the purposes of totalitarian censorship were entwined.

The Censorship's rules, norms and directives were applied, from one decade to another, in varying shades, degrees and combinations, either simultaneously or alternately, in a manner that was specific to each of the different periods of activity of the almighty institution. Of course, the absolute limit of tolerance was known both to the censors and to the writers: neither could the basic principles of the communist political system be questioned, nor could the regime be denounced as totalitarian. Publication bans promptly punished any systemic criticism, even if it occurred in translations. Other than that, the demarcation line became less clear and had to be periodically reinforced.

Literature and art were identified with propaganda, and a writer's or an intellectual's neutrality was equated with adversity. In this adversarial environment, any idea had subversive potential. Thinking or acting *differently* was already an inexcusable act of

hostility. Dissent, both doctrinaire and militant, was inconceivable for the power holders. A few, rare, exceptions existed, however. Over time, the situation radicalised. The gap between literature and the Communist Party increased so much that the latter ended up considering all art as subversive. Making art and nothing but art became, in the 1980s, a serious insubordination offence. Aesthetic freedoms, as few as they were, were either obtained by writers through strenuous efforts and by seizing the right moment, or were the result of strategic concessions made by a party that was sometimes forced by the international context or by circumstantial interests to adjust its dictatorial claims.

The ambiguity induced by the game between prohibitions and tolerated freedoms generated a paradoxical cohabitation of writers with communist censorship.

On behalf of the party, censorship prescribed aesthetic attitudes (such as formalism, aestheticism, naturalism, fantastic, absurd), torpedoed different forms of art, styles and various works, and even moulded its prohibitions according to literary genres or even subgenres. The novel was inconvenient, for example, because of its dialogic form and the interplay of alternative perspectives. Its multiple voices contrasted violently with the dogmatic authoritarianism of the supposedly infallible state party¹. It was also inconvenient because of its critical component and the party's phobia towards innovation, as novelists resorted to meta-textual narrative strategies aimed at activating the readers' consciousness. By contrast, poetry irritated because of its a-social character, its ineffable content, its metaphysical vocation, and also because it used themes related to the individual, undermining thus the collective imperatives. Poetic

language was in itself a way of resisting the devastating aggressiveness of the *langue de bois*. In the case of dramaturgy, exigency increased when a play was to be performed on stage, instead of just published². Direct contact with the public demanded extra vigilance and instantly placed the censorship institution on alert, because any group was considered potentially subversive for the Communist Party. The forms and intensity of censorship were thus adjusted according to the type of reception: the higher the degree of the audience's involvement, the more vigilance had to be increased.

The great and constant battle of the censorship institution was fought, throughout its existence, on a thematic level. A possible typology includes: *prohibited* or *forbidden themes*, *recommended themes* and *tolerated themes*. Depending on the political and propagandistic goals of the communist regime, these themes could migrate from one category to another, their instability reflecting both the political mutations and the volatile relations between literature and power, mediated by Censorship, and the conquered artistic freedoms. The mere fact of cultivating the former and/or ignoring the propaganda themes amounted to putting up (micro)resistance. Thematic incongruence with the party's commandments was intolerable. There were some themes that could be negotiated contextually with censorship and were tolerated by it to ensure the democratic mask of the regime and implicitly its own. Approaching them, however, was not risk-free.

Apparently, the confrontation was between imposing some themes and expelling others. There were, indeed, certain taboo topics³. Many of the other restrictions were taken, by imitation, from the stockpile of

prohibitions instituted by the USSR. Others were formulated in a local context. Some were regulated, others tacitly applied. What can be seen retrospectively is that the literature's duel with communist censorship had a peculiar side effect: a certain thematic immobility. In other words, assuming its polemic and contentious dimension, literature resumed the themes of communist propaganda, most often reversing them, but also limiting its potential that way. Indeed, the recurrence of literary themes in the censorship documents creates the daunting and false impression that under communism, the entire Romanian literature produced only texts designed according to the GPPP /CPP patterns and regulations, or, more precisely, conceived in such a way as to contradict them. One cannot say that the writers' sole concern was to provide raw material for this text-devouring beast. In reality, the complexity of Romanian literature under communism must be sought beyond precarious and aesthetically rudimentary clichés, to which censorship tried to confine it. These generated some forms of artistic perversion, but ultimately, they did not stifle a phenomenon that eventually managed to keep itself alive.

Regarding the performance of the censorship institution, the archive documents attest that "official readers" were able to promptly identify the subversive potential of a volume. Over time, censors could detect the ideological flaws of literary works with ever-growing precision.

The forbidden/recommended opposition coincides, mainly (as part of the Soviet heritage), with the opposition between the themes of the Self and the themes of the City, overlapped by the antithesis between (i) literature with an (intelligible) message and (ii) enciphered literature.

Experimental modernist (surrealism, constructivism, existentialism, orphism etc.) and avant-garde literature was repudiated because it was considered decadent⁴. The censors clearly did not tolerate it, because it lacked intelligibility, so they had to be cautious. The resistance to interpretation of these "extremely formalist" texts made them be regarded as "intentionally, programmatically, unintelligible" and as having an "irrational" content⁵.

Therefore, modernist literature was not inconvenient because of its abstractionism or hermeticism, but because it was seen as a diversionary ploy, with the help of which the reader could pour out subversive contents onto a canvas obtained by twisting the customary rules of thought and linguistic communication, onto a texture of oblique phrases in relation to habitual thought patterns. The literary work thus turned into a screen, onto which potentially subversive fantasies could be projected and which could help readers activate their own protesting impulses, which were dangerous for the regime. As for the censor, there could be a time bomb concealed in that text, so he had to approach it cautiously to defuse it⁶.

The hostility harboured against the avant-garde by some communists who obsessively talked about the "permanent revolution" could, at first glance, sound perplexing. Several hypotheses can be advanced, however. Like any flight of the unchecked imagination, the avant-garde caused anxiety to the thought police. On the one hand, considering its radical spirit, the avant-garde represented a game with the potential for rebellion. Even though the avant-garde was divested of its political component and regarded as pure aestheticism, it was still inconvenient. The gratuity

of this game contradicted the activist ethos of communist ideology (although futurism and, in part, surrealism did not do that). Too aesthetically veered, the avant-garde became politically ineffective⁷.

There was then a historical aversion to the avant-gardes, starting at least with Lenin's idiosyncrasy against Mayakovsky. In the 1920s, the avant-garde had sided with the Bolshevik Revolution, which for a while used its capital. Then politicians distanced themselves from militant avant-garde artists, including for the reason that their type of culture did not allow them to appreciate their experimental and insurgent art. Later, the popular democracies of Eastern Europe took over some prohibitions, with mimetic respect for the proscriptive gesture emanating from the centre (Moscow), through a kind of reverent inertia⁸.

Clement Greenberg gives the issue a maximalist answer. He believes that totalitarian regimes promoted the avant-garde only to the extent that they intended to hide the fact that they were regression movements⁹.

The opposition between the themes of the Self (ideologically, an outcast) and the themes of the City (recommended in triumphalist terms) is derived from the totalitarian nature of the communist regime, founded on collectivist and profoundly anti-human theses: a regime predicated on the loss of individuality and prohibited intimacy. Because it was the distinctive feature of private space, intimacy was perceived by Power as a fold (a niche) in which inaccessible contents were hidden. "Inimical" tendencies could be born here any time. The refuge within oneself, the individual's refusal of full disclosure, the suggestion that he had retreated within a

secret world for self-protection, all of these determined totalitarian power (interested in controlling even the thoughts of citizens) to intervene forcefully. The self had to be removed from the most intimate recesses and made visible, exposed to the devouring gaze of Power. The difference between public and private had to be annihilated.

At the same time, the writers' interest in "intimate poetry", in fiction or plays on "individualistic, psychological themes of little relevance for the masses"¹⁰ was considered politically bankrupt, because it ignored more urgent social issues. The topics that were promoted were related to the community: the poetry of the city (the motif of the "festive city"; the ode, the hymn), the prose of the great achievements of socialism and of the new man, the drama of the progressive present. They were derived from the mainly social and propagandistic purpose attributed to art: useful service to communist society.

From the GPPP/PPP's perspective, artistic particularities were not discussed and aesthetic distinctions were not operated. What was attempted again and again was to eliminate a psychological background that was at variance with the abstract, politically committed model of the *new man*. Approached from the reductionist perspective of the confrontation between the individual and the collective, literature became radically incompatible with totalitarianism. Consistently criticised in party documents and criminalised, purged or banned by censorship, intimist poetry proliferated and occupied the seat reserved for partisan and civic poetry.

By explicitly refusing ideological engagement, poets preferred, in their perennial creations, anguished metaphysical

states (loneliness, fear, failure, death), or love poetry. Their gesture was critiqued by Power as escapist and equated to a blatant refusal to comply with its prerequisites. Novelists also refused to sign or fully comply with the pact, abandoning social macrostructures in favour of private microstructures, and adopting storytelling techniques specific to the modern novel (pluri-perspectivism, Faulknerian and Proustian narrative strategies) instead of the monolithic expressiveness character of the realist socialist novel¹¹.

Heroic typologies gradually gave way to petty biographies, while conventional, grandiloquent political narrative was substituted by the novel of everyday experience. Rarely were talented writers drawn to the abstract utopian image of the “new man”. On the contrary, the most successful novels revolved around the ordinary individual.

Through a literature of memory, writers sought to restore this individual’s confiscated identity and rehabilitated his imperfect humanity, focusing on his quotidian existence. Ideologically occulted in order not to tarnish the purity of the model, the human triumphed artistically, managing, through this very game, to shun, to damage or to undermine the authority of the coercive political structures in the collective imaginary. Where the party wanted the removal of any contingency, novelists chose to talk about the banal man, about his body and his helplessness, or dared to show that, despite the official doctrine, the individual did not always lose in the face of History. In short, literature tried to fictionally recapture the notion of individuality, which had been socially erased or disfigured and politically annihilated.

As for the themes, the ones that political readers (censors) constantly had in sight, regardless of the period and the perpetually changing methodology, were: history, revolution, freedom, religion, the present, the self, eroticism, loneliness and death. In connection with these topics, Literature and Power placed themselves in perfect opposition.

One theme, however, had always been taboo: Censorship itself, the institution, but also the political power holders’ discretionary and abusive act of limiting literary expression. It goes without saying that a repressive institution is interested in asserting its omnipotence by banning any reference to itself. *Censorship* is (more precisely: envisages itself as) an invisible institution. The term itself was, as is known, purged from public discourse, where censorship was officially presented as a positive one, of “coordination and guidance” for cultural and artistic activity in Romania. Only Ceausescu could afford to use it openly¹². The non-representability of censorship (even by allusion) is a guarantee of its unlimited, discretionary power. The desire to annihilate the conscience of a witness that attests and thereby denounces its existence proves that Censorship is aware of its morally reprehensible character.

Not only was it not convenient, but it was dis-honourable for GPPP/PPP to be portrayed as a coercive institution in the writers’ texts. On the one hand, to tolerate it would have meant committing political impiety. The censors, according to Gheorghe Bendovschi, head of service at GPPP, were party activists, and their image had to be protected: “We have a duty to avoid the possibility of being attacked. Who are those people who are assaulted with epithets like: brainless dogs, glass and

tin heads, monsters, and so? They are party and state activists, people with important jobs...”¹³

On the other hand, and precisely by virtue of this identification, since Censorship “did not exist” in communism (censors were not called *censors*, but *readers*), they did not censor, but rectified, improved, reformed; in short, they assisted the work to become publishable. Any other interpretation was considered tendentious.

The sophism according to which since the word itself was forbidden, any reference to censorship should have been removed, did not work. Explicitly or allusively, writers did not give up portraying their adversary artlessly. Conversely, censors, who considered they occupied a self-legitimising position, rejected invectives, caricature portraits and vituperating epithets, on the one hand, and innocuous allusions, on the other. They secretly dreamed of the status of intangibility. Had it been entirely up to them, they would have forbidden the very possibility of thinking irreverently about the sacrosanct office of Censorship, as well as about its servants, of course.

Reproaches existed, though¹⁴. Some were fictionally expressed, in literary texts, others directly, in articles or interviews, in which the censorship institution was accused of incompetence and abuse.

Thus, in the article “Trei repere în diversitate” [Three Benchmarks of Diversity], published in issue no. 11, 1967 of the journal *Gazeta Literară*, Ștefan Aug. Doinaș stated the following, with reference to the situation of literature at that time: “When it comes to dangers, we consider that because of its dogmatism and exclusivism, the activity of some *literary gendarmes* [emphasis mine] is more dangerous than

artistic poaching...” The censor demanded that the fragment should be modified¹⁵.

During some interviews, various writers made statements about the freedom of expression. Of course, those statements were suppressed by censorship. This was the case, for example, of Fănuș Neagu, who gave an interview to Adrian Păunescu, entitled “Într-o duminică dimineața cu F. N.” [On a Sunday morning with F. N.]. It was scheduled to appear in issue no. 1, 1968 of the *România Literară* review, but it was rejected. According to the censor, the interview “referred to the hardships created by ‘a large number of people from the publishing house and beyond the publishing house... the floors of officials, with puffed and well-dressed sleeves, from the CSCA, people without ideas, without a sense of life, a species living in three dimensions: phone, chair, fear...’, and to their ‘interference’ in creation... [...] so much so that they ‘end up smothering everything that does not fit into their thinking patterns’”¹⁶.

D.R. Popescu and Laurențiu Fulga also fell victim to censorship partisanship. Interviewed, in 1970, for the *Luceafărul* magazine, also by Adrian Păunescu, D.R. Popescu answered a question about his creation:

I have used the word *step* before. I’ve said it before, [...] it’s because of the steps that I don’t write poems. I bring them to you, you’re the editor. You’re one step. If you like it, the poem meets the second step – the editor-in-chief. At the publishing house, the same story all over again. Two steps as well. But let’s say not two, but four. There’s a [indecipherable word] in theatre: there are several steps. The literary

secretary, the theatre director, the literary committee of the theatre, the city committee for culture and the arts, the county committee for culture and the arts, the ministry, and another step that must have slipped my mind¹⁷.

The reference was, of course, removed. Finally, in a survey among writers carried out a year later, in 1971, by the same Adrian Păunescu in the same journal *Luceafărul*, entitled “Realitatea socială și prezența literaturii” [Social Reality and the Presence of Literature], a survey that was “based on eleven questions related to the current climate in the field of creation”, the censor deleted or modified a lot of the answers in which “those interrogated referred to some violations”.

As for the “interference” of the censor in the text of D.R. Popescu, it was quite typical. In the phrase: “However, if in a novel, a character of mine stumbles or errs, much to the disbelief of the one who *stamped* him on the forehead...”, the underlined word was replaced by “aneled”! In addition to this, in order to eliminate any allusion to censorship, it was suggested that the key term should be replaced with another, ecclesiastical term, that is, paradoxically, with a term from an otherwise permanently censored area. D.R. Popescu had made that statement in a clearly ironic context. To soften it, the censor hijacked its meaning.

However, the proposed ecclesiastical synonym (*a mirui, to anel*), had in Romanian the double meaning of “anoint”, but also of “hit someone in the head”, “kill”, which defines equally explicitly the blunt action of the censors: in order to be published, the texts are forced to undergo the

distortive changes imposed by the censors and to be mutilated. “...I am afraid”, Laurențiu Fulga confessed, of the permanently insensitive sword hanging above our heads, ready to split our skulls...”¹⁸

Similar attempts can also be identified in the field of creation. Thus, in 1968, in the *Travesti* play (sent to the Directorate of Theatres to be included in the repertoire of the “I.L. Caragiale” National Theatre), Aurel Baranga attempted a *mise en abime* of the institution of censorship, by means of certain replies that, as the censor noted, referred to the “establishment of viewings with the Artistic Council, Assembly, and Ministry; making certain changes in the text, as requested by the governing bodies...”¹⁹ The play received an “OK to be performed”, provided that those replies were removed.

What did not receive the “pass for press” was the poem “Diatriba poetului întemnițat la tiranul său critic” [The Diatribe of the Poet Imprisoned by his Tyrannical Critic] from the volume *Și alte poezii* [*And Other Poems*] (1948-1970) by Romulus Vulpescu (Cartea Românească Press, 1970), on the grounds that “the poet voices his revolt against an abusive intervention from outside into the intimate universe of his creation, seeking to alter its meaning...”²⁰

Censorship also reacted by prohibiting the publication of the pamphlet “Drumul fructului” [The Journey of the Fruit] from the volume *Calitatea de martor* [The Witness Quality] by Ana Blandiana (Cartea Românească Press, 1970), for the simple reason that the institution refused to recognise itself in the mirror. In this pamphlet, the censor claimed, “freedom of creation is demanded without the ‘countless links’, without the

‘horribly complicated mechanism that ensures both the journey and the destruction of the fruit’, without the demeaning need for the creator to present his ‘fruit to the dispatcher to see if they are not poisoned’²¹. Indeed, the comparison is a clear reference to the institution of censorship. What is also highlighted, at the same time, is the damage to the dignity of the creator.

The question of the writer’s condition became, in 1974, the subject of analysis for the Directorate for Literature and Art of the GPPP, which, in a “Note on the volumes of original poetry sent by publishers for approval after the CC Plenary of the Romanian Communist Party in November 1971”, stated that:

Many poems suggest the idea that there are constraints to and interferences in the creative activity, the idea of an oppressive literary climate, in which any genuine creation impulse is equated to nonconformism, verging on the tragic. [...]. The issue of guidance as petty guardianship and interference in creation is raised with great acuity in the volume *Tuturor drumurilor* [To All the Roads] by Tr. Coșovei (Cartea Românească Press, 1974), Mircea Diniescu, *Elegii / de când eram mai tânăr* [Elegies / Since I Was Younger] (Cartea Românească Press, 1973), Nicolae Prelipeanu, *Arheopterix* (Cartea Românească Press, 1973).

Synthesis documents of the censorship institution from 1975 demonstrate the damaging interventions operated in the texts of writers who deplored “the restriction of the possibility of free expression for the creators of spiritual values”, or

“affirm that some leading activists ‘have a vast experience in deciding how to cut or to add, how to change or to rectify, how to end or discreetly outline...’²².

On the one hand, writers critiqued the lack of professionalism of the “controlling cultural bodies”; on the other hand, they confirmed that censors were well-versed at distorting their texts. Censors were described as specialists in mutilating the writers’ works. Sometimes, merely by moving punctuation around, they operated changes on the level of the meaning, with repercussions for the deeper meaning and the overall structure of the text.

The hyper-vigilance of censorship institution often led to far-fetched situations. Undoubtedly, the short fiction “Scrisoare către mamă” [A Letter to Mother] by Radu Coșău, for example, scheduled to be inserted in the “Three-Second Chronicle” section from issue no. 16 of 15 April 1976 of the *Tribuna* magazine, was suppressed because of the censors’ excessive zeal. In this text, which can be seen as a replica of Kafka’s famous letter to his father, the censors (G. Mic and Vasile Săv) considered that “the author metaphorically used the word *mother*”, so that it became “a symbol, which signifies the guidance of creation in our country by the competent authorities” [*sic!*]:

From the context of the prose, the censors argued, ‘the idea that emerges is that there is some discord between the creator and those who guide him’, that the latter are not be able to understand him. Thus, reference is made to the much too lavish ‘haemorrhage of letters’, to the fact that the mother does not have a ‘taste for metaphor’;

that she is confused by the fact that her son has sent her an essay, that she ‘hates surrealism’ and that her great horror is not being able to define the ‘moods’ of her son²³.

We can assume that the censors’ reading was aberrant, that they detected a metaphor of censorship in what was, most likely, merely the artistic transposition, through the lens of memory, of the author’s convulsive relationship with his mother, a mother who was living, at that time, in Israel. We must admit, however, that, in the context of those times, the text does not seem completely innocent. Whenever there was a divorce, the censors preferred (in keeping with their job attributes) to interpret the ambiguous data of the text as ideologically injurious.

The intolerance of the censors, their complete lack of humour, their refusal of dialogue and constant suspicion meant that the attempts to violate taboos, as few as they were, had to fail. Neither the great writers, nor those who were loyal and agreeable to the party managed to slip in their criticism of censorship. On the basis of archival documents (from what the censors suppressed to hide their own actions and from the arguments they advanced in their own reports), on the basis, therefore, of the forbidden texts in which the censors seemed to recognise themselves as in a mirror, we can reconstruct today a portrait of Censorship, including the lines of flight and those of tension between literature and power.

Thus, Marin Sorescu denounced systemic censorship. The poem *Tușiți* [Cough] was removed from the volume *Moartea ceasului* [The Death of the Clock]:

The poet, we read in the censor’s report, tells us that at the best lines of the performance, arduously rehearsed, for years on end, which ‘people waited for with bated breath, the old bitch was coughing’. But the cough contaminated the whole hall and now ‘the play went from beginning to end as a whooping cough.’ The author continued his role in which he had put his soul, being sure that ‘... at the end, / You must evacuate the Hall, / Old bitches’²⁴.

Ambiguously, the passage contains a double suggestion: one that hints at an oppressive climate and another that anticipates rebellion. The contagious climate of censorship, which deforms and bars perception, jamming it (“The old bitch was coughing”), triggers a reaction: censorship that is involuntary, but no less effective. The censorship action here appears to be an insinuating one. It forms a castrating environment: by the very fact of being inside this environment, art is defiled. The audience experiences censorship and self-censorship. In this way, what started as intentional censorship ends up as systemic, background censorship because the environment itself, which causes the voice of the “old bitch” to reverberate, becomes poisonous, by contamination (the hall takes over the stimulus and amplifies it involuntarily). Like the face of the doomsday Beast, censorship also multiplies. Proliferating, censorship gets to imbue the deep structure of the system, paralysing creation and destabilising the public.

Sometimes the GPPP had chain reactions. In response to the “massive interventions” levelled at his volume *Pe malul apelor adinci* [On the Banks of Deep Waters]

(ESPLA, 1968), accused of “reflecting mystical and deeply pessimistic philosophy”, Székely János published, in *Útunk* no. 6 of February 1968, the poem entitled “The Poet Speaks”, considered, as the censor claimed, “a direct attack against our control”: “I am a prisoner, I can’t stop feeling that/ A yellow eye always looks at me / Never leaving me for a moment/ And it resembles my eye”²⁵.

The censor’s decryption was most likely correct. The metaphor of the “yellow eye” suggests simultaneously censorship and, its perverse effect, self-censorship: more precisely, a ubiquitous censorship (like the Big Brother in Orwell’s counter-utopia, where you never knew when you were being watched from the television screen) that becomes internalised. The eye that watches you deceitfully borrows the characteristics of privacy, something or your own eye, thus penetrating the self fraudulently, like a disguise that opens up otherwise inaccessible ways. Two interpretations, both unfavourable, are possible. According to the former, the aggressor borrows the characteristics of the victims, in order to more effectively supervise and terrorise them. Complementarily, the reverse process also exists: the victims suffer a sudden and troublesome metamorphosis, internalising the aggressor and identifying with him. Censorship then turns into a phenomenon of self-censorship.

Dorin Tudoran also benefited from the self-reflexive attention of censorship institution, which, in the poem “Nu toate zidurile” [Not All the Walls] from the volume *Cîntec de trecut Akheronul* [A Song for Crossing the Akheron], sees its “guidance” written down on the page:

Speaking of the brothers that bring glory to the city, with tender wounds

in the windows (the poets), it is stated in the report, the author emphasises the presence of ‘bloody gardens surrounded by lies that sounded like the truth...’; ‘And the devout and attentive thresholds / are crossed only by the news that is already well known, and thus / all our words are no longer anything but / bars of death, frosted ribs of a moon / with the corners sanded down in hesitant blood / someone asks for peace for the songs of the city/ with the same calmness / but someone else is right’²⁶.

The poem was removed. Referring to the censorship of language and to its insidious character, which upholds the so-called truthful lies in order to preserve the appearance of the regime’s legitimacy, the poem speaks about the risk that the poet takes when he tries to eschew the wooden language of propaganda.

The double function of censorship – repression and the promotion of ideology – was tackled by the censor in an intervention on a group of poems by Mircea Dinescu, which should have been published in issue no. 3 of 18 January 1975 of the *Luceafărul* review. The poem eliminated from here was “Elegia tînărului american închis în Statuia Libertății” [The Elegy of the Young American Imprisoned in the Statue of Liberty], which the censor described as follows, in his report:

it outlined the image of the young creator, eager for change, but slapped ‘over the mouth’ day after day by the ‘plaster hand of the cowards’ art...’. Finally, the poet invoked the Heavenly Father, to prove to those about whom

he did not want to sing 'how holy they are / how stuck they are on the social cross'²⁷.

The title of the poem did not deflect the attention of the censor, who was obviously uncomfortable with the idea that the cowardly writers occupied the foreground, not allowing the authentic creators to express themselves, suffocating them, assaulting them. Indeed, Mircea Dinescu seems to synthesise here, in one and the same poetic image, a reference to both authentic writers and the censorship that promoted propagandist writers. In this way, the twofold nature of censorship is revealed: repressive, but also proactive, as it assumes the role of foregrounding the writers who are loyal to the party and who can promote the bright side of the regime. The poet's revolt takes the form of religious invocation.

Finally, the following phrase was censored from the novel *Bunavestire* [The Annunciation] by Nicolae Breban (Junimea Press, 1977):

What kind of author is this?... [...] Is this the spirit of fair-play, sir, respect for the reader, for the craft, for the honest printer that typesets it, for the anonymous proof-reader that protects

it from ridicule, for the bookseller that places it in the shop window, for the censor [emphasis mine] that wrongs it by wanting to do it good, or, the other way around, does it good by wanting to wrong it, etc. etc. etc.?!²⁸

Beyond the mocking tone, the quoted fragment unmasks the destructive and maleficent nature of censorship, placing it, through a transparent textual reference, in the lineage of Goethean demonology.

These texts make up, from shards, a portrait in shreds, an imperfect portrait that displays the patina of time, of a once omnipotent institution. An occult institution at one point in time, Censorship has now the chance (or misfortune) of coming to the surface through the writers' words that it once suppressed. We can say, therefore, that the posterity of the executioner is, once again, albeit on a smaller scale, ensured by the victim.

This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research and Innovation, CCCDI - UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017-0326/49 PCDDI, within PNCDI III.

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NOTES

1. The novel was incompatible with the totalitarian universe, because, as Cécile Vaissié notes quoting Milan Kundera, «what his spirit accomplished» was «relativity, doubt, interrogation», in other words, everything that excluded «totalitarian truth». Milan Kundera, *L'Art du roman*, Paris, Gallimard, Folio, 1986, p. 18 and p. 25, apud Cécile Vaissié, *Les ingénieurs des âmes en chef. Littérature et politique en URSS (1944-1986)*, foreword by Claude Lefort, Paris, Berlin, 2008, p. 31-32. See also Nelly Wolf, *Le Roman de la démocratie*, Saint-Denis, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2003.

2. "I'm dying with envy", Ion D. Sîrbu stated, noticing how much freedom the poets enjoyed. "Poetry has a special status, it is a sort of Latin reserved for a limited circle of specialists, censorship ignores them; a man in charge of the publishing houses explained this to me: 'language, sir, is going through a long, dark tunnel, and poetry is the gymnastics by which it can stay in good shape, because there will come a day when it must come out of the tunnel, and then it will have to rise to the height of the truth it has not told, but merely whispered'... While a play has the honour of being purged through three successive readings..." Ion D. Sîrbu, *Scrisori către bunul Dumnezeu*, edited by Ion Vartic, Cluj, Biblioteca Apostrof, 1998, p. 43-44; 77. I. D. Sîrbu (1919-1989), play-writer, essayist and novelist. An intellectual with left-wing sympathies, he was nonetheless imprisoned by the communist regime for his political views (1956-1963). After the political detention, he received compulsory domicile in the city of Craiova, being allowed to publish again. He was one of the rare Romanian novelists with a consistent body of «closet» literary work which was published after the fall of the communist regime.

3. "Censorship does not recognise that it has set taboos", Paul Goma stated in his open letter to Heinrich Böll in 1973. "That doesn't stop it from rejecting manuscripts because of taboos. Here are some: prison; the collectivisation of agriculture; the activity of Security and activists; the situation of Saxons in Transylvania, Romanian-Soviet relations (the theft of Bukovina and Bessarabia, [...] the organised looting after the truce, then Hungary 1956; Czechoslovakia 1968...), then love with too much love; death with too much death; sadness that is too... sad; then: everyday material hardships; bureaucracy; corruption; the incoherence of laws, judgments, provisions; social inequity... I haven't exhausted the list of taboos. It would be difficult to do that: censorship always enriches it, reshuffles it (sometimes on an everyday basis, mirroring the course of events)". "Către Heinrich Böll [Bucharest, 11 September 1973]", in *Scrisori, I, 1971-1989*, Bucharest, Curtea Veche Press, 2010, p. 93-94.

Paul Goma (born 1935), novelist and dissident. He was arrested as a student in 1956 and imprisoned until 1958. After liberation he was forced into compulsory domicile in the Bărăgan plains, until 1963. He is one of the few Romanian intellectuals who adhered to *Charta 77*. He was expelled together with his family to Paris in 1977.

4. Decadentism was the most serious generic charge against writings deemed to be incongruous with the party's "progressive" line. Over time, the semantic sphere of the term expanded. Its conceptual permissiveness, unlike its political one, became so great that, under the pretext of decadentism, any disregard of the rules of classical syntax was rejected. Used without cultural precision, this pejorative phrase grouped together artistic phenomena, trends and forms of the most diverse kinds, by which the influences of the so-called decadent and "retrograde" western culture were punished. The intermingling observations from the censors' reports cannot be rigorously systematised either. Different types of artistic texts benefited here from similar verdicts and characterisations. Allegations proliferated, being often redundant. Two of them prevailed: anti-realism and illegibility.

5. Central Historical National Archives of Bucharest, from now on: ANIC [logo for *Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale București*], Nota. C. Abăluță, *Unu*, Bucharest, Cartea Românească Press, File 31, 1974, f. 159.

6. An old dilemma was thus reactivated in the censors' confrontation with so-called decadent literature. On the one hand, they felt all the more pressured by the object they had to censor precisely because it was difficult to grasp, because it was barely intelligible. This was, for most of them, a difficult territory to control. On the other hand, paradoxically, in such cases, censors could experience greater relaxation,

as their responsibility diminished. The difficulty in understanding this kind of literature meant that it targeted a smaller readership. The advantage was born from the fact that, because it was considered less dangerous/ harmful, this kind of literature was easier to publish. The attitude was not consistent and those oscillations should not be justified exclusively politically. The bottom line is that, terrorised by a rhetoric of secrecy, censors banned everything that, by being non-intelligible, was potentially subversive. The stakes seem to have been not to let intellectuals pass on secret, coded messages among themselves.

7. “The main problem with the avant-garde plastic arts and literature, from the point of view of the fascists and the Stalinists”, as Clement Greenberg claims, «is not that they are too critical, but that they are too ‘innocent’; in other words, it’s too hard to inject propaganda effectively in them». Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”, in *Partizan Review*, 1939, from the opening chapter of Clement Greenberg’s book *Art and Culture* (1961, p. 13). Thomas Schlessler deciphers the aversion of totalitarian regimes to the avant-garde in the indirect message that is found in the apparent “lack of message and appeal” of this aesthetic movement. The literature of the absurd and nihilism allegedly expresses “if not resignation, then at least frank despair”. Such an attitude cannot, however, be tolerated in totalitarianism, where “happiness is compulsory”. In addition, “the meaning and sense of the future also disappear, as do social principles, which cement social consensus...”. Thomas Schlessler, *L’art face à la censure. Cinq siècles d’interdits et de résistances*, Paris, Éditions Beaux Arts, 2011, p. 186.

8. The paradox is also visible in the Romanian case. In post-war Romanian literature, writers with avant-garde backgrounds had a special status. Recognised as leftist writers, they were accepted by the new regime, even though they were also subject to party norms. After the establishment of socialist realism, some accepted these corrections, others – not so much or they took refuge in the area of children’s books, as Gellu Naum did, for instance. For these artists, who “followed the party line” until 23 August 1944, their political option from the years of socialist realism was most often accompanied by drama, as they were forced to radically change their own artistic methods and procedures. Because they were forced to change their creative techniques, they could no longer preserve their autonomy as artists. Later, however, emblematic figures of the writers’ community were recruited from among them: having gained for themselves some degree of cultural autonomy and crowned with the aura of their left-wing interwar experience, their literary authority was recognised by their brethren and they embraced the position of *sui generis* spokesmen of the guild (see, for example, Miron Radu Paraschivescu). As a result of their attempts to offer protection or to advocate for the rights of the entire writing community, they became uncomfortable for the power holders, but remained partially untouchable.

Gellu Naum (1915-2001), poet, novelist, play-writer, and essayist. He is considered the most important exponent of Romanian Surrealism.

Miron Radu Paraschivescu (1911-1971), poet and essayist, representative of the left-wing intelligentsia before the instauration of the Romanian communist regime, in 1948. He is well known for his flair and readiness in discovering new literary talents.

9. Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch”.

10. xxx, “Un pact al dramaturgiei românești. Falsa esențializare a temelor neesențiale”, in *Rampla*, series IV, no. 130, Sunday, 16 May, year 37 (1948), p. 3.

11. See Alex Goldiș, “‘Alegoria națională’ în discursul identitar românesc”, in *Transilvania*, no. 12, 2015.

12. See xxx, “Adunarea Generală a Scriitorilor din R.S.R. Cuvîntarea tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu”, in *Luceafărul*, no. 47 (343), Saturday, 23 November, year XI, 1968, p. 1; 3; 8.

13. ANIC, Fund: Press and Printing Committee, from now on CPT [logo for *Press and Printing Committee*], “Consfătuirea DGPT 12-14 June 1958”, ANIC, CPT, d. 14, 1958, f. 77.

14. Famous, in the era, was the pamphlet about the doctor I. A., published by Eugen Jebeleanu. It was believed that the initials belonged to Iosif Ardelean, head of Censorship. Vladimir Tismăneanu has revealed that, in fact, the text was a pamphlet against a “doctor in Marxist aesthetics, the dreaded Gh. Stroia, chief of staff of Popescu-God”. The poet asked “this jailer of the spirit to take the pliers out of his mouth, to let him speak freely...”. Vladimir Tismăneanu, “Viața și timpurile lui Eugen Jebeleanu”, in 22, 17 May 2011.

Eugen Jebeleanu (1911-1991), poet and publicist, an active intellectual in the left-wing politics, before the Romanian communist regime has been installed in 1948.

Vladimir Tismăneanu (born 1951), political scientist and essayist, established in the USA in 1982. He is very active in the academic environment since then.

15. ANIC, Fund: CPT, Directorate for Literature, No. 41, III, 1967, *Note* for the working session of 20.III.1967, File 52, 1967, f. 120. Ștefan Augustin Doinaș (1922-2002) was an influential poet, essayist, and translator of the Socialist era. He was also a political prisoner. Doinaș was a member of the Sibiu Literary Circle, a group formed around the poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga and other intellectuals from Cluj, who had settled in after the University of Cluj had moved there in 1940, in the wake of the Hungarian occupation of Northern Transylvania.

16. ANIC, Fund: CPT, no. 193, 12.XI.968, NOTE. *România Literară*, no. 1, 1968, File 13, 1969, f. 21-22.

Fănuș Neagu (1932-2011), novelist and dramatist. He lived a bohemian life in literary circles.

Adrian Păunescu (1943-2010), poet and publicist. He is known as a polemic writer (especially in the '60s), but also as a political propagandist. He served the communist regime through his literary work, and through a series of ample, manipulated spectacles (called *Cenaclul Flacăra*), organized live and broadcasted by the state television.

17. ANIC, Fund: CPT, *Note* with some interventions made in the review *Luceașărul*, no. 140, File 18, 1970, f. 141.

Dumitru Radu Popescu (born 1935), novelist and play-writer. Considered to be one of the innovators and a bold voice of the 1960s generation of writers. He occupied a high position within the communist political power (member of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party) since 1969. He was the president of the Romanian Union of Writers since 1982.

Laurențiu Fulga (1916-1984), novelist, play-writer and essayist.

18. ANIC, Fund: CPT, Directorate for Literature, NOTE. *Luceașărul*, no. 46/13, XI, 1971, File 39, 1971, f. 146-147.

19. ANIC, Fond: CPT, Note. *Travesti* – a comedy in three acts by Aurel Baranga, sent by the Directorate of the Theatres of CCSA to be introduced in the repertoire of the National Theatre “I. L. Caragiale”, File no. 14, 1968, f. 58-62.

Aurel Baranga (1913-1979), play-writer and poet. He was part of the leftist intellectual circles in the years before the Second World War. He became one of the main supporters of the socialist realism in the 1950s.

20. ANIC, Fund: CPT, Note. *Alte poezii (1948-1970)* by Romulus Vulpescu (Bucharest, Cartea Românească Press), File 18, 1970, f. 173.

Romulus Vulpescu (1933-2012), poet, translator and publicist.

21. ANIC, Fund: CPT, no. 5006/ 28. VIII. 1970, NOTE. *Calitatea de martor* by Ana Blandiana (Bucharest, Cartea Românească Press), File 19, 1970, f. 162-163.

Ana Blandiana (born 1942), poet and publicist, daughter of an anti-communist political prisoner. Until the fall of the communist regime, in 1989 her writings have been repeatedly banned by the communist authorities.

22. ANIC, Fund: CPT, *Analiza muncii pe anul 1975*, File 20, 1975, f. 1-12.

23. ANIC, Fund: CPT, *Nota de sesizări* for the month of April 1976, File 16, 1976, f. 112-118.

Radu Cosașu (born 1930), novelist and publicist. Fascinated by the proletarian ideology, he rejected the petite bourgeoisie values of his own social class, only to come back to them in his 1970s writings.

24. Marin Sorescu, *Moartea ceasului*, Bucharest, Tineretului Press, 1966, in Marin Radu Mocanu, *Literatura și cenzura comunistă (1960-1971)*, Bucharest, Albatros, 2003, p. 59-60.

Marin Sorescu (1936-1996), poet, novelist, play-writer and essayist. He is considered one of the most important post-war Romanian writers.

25. ANIC, CPT, d. 1, 1968, f. 107.

Székely János (1929-1992), poet, novelist, play-writer and essayist, ethnic Hungarian from Romania.

26. ANIC, Fund: CPT, Directorate for Literature-Arts, *Note* on the volumes of poems submitted for approval between January and October 1975, File 18, 1975, f. 150-151.
Dorin Tudoran (born 1945), poet and publicist. Political dissident. Expelled from Romania, he emigrated to the USA in 1985.
27. ANIC, Fund: CPT, Directorate for Literature-Arts, no. s/395, information on the workload, the situation of the controlled works and productions, of the most important interventions and alerts from the month of January 1975, File 18, 1975, f. 48.
28. ANIC, Fund: CPT, Note. *Bunavestire* de Nicolae Breban (Bucharest, Junimea Press), f. 16.
Nicolae Breban (born 1934), novelist, essayist, play-writer and publicist. He is considered one of the most important Romanian post-war novelists. While in Paris in the summer of 1971, he criticized the discourses of Nicolae Ceaușescu which enforced his ideological principles (known as *Tezele din Iulie* ["July Theses"] by the French press). This gesture had political repercussions in Romania.