



Field Philology

**PhD THESIS**  
**- ABSTRACT -**

**TITUS POPOVICI – LITERARY MONOGRAPHY**

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The study of the life and work of an author, from a monographic point of view, implies an exhaustive research approach, because the monographic study coagulates both the biographical elements of the writer and also his creation. The undertaking made by the biographer is very difficult, it consists of identifying certain places, people and events in the life of an author, action reinforced also by the analysis of the writer's work.

In addition, detecting the events in an author's life can be a real challenge in terms of analyzing the authenticity and credibility of the sources, their interpretation and correlation with other critical opinions, already well-established. Thus, the biographer's responsibility also consists in entering into a live dialogue with various critical opinions, as well as assuming solid and valid tracks of interpretation, which will be the basis of the originality of his activity.

In some cases, in its traditional version, the writer's life and his work were intimately linked. The hermeneutic approach also engages the author's vision, his own subjectivity in relation to the analyzed writer, but this mechanism must not vitiate the objectivity of his analysis.

An important element is the fact that a certain writer cannot be analyzed, received, without the analysis of the period in which he lived; moreover, in the case of totalitarian regimes (such as the communist regime in Romania), more attention must be paid to the whole aesthetic and ideological canon imposed by them and the way in which the analyzed writer managed to evade customs censorship or on the contrary, it served the interests of the Power.

With the establishment of the communist dictatorship in our country, the entire culture, implicitly the literature, will be subjected to extreme pressures, having as a consequence the stopping of the natural evolution and of the progress registered in the interwar period. The tombstones, placed by the new Power on any form of protest, will decisively influence the evolution of literature for almost four decades. Literature will go through a nefarious period, it will become an ideologically undermined landscape in which the freedom of creation will be just an empty rhetoric. The consequences were predictable: literature seems, for a while, to have lost its own profile and its own identity. The writers did not really have freedom regarding the creative act, being, most of the time, bound to write a partisan literature, which respected the grid imposed by the Power and, at the same time, promoted the official ideology.

Throughout this picture, the bizarre phenomenon is that the communist regime imposed new grids of creation, new visions regarding the creative act, according to the changes promoted in the political sphere, thus putting its indelible mark on the literary phenomenon (in fact, the Power claimed its status as depository of immutable truths, thus draping their oppressive actions into democratic clothes). The few cases in which it gained the autonomy of aesthetics were those allowed by the regime or, in the case of some writers, as a result of disgusting compromises and mesalliances, made with the Power.

This hostile climate forced writers to find their subterfuges, to deceive the customs and sentinels of censorship and to show a special inventiveness in methods to circumvent partisan doctrine, methods that always had to be rethought, such as the movements of an experienced chess player. Despite this arid climate, from the point of view of creative freedom, writers, in general, managed to write works untouched by the influences of the Power, without being limited only to texts of a purely propagandistic nature that promoted the uniformity of language.

After the Revolution of '89, some critics considered the field of literature (touched by the ideological microbe) as an interesting and, especially, challenging field of research. For other critics, literature written in the decades dominated by the communist dictatorship is a

literature that does not deserve attention, here including works that do not bear the imprint of the power imposed by the Power of a writer who can be considered compromised (from different points of view).

The two attitudes started a real war of opinion on communist literature. The followers of Eastern ethics promoted by Monica LOVINESCU coagulated in a camp with categorical opinions regarding the field of literature. In 1990, Gheorghe GRIGURCU publishes in the newspaper "Dreptatea" (from April 18) a list of writers who "collaborated" with the Power. The vituperative tone is amplified in a year, in an article of March 2, 1991, published in the same newspaper. The critic's conclusion is unequivocal: the "moral betrayal" of compromised writers has generated a serious alteration of the aesthetics of their works. In view of the solution proposed in politics, that of lustration, these voices consider that, in the field of literature, it could be a saving solution.

In the opposite camp are the voices that refute the movement promoted by Monica LOVINESCU and propose as a solution the aesthetic principle as a basis for critical re-evaluations (in this context, Monica LOVINESCU is accused of some political militancy, being questioned her intentions and solutions regarding the problem of literature). Valeriu CRISTEA<sup>1</sup> will write on June 15, 1991, in the newspaper "Adevărul", a harsh article, in which he calls Monica LOVINESCU "an Ana PAUKER of Romanian anti-communism".

The controversy will continue with an investigation initiated in the same period, by the magazine "Apostrof", an investigation entitled „Revizuiți și supraviețuiți în cultura română contemporană”. The purpose of this investigation is to answer two questions: whether it is appropriate and necessary to re-evaluate literature during the communist dictatorship and the levers by which this re-evaluation could be achieved. Several intellectuals, writers and critics of the time respond to the invitation addressed by the magazine. Some of them considered the aesthetic criterion as the decisive factor of an authentic critical judgment and propose several solutions for the re-evaluation of literature (the degree of complicity of the writer with the Power, in fact, with the Party, being a possible zero point of this approach).

The problem was solved, but only in appearance: the chapter on communism and its interference in literature remained just as current, even after the old controversy was extinguished. Literature review still haunts the pages of cultural and literary journals (especially in the case of studies on postwar literature).

On the other hand, Nicolae MANOLESCU identifies three major factors responsible for the failure of the process of revising written literature during the communist period: moral processes (aesthetics was replaced by ethics, the latter aimed at the writer as a man, eliminating his work; another identified factor critical is the way the book market has evolved (aesthetic value does not always mean success in sales), and the last factor was the idea of a literary canon (critical review of writers could also mean a control of how the literary canon evolved). The critic from "România literară", despite the fact that he does not seem to want to be labeled as a follower of Eastern-ethical criticism, in the end, seems to become his followers.

The critic Paul CERNAT makes an interesting history of this phenomenon, in the article "*Iluziile revizionismului est-etic (III)*". He believes that, in essence, the purpose of these revisions was not achieved, on the contrary, the effect was even worse: the entire post-December cultural space was infected by "prolonged maintenance of a deliberate confusion between ethics, aesthetics and politics."

Gheorghe CRĂCIUN in "*Scriitorul și Putrerea sau despre puterea scriitorului*" dedicates an entire chapter to the problem of Eastern-ethical revisionism, a chapter entitled:

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<sup>1</sup> Valeriu Cristea, *Cui i-e frică de Monica LOVINESCU?*, in „Adevărul”, June 15, 1991.

"Generațiile între etic și estetic" . The writer's conclusion on this issue is that, although much has been written in favor of an aesthetic evaluation, the crisis of literature is perhaps, first of all, a crisis of confidence in literature. Once again, aesthetic achievement is losing ground to the truth. Once again, ethics is beginning to be considered superior to aesthetics. "2 The writer's solution is to promote, in the spirit of Petru CULIANU, a pedagogy of the idea and a public school of aesthetic taste.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, writing a literary monography on Titus POPOVICI can be categorized as a risky gesture, especially since certain opinions of established critics might seem difficult to combat.

Our interest was oriented towards the realization of a monographic study, which would coagulate both the biography and the work of Titus POPOVICI, these being, in some cases, closely related. This approach is necessary, because the writer was, immediately after the Revolution, indexed in terms of his relationship with the Power.

Unfortunately, the singular voices, it is true<sup>4</sup>, of the critics who objectively analyzed the writer's work, in an attempt to decant the valuable, ideologically untangled core, were few, and the revaluation, from a strictly aesthetic point of view of the author's work, remains a challenge for any monographic approach.

The case of the writer's books, published after the Revolution, is an interesting one: their reading is still dependent on the Eastern ethical grid, in fact, a grid, rather of a political nature.

The topicality of the theme is in line with the trend of recent years, that of bringing back into discussion writers who today are hardly spoken or very little talked about and to maintain their reference works in the context of contemporary literary history. The inclusion of the writer in the literature from the communist and post-December period requires an exhaustive approach, both in the content of the paper and in its scientific foundation, doubled by the documentary one.

Our approach started from the premise that any type of subjectivism must be avoided, without tributary opinions to some already well grounded in literary criticism<sup>5</sup>, however, given these critical receptions of the analyzed author. Another issue was that reality does not always find its rightful place in the realm of fiction, so that "a non-fictional narrative can become the starting point for a game of imagination or for an imagined imagination."<sup>6</sup>

The monographic study carried out is the result of a long-term research and documentation activity, during which we tried to exhaust the sources on the subject and decant some valuable ideas in the chapters of the paper. The exegetical approach also took into account the realization of a lively dialogue with these investigated sources, as well as with the critical opinions from the communist and post-December period.

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<sup>2</sup> Gheorghe CRĂCIUN, *Scriitorul și Puterea sau despre puterea scriitorului*, Edit. Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 2015, p. 275.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 278.

<sup>4</sup> The critic Alex. ȘTEFĂNESCU tried to rehabilitate the writer by publishing and promoting the books he wrote after the Revolution.

<sup>5</sup> In this sense, the critic Daniel CRISTEA-ENACHE confesses in "Titus POPOVICI. O carte perversă", in *Concert de deschidere*, 2nd edition, Liternet Publishing House, 2004, electronic version, the manner adopted to treat the objective of the *Cartierul Primăverii. Cap sau Pajură*: "So I thought of a chronicle title as acid as possible, I felt on all sides the variant « Titus Procopovici din Caesarea » and it seemed acceptable to me. All the personal fund of pre-judgment and personal resentment strongly believing in an idea, it becomes yours, private) has diluted and become effectively insignificant."

<sup>6</sup> Matei CĂLINESCU, *A citi, a reciti. Către o poetică a (re) lecturii*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2003, p. 197.

The practical part of the research involved field research work: trips to Bucharest to CNSAS<sup>7</sup>, to the Film Archive (Jilava), to the Academy Library. Also, in order to outline certain aspects of the biographical journey and of the work, I conducted two interviews: with the writer's son, Toma POPOVICI (currently, professor at the National University of Music in Bucharest), and with one of the very actors close, not only to the screenwriter Titus POPOVICI, but also to the man Titus POPOVICI: Ion BESOIU.

The approach aimed at the hermeneutic part took into account the idea that "strictly hermeneutic investigations involve in-depth reading of texts and their enhancement in one way or another, possibly after assimilating special analysis methodologies, while studying and the lives of Our most deserving writers cannot be done without prior stages of actual documentation, in libraries, archives or in the field."<sup>8</sup>

The mentioned aspects allowed the orientation, both on well-documented biographical coordinates, relevant at least in the narrative skeleton: "the biography of a writer must be detailed and analyzed from several points of view, no matter how detestable or controversial they prove because valid, sometimes the biography resonates with the work, both the skeleton of the construction"<sup>9</sup> and on the coordinates of the creative emulation.

The work integrates five chapters that focused on the biographical path of the author and his work, one of the chapters, briefly following the activity of screenwriter (very prolific) of the writer.

The chronological perspective through which the theme is approached allows both a clear systematization of them and the evolution in terms of artistic changes of the author. The analysis of the author's prose and dramaturgy is based on an objective and, at the same time, integrative process of criticism.

The first chapter, ample, concerns the biographical course of the author. In outlining his spiritual profile, we had in mind the analysis of various sources: we corroborated the information from various literary histories, from memoirs published post-December, from the author's memoirs. The access to the two files of the writer from the Archive of the National Council for the Study of Security Archives allowed us to access information that shed new light on both the activity and personality of the writer and lesser known elements behind the scenes of writers. In addition, the way the files were organized allowed conclusions to be drawn about the strategies used by the Securitate to verify writers and, in some cases, to blackmail them into becoming informants or, as they are called in the files, "sources" or "agents".

The disputes in the world of writers, the various camps, the positions of the writer on the occasion of cultural or political events were analyzed objectively, being doubled by aspects related to the professional career and personal life of Titus POPOVICI.

The second chapter, entitled *Literatura scriitorului din perioada proletcultistă*, analyzes the work of the writer who bears the imprint of this period. At the beginning of the chapter are made some complex analyzes of the historical context that allowed the establishment of communism and the levers used by this dictatorial regime to control the entire culture, including literature. The establishing of clear stages from a political point of view, had literary reverberations: certain periods were totally ideologically infected, while in

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<sup>7</sup> In the CNSAS archives there are two files that have as subject Titus POPOVICI: one of "network", called "Marin Duma", archived at CNSAS with number R243769 and another file, called "Setosul", in which he was investigated, archived at CNSAS with number P007809. During the paper, we will refer to the two files, using their numbers: R243769 and P007809.

<sup>8</sup> Mircea ANGHELESCU, *Echilibrul între antiteze. Heliade – o biografie*, Ed. Universul Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 2001, p. 316.

<sup>9</sup> Marin Radu MOCANU, *Scriitorii și puterea*, Ed. Ideea Europeană, 2006, p. 213.

other years, the Power draped, under the prerogative of democratic measures, oppressive measures.

The works published during this period are tributary to the grid of socialist realism, but, at a fine and objective critical analysis, one can detect the aesthetic qualities of the work and certain passages that I categorized as subsversive - these managing to pass the sentinels of censorship. The two novels "*Străinul*" and "*Setea*" brought him consecration, being preceded by two volumes of sketches with a pronounced thesis accent. These works were analyzed both in terms of narrative elements and in terms of an aesthetic grid that would allow drawing some conclusions regarding their authentic aesthetic value, even if touched by the ideological microbe. A subchapter deals with the play "*Passacaglia*", a play included, through the prism of clear ideological elements, in the proletarian period.

The next chapter, *Literatura din perioada de maturitate* investigates the play *Puterea și adevărul* and the short story *Moartea lui Ipu* (written after a long period in which the author had not published anything, dealing only with his career as a screenwriter). The analysis from the perspective of narrative elements, as well as that specific to dramatic works, were doubled by analyzes of human typologies or dramatic conflicts. These works prove that the autonomy of aesthetics can be manifested, bypassing political interference.

The fourth chapter analyzes, following the same chronological criteria, the prose that appeared after the Revolution. The works *Cutia de ghete* and *Cartierul Primăverii. Cap sau Pajură*, at a first level of reading, are part of a paradigm of complementarity. At the thematic level, they depict the morbid aspects of communist society: both ordinary people and the protipendada of the political class.

*Cartea de la Gura Zlata*, respectively *Disciplina dezordinii*, is part of a confessional literature, in which the narrative seems to work for the writer, like a balm with therapeutic valences.

The last chapter analyzes the activity of one of the best Romanian screenwriters; trying, from a thematic perspective, to make a taxonomy and analyze some of the films relevant to the identified categories.

The annexes of the work are valuable in terms of the information provided to the author by Toma POPOVICI and the actor Ion BESOIU; also the letter found in the Library of "Carol I" Central University from Bucharest was a unique element. This letter brings to light a lesser known relationship, that between the writer and Nicolae LABIȘ.

This whole monographic approach aims to bring the writer and screenwriter Titus POPOVICI back to the center of discussions aimed at the condition of the writer under a totalitarian regime and the study of techniques and aesthetic formulas by which he managed, in some cases, to not compromise his work.

Throughout this doctoral approach, we intended to prove that Titus POPOVICI is an important writer of postwar literature and deserves that the tombstones placed over his work be set aside to be analyzed in terms of new theories, both in the field of culture as well as literature. Although he is labeled as one of the canonical writers of the communist regime, in terms of his biographical career, and the work tributary to the realistic socialist grid, these ideological strengths were highlighted objectively in an attempt to discover the lines of force of the writer's work which evaded the thesis and remained aesthetically valuable.

The whole post-December logomachy on the issue of Eastern ethics should be replaced by principal discussions, not attributing personal opinions or already established opinions, regarding this literature, to the way in which it managed to survive, taking into

account the extent of the concessions made. author of the ideological factor in the economics of works.

From this point of view, we tried to reconcile diametrically opposed critical opinions on the aesthetic value of works from the proletarian period. Ion SIMUȚ detects four main types of literature (opportunistic, subversive, dissident and evasionist<sup>10</sup>), but this criterion would have been difficult to apply to the writer Titus POPOVICI, because he covers, through his work, almost four decades, and his writings are difficult to be framed in this taxonomy.

Caius DOBRESCU<sup>11</sup> proposes the separation of the ethical component from the aesthetic one: the consequence of this hypothesis is the existence of works, "which allow evil to penetrate them, but do not lack of aesthetic force." He continues his argument by pointing out that a valuable writer will not serve a cause, or a thesis he does not believe in.

His conclusion lies in the fact that there are works that ignore the political factor "standing on the side of civilization", with the perfect civil tone, always kind address to the reader, systematic avoidance of pathos and ideology. " These works, from this point of view, evade the dogmas imposed by a certain regime, not endangering their aesthetic value.

The equidistant and objective point of view is the one adopted in our interpretive approach of the works of Titus POPOVICI, both in terms of ethical and aesthetic issues.

Another aspect concerned the reception manner, both during and after the Revolution, of the work of Titus POPOVICI. The critical-opinion coordinates are very different from one work to another, and from one critic to another - regarding the value of the same work. Taking into account the new integrative theories regarding the reception of a literary work, we noticed the tendency to standardize the way the whole work is received, in a Manichaeian manner: criticized or exaggeratedly praised.

These slippages could be regulated by promoting reading policies that would bring to the fore these very talented writers, but who, through much of their creation, served the communist regime.

Titus POPOVICI's dramaturgy deals not only with historical themes, but also with deeply human existential problems: love, loyalty, war, authoritarian attitude and its inherent behaviors.

POPOVICI's screenplays, not only numerous, were also the ones that consecrated a distorted image on the history and on some events or characters from the works scripted by the writer. These distortions or falsifications should be analyzed in terms of their long-term impact on the collective mind of that period; the extent to which they were propaganda tools will be praised, but, to the same extent, certain situations assumed by the screenwriter, even if he knew that they would not be to Nicolae CEAUȘESCU's liking.

The appendices of the work bring to light certain unique aspects of the writer's personal life, but also of his screenwriting career. They seem to cement certain assumptions about the writer; in other cases they highlighted unaltered character traits during the writer's career analysis.

Although Titus POPOVICI's work seems to be touched by antiquity, we hope that it will be brought back into the literary circuit, through the topicality of some themes, but also through the techniques approached by the writer, techniques that show a very special talent.

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<sup>10</sup> Ion SIMUȚ, *mentioned work*. loc.cit.

<sup>11</sup> Caius DOBRESCU, *mentioned work*, p.185.