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LITERATURE AND RED IDEOLOGY  
ROMANIAN PLAYS ON RELIGIOUS THEMES  
IN THE 1950S AND 1960S

This study analyses several aspects of the relationship between communist censorship and literature, from the vantage point of literary sociology. Focusing on the issue of religious drama, the author intends to examine the transformations undergone by Romanian literature in the 1950s and 1960s, considering the impact of totalitarian communist ideology had upon it. What the study highlights is the game between prohibition and subversiveness, between misappropriation and reappropriation, which shaped the literary climate of that period. One of the conclusions envisaged here is that despite unrelenting and excessive pressures exerted by censorship, literature resisted being turned into an ally of the Romanian Communist Party.

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At the vital core of the communist system lies *censorship*. Launched concurrently with the communist regime, censorship was the latter's staple ingredient from its (promising) beginnings to the very end, when the certitudes of communism collapsed into dissolution.

Censorship was responsible for safeguarding the ideological purity of public discourse and carrying out acts of political cleansing. This is why it represented the main instrument of political and cultural control over information, as well as over scientific and artistic production. At first, censorship would target art and literature only in so far as they were perceived as means of propaganda. Later, however, art became suspect, in the eyes of the communist party and of censorship, for its humanist values, which revealed and denounced the oppressive character of the communist regime, prone as it was to dissolve any sense of community cohesion and to mutilate the individual.

In order to understand the role and importance of censorship under communism, several things should be remembered. To its supporters, communist ideology was infallible. (It is not by mere chance that analysts have defined it as a gnosis.<sup>1</sup>) There could be only one good and that was the good promoted by the communist party. Its doctrine, comprised in party documents and speeches delivered by high-ranking party officials, which were thereafter largely reproduced in the press, set forth the party's direction, general line, principles and "orientation" as regards all the areas of social life, including literature and the arts, public information, science and communication. They were imposed as dogmas upon the entire society. Any alternative thought was prohibited, since it could sow the

seeds of doubt and foster a critical spirit. In a society governed by a unique party's totalitarian ideology, it was impossible to think other than in a uniform and reductionist manner. Failing to conform to the official ideology meant taking the foreseeable risk of becoming an outcast.

Censorship had no doctrine, just like it had no goal of its own. It ensured that the party dogmas were faithfully abided by, as it was one of the instruments used to consolidate the system and to solve certain specific problems. Censorship aspired to be as efficient as possible. Hence, its ultrapragmatic character: it would accept any means it could put to such use.

It should be mentioned that communist censorship was not substantially different from that practised by right-wing dictatorial regimes, except, perhaps, as regards its totalitarian character.<sup>2</sup> The two types of censorship also differed in that they displayed, in various degrees, the will to conceal their true character. If we are to admit, however, that communist censorship had its own peculiarity, it would be its paradoxical association with the idea of democracy, which granted its twofold character: censorship was both prohibitive and predictive.

The main role of censorship was to forbid and exclude from the public space anything that might be considered dangerous to the regime, or merely incongruous with the official doctrine and with the goals and practices of the communist party. Censorship aimed to prevent the circulation of politically objectionable documents and to block out the information the regime disallowed. At the recommendation and under the strict control of the party, the institution of censorship formulated and laid down an anti-canon of writing, meant to serve as a practical guide for the censors. Devised according to an aesthetics of negativity, this anti-canon comprised a series of negative provisions and prohibitions whereby various artistic forms, styles and works were to be subverted. Censorship's surgical strikes also led to the amputation of science and of the press; these were distorted and constrained to become, in their turn, compatible with the political regime, which would only tolerate them in so far as they could be instrumentalised to its own advantage.

At the same time, censorship also had a predictive role of forming, fomenting and guiding the new socialist culture and literature, which, in some cases, had to be invented from scratch. While repressive censorship imposed *a posteriori* prohibitions, preventive censorship attempted to stimulate works that would be loyal to party interests. Through such works, themes that were recommended or imposed by censorship came to supersede forbidden themes.

Repressive censorship would intervene into already written texts so as to retrospectively correct the ideology of insubordinate works. On the other hand, the so-called "formative" ideology would not forbid but rather mutilate works by attempting to mould them, *via* persuasion. Far more perverse than clear-cut, trenchant prohibitions, the excisions, adjustments

or the recommendations aimed at politically optimising a certain literary work were all complicitously undertaken in the name of censorship's facilitating the publication of the particular work.

Endorsed by obedient literary critics, censorship's onslaught of fostering party-oriented literature and occasional literature entered a special equation with the perennial nature of art as a consecrated expression of value.

Censorship's axial functions (prohibitive and predictive), which also defined its goals, were deeply intertwined. They went hand in hand, generating modulations of intensity. Pending on various internal interests and the international context, each stage in the development of the communist regime emphasised a particular facet of censorship's many-headed monster. The diverse forms of censorship that were embraced throughout time were either straightforward and unambiguous or covert and camouflaged. There were several forms of intoxication meant to conceal censorship's destructive nature, including:

### Censorship's *democratic mask*

The communist state claimed to promote a culture accomplished by the people and addressed to the people, that is, a "progressive", "humanist" and "revolutionary" culture, grounded in Marxist-Leninist philosophy and ideology, in stark opposition with the western world's decadent culture. In the name of this ideal, censorship purported to salvage its honourability, which it had clearly relinquished in the eyes of the "people". Its professed eulogy of popular creativity was but an expedient, however, designed to feed the party's illusion that its closeness to the people also meant its being appreciated by the latter. In effect, what was intended was masking the abyss gaping between them.

Censorship's efforts of maintaining this party illusion had disastrous consequences upon the arts, ranging from a massive proliferation of amateurism and anti-professionalism to the cultivation of decorative and ornamental art or to (sometimes grotesque) manifestations of debauched festiveness. As to the will to protect the people against decayed morals, this was, for the most part, just a hypocritical attempt to justify a melange of morality and ideology, which had been composted into a well-calculated ambiguity. On the other hand, the "class character" and the "party-oriented character" of the arts overtly avowed their permeation by the political ideology that the communist party endorsed. Literature was conceived as an expression of the proletarian progressive class and was expected to contribute substantially to achieving the inevitable triumph of international communism. The supremacy of the political dimension would constrict the arts, providing the communist party with an instrument for disseminating its propaganda and appropriating thus a prestige that it was otherwise refused.

### Censorship's populist mask

This was used to counter the accusation whereby the communist regime looked down on intellectuals, barring their access to the structures of power. In the name of populism, censorship outlined a new contrast, between elite art (a term which variably aimed to repudiate formalism, abstractionism, avant-gardism, or mannerism) and art that was accessible to the larger public. Advocating the cause of the latter, censorship demanded that the literary text should be legible and intelligible. Aesthetic modernism and artistic experimentation were altogether suspect. The stakes here were again political. What was intended was ensuring the hegemony of literature “with a message”.

At least two characteristics ensued from this conception about literature: its social value and its national character. The former was responsible for the primacy of themes related to the community over themes related to the individual, which would, at times, be utterly prohibited.

The concept of national literature presupposed, on the one hand, exalting the old values and the ancestors' heroism by cultivating certain emblematic characters and exemplary patriotic events. On the other hand, commemorating the revisited past was envisaged to contribute to its ideological reinterpretation and political instrumentation. After the disaster triggered by the installation of the communist regime, what was needed was reconstructing national unity and creating the illusion of concord, which was supposed to bridge the fault lines wrought into the national body and to conceal the regime's intolerance of difference. Despite its self-proclaimed ideology of progress (responsible for the obsession with urbanisation and the myth of industrialisation), communism attempted such reparation by overemphasising the past. Topics like folklore and the idyllic past were but a few ingredients used here, while exaggerating the national feeling (with xenophobic overtones), channelling it into worshipping an inauthentic, politically fabricated past, and the ideology of protochronism served as formidable instruments.

### Art's educative mask

One of the commonplaces of communist ideology was the “formation of the new man.” The political ideology of shaping a purportedly progressive socialist conscience also included the arts. So as to foster the cultivation of virtue in the good citizens of the new society, the arts were forced to abandon both their entertainment characteristics and their aesthetic autonomy. Amongst the imperatives imposed upon the arts under communism were: morality pushed to the limits of prudery; “gravity” that was allergic to the comic; placidity; the ludicrous flaunting of the communist hero's counterfeit revolutionary virtues; militantism,

etc. The arts also had to comply with the communist regime's idiosyncratic rejection of religion, converting this allergic repudiation into atheist education.

The communist propaganda's attempts to naturalise censorship failed to conceal its malign character. Like some infernal limbos, its attributes, based on imprecise and manipulable criteria, spread constantly, adversely affecting words, themes and works. The inquisitorial activity of communist censorship produced forbidden, (self-)exiled or morally and aesthetically corrupt authors, as well as conformist, power-lusting, obsequious and abusive (pseudo-)artists. No one was exempt from bearing the brunt of communist censorship's distorting influence. Everyone had to pay a price they were not always able to negotiate themselves, having no way of foreseeing the long-term consequences of a genuinely fatidic pact.

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Against this wide horizon of interpretations, the present study addresses a strictly delineated phenomenon from a particular historical moment in Romania (the 1950s and the 1960s): the confrontation between religious dramatic writing and communist censorship, which was officially deployed by the General Direction for the Press and Publications [GDPP]. Set up by virtue of Decree 214 of 23 May 1949, the latter was active until its dismantling in 1977; this was interpreted by analysts as a genuine *coup de theatre*, although it actually increased rather than diminished the power of censorship, which continued to operate at an informal level after having been officially dissolved.

The case of Romania is rather similar to those of other countries from Eastern and Central Europe, which, in the aftermath of WWII and the settlement of accounts between the Major Powers, became "popular republics". Up to a point, it replicates the unique model the Soviet Union provided all these satellite-states with. As regards the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), it behaved both like a faithful disciple, who was eager to learn, and like a reckless apprentice, who was ready to improvise on his own.

We have decided to focus on the first two periods, 1948-1964 and 1965-1971, which were separated by Nicolae Ceaușescu's accession to power. They offer contrastive examples of, on the one hand, a violently repressive type of censorship, and, on the other hand, a more permissive type, subtly relying on the advantages of collaborating with the authorities, which was altogether impossible to refuse. The antithesis between the two periods is legitimated by the different roles ideology played in each of them.

In the 1950s, physical terror was omnipresent. Coming into office after King Michael I's forced abdication on December 30, 1947, the RCP had

as its immediate target subjugating a country that was hostile to the Stalinist project of communisation.<sup>3</sup> In a relatively short time, the communist regime managed to dismantle the older political and administrative structures.<sup>4</sup> Ideology had the role of legitimating, *via* the myth of the revolution, the RCP's abusive and criminal practices. Supplementing upfront political action with a covert, submerged type of action, ideology aimed to provide the subjects with a rationale for domination and an intelligible explanation for coercion and terror.

By the 1960s, the population had become pacified and acquiescent. The RCP's ambition was redirected towards recolonising the collective imaginary and imposing its own structures of symbolical domination, which were deemed the sole means of ensuring its political stability. The role of ideology was altered to meet those new goals. Its main task became that of dissimulating the domination exerted by the party and rallying as large a section of the population as possible to the communist project, which, in order to have greater appeal, had been dubbed "nationalist". The objectives and the methods of censorship reflected these fluctuations.

The initial period was characterised by the explorations and intolerance that are specific to beginnings. In 1948, when the RCP was forcefully set in office in Romania, it came into the legacy of a censorship tradition, inherited from the previous dictatorial regimes (Charles II's royal dictatorship and Antonescu's legionary dictatorship). However deleterious, censorship was partially legitimated by the need for informational self-protection triggered by the war; furthermore, it appeared to be limited in time and was exerted directly through overt institutions and through publicly displayed norms and regulations. No credible justification could account, however, for continuing to use censorship in a purportedly democratic political regime. The conscience of its own illegitimacy led to censorship functioning in a quasi-occult manner.

It was the Bolshevik model that was applied and followed with maximum assiduousness, since it endorsed censorship as a fundamental institution of communist regimes rather than as a mere incidental political instrument. Aiming to extend its tentacles across the entire social span, censorship derived its authority from its excessive prerogatives and, in particular, from its institutional association with the Direction for State Security. This formidable alliance granted communist censorship a terrifying aspect. Besides publication obstructions and prohibitions or restrictions on public expression, it also involved existential risks, such as social marginalisation, physical and moral aggression, imprisonment, etc.

Maintaining censorship after the communists came to power necessitated adapting it to meet the new circumstances. This meant not only altering the legislation so as to allow greater freedom of movement to the institution of censorship, but also its institutional reorganisation.

The RCP succeeded in creating a censorship system with professionally and geographically distributed organisms and services, which were, however, strictly subordinated within a hierarchically structured national network, with several nodes and filters surveying every publication and artistic creation in Romania. Irrespective of their hierarchical rank, all censorship organisms enjoyed discretionary, progressively greater powers, culminating with the absolute authority of the RCP's Central Committee, albeit it was only the party's secretary general who held the supreme and infallible decisional power, which could only be limited by his own tactical games.

As regards censorship's grasp, legislative changes enabled it to extend excessively to any type of information, communication or artistic phenomenon. By virtue of its statute, the GDPP, as the official institution of censorship, had to be prepared to foresee everything and to anticipate any possible malfunction.

Its methodology underwent constant refinement so as to meet the demands of its repressive goals at a particular historical moment which, although propagandistically described in triumphalist terms, actually coincided with a profound crisis. Periodically amended regulations were meant to ensure the fact that the control it exerted was of utmost severity. Even the most tentative of ideological or political deviations was incriminated and retributed as a capital crime. The seeds of sedition were detected in the slightest (and apparently most innocent) of details.

Such regulations were enforced mechanically by virtually illiterate, obtuse and intolerant censors, whose interventions entailed quasi-castrating and, most of the times, hilarious and absurd consequences. The explanations adopted invariably clamoured defending the "state secret", a covert expression for the party interest.

In the beginning, censorship exhibited no special interest in literature (as for the theatre, it was only explicitly mentioned in the DGPP regulations in 1954); literary texts would simply be checked lest they should attempt to transmit state secrets in a ciphered manner. In less than one year, however, this attitude would change, the censor's attention targeting the degree to which the literary work was adapted to the ideological and (allegedly) artistic criteria. Although apparently distinct, these criteria were actually intertwined. A rigorous control of themes was meant to certify that literary works conveyed the RCP's ideology faithfully and *quasi-literally*. Such content analysis aimed to ensure that literature exhibited its party and "class" bias. Access to the method of artistic creation was also limited by the formula of the so-called "socialist realism"<sup>5</sup>. In the name of this inviolable syntagm, various artistic trends were repudiated in that period, such as, for instance, avant-gardism, abstractionism, formalism and others; in effect, the entire western literature was excluded by being reduced to the infamous label of "bourgeois decadent literature", while national literature that was deemed

overtly aesthetic or intimist was also ruled out. Such prohibitions amounted to forms of intimidating and threatening artists, since their purported deviationisms were coercively used to punish real or imaginary acts of insubordination.

The RCP's intention was to use literature rather than propaganda (whose discourse was perceived as duplicitous, deceitful and manipulative) as a subtler means of resuscitating the population's affective resources in order to attain the goals set by the party (for example, transforming the prescriptions of communist ideology into widely and sincerely held opinions). However, this intention never fully came to its fruition, since it was undermined by the very tension implicit in the concept of *propagandistic art*, which amounted practically to an oxymoron. Thus, originality in such art, which the party desired to harness in the service of propaganda, was completely thwarted by the constraints of party ideology. Given the latter's reluctance to embrace novelty, art was also compelled to forsake all, even if merely lexical, innovations and to endlessly recycle the same commonplaces.

The RCP's incapacity to formulate an aesthetic programme that would reconcile the imperatives of propaganda and the demands of artistic creation turned propagandistic art into a logical impossibility. The political and penal risks entailed by artistic innovation led to a creative standstill. Censorship's surgical interventions amputated and disfigured literature, constraining it to become compatible with stereotyping, which was fundamentally alien to its nature. Intended as politically and ideologically beneficent measures, these brutal interventions of censorship ended up destroying the aesthetic value of literary works, rendering them utterly inept, even from a political point of view. The party activists' denunciation of this impasse took the shape of the critique of schematism.

After one decade of dictatorial government, the RCP had taken literature and the arts to the brink of asphyxiation. Unlike the highly stereotyped pseudo-literature of "socialist realism", any authentic form of artistic creation had been excommunicated on the grounds of its ideological toxicity.

The ensuing period (1965-1971)<sup>6</sup> was considered to record a political "thaw"; this would come to an end when Nicolae Ceaușescu published his well-known "July theses", which launched a cultural minirevolution of Asian inspiration. During this period, the RCP revised its strategy and reconsidered propaganda's priorities, those of censorship included. This change of strategy did not, of course, also entail a change of vision. Officially, ideology remained unchanged in its main guidelines, maintaining its principles and, oftentimes, its flexibility. What did change, however, were Power and its practices. Sensing that it was in full control of itself, the RCP adopted a different type of conduct.



Its change of attitude derived from multiple causes. On the one hand, the geo-political context had registered a modification in the international balance of forces; on the other hand, in the wake of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the RCP's secretary general's death in 1964, internal factions had started vying for power. Change was also assisted by the party's conviction that the stage of trench combat, characteristic of beginnings, had been surpassed, that antagonisms had been pacified, that the RCP had gained a solid position, and that both the society and the party were now ready for liberalisation.

Emancipation from the USSR, whose troops had withdrawn from Romania after Dej's crafty political manoeuvre, opened the gateway towards nationalist communism, an opportunity that would be fully exploited by Nicolae Ceaușescu in his own interest. It was hoped that the new nationalism would engender that sense of collective identity which communist internationalism had destroyed. Rallying writers to support a self-defining reformed RCP was done by inviting them to participate in this national project and by granting them a supervised space of artistic freedom.

The RCP eased the pressure exerted upon the arts and abandoned its vehement demands on writers participating in the building of the new society. The latter were no longer compelled to use *socialist realism* as the sole method of creation, which led to its removal from political usage and to its speedy retreat into oblivion. The RCP hence gave up on several of its clichés, casting them into derision, and abandoned various theses it had hitherto defended rather fiercely. A tacit armistice was under way between the totalitarian Power and the country's writers.

This change of political tactics represented a crossroads for censorship. The older repressive methods no longer corresponded to the new political and ideological climate, which claimed to endorse a controlled freedom. The RCP's Ninth Congress had launched the formula of "a diversity of [artistic] styles", on condition that faithful adherence to the Marxist subject matter was maintained. Conceived as a sophism meant to disguise the party's intolerance as formal permissiveness, the formula of stylistic diversity allowed writers to force a breach whereby authentic literature simply pushed through in an explosive manner.

Faced with the new political and literary climate, the institution of censorship experienced bouts of confusion and bewilderment, but was quick to find its bearings and start adapting and reinventing itself. It began by refocusing its interest and transferring its interventions from the political problem onto morality issues. Sex, drugs and the *hippie* movement came to be the major deviations barred from publication, seconded only by the literature of the absurd, which censors were noticeably intolerant of the cautions about, given its lack of intelligibility.

Having reformed its structures and methods, as well as its staff, the institution of censorship [DGPP] then proceeded to relatively relax its

control, replacing explicit constriction with manipulation and seduction. The main objective was no longer prohibition – it had actually only resorted to that *in extremis* – but challenging writers, through successive pressures exerted upon them, through exhaustion, threats, exasperation, as well as enticing promises, to produce art that was compatible with the exigencies of ideology and with the party's will and caprices. Claiming to be making a series of great concessions, the much feared Book Inquisition was now content with operating slight textual modifications, in full awareness that however minor, any stamp of approval from the censors was likely to maculate.

Even if closely monitored, the liberalization and the an the partial and inconsistent **disideologisation** that characterized this period<sup>17</sup> have had beneficent effects upon the artistic sphere. Even though censorship never removed its grip and publication restrictions continued, literature gradually acquired considerable autonomy. By restoring the links with the prestigious domestic inter-war tradition, and by resuming contact with western literature after its brutal suppression in the previous decade, literature could rediscover its perennial values.

While during the 1950s, the arts had been invariably perceived as either propagandistic or subversive, with the former being overextolled and the latter being suppressed, the RCP appeared at this point to accept a certain political neutrality of the arts. The regime was willing to tolerate a literature that, while not being favourable, was also neither overtly hostile to it. Whatever was not deemed to be incompatible with the RCP's ideology and practice could be submitted for publication. Prohibition had become, in the eyes of the party's leadership, more noxious than tolerance.

A two-sided safety belt was thus created. The power accepted that the arts should be dissociated from propaganda and that artists could have recourse to the imaginary, on condition that the latter was not politically exploited, in the manner of social and ideological criticism. Artists, in their turn, would abandon their dissenting positions, being content with transgressing interdictions only within the protected perimeter of literature and only through art's symbolical images.

Censorship's efforts of maintaining this tacit consensus were undermined by its own limits. Censorship could not refrain from fearing words, which it hunted down, mutilated or simply eliminated, thus managing to make them all the more explosive. Texts devoid of political connotations – for instance, fantastic or oneiric literary works – could thus acquire a subversive value whenever censorship interpreted them as such, out of either lack of trust or lack of self-confidence.

It was this gaming with the freedoms conceded to it by censorship that would grant Romanian literature a specific character. Only in rather exceptional cases would it openly contest the regime; moreover, it would never experience what in the USSR came to be known as the *samizdat*. Literature would remain confined to the (lately contested) formula of

“survival through culture”, which would generate allusive works, excelling primarily at using parables, metaphors and symbols, as forms of political insubordination and complicity with a readership that, in the wake of successive aggressive attacks, would recoil to a position of mute resistance.

I consider that these complicated relations between the communist power and literature in Romania can be brought to light by analysing, however summarily, the drama written on religious themes,<sup>8</sup> which was remarkable not so much through its artistic achievements (a few of them were quite noteworthy) as through the fact that it was subject to political manipulation and prohibition. Religiously-oriented drama became one of the poles in the confrontation between the totalitarian communist regime and literature. The communist party’s aggressive onslaught against religion was endorsed by its philosophical adherence to the principles of Marxism. The clash between (Judeo-Christian) religion and (materialist-atheist) Marxism was inevitable, given their irreducible antagonism.

Intent as they were on staunchly enforcing the strategies of subjecting the population according to instructions received from the Kremlin, the RCP leaders, albeit politically and ideologically ignorant, took over an entire compost of ideas referring to the political treatment of religious issues. Casting religion as its ultimate rival, the RCP set about the ambitious task of eradicating the religious tradition in Romania and subjecting the Church to police persecution. The onslaught would only subside or cease when the Church accepted to become the ally of the atheist communist power, legitimating the latter in the process.

The regime’s attitude towards religion and the Church registered various nuances depending on the willingness of the high-ranking officials of diverse confessions (Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, Catholic, Protestant, Neo-Protestant) to collaborate. Thus, while the Greek-Catholic Church was abolished and its bishops were martyred, the Orthodox Church enjoyed a lenience verging at times on complicity. The Neo-Protestant cults were all subjected to persecution, with varying degrees of intolerance.

The clash between the atheist communist propaganda and religion made the RCP extremely alert to the consequences ensuing from allowing religious themes to permeate literature and the arts. Religious drama was part and parcel of the culture of revolt, through its sheer rejection of the pseudo-values imposed and demanded by the communist ideology.

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The interference of censorship, which resorted to punitive, prohibitive or (merely) prescriptive methods, radically altered the evolution of Romanian drama and determined its approach to religious issues. The turn of **the 1950s** was marked by radical prohibitiveness. Embarking on the project of the harshest type of censorship, the RCP

aimed at removing any overt or covert textual allusion to religion from literary discourse. It was not long before ideological paroxysm would be reached. Not only the dogmatic/conceptual content was expurgated, but also any specific lexical reference to it. The word “church”, for instance, was barred from appearing in any dramatic text or, for that matter, even in detracting critical reviews. Religious symbols were disavowed even when they were the target of contestation.

The power aimed to preclude even the possibility of *thinking* alternatively. Religion had to be discredited as a social practice and, at the same time, it had to be rendered inaccessible even as sheer mental possibility. Citizens were expected to abjure their own faiths. They would, however, only rise to the standards imposed by the party’s ideological exigencies when they stopped regarding religion as a viable possibility, in other words, when they ceased to rationally admit its grounds for existence.

Under these circumstances, during the first years of communism in Romania, it was out of the question that religion-related episodes, themes or allusions might appear in the drama or in the arts. Whatever attempts there might have been, they were relegated to clandestineness and never circulated even in samizdat manner. Today we have knowledge of a single text: Valeriu Anania’s *The Diamond Robber*, which was inspired from the biblical epic, and rendered the parable of the Prodigal Son in a rather faithful, witty and expressive manner. As the author (an Orthodox clergyman)<sup>9</sup> has confessed, the play was written at Curtea de Argeș in 1952 but was only published in 1993.

Paradoxically, the twofold goal of communist propaganda – promoting atheism and combating the values of religion – was what enabled the comeback of religious concepts, symbols and terminology, which had been excised from literary discourse. Impossible to avoid in polemical texts, the presence of religious references in the very canon of propagandistic art amounted to a veritable *coup de theatre*. Thereafter, downright rejection, in the shape of making any reference to religion taboo, ceased to be the only possible attitude. The RCP conceded that rejection could be supplemented by polemical acceptance. Religious references thus started to be gradually tolerated, albeit for the exclusive purpose of being ridiculed or condemned in satirical and parodic texts.

The anti-spiritualist campaign, targeted primarily against the Christian religion, relied on locating the latter in an area of the malefic. To ensure its critical destructibility, authentic religious experience was curiously associated with phenomena that were officially regarded as reprehensible and retrograde. On the one hand, it was related to popular “mystical” beliefs placed under anathema by the party propaganda, such as superstitions or anachronic (“backward”) cultural forms. On the other hand, religious experience was dramatically rendered using the perspective and the terminology of the legionary movement, which had

been ideologically and politically compromised. A twofold advantage was thus secured: religion was castigated not only as an ideologically blameable inner experience, but also a criminal political venture. In plays like *The Ghost in the Barn*, Aurel Baranga potently illustrates, to the point of exaggerating, such demands of the party propaganda: according to the latest RCP guidelines, religious “sects” are denounced, in his text, as the haven of the “class enemy”.

Despite its concerted attacks against the Christian model, the materialist and atheist communist ideology evinced a (never acknowledged) dependency upon it, attempting to utilise religious forms and symbols and enlisting them in the ritual of submission to communism. This phenomenon has been described by researchers as the “return of the repressed”.

Since they were incapable of creative inventiveness, collaborationist writers mimicked in reverse the mental structures, specific representations and tropes of the religious imaginary. The propagandistic literature of *socialist realism* slyly appropriated some of these Christian symbolical forms, divested them of their sacred content and thereafter converted them into *topoi* of the communist political imaginary.<sup>10</sup> It might be argued that the writers of *socialist realism* did not in effect replicate the Christian imaginary, but resorted instead to a set of more general symbolical and typological forms which are not necessarily religiously connoted, not even in reverse. According to this hypothesis, these forms should be regarded as archaic, pre-Christian universal signifying structures, similar to the Jungian archetypes. Even if that were the case, the analogy with the Christian pattern cannot be foreclosed, since, at the reception level, there is an ongoing overlap between them.

A transparent thematic reworking of (Eastern-Orthodox, as well as Western) Christian imagery led to its gradual replacement with, initially, a “soviet mythology”, and then, as nationalist discourse gained in importance, with the meditation on autochthonous history. To a neutral observer, this would only certify the fact that the political games deployed under the banner of communism were as irrational and non-scientific as the ones it denounced.

In his analysis of the pseudo-artistic results of this dramatic method, the critic Ion Vartic<sup>11</sup> notices not only the blatant aesthetic regression but also the transformation of Romanian drama into a “Theatre of Unmasking”, as a reflex of the “Bogomilist vision”. The (purportedly) dramatic texts (in actual fact, didactic and stereotypical plays, in which the political message was quite overt and had a compulsory happy ending) adopted the structure of serial “moralities”. Manicheist typology engendered, in its turn, the transformation of the stage space into an “agonic battleground for ‘angels’ and ‘demons’”. For instance, in a play like Horia Lovinescu’s *The Crumbling Citadel* (1955), the saintly hermit is recast

as a revolutionary, while the “class enemy” embodies the mundane manifestation of metaphysical Evil.

The trick was a failure, however. Although tailored after the patterns and with the instruments of religious discourse, *socialist realist* literature lacked its participative fervour and force of impact. That is why the new typology cultivated by the socialist realist arts hardly ever managed to appear as credible. One case represents an exception, though: Aurel Baranga’s *The Rabid Lamb* (1954), in which the protagonist, Spiridon Biserică (Church) – ironically nicknamed “God’s lamb”, on account of his disconcerting goodness – was built after the Christian archetype of the sacrificial victim. The reversal of the archetypal scheme (the saviour figure become an inveterate persecutor) and the ambivalent (neutral, as well as pejorative) deployment of Christian symbolism gave way here to contradictory interpretations. Some interpretations simply reinforced the party’s ideological themes: for example, the “class enemy” could camouflage as mock reformists arising from the former condemned social classes, preventing the proletariat from fully exercising its revolutionary force. Others could become subversive: for instance, the idea that not only were the working class members unprepared to take over the power, but that under the influence of communist ideology, they would end up being corrupt and abusive rather than emancipated and animated by their revolutionary consciousnesses. The tension inherent in this pattern of character construction, triggering, for instance, the protagonist’s transformation from a formerly “humiliated” into a currently empowered individual, into a truly “rabid lamb”, revealed the distorting nature of power by subtly counterfeiting the party’s ideological prescriptions. In this text, subversiveness became a gauge of artistic authenticity.

Most often than not, however, the characters of party-biased literature were simply ludicrous, the would-be “mystical revolutionary” adopting the role of an involuntary buffoon, devoid of artistic credibility: a poor merry Andrew. Literature wrought thus a well-deserved revenge on ideology.

The breakthrough inaugurated by the relative political permissiveness following 1964 allowed for literature to renew itself. The context fostered replenishment and emulation, generating very diverse and intriguing dramatic forms, in which, despite consistent hindrances, religious themes started developing inside a well-defined perimeter. After almost two decades, religious themes, episodes and symbols made a comeback in drama, and this time they were no longer a target of satire. Having been expurgated in the 1950s, religious discourse would swamp the artistic sphere via the fire escape in the 1960s.

The tendency to revive religious themes was not only natural and legitimate, but also explicable. In that political climate, the Christian religion represented for artists the ultimate alternative to the materialist

and atheist communist ideology. Both systems aspired to totality and it was natural that they should attract one another in a polarised context.

This tendency was based on different, yet not contradictory premises. On such grounds, we may group the dramatic texts and the authors corresponding to them into several categories, albeit their borders are flexible and they interfere at many levels.

At the *first* level, religious themes were retrieved into dramatic texts as a natural response to ideological relaxation. There was a possibility that playwrights might be tempted to use religious discourse (instead of social action) as a sort of rebellious gesture meant to assert their own independence. Aiming to win over their readership again, some authors ostentatiously chose to write plays on religious topics as the most obvious and unambiguous way of disavowing official discourse and party propaganda. Both contextually and opportunely, they used religion as a springboard situated at the opposite pole from the communist ideological system. Literature's freedom from political interference was thus emphasised. One decade before, mysticism would have been a serious indictment. Now, although not entirely harmless, it could be transformed into a strategy for public success.

Recourse to drama on religious themes represented a manner – altogether different from stark opposition or radical non-conformism – of freeing oneself from, on the one hand, the oppression exerted by the rhetoric and imagery of party propaganda upon human minds and bodies and, on the other hand, from the prevailing political order. It was an effective means of identifying rebels, who did not belong to the system and who wanted to emphasise that dissociation. Religious themes implicitly became enlisted in the process of reinventing the language of nonconformism, which had been completely excluded up to that point from public discourse.

As the literary climate consolidated itself, such attitudes were no longer called for. Literature written on religious themes also underwent a process of normalisation, approaching Christian topics and motifs from a politically neutral and strictly cultural perspective. While in the 1950s, when writers were faced with the radical prohibition to use religious themes in literary texts, those who did use them exhibited their overt opposition to the regime, risking imprisonment, now they resorted to such themes for purposes that were intrinsic to the process of artistic creation.

Authors were no longer interested in the subversive substratum or the specificity of religious experience, but in valorising a cultural *topos* that would allow them access to the universal. Religious themes were not cultivated for their own sake but as bridges towards other themes with which they shared a metaphysical or, in any case, a transhistorical type of scepticism. Such theatre plays deployed themes like Time, History, the decay of civilisations, etc.

Recourse to the sources of Christianity is well known to be specific to modernity, with the major religious themes becoming cultural themes. Recuperating them for their literary prestige and their force of symbolic dissemination, these playwrights implicitly rallied themselves to a tendency that was peculiar to the twentieth-century western world.

The poignant speculative concern with interrogation, debate and dialectics reveals these plays as dramas of ideas, whose ideational as well as artistic calibre varies. It is the case, for example, of Dan Botta, whose *The Sun and the Moon* (1968), a “liturgical drama in four acts”, approaches, with ample poetical gestures and romantic rhetorical prowess, religious themes, out of a desire to aesthetically detach itself from the degrading social and political context.

Religious experience also becomes a pretext for metaphysical interrogation with playwrights like I.D. Sîrbu, Horia Lovinescu, Marin Sorescu *et alii*<sup>12</sup>. Plays like I.D. Sîrbu’s *The Ark of Good Hope* and Horia Lovinescu’s *The Game of Life and Death in the Ashen Desert* partake of the same thematic constellation. Admixing (mock)existentialist ideas with structures borrowed from the theatre of the absurd, reworked in a deliberately expressionist manner, these plays address eschatological myths (the Flood, the Apocalypse) in surprising combinations with other myths of birth and resurrection: Genesis, the Christic myth, etc. Each and every time, this symbiotic mixture of biblical themes and motifs outlines a world that is out of joint, nearing the end of a historical and civilisation cycle.

Whether deliberate, as in Horia Lovinescu’s case, whose play locates humanity in a post-nuclear apocalypse, or accurately conveying, with minimal interventions, the archetypal adventure of a biblical character, as is the case of Noah in I.D. Sîrbu’s play, the preoccupation with the crepuscular is quite evident and violently contrasts with and denounces the optimistic rhetoric of communist propaganda. The dramatic universe of these plays revolves around the symbol of an apostate century whose regeneration the authors of these plays pursue with the visionary determination of the explorers of yore. Grafting together the mythology of extinction with that of salvation and creation suggests the imperative need for resurrection, for regenerating a dissolute world that has reached the end of an evolution cycle. The belief in survival, continuity and renewal is undermined by the theme of the shipwreck and of the final destruction.

Thus, “Noah’s ark”, the biblical archetype of salvation, acquires in I.D. Sîrbu’s play antithetical connotations: the ark is simultaneously a space of division, of hatred, of terrible violence, of fraternal confrontation and, eventually, of murder. The emphasis is laid on this secondary meaning which sacrilegiously renders futile any attempt at salvation. The true question is not whether redemption is possible, but whether **this** humanity (so decayed and perverted, so divorced from the luminous side of its conscience) deserves indeed to be saved. The ambivalent ending, verging



on the sceptical, violently contradicts the myth's soteriological purpose and grants an ironical meaning to the unequivocal title, which promises to transform the illusion of a new Genesis and a new beginning into certitude.

Horia Lovinescu's play, published in 1968 and built around the biblical myth of Cain and Abel, represents, according to Nicolae Manolescu, a "buffooning apocalypse", given its mixture of the tragic and the grotesque, of the sublime and the abject. The characters' failures (death, self-exile, solitude and insecurity) eventually bring about a "brutal awakening", which announces the promise of regeneration. Again, the question that is raised is whether the grotesque and deplorable family that, in the play, is emblematic for humanity's sole chance of regeneration really deserves such redemption.

We might surmise that the frequency of myths of the flood and destruction, supplemented by myths of hope, could be interpreted as the metaphorical expression of the age that engendered them. It was, indeed, an age that could breathe relieved after the great terror had finally subsided, but could not repress its memories, turning them into further sources of anxiety for the future. The re-emergence of eschatological myths may be related to the collective trauma of "class struggle", which had been induced in the previous decade. The social hatred and violence unleashed back then could hardly be tempered by the officially imposed values of the "new man". The tentative, hope-giving political liberalisation could hardly render acceptable the recent unimaginable terrors or alleviate uncontrollable tensions and irrepressible anxieties.

Given this context of hope undermined by anxiety, the call to rediscover primordial, archetypal gestures may be seen both as an essential survival gesture and as the expression of a state of alarm and of an all-too-lucid conscience, aiming to caution that despite the deceitful assurances given by the communist power, the exit from the Apocalypse has never truly occurred, nor is it ever, perhaps, really possible.

Analysed in themselves, these texts do not adopt, however, an explicitly anti-totalitarian position, nor are they intent on expressing dissent. They were created within a particular European cultural *Weltanschauung*, which, at that time, was dominated by the themes of solitude, suffering, anxiety and the absurdity of human existence. Nevertheless, such works were by no means politically naïve, nor were they perceived as such. Religious themes and motifs, which were not to the liking of censorship but were tolerated all the same, enabled the expression of other themes that had continued to be prohibited politically: loneliness, helplessness, the lack of perspectives, social isolation, failure, uniformity as the ante-chamber of death, marginalisation, the impossibility of communication, the absurd, the perils of liberty, individual frustration in the face of massification, existential anxiety, the besieged spirit, the feeling of insecurity, etc. All these dramas of alienation, of failure, of non-communication, and of the absurd (fraudulently inserted in

the plays, like Trojan horses), as well as the attempts to fictionally retrieve a sense of the individual (through theophanies and hierophanies), were starkly opposed to the triumphalist optimism of the age and flagrantly undermined the officially promoted propaganda image. This is what made them difficult to tolerate. The RCP became more and more confused and visibly irritated by the resurrection of metaphysical anxiety in the arts and by the writers' determination to unravel a transcendent meaning in quotidian situations.

The highest aesthetic achievement in this type of dramatic writing belonged to Marin Sorescu, who also succeeded in authentically replenishing dramatic form and content. In *The Thirst of the Salt Mountain*, 1974 (a tryptich including *Jonah*, written in 1965 and published in 1968, *The Verger*, 1971, and *The Matrix*, conceived between 1969 and 1973, and published in 1974), the author used religious experience as a pretext for metaphysical interrogation, exploring the crisis of the modern spirit. Sorescu was also one of the few playwrights who arrived at a genuine religious meaning (particularly in *The Verger*). He is considered to have retrieved, in the autochthonous space, the medieval mystery play, filtered through popular farces. Censorship indicted his texts for their "spiritualist" allure, for their aspiring to enlarge the sphere of understanding human existence beyond its sheer material, temporal limitations (which Marxism emphasised), highlighting instead its transcendental dimension.

The opposition that can indeed be detected in this attitude is a *cultural* opposition, consisting primarily in euphorically ignoring the political commandments. Censorship had, however, explicit reasons for becoming alert, like, for instance, in the case of *Jonah*, a play that reworks its homonymous biblical myth with great philosophical and aesthetic amplitude, as well as with unmistakable humour. Although largely interpreted as a metaphysical drama about the impossibility of escaping one's own condition, political readings are also feasible: it can also be seen as an anti-utopia of the totalitarian society, as a parable of the communist regime, or as a metaphor of the social system, seen as a malefic labyrinth that swallows one like an all-consuming belly.

The play's political undertones, which were made all the more evident in its performances, become obvious if one considers the historical moment of its publication. Set against the background of 1968, the play appears downright subversive. The sense of freedom announced by the ending is countered by a great disillusion: the awareness that one is freed into an even larger prison.

The *second* category comprises texts that resort to religious themes in order to conceal their critique of totalitarianism, casting oppression in several allegorical forms. These plays either deconstruct an ideology, denouncing its partisanship, or take the shape of anticommunist allegories or explicit parables of the communist (counter)utopia. The political

meanings are, this time, no longer ascribed to them indirectly, by analogy, but ensue naturally from their very dramatic construction. In their cases, the intervention of censorship was no longer aimed at cleansing whatever religious significance might contradict ideological atheism, but at eschewing allegorical or symbolical artistic constructions that might have given way to unwanted interpretations.

A relevant example here is Ion Omescu's attempt to publish in 1970 a dramatic rewriting of Jesus Christ's passions, in a play entitled *He & The Other*. Banning the play's publication,<sup>13</sup> censorship reproached its author on two accounts: on the one hand, his too mild critique of Christianity, and on the other, his unravelling of certain mechanisms of political power, the communist situation being rather transparently rendered.

The RCP intended to place religion within a derisory context, since that could prove a far more efficient critical instrument than any propaganda action which, by combating religion, might have involuntarily legitimised it in the readers' eyes. Given the association between religion and ideology, the theme was, however, rather explosive. Censorship regarded the deconstruction of ideology as a subversive gesture since, by its very rationalism, it could actively challenge consciousness and increase lucidity, resisting the annihilation of the individual and discouraging his blind obedience to the regime.

Ion Omescu's play revealed indeed the truthful fact that at a certain point, an ideology might turn against its founders, lose its live and effervescent "revolutionary character", and cage itself inside irrefutable dogmas that might wreak havoc even amongst their adherents. What was most disturbing for censorship was the possibility to generalise and understand that any ideology, not only the ideology of Christianity, but also the Marxist one might embark on that trajectory (which, of course, was quite unacceptable).

The prohibitions imposed by censorship were, however, nuanced. What mattered were not only the moment and context of publication, or the intensity and transparency of critique, but also the author's status. Rights or privileges that were refused to one author might have been granted another. Thus, only two years before, in 1968, Dinu Săraru had published his play entitled *The Saint*, where the key retort was similar: "Any spiritual movement starts feeding, at a certain point, on a corpse. The saint is a perennial idea." Performed at the Comedy Theatre, the play was directed by Sanda Manu and scenographed by Dan Nemțeanu, starring Sanda Toma and Mihai Fotino. In the following decades, several other plays, amongst which Dumitru Radu Popescu's *The Dwarf in the Summer Garden* (1972), and Al. Sever's *The Old Angel* (1982) and *Night is My Parish* (1981), eluded censorship, passing for anti-Nazi works.

The strategy was this time reversed. While Ion Omescu demystified Christianity, purging it of its sacred content and reconstructing it as an ideology (similar to political ideology), Dumitru Radu Popescu, for

instance, took an opposite course, by interpreting rightwing totalitarian political ideologies as traps/gateways for malefic transcendence permeating history. A critique of totalitarianism invites, however, considerations on its reversible facets. Nazism is here but *one* example of totalitarian ideology, making possible, and perhaps legitimating and encouraging, its confusion with communism. Both systems defined themselves as messianic and could be perceived as counter-utopias by readers sufficiently skilled at discerning the anti-communist undertones of a work.

Such plays took over religious themes and motifs and, under the protective umbrella of their universal cultural significance, deployed them in what otherwise might have been a forbidden type of discourse. The method consisted in using a cultural schema to address prohibited topics; in effect, under the guise of archetypal and atemporal significance, such plays could give expression to political protests, in a form of opposition altogether secure from hardly negligible (existential) risks.

Finally, the *third* category includes works in which Christian inspiration or allusion had obvious political stakes and which deliberately and, sometimes, ostentatiously, exploited the religious imaginary in order to aggravate the authorities.

The premises are quite clear. Communism represents the Evil devouring an entire country and that must be vented out. Communist ideology refers to the illusion of a terrestrial paradise. Well, then, communism must be exposed in its real, quotidian dimension. Hence, the day-to-day life will be put on display, with all its pettiness, its lack of horizons, its immense, corrosive ennui; furthermore, the failings of power itself will be unveiled: lies, incompetence, brutality, corruption, pettiness, opportunism, careerism, intolerant authoritarianism, and dogmatism. This panorama of reversed values aimed to unmask a disordered world (at the antipodes of that described by the official propaganda) that was decayed, degraded, on the point of demise. Religious themes turned out to be instrumental forms of representation for the downfall of the communist world. By contrast, however, it was revealed that despite the generalised communist destabilisation, the nostalgia for the divine had not been, after all, eradicated, and the memory of a harmonious, integrating order had persisted.

Most often than not, these plays were comedies that concurrently aimed to violently remove any taboos which had ousted religious themes from dramatic works. While authors like Marin Sorescu had recuperated such themes in the serious register, these plays resumed them under the *aegis* of the ludic and the parodic.

After the coarse satires of the 1950s, characterised by dull attempts at purveying a forced and artificial type of humour, several dramatists would practise or specialise in this genre. Teodor Mazilu was by far the most accomplished of them. However, although such attempts proliferated in

that period, artistic achievements remained rather scarce. The recurrence of titles using religious terms or metaphors may be surprising: *Thou Shalt Not Slander the Inferno* (Mihail Raicu), *Paradise* (Horia Lovinescu), *The Gentle Inferno*; *A Second-Hand Paradise*; *Satan the Good and the Righteous* (Tudor Popescu), *Hell and the Bird* (Ion Omescu), *These Sad Angels* (D. R. Popescu), etc. The connexions were, though, rarely more than superficial (they seldom went beyond the title), since the religious motifs were mere conventional pretexts meant to enhance their prestige.

In a few cases, plays were anchored in myths so as to voice, from such safe outposts, devastating critiques of the system. Hell and mock Paradise became alternatively allegories of the utopian communist society. Comedy revealed communism's entrenchment in deceitfulness and derision. The allure of religion was quite evident in these comedies, since it could generate, under circumstances of insecurity, defence mechanisms for screening its subversive potential. The above-mentioned comedies culturally recycled religious themes and motifs which, given the protective camouflage of their stereotypical content, enabled the consolidation of an otherwise prohibited category of critical discourse. It needs be mentioned that such works were not vituperative enough to disturb the power, except perhaps circumstantially. The little truths these texts conveyed with maximum caution also contributed, however, to the dissolution of the communist system.



In retrospect, it is obvious that censorship – an avid, polymorphous monster – tinged and compromised everything. Protected by special laws (in themselves, inaccessible to the wider public or to the citizens) and organised by military regulations, yet preferring clandestineness, the DGPP was the institution of censorship which, alongside the Security Direction, represented one of the most feared and despised instruments of the communist state in Romania during the first three decades of the regime. Its entire activity was a legally-sanctioned abuse it committed on a daily basis. The laws providing for and protecting it represented a source of self-legitimation and validation for a fundamentally illegitimate activity. In actual fact, the DGPP acted as a commando of the superior party leadership.

The political meanders and shifting self-images of the RCP were reflected in censorship's changing attitudes. Radicalism and acute intolerance alternated with periods of supervised freedom; this never amounted to actual political freedom, which was not granted and was practically impossible to achieve.

Censorship exhibited several types of reaction towards dramas written on religious themes. It maintained its intransigence towards any authentic religious text, prohibiting it completely. A symptomatic case is

that of Lucian Blaga, whose reputation as a poet was rehabilitated after his death, yet who remained a forbidden playwright for several more years, on account of his “mystical” disposition.

Censorship also rejected most of the works in whose symbolical or allegorical structure it could detect a covert critique of the regime. It only gave way when and where the party’s circumstantial interests demanded it to. Its strategy of approving and, at times, officially encouraging the publication of such texts may be accounted for as part of the system’s political tactics of relaxing its grip, which were deployed out of a fear of self-asphyxiation, out of a desire to minimise liberalism, or in order to gain external recognition. Since it was aware of the political pressure it exerted upon the society, the RCP knew it needed safety valves for maintaining this social pressure at a level of bearable intensity, that is, beneath the critical level, which might have triggered overt contestatory acts from the oppressed populace. Even in such cases, censorship intervened in varying degrees, manifesting a certain amount of tolerance towards strictly delineated, sectorial critiques, yet never allowing systemic criticism.

An analysis of censorship’s reports may enable us to construct a diagram of (in)tolerance to dramatic texts on religious themes. In principle, religious symbols were tolerated in so far as they could be interpreted as mere cultural slip-ups, which were not effectively assumed by their authors in their religious dimension. Such an attitude was compatible with an atheist point of view and, furthermore, also had the advantage that it imparted a humanist dimension upon communism. Should these visual or conceptual images exceed a purely speculative frame and attempt to characterise the contemporary historical background, they were deemed dangerous to the totalitarian power and were, therefore, forbidden.

The conviction that religious imagery was and could be politically dangerous was never abandoned by the communist ideologues and politicians in Romania. Censorship kept an alert interest in literary texts that conveyed religious themes and images, given their “symbolical violence” (Pierre Bourdieu). In that area, permissiveness was rather restricted and limited. Even when authors innocuously resorted to such motifs, censors would interpret them as subversive, for a climate of generalised uncertainty fostered cautionary suspiciousness.

The writers’ vocal resistance never reached a high pitch. Prohibitions were rarely transgressed. Instead, a wide network of complicity generated hyper-codifications in the field of literature and the arts, which quite often encrypted subversive meanings. Writers took advantage of any gesture of lenience on the regime’s part, but rarely took the initiative themselves. They adapted themselves to the political context, which, while essentially petrified, was nonetheless jolted at regular intervals by small internal, and, sometimes, self-inflicted cataclysms. Moreover, in an atmosphere of

generalised deceitfulness, writers made disproportionate efforts to delineate their own oases of truth.

Having been suppressed through threats and terror in the 1950s, the idea of political resistance through art had re-emerged by the middle of the 1960s, when writers gradually assumed a subversive attitude of indirectly yet trenchantly criticising the regime. Literary works amounted to imaginary surrogates for the lack of civic courage. In less than one decade, the gap between literature and the communist party had widened to such an extent that the latter ended up considering art *per se* as subversive. Art for art's sake became regarded as a serious crime of insubordination.

To sum up, the communist regime in Romania may be said to have tolerated literature and the arts only to the extent to which it could enlist them to its own purposes. Literature had to pay a political price but remained loyal to its own purpose and nature, resisting as far as possible the totalitarian regime, whose identity it undermined, even if through the mere voicing of its taboos.

(Translated by Carmen Borbély)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Despite the communist ideologues' explicit disavowal of religion and Christianity, international analysts, such as Jules Monnerot, Alain Besancon, Girardet, Jean-Pierre Sironneau, and Romanian scholars like Lucian Boia, Vladimir Tismăneanu or Sanda Cordos have very cogently detected certain similarities between the premises of Marxism and those of religion. It has become a commonplace in religious studies to denounce the unnatural alliance between religion or gnosis and the communist ideology.

<sup>2</sup> See Graça Dos Santos, *Le Spectacle dénaturé. Le Théâtre portugais sous le règne de Salazar. (1933-1968)*, Préface de Robert Abirached (Paris: CNSR Editions, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> The urgency of such action was increased by the awareness of the RCP's illicit position: it had no mass representation (it ranked about 1000 members at the end of WWII) and its political legitimacy was fragile (it had been practically imposed in office by the USSR).

<sup>4</sup> Several analyses dedicated to this period can be consulted in Romulus Rusan, editor, *Anul 1948 - instituționalizarea comunismului/1948 - The Institutionalisation of Communism*. Papers delivered at the symposium from Sighetul Marmației, 19-21 June 1998, (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, *Analele Sighet* 6, 1998). See also Nicoleta Ionescu-Gură, *Stalinizarea României. Republica Populară Română 1948-1950: transformări instituționale/The Stalinisation of Romania. The Romanian Popular Republic 1948-1950: Institutional Transformations* (Bucharest: All Publishing House, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> The fact that *socialist realism* represented a form of political dictatorship was confirmed in time by the conduct of the RCP, which resorted to it whenever it deliberately aimed to intimidate artists: in 1948, 1958, 1971 or in the 1980s.

<sup>6</sup> For a more nuanced assessment of the various stages of Romanian literature under communism, see Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub communism/Romanian Literature under Communism* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Pro, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> A period which literary critic Eugen Negrici has defined as the "age of phantasmatic freedom".

<sup>8</sup> Given the lack of an elite religious tradition, the syntagm "religious drama" would only partially be appropriate to use here. Romania never had a literature of "mysteries" and "miracles"; furthermore, in recent history, including the interwar period, there have only been very few particular cases of religiously inspired dramas and by no means an entire such trend. Whatever representative authors and titles deserve mentioning here could be subsumed either to romantically-inflected symbolism or to expressionism.

<sup>9</sup> Known as Bartolomeu Anania, Archbishop of Vad, Feleac and Cluj, currently Metropolitan Bishop of Cluj, Alba, Crișana and Maramureș, the author enjoys a certain literary fame. He has written a "pentalogy of Romanian mythology", entitled *Greul Pământului/The Earth's Weight*, which was published in 1982. Anania is a playwright following in the footsteps of Lucian Blaga's folklore-inspired drama.



<sup>10</sup> In order to emphasise such monolithic attitudes, literary historian Eugen Negrici has entitled an anthology of propagandistic poems *The Poetry of a Red Religion*. See Eugen Negrici, *Poezia unei religii politice. Patru decenii de agitație și propagandă, o antologie a poeziei proletcultiste/The Poetry of a Political Religion. Four Decades of Agitation and Propaganda, a proletcult poetry anthology* (Bucharest: Editura Pro, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Ion Vartic, *Modelul și oglinda/The Model and the Mirror* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească Publishing House, 1982, 266-275).

<sup>12</sup> An exhaustive list would necessarily have to include Al. Sever's two plays, *Îngerul slut/The Hideous Angel* and *Don Juan apocaliptic/Don Juan the Apocalyptic*, as well as other, less convincing plays, like Leonida Teodorescu's *Cina cea de taină/The Last Supper*.

<sup>13</sup> The play would eventually see the light of print only in 1992.