

COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA IN CHILDREN'S POETRY UNDER GHEORGHIU-DEJ'S REGIME

Cosmina CRISTESCU (TODERICĂ)¹
PIPOȘ Cristina²

ABSTRACT:

THE PRESENT PAPER AIMS TO DEMONSTRATE THE POLITICIZATION OF CULTURE, ART AND LITERATURE DURING GHEORGHIU-DEJ'S COMMUNIST REGIME IS REFLECTED ON THE CONTENT OF THE POETRY PUBLISHED IN THE ROMANIAN TEXTBOOKS. THE LYRICAL TEXTS, TURNED INTO PROPAGANDA TOOLS, ARE DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE IDEOLOGICAL GOALS, IN ORDER TO EMBELLISH THE REALITY AND TO EDUCATE YOUNG MINDS IN THE COMMUNIST SPIRIT. THROUGH THE MESSAGE IT SENDS, POETRY IS EFFECTIVE IN LEGITIMIZING THE TOTALITARIAN REGIME. DURING 1948-1965, THE POETRY FOR CHILDREN BUILDS ON MORAL, AESTHETIC, BUT MORE PROMINENTLY, ON IDEOLOGICAL LEVEL.

KEY WORDS: COMMUNISM, CHILDREN'S POETRY, PROPAGANDA THEMES, TEXTBOOKS

During the communist era the children's poetry published in the Romanian textbooks reflects the intention of the totalitarian regime to change reality according to its ideological claims. In terms of doctrinaire content, the children's poetry present in the textbooks during Gheorghiu-Dej's regime isn't neutral. In addition to the classic themes (childhood, the small animals, nature, etc.), the reader can come across those touched by the communist propaganda. The single party's intention to maintain control over everything,

¹ PhDe „Transilvania” University of Brașov, cosminatode@yahoo.com.

² PhDe „Transilvania” University of Brașov, „Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University of Bucharest, cristina.pipos@unitbv.ro.

including literary production, is reflected in the restrictions regarding the themes and the form of the lyrical creations. Many of the poems published in the Romanian textbooks after 1948 mirror the dogmatic absolutism of the Socialist Realism.

The mimetic attitude towards the Soviet model can be noticed in all domains in the first years of communist regime in Romania. The ideological alignment of our country was closely related to the Sovietization campaign and, therefore, in the textbooks published soon after 1948, one can find texts that glorify the Soviet Union, the Bolshevik heroes, Lenin or Stalin – the "brilliant" teachers of the working class.

„At five, my father told me about Lenin, / When he returned weary from the locomotive, / he told me he was not king, nor prince / but a father to the oppressed, / who took life into his hands / to change the dominion of the greedy. / But about this, he postponed it to another time / for he rushed to the hungry Grivița! / And left, // left, but he did not say anything, / For they picked him hurt from the mud/ and then killed him in the prefecture’s basement!...”³ (Nicholas Tăutu - *Written paper: Lenin*)

After 1948, the lyric of glorification uses Stalin’s name very often. “With Stalin, the discrepancy between the imaginary communism and the real one reaches the most spectacular dimension,”⁴ considers historian Lucian Boia. Stalin was highly glorified in life, but, following his death, in 1953, his image disappears from the textbooks.

“Throughout the country, from peak to peak, / From where the eagle freely flies/ To Stalin, the hero and the liberator, / The people sing a song from their heart. // (...) On the triumphal paths the song of brotherhood / Deeply penetrated in the Romanian lands, / And we are all proud that in the nations’ choir / Our singing heart answered.”⁵ (*Stalin’s song* – processed by A. Toma)

The first words of the scientific communism, the first words of the Communist Manifesto are: “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles.”⁶ Many poems for children published in the Romanian textbooks between 1948 and 1964 aimed at strengthening the class consciousness. The tone is vehement, the poetry urging to indefatigable vigilance and to hatred towards the class enemies.

“We work hardly / to increase your wealth, / For, successively, how you liked / Of our strength you made / Against our force shield / As your will was // (...) But one day

³ Limba română. Manual unic pentru clasa a VII-a elementară (București: Editura de Stat, 1949), 272-273.

⁴ Lucian Boia, *Mitologia științifică a comunismului*, (București: Humanitas, 2011), 81.

⁵ Limba română. Manual unic pentru clasa a V-a elementară (București: Editura de Stat, 1950), 255.

⁶ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifestul Partidului Comunist* (București: Nemira, 1998), 10.

from the valleys, from the mountains / from villages and from towns, / young men, women, gray haired men, / shall rise, and strong and gray / will put your forehead in the dust / You, haughty beasts.”⁷ (D. Th. Neculuță – *Chorus of slaves*)

In order to promote internationalism, the poems portray children of the world. Equality of peoples, regardless of nationality or race, the right to independence and the international cooperation are opposed to nationalism and chauvinism, considered of bourgeois origin. The independence from Moscow and the instauration of the national communism promoted by Ceaușescu will later lead to the removal of these principles of the Marxist philosophy.

“Hush-a-by, young black / They were saying in a song. / To New York they throw towards you / With stones on the road. / / We love you, little black / Were saying in a Russian song / The kindergarten children / With fair hair in the wind. / / If fascists hate / Your brownish cheeks / The children of Moscow / Are lovingly embracing you!”⁸ (Veronica Porumbacu – *The black doll*)

During Dej’s regime, the reader also notices in the poetic discourse the references to the “odious” bourgeois culture. Many poems of those times are truly anti-capitalist manifestos. The bourgeois culture is slandered and minimized, in order to emphasize the benefits of the new social regime, by contrast. Many of the lyrical productions reflect the enthusiasm in describing the new realities and the great achievements of the communist times.

“Glorious land of the beloved country, / Lighted by the freedom star, / With the support of the Soviet people / From heavy yoke forever we released you. / / (...) Long live the Republic, the dear country, / Strong in the peace camp. / We’ll build under our party’s flag, / As in Lenin’s land, a happy life.”⁹ (Eugen Frunză - *Glorious land of the beloved country*)

The exponents of the communist struggle are set as an example to the younger generation. They are heroes who fought illegally, under the Romanian Workers’ Party’s leadership, against oppression and exploitation, for the freedom and the happiness of the people. Always ready to remove injustice, the communists help on building an outstanding social world.

⁷ Limba română. Manual unic pentru clasa a VII-a elementară (București: Editura de Stat, 1949), 167.

⁸ Limba română. Manual pentru clasa a II-a elementară (București: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1952), 92.

⁹ Citire. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a (București: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1960), 26-27.

“Let’s bring the children here, near the rocks, / To feel the heat of the vivid stoves. // With the forehead close to the wall, / For the child to feel what the Party means. // What love means, what heroes mean / What those who fought for us mean.”¹⁰ (Maria Banuș - *Glory to the Doftana heroes*)

The love for the communist heroes is coupled with the hatred for the enemies (the kulaks, the businessmen, the fascists, the imperialists, the spies to name a few). Maria Banuș’s poetry, *The owner*, published in the 7th grade 1948 textbook, portrays a social category annulled by the nationalization decree of June 11, 1948¹¹.

“From a deepened stall, from a fluffy stall / A greenish gentleman stood up; / He wore the tuxedo of a luxurious dead / And his eyes were faded and too stuffed. (...) // - *You gentle man, I thank you. / I appreciate your coming. / Weary of work, I forget, I’m wrong / And I think you rotten long ago. // Today I know your spirit never sleeps. / That you’re wearing a gun under your coat, / But do not worry, we have guns / And needles for each waistcoat.*”¹² (Maria Banuș – *The owner*)

Years of communist lyrical practice are illustrated in the schoolbooks, reflecting the abstract and the unpoetical theme of the party. The incontinent propaganda present in the poems shows the party’s ubiquity and its sectarian spirit.

“Old men proudly wearing / The light of years in their hair, / Burly men, masters of their fate, / And mothers, and children, and girls. / With joyful heart, / Throughout Romania, / They joyously praise you, / Party of the working people!”¹³ (Mihai Beniuc – *To the Party*)

The thematic repertoire, between 1948 and 1964, includes poems that reflect the new man. The proletarian hero is reduced to a single feature. The character is artificial and pale. He represents, in a naive manner, the positive hero, the creator of the new world. Poems such as *Lazăr from Rusca* by Dan Deșliu and *Silvester Andrei saves the hewing* by A. Toma were popularized for years in schools. Deșliu’s model, *Lazăr from Rusca*, is followed in the epoch by other poets who publish poems of 40-80 pages. The explanation is simple: a literary hero who fights against social injustice becomes a model to the reader and a promoter of the single party’s ideas.

¹⁰ Elena Dărmănescu and Gh. Ghiță, *Limba română. Manual pentru clasa a VI-a* (București: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1959), 83-84.

¹¹ Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, *Articole și cuvântări* (București: Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1951), 177-179.

¹² *Limba română. Manual unic pentru clasa a VII-a elementară* (București: Editura de Stat, 1949), 246-248.

¹³ *Citire. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a* (București: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1960), 66.

“In all the light of life / which from sweaty labor grows, Lazăr is, Lazăr smiles... / His voice echoes again / in the companion’s word / and his faith / is in the party’s deeds, / in the people’s fight / to the infamous.”¹⁴ (Dan Deşliu - *Lazăr from Rusca*)

In communism, ignoring the personal well-being is a mandatory frequent practice. The human being is not an individual but a productive force. In this sense, education through labor is superior to that relying on the intellect.

“Hey, my sun, / My brother, / Do you wait for people to call you? / If you want to be on time, / You must come earlier. / (...) When it's time to sow, / We can't wait longer! / Today is the day of the diligent. / The norms are broken in factories / They are also broken in the village.”¹⁵ (Valeriu Câmpeanu – *The new morning*)

The collectivization of Romanian Agriculture (which begun in 1949 and was completed in 1962) is reflected by poems that capture the paradise of collective life. The agricultural associations are an opportunity for the poet to praise the realities of the present. In fact, the collectivization was met with resistance by the peasants and the communist authorities made use of repressive measures for the process to be implemented, so that the peasants give away their lands.

“It's collected in the household / The fruits of the field are in barns / And for the harvest, / Today is a holiday. / / Beautiful carriages ride to the town / With golden fruit loaded: / To grow plants and factories! / To let tractors come to the villages!”¹⁶ (Virgil Teodorescu – *The harvest celebration in the farm household*)

On April 30, 1949 the first detachments of pioneers and squads were established. Mandatory membership to the pioneer organization offers the children their first lesson in serving the Party’s policy.

“A warm greeting of pioneer awaits you, / girls and boys around the world! / The enemies want war! United we stand: / The same dream and the same faith bind us!”¹⁷ (Marcel Breslaşu – *The Pioneer Song*)

¹⁴ Elena Dărmănescu and Gh. Ghiță, *Limba română. Manual pentru clasa a VI-a* (Bucureşti: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1959), 103.

¹⁵ *Limba română. Manual unic pentru clasa a VI-a elementară* (Bucureşti: Editura de Stat, 1950), 249.

¹⁶ *Limba română. Manual pentru clasa a II-a elementară* (Bucureşti: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1952), 28.

¹⁷ *Limba română. Manual unic pentru clasa a VI-a elementară* (Bucureşti: Editura de Stat, 1950), 16.

The poetry of the festive days (November 7, August 23, May 1, November 30) is well represented. The holidays' poetic expression avoids the shortcomings and reveals only the positive things.

“Nature is rejuvenated under the spring sky / Along the way marches an army; - it's the proletarian one... / No sound of weapons, no dull marching band... / But cheerful eyes seek: 'cause it's written in white letters, / On the red flags, the light of a dream ...”¹⁸ (I. Păun-Pincio – *The 1st of May*)

Related to internationalism, children's poetry assiduously promotes peace. In his statement in front of the nomenclature (December 8, 1949) Gheorghiu-Dej emphasizes: “Fighting for peace is fighting against these enemies who seek to weaken the unity, the vigilance and the combativeness of the working people.”¹⁹

“You, mothers! / Teach your little ones, / Before the word mother, / Before the word bread, / The word peace! // (...) Put it, mothers, to your infants / Like a rosy smile in the corner of their mouth. / Teach, teachers, the only hatred / the hatred against hate seeders!”²⁰ (Marcel Breslașu - *Hymn*)

The children's poetry in the communist era is a method of influence and manipulation of the pupils. Explicitly used propaganda themes are accompanied by those that disguise ideological goals under the glorification of the Romanian language, the social justice, the Romanian history and the old time heroes etc.

The ideological message has a greater resonance as it is addressed to younger minds. They are more vulnerable, easier to be indoctrinated, less able to filter the received information. The boundary between poetry and ideology is difficult to determine and the texts written by political recipe were contributing to the proliferation of literary conformism. The formative function of the lyrical productions is shadowed by the political function, the propagandistic message of the texts proving the political insertion into creation. The children's poetry published in the Romanian textbooks under Gheorghiu-Dej's communist regime builds on moral, aesthetic, but more prominently, on ideological level.

¹⁸ Limba română. Manual unic pentru clasa a VII-a elementară (București, Editura de Stat, 1949), 161.

¹⁹ Gh. Gheorghiu-Dej, Articole și cuvântări (București: Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1951), 377.

²⁰ Limba română. Manual unic pentru clasa a V-a elementară (București: Editura de Stat, 1950), 7.

REFERENCES

1. **Boia, Lucian;** *Mitologia științifică a comunismului*, București: Humanitas, 2011.
2. *Citire. Manual pentru clasa a IV-a*, București: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1960.
3. **Dărmănescu, Elena; Ghiță, Gheorghe;** *Limba română. Manual pentru clasa a VI-a*, București: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1959.
4. **Gheorghiu-Dej, Gheorghe;** *Articole și cuvântări*, București: Editura Partidului Muncitoresc Român, 1951.
5. *Limba română. Manual pentru clasa a II-a elementară*, București: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1952.
6. *Limba română. Manual unic pentru clasa a V-a elementară*, București: Editura de Stat, 1950.
7. *Limba română. Manual unic pentru clasa a VI-a elementară*, București: Editura de Stat, 1950.
8. *Limba română. Manual unic pentru clasa a VII-a elementară*, București: Editura de Stat, 1949.
9. **Marx, Karl; Engels, Friedrich;** *Manifestul Partidului Comunist*, București: Politică, 1962.