

PUBLISHED POETS IN THE ROMANIAN TEXTBOOKS BETWEEN 1948-1964

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ABSTRACT:

THE PRESENT PAPER AIMS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE MIXTURE OF VALUES IS A FREQUENT PRACTICE FOR THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN ROMANIA. THE ROLE OF STUDYING POETRY IN SCHOOLS IS MAINLY TO FORM THE POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE PUPILS, NOT THE LITERARY ONE. THE CHILDREN'S POETRY, TURNED INTO A PROPAGANDA TOOL, IS DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE IDEOLOGICAL GOALS. VALUABLE POETS ARE PRESENT IN THE TEXTBOOKS TOGETHER WITH THE MAKERS OF COMMUNIST POETRY WHOSE WORKS DON'T HAVE ANY LITERARY VALUE. THE COMMUNISM LACKS AESTHETIC ASSESSMENT OF THE POETS, THE ONLY IMPORTANT RULE FOR PUBLICATION AND PRESENCE IN THE TEXTBOOKS IS THE REFLECTION IN THEIR WORKS OF THE COMMUNIST VALUES. THROUGH THE MESSAGE IT SENDS, THE POETRY IS EFFECTIVE IN ACHIEVING PROPAGANDA OBJECTIVES, THEREBY LEGITIMIZING THE TOTALITARIAN REGIME.

KEY WORDS: COMMUNISM, IDEOLOGY, POETS, ROMANIAN TEXTBOOKS, PROPAGANDA

After the establishment of the totalitarian communist regime in Romania, education is transformed into a means of propagation and inoculation of the communist values. The unique Romanian textbook studied beginning with 1948 in schools proves its responsiveness to the changes from the public space. Propaganda made through literary texts illustrates the effort of legitimating of the newcomers to command in the conditions of a low popular support.

The mixture of values is a frequent practice for the communist regime in Romania. Valuable poets are present in the textbooks together with the makers of communist poetry whose work doesn't have any literary value. The communism lacks aesthetic assessment of the poets, the only important rule for publication and presence in the textbooks is the reflection in the works of the communist values. Ana Selejan answers the question: *Who are the poets that materialized in the early years of communist regime in Romania the new lyricism?* "They are authors of all ages, of all poetic formulas. They are the poets converted from the confessional lyric to social poetry, yet with no visible political commitment. They are those who continue their early literary orientation more or less prominent, finding themselves in the sensitivity of

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the new paradigm. They are the newly published authors and they are not scarce. Therefore, they are the generation of poets of August 23, to use a phrase of the times.”³

After 1948 the Romanian in the textbooks is published a poetry complying the communist instructions. The perspective on Romanian literature as shown in the school curriculum is much simplified. The poet has to educate students in the ideological spirit and the poetry is responsible for the dissemination of the party’s interests.

The poets become tools in the hands of the political power, which is more interested in their ideological orientation than in the aesthetic value of their creation. The position that the contemporary writers adopt against the power involves different shades: from hesitation or hostility to adaptation, conformism and collaborationism. In the present study it is not important how poets relate to the political regime or the literary value of their texts, but the way in which the authorities use their creation in order to achieve propaganda objectives.

Depending on the editorial debut, poets published in the Romanian textbooks for elementary school between 1948-1964 can be divided into three categories: poets of the XIXth century and poets of the beginning of the XXth century, poets of the interwar period and contemporary (politically) „engaged” poets.

In the first category there are generally included valuable authors who have published before the establishment of the communist regime in Romania, and their texts aren’t affected by propaganda. Despite the fact that their work hasn’t been altered by pro-communist ideas, it has been used by the political power in order to achieve ideological objectives. In this sense, there were chosen to be published in the Romanian textbooks, poems containing a social dimension. The publication of these texts also intended to create a sense of continuity with the literature of the predecessors.

The second category includes poets of the interwar period by whom it was invented a tradition for the communist militant poetry. Most of these poets have used the reputation gained in the interwar period to promote the new communist lyric.

Contemporary „engaged” poets included in the third category are mainly rhymers of communist propaganda. There are poets who published after 1948 and who assiduously published “committed” poetry during the communist regime. The category includes both aesthetic worthless poets (who have collaborated since the beginning with the totalitarian regime) and also valuable poets.

Referring to only a few poets of the 19th century and of the beginning of the 20th century published in the Romanian textbooks, we can consider that they are reassessed under the ideological pressure. The reticence to Mihai Eminescu is due to the fact that he cultivates pessimism and decadent formalism in his lyric. The national poet is present on the pages of the textbooks as the author of the epic poem about the French Revolution of 1789, *Emperor and Proletarian* and with *3rd Letter*, texts that can be interpreted as a social critique. Eminescu is also published in the textbooks with poems inspired by nature or folklore, while his publishing, philosophical poetry or romantic prose are not even printed.

In the textbooks there are published a number of “progressive bourgeois” writers: George Coșbuc, Ion Creangă or Alexandru Vlahuță proving that nomenclature rewrites the literary tradition based on their own interests.

Two Romanian limerick writers often published in the textbooks are Grigore Alexandrescu and Alecu Donici. Their texts convey messages about ethics and social justice, and “the allegorical essence of fable does not create the slightest difficulty when it comes to decoding the message.”⁴

³ Ana Selejan, *Poezia românească în tranziție (1944-1948)* (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 2007), 202.

⁴ Nicolae Manolescu, *Despre poezie* (Brașov: Editura Aula, 2002), 103.

The authors in this category best represented in the Romanian textbooks for elementary school (grades I-VII/VIII) between 1948-1964 are: Vasile Alecsandri, George Coșbuc, Grigore Alexandrescu, Mihai Eminescu, Șt.O. Iosif.

After 1947 the political power disclaims the writers who haven't complied fast enough with the communist values. The vacant seats are filled with non-values: D.Th. Neculuță has a conception of society far more advanced than that of Mihai Eminescu's, Tudor Arghezi is overshadowed by Alexandru Toma.

The interwar poets published in the textbooks between 1948-1964 aren't well represented in the Romanian textbooks. Arghezi, Blaga, Barbu write poems considered reactionary, mystical and hermetic by the authorities. Many writers who believed in the freedom of creation have been prevented from participating to the literary life after 1948. Leonte Răutu, head of party propaganda, is the artisan of some disappearances/ reappearances on the stage of literary life.

Making reference to the political influence after 1944 on the behavior of many poets belonging to the interwar period, Ana Selejan notes that "few were those at who we can mention a lyrical quasi continuity (adapted, of course, to the new socio-political priorities): M. Beniuc, A. Toma, Ion Th. Ilea, D. Corbea."⁵

Alexandru Toma writes poetry from the position of the working class: "Dead in 1954, A. Toma (to whom the authorities have invented a biography of a revolutionary proletarian poet) was the model of the creator in the first Republican year."⁶ Sorin Toma, son of the poet, representative of the nomenclature, triggered a strong attack in epoch on Arghezi. The article *The Putrefaction of Poetry and the Poetry of Putrefaction*, published in January 1948, will extract the arguments on "the harmfulness" of Arghezi in the volume *One hundred and one poems* in a simplistic and theists comment. Arghezi's volume, published in 1947, is seized immediately after publication. Thus all literary honor goes to Alexandru Toma, father of the Chief Editor of "Scântea" Newspaper. From an obscure versifier, A. Toma becomes one of the most celebrated poet of the '50s and very present in textbooks (*Song for the Romanian People's Republic*).

Mihai Beniuc (author until 1950 of six volumes of poetry) will also be a key figure of the Romanian literary life. After 1944, the Transylvanian poet knows a constant notoriety, enjoying the advantages of the writer status. Significant positions and awards do not bypass: former consul at the Romanian Embassy in Moscow, first secretary of the Writers Union and then president of the same institution. Social issue obsessed the poet even before August 23, 1944, his lyric being one of the most representative artistic expressions of the communist ideology. Master of socialist-realist school, Beniuc's creation is vast, also including short stories or novel.⁷

In his literary studies the critic Eugen Negrici makes him unflattering portraits, capturing its opportunist spirit: "The most skilful of all, the most talented, a true precursor of the big bootlickers of the Golden Age is Mihai Beniuc."

Demostene Botez is present in the Romanian textbooks published before 1965 with texts reflecting the lyrical space of childhood, but also with poems that demonstrate allegiance to the regime (*The Sentinel*).

Director of the National Theatre, Writers' Union president, member of the Romanian Academy, "Zaharia Stancu is among the writers who, after August, 23, 1944, quickly joined the party politics. Due to his past as an informant and being a toad-eater, he did it with an

⁵ Ana Selejan, *Poezia românească în tranziție (1944-1948)* (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 2007), 205.

⁶ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism 1948-1964* (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 2010), 310.

⁷ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism. Poezia (I)* (București: Editura Fundației Pro, 2006), 77.

enthusiasm useful to propaganda organs in the difficult period of battling to gain full power.”⁸ The author is published in the textbooks with poems paying into propaganda.

Many poets joined for opportunistic reasons the conformist poetry production (Eugen Jebeleanu, Radu Boureanu, Cicerone Theodorescu, Maria Banuș etc.). In exchange for compensation of media or material nature, they have temporarily dedicated themselves to the communist poetry dogmas.

Eugen Jebeleanu published in the Romanian textbooks throughout the communist era. The poet enjoys the personal sympathy of Nicolae Ceaușescu, because in the trial of Brașov, in which the future president was among the defendants, Jebeleanu had taken his defense. During the visit at the Writers House in Neptune (August 4, 1971), the head of state addresses the poet laudatory and facetious words: “I’m looking at Jebeleanu, I remember when I first met him he was very active and wrote beautifully. He has good talent, writes rarely, less. We know each other since 1936; of course, in special circumstances, I was in prison, he was out. (Laughter) But he wrote good.”⁹

Radu Boureanu is the one who introduced in the movement of literary ideas Stalin’s phrase, referring on the writers as “engineers of souls”. When, in March 1949, the Romanian Academy People’s Republic granted its first awards, Radu Boureanu and Maria Banuș were the first winners of the poetry prize, called „George Coșbuc.”¹⁰

Cicerone Theodorescu craftsman on duty, with ease in versification, well educated (familiar with the prosody of Barbu and Maiakovski)¹¹ is a well-known figure of the Romanian textbooks published in the communist era. Beginning in 1936 as a hermetic poet, Cicerone Theodorescu is heading after two years to the poetry of proletarian revolt. The poem that gives the title of the volume *A song from our lane* (1953), a volume which was awarded the State Prize Class I, is also published in the textbooks.

„Classic alive of the socialist realist poetry of militant, combative essence”¹², Maria Banuș is a poet whose voice is heard very often in the textbooks. Poems such as *The Employer* or *To the Green Table* are required to study texts in the Romanian literature curriculum. Reviewing several volumes belonging to the poet, Nicolae Manolescu makes the observation (also valid for the poems published in the textbooks) that the too simple oppositions, the illustration, the story, evince a program, not a deep inner need. The simplifying political vision and the transparent moral does not help Maria Banuș’ texts to survive aesthetically.

Another poet of militant vocation present in the Romanian textbooks is Marcel Breslașu. The poet “was part of the famous writer’s team in the Socialist Realism period, of the frontrunners poets, winners and classics alive.”¹³ It is published in the textbooks with programmatic poems in the proleto-cult spirit (*August, 23, When I’ll become pioneer*).

The interwar poets best represented in the Romanian textbooks for elementary school (grades I-VII/VIII) are: Maria Banuș, Mihai Beniuc, Otilia Cazimir, Alexandru Toma, Eugen Jebeleanu, Marcel Breslașu, George Topârceanu.

Unlike some of the interwar poets who have lent the party some of their literary fame achieved before 1944, a group of contemporary poets owe their prestige to the political commitments they made (Eugen Frunză, Victor Tulbure and so on).

⁸ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism. Proza* (București: Editura Fundației Pro, 2006), 88.

⁹ Liviu Malița, *Ceaușescu, critic literar* (București: Editura Vremea, 2007), 47.

¹⁰ Ana Selejan, *Poezia românească în tranziție (1944-1948)* (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 2007), 332-333.

¹¹ Eugen Negrici, *Poezia unei religii politice. Patru decenii de agitație și propagandă* (București: Editura Pro, 1995), 8.

¹² Ana Selejan, *Literatura în totalitarism 1959-1960* (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 2000), 144.

¹³ Ana Selejan, *Poezia românească în tranziție (1944-1948)* (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 2007), 234.

In the early years of the Communist regime, the official literature in the Romanian People's Republic respected the thematic and stylistic canons of the Socialist Realism. Contemporary "engaged" poets included in the third category are the creators and the propagators of the new literary order.

For Nicolae Tăutu poetry represents slogan in the party spirit. The poetical themes preferred by the author are subordinated to ideological demands (*Meeting on Tatra; Written paper: Lenin*)

Veronica Porumbacu is "one of the most passionate and prodigious socialist realist poets after 1948"¹⁴, proving a total devotion to the unique party principles in writing versified stories. The poems published in textbooks serve the internationalist commandments of propaganda or evokes the struggle for emancipation of the communist movement (*The Key of the Valley; The Black Doll; My Father*).

Victor Tulbure was one of the most prolific writers of the socialist-realism times, writing poems of guided inspiration (*Our wishes are simple; Inscription*).

A significant feature of the contemporary poets is that they tirelessly write and chose a loud and strident way to express their commitment to the party. They produce a huge amount of lyrics. Dan Deșliu, for example, published in 1949 four volumes of poetry (*Trumpets of the heart; Song for the Great Low; Lazăr from Rusca; Poems*) being one of the most significant poets of the times.

Eugen Frunză "one of the most prolific poets of the time", takes the comfortable posture of the politically "engaged" writer. Debuting in 1950 with a volume inspired by the Socialist Realism, *Under the flag of life*¹⁵, many of his poems published in the textbooks are demos of poetry written on a political command (*To the party*).

Virgil Teodorescu "contributed to propagandistic literature"¹⁶, regressing from the surrealist poems of the debut to social poems in a disappointing proletcultist style. Many of the poems published in textbooks are samples of the Socialist Realism principles (*The hydropower from Biczaz "V.I. Lenin"; The famous mason*)

Denounced as decadent by the literary critics of the time, Nina Cassian denies her debut book and the "dangerous" bourgeois modernist influence¹⁷ and turns to socialist realist lyric. The poet is mainly present in the Romanian textbooks with texts reflecting childhood (*The Calendar; Talking to New Year; Mai 1st; It's raining*).

For Aurel Gurghianu poetry represents nothing else but a reportage. Few of his poems are worth reading today. The author is present in the textbooks with a poem dedicated in the spirit of the times to peace (*Peace to homeland!*).

Among the contemporary "engaged" poets published with many poems in the Romanian textbooks we can mention: Nina Cassian, Veronica Porumbacu, Virgil Teodorescu, Dan Deșliu, Nicolae Tăutu, Victor Tulbure.

All poetry subordinated to the propaganda machine has the function to embellish the reality and to educate young minds in the communist spirit. Through the message it sends, the poetry is effective in achieving propaganda objectives, thereby legitimizing the totalitarian regime. During the communist era, the children's poetry published in the Romanian textbooks builds on moral, aesthetic, but more prominently, on ideological level.

¹⁴ Selejan, Poezia românească în tranziție, 271.

¹⁵ Ana Selejan, Literatura în totalitarism 1959-1960 (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 2000) 172.

¹⁶ Eugen Negrici, Literatura română sub comunism 1948-1964 (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 2010), 204.

¹⁷ Ana Selejan, Poezia românească în tranziție (1944-1948) (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 2007), 90.

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