

Habeas Corpus

The Resurgence of Lyricism in the Romanian Poetry of the 1960s Generation

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I.

IN THE aftermath of the 1950s, the landscape of Romanian literature looked almost completely devastated: the Romanian version of proletcult, even though less prone to the curious blend of proletarian avant-garde theorized by Aleksandr Bogdanov in the original Russian proletcult a few decades earlier, had practically annihilated any attempt at serious literary art in Romania during the 1950s. If, somewhat miraculously, in what regarded prose three strong novels (written by Marin Preda, Petru Dumitriu, and Eugen Barbu) were produced, the desertification of poetry was practically complete: not only is there is no complete volume of poetry to be redeemed from the period, but not even a cycle of poems. Even worse: not even one serious poem can be remembered from that anti-poetical catastrophe.

One can thus easily understand why the lyrical eruption of a massive poetic generation in the 1960s had the trappings of a miracle. After 15 years, the desert was finally traversed—and the lyrical oasis was magically luxuriant: poetical forms suddenly flourished, just as numerous and variegated and vital as in the interwar period. The psychological effect was overwhelming—and literary criticism was ecstatic in the reception of these new poets. Nicolae Labiş, Nichita Stănescu, Ioan Alexandru, Leonid Dimov, Mircea Ivănescu were not simply well received: they were critically sanctified. The first major critical synthesis regarding the period, Eugen Simion's *Scritori români de azi* (Romanian writers of today), put it plainly:

The recovery (of values, of tradition, of abandoned models, denied in the previous decades) is the work of these writers, many of them coming out of a long silence. Young people, in these circumstances, bring back the models of modernity in literature . . . Their action is reactive, rehabilitative, integrative . . . Their models belong in large part to

This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research and Innovation, CCCDI-UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017-0821/INTELLIT, within PNCDI III.

*modernity (the cult of the purity of literary genres, the obsession with identity, the poetry of poetry, the hermetical and conceptual language, the belief in the progress of art and the will to synchronize, the mythical vision of the poetic man, etc.), but they, or rather some of them (Nichita Stănescu, Dimov, Marin Sorescu, Mircea Ivănescu...), also overcome these models of modernity and overcome themselves.*¹

As it usually happens not only in the evolution of the *psyche*, but also in that of literature (which is itself, of course, our essential *psyche*, and therefore functions as one), elation was soon followed by depression—and the *Entzauberung* was not late to arrive. For the generation of the 1980s, the lyrical achievements of their forerunners were not actually achievements—but rather misfortunes: according to the new standards, the poets of the 1960s were too lyrical, too metaphorical, too modernist. What they wrote was not a continuation of the great lyrical forms of the 1930s—but a mere repetition of them. Pejorative terms like *neomodernism* or even *tardomodernism* were coined; in his groundbreaking synthesis on Romanian postmodernism, Mircea Cărtărescu stated that “the metaphorical explosion of the poetry of Nichita Stănescu’s generation, spectacular in itself, created the illusion that we had ‘one of the greatest poetries of the world’ in a moment when nowhere in the world a metaphorical poetry of modernist type was written anymore.”² Even more, while admitting that what the poets of the ’60s wrote was “real poetry,” Cărtărescu thought that this “resurrection of lyricism” was in fact an anachronism, a repetition of interwar modernism, delaying the synchronization of Romanian poetry with Western postmodernist poetry—which was the main theme of his own generation.³ And, even worse, not only did it delay the synchronization—but it also avoided reality by over-metaphorizing it. It was anachronistic literature—and it was also escapist. This was to become the real content of the *neomodernist* label—and the official interpretation of the lyrical output of that age.⁴

After the Revolution, there was already a general consensus regarding the anachronistic and escapist nature of the poetry of the 1960s; the best post-revolutionary literary history, that of Nicolae Manolescu, should have been theoretically favorable to these poets, belonging to the same generation as Manolescu himself; and, as a matter of fact, it was; but even so, the anachronistic (disguised as “non-historical”) and escapist charges are explicitly uttered:

*As was the case with the lyrical poetry of the 1960s, encouraged in its escapism and abstraction, literary criticism was allowed to indulge in textual and non-historical fireworks (despite the fact that Marxism was fundamentally connected with diachronism), from the same mauvaise conscience which led to the urgent condemnation of the [Romanian] proletcultism: the present reality, both of society and of literature, intensely recommended by the ideology, was but the demagogical guise of an opposing interest, namely that of speaking as little and, in any case, as less concretely as possible about the present.*⁵

I will show in what follows that both these charges are false: this lyrical poetry was not non-historical—quite the contrary, it was an acute response to the historical context, formulated in the only ways admissible then; and it was not escapist and non-

concrete—also quite the contrary, it gave a concrete poetical life and *corpus* to a chorus of voices demanding their right to exist.

II.

IN ORDER to prove this, one needs to examine first what life and *corpus* meant in a totalitarian regime, as opposed to what they mean in a liberal democracy. For Agamben, “nude life” is the very political subject of the modern democracy—and the principle of *habeas corpus* (as stipulated since 1679) its functional articulation; “the simple *corpus*” is the new subject of all modern policies—and it lies at the heart of all modern constructions “in the philosophy and science of the baroque age, from Descartes to Newton, from Leibniz to Spinoza.” The *corpus*, with its “nude life” (or “sacred life” or *zoe*, as Agamben also calls it), is the central metaphor in all modern political reflections about communities, from Hobbes to Arendt and to the policies for refugees.

What totalitarianisms and their camps do, Agamben shows, is the brutal separation of the human from the political—namely the annihilation of the *corpus*. “Every ‘politicization’ of life,” *dixit* Agamben, “necessarily implies a concerning the threshold beyond which life ceases to be politically relevant . . . and can as such be eliminated without punishment.”⁶ In a totalitarian regime, the private *corpus* becomes irrelevant for the public policies and has to be eliminated.

This elimination of the private *corpus* is called by Marci Shore, in her studies about literature in Eastern European (post)totalitarianism, “the eclipsing of private space.”⁷ What poetry can do in such (post)totalitarian regimes is to preserve the concrete integrity of the *corpus*—not only of the mind, but also of the body.⁸ In (post)totalitarianisms, Shore shows, “the political became the existential”⁹ and vice versa—the existential becomes the political; the totalitarian state infiltrates its ideology and its political language in the capillaries of one’s private existence. In order to escape this infiltration, one has to invent a “private language,” “a language clearly departing from a communist idiom that was their public language,”¹⁰ which would help one survive—would give one a linguistic *corpus* which to metonymically live free.¹¹ It was exactly what Polish poets did: they invented a kind of lyrical poetry which would re-unify existence.¹²

III.

SHORE’S SENTENCE about the political becoming the existential and vice versa is almost coincidental with the conclusion of Miranda Sherwin’s study on confessional poetics: after observing that poetry has to do with “discourses of identity,” which means that “theorists are therefore exploring the ways in which identity is constructed, interpreted, internalized, represented, repressed, rejected, fragmented, and deconstructed,”¹³ Sherwin concludes: “in confessional poetics, it is not so much that *the personal is political, as that the political has always already been personal*”¹⁴ (my italics). And what

both Shore and Sherwin write is also strikingly similar with what another American critic and poet, Edward Hirsch, writes about Polish poetry of the 1960s: “In Polish poetry there is always a dialogue between the individual and history,” Zagajewski has said. “Every major Polish poet is opposed to collectivist thinking. Yet the individual is also in touch with what is general, impersonal, historical. The individual is under pressure to justify being an individual.”¹⁵

The existential becomes political—the individual becomes historical—and, as Hirsch notes further on, even the metaphysical becomes historical: “Miłosz’s ambivalence points out that Polish poets are in some sense metaphysical poets forced to become historical ones.”¹⁶ This is the crucial observation that also has to be made in the case of the Romanian poets of the same era: their metaphysical wit was a camouflage for their historical sense. Christopher Ricks remarks the same thing about Miłosz: “he needs, and builds, a poetic art which incorporates matters of speculation, argument, and wisdom, together with historical, philosophical and political hard terms.”¹⁷ The individual is forced to become, under totalitarianism, historical—and political—and metaphysical—and metaphorical. It is his manner of building himself a *corpus* when his own corpus becomes public property; it is his manner of building his private language when his language is confiscated; it is his manner of dealing with history in a non-historical appearance when state ideology becomes the official history.

There was a general isomorphism of the situation in the whole of Eastern Europe, captive under communism: reinventing lyricism in an anti-lyrical age was synonymous with building a lyrical *corpus* which would allow one to live *free* in an age of anti-liberty. Polish poets of the 1960s found more or less the same solutions like the Romanian ones (and like the Czech and Slovak ones, and like the Hungarian ones of the same period): they also camouflaged their sense of history under metaphysical and metaphorical allegories; they also talked obliquely about political matters, with sophisticated and baroque allusions; they also invented “private languages” in an attempt to resist to the all-pervading public ideological language. Their poems also have in general the appearance of a metaphysical and metaphorical fable—one can immediately sense that the poem speaks about this contingent world even though it always pretends to speak about something transcendental or non-contingent.

These similarities of adaptive solutions are indeed striking. Ana Blandiana famously camouflaged her anti-Ceaușescu poems under the mask of a seemingly innocent animal fable, involving the figure of a tomcat named Arpagic (Scallion), representing (as any Romanian reader could tell) the malign figures of the communist power in Romania; Wisława Szymborska also made use, in one of her most famous volumes, *Calling out to Yeti*, of some sort of animal fable involving Yeti, standing (as every Polish reader could tell) for the brute destructive force of Polish Stalinism; Aleksander Wat also used this solution of the apparently innocent animal fable in his well-known “mouse poem” in *Mediterranean Poems*. The complicated allusive mythological poems of Czesław Miłosz were frequently similar, both in scenery and in political substratum, with those of Ștefan Aug. Doinaș. Zbigniew Herbert’s jocular speculations about matter and angels find their correspondent in Nichita Stănescu’s poems about angels and the structure of matter and time. The young Polish poets of the influential Skamander group (Julian

Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski, Jan Lechoń, Jarosław Iwaskiewicz) share the same post-avant-garde *Drang* and furor, as well as the same gusto towards a poetry descended in the streets, with the young Romanian poets of the post-avant-garde *Albatros* group—Geo Dumitrescu, Ion Caraion, or Constant Tonegaru.

Despite the rich inventiveness of morphological adaptations, they all share one common feature: *the existential becomes political via the metaphorical*. The historical conscience is camouflaged under rich metaphorical strata—often buried so deep beneath them, that it seemed to many commentators that it had no historical conscience at all. But this poetry itself *is* the historical conscience of its time; it was the only possible answer to those absurd and repressive historical times—and it is indeed telling that the poets of the whole Eastern European communist bloc did identify the same adaptive solutions of talking about their confiscated historical conscience, about their confiscated private language, about their confiscated intimacy, about their confiscated *corpus*. Their baroque metaphorical lyricism was not escapism and non-historicism—quite the contrary, it was the only possible form of free speech in those historical conditions, both *about* and *above* those historical conditions—and was therefore the opposite of propaganda. Their poetical *corpus* gave them back their private *corpus*. Poetry, as in all totalitarianisms, was their *habeas corpus*.

When the *corpus* is captive, lyricism becomes a political statement *per se*. It is what Joan Aleshire also remarks in her beautiful defense of the lyric:

*What has happened to “lyric” as a descriptive term? It is used most often in its meaning of “rhapsodic” or “spontaneous” or “songlike,” but rarely in its original sense: as a poetry directly expressing the poet’s thoughts and emotions. Such a poetry has often been, in itself, a political statement; Ossip Mandelstam and Anna Akhmatova wrote insistently and subversively of the self in a period that demanded political and artistic conformity. As their work shows, the poem of personal experience—the true lyric poem—can, through vision, craft, and objectivity toward the material, give a sense of commonality with unparalleled intimacy.*¹⁸

It is remarkable that this is also true not only for Eastern European totalitarian regimes of the 1960s, but also for Western liberal societies of the past midcentury: whenever the system aims at denying the *corpus* and/or effacing the private language and the private space, lyricism immediately responds as free speech camouflaged under aesthetic form. Andrew S. Gross has devoted an entire book to this inverse correlation between the erosion of liberalism and the consolidation of lyricism. Due to this reaction of lyricism against the abuses of power, Gross calls it “the free speech argument”—or, more technically, “the liberal aesthetic”:

Lyricism per se was taken to be the opposite of propaganda: a form of free speech answerable only to the dictates of self-reflection and valued primarily in open societies where artists were at liberty to speak their minds. This free speech argument, which distinguished poetry from politics in the name of liberal individualism, is what I call the liberal aesthetic. It was prominent in the early years of the Cold War but had the ironic effects of

*turning a fascist poet into a spokesman for democracy and prison-poetry into a symbol of free speech.*¹⁹

The case of Gross's study is that lyricism in contemporary American poetry was redefined radically after World War II, in the wake of the scandal of the first Bollingen Prize in 1949, awarded to Ezra Pound while he was still in the military prison-hospital of St. Elizabeth's. Gross is right—it was indeed sadly ironic that the “liberal aesthetic” of lyricism had the effect of turning a fascist poet like Pound into a spokesman of democracy; on the other hand, it is not absurd at all that the same “liberal aesthetic” turns prison-poetry into a symbol of free speech. As we have seen, in conditions of confinement, when one's *corpus* is denied, lyricism *is* free speech. Literally—and corporeally.

It was not only the isolated case of Pound and of his dramatic confinement—for the American poets of the 1960s the accidents of American democracy had meant a new understanding of literary culture, as Philip Coleman has proven in a study about John Berryman; seemingly the most apolitical and non-historical of the poets of his generation, Berryman's poetry also shared a “public vision,” understanding lyrical influence “as a political matter,” as Coleman shows throughout his impeccable book: “an understanding of literary culture that sees influence itself as a political matter, a process of strategic engagement between poets that reflects their active selection of role models from among many different possibilities.”²⁰

Thus, one can see that Aleshire and Gross are absolutely right: lyricism *is* a political statement. The lyric poem builds a *corpus*—and it gives him a personal voice. And even a heart, as Aleshire justly observes somewhere, annotating one of Tsvetayeva's beautiful sentences: “I'm reminded of Marina Tsvetayeva's comment on criticism: ‘There is no approach to art; it is a seizing.’ In no art form is this seizing more apparent than in the lyric poem, which gives the shock of hearing a human voice speaking intimately, from the heart.”²¹

Even when totalitarianism takes away the *corpus*, lyricism gives the absent *corpus* a heart.

IV.

IT IS by now obvious that, despite the consensus among literary critics, the lyricism of the '60 generation is not escapist and non-historical—on the contrary, it *is* free speech, as form of “liberal aesthetic” exerted within a non-liberal regime and is therefore political and historicized. The comparison with the lyricism of the Polish or American poets of the same period has helped us see that more clearly. But even considered *an sich*, their lyricism should not have been taken as escapist and non-historical by a more attentive eye. It is true: theirs is a richly metaphorical poetics, reinstating the rhetoric of the interwar modern poetry. But, while repeating that modernist rhetoric, they do not also repeat the modernist orientation of the poetic imagination. The major theme of modern Romanian interwar poetry was escapism and transgression—of the self, of the world, of the *corpus*: for Tudor Arghezi it was a mystical transgression, for Lucian Blaga a

metaphysical one, for Barbu an intellectual one. For each of the great modernists (with the singular exception of Bacovia), the self was something which had to be overcome, the world was something to be transcended, the *corpus* was something to be left behind.

On the other hand, for the neomodernists (and it is curious that this was never noticed) the direction is reversed. It is true—like the modernists, they tend to define themselves as otherworldly beings:

*I am the spirit of the abyss,
I live in another world than you do.*
(Nicolae Labiș, “I Am the Spirit of the Abyss”);

*I am but a
stain of blood
that speaks.*
(Nichita Stănescu, “Self-portrait”);

The Poet—crown of thorns on the head of his generation.
(Ioan Alexandru, “The Memory of the Poet”)²²

But they are not attempting to leave this world behind them, they are not putting all their effort into an attempt at transgression. On the contrary, they are trying to colonize the real, they come here from their other worlds *to stay*; they are beings that have found their voice—and also their *corpus*—and now want to make use of them. For them, the poet is an extraordinary being surviving in a hostile world—their poetry being thus, in the final analysis, an exercise in accommodation and survival. Which means, of course, the contrary movement of escapism; it could be defined, in a phrase coined by Caius Dobrescu for the criticism of the 1960s, as a lyricism originating in a *civic aestheticism*.²³

What makes the case of the Romanian neomodernist poets remarkably peculiar is that they have to undertake their exercise of survival against “an obligation to happiness”, as Mihaela Ursa observes.²⁴ Unlike their Western counterparts, writers living in the communist confinement shared an obligation to happiness; which, of course, made lyricism as a political gesture even more absurd: if in the case of the “liberal aesthetic” in the Western liberal democracies the enemy was clear and visible, in the Eastern communisms the official ideology did not allow them any enemy. As poetry is always a reaction, the paradox is that its lyricism was allowed nothing to react against. It was an exercise of survival against a deadly threat which was to remain unnamed—and which was to be taken as a blessing. The abstruse metaphorical sophistication of the ’60 generation was also a response to the absurd abstruseness of the Romanian post-Stalinism.

V.

THE ROMANIAN lyricism of the 1960s was the “liberal aesthetic” surviving in a non-liberal historical circumstance. It was just as allusive and metaphorical as lyricism in other communist regimes; and, just like them, it created a free *corpus*

and a private language in a totalitarianism which denied both the *corpus* and privacy (private language included).

It was, therefore, neither escapist nor non-historical: it did what it could best in the worst of times. And what it did was an exercise in *habeas corpus*. Without the free voices made possible by this lyricism, the postmodern poetry of the 1980s would not have been possible either—it would have lacked the private languages to react to. □

Notes

1. Eugen Simion, *Scritori români de azi*, vol. 4 (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1989), 469.
2. Mircea Cărtărescu, *Postmodernismul românesc* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999), 15.
3. *Ibid.*, 131: “The interwar modernism, rediscovered with enthusiasm, seemed very modern after the clichés of the ‘proletcult’ art. It was, after all, real poetry, real music, real painting, the return to modernism was unanimously welcomed by the criticism of the time as a ‘resumption of the tradition of Romanian art’ . . . Worn out and discredited in the West, modernism flourishes for the second time in our country, contemporary with the counter-culture, neo-avant-garde, psychedelic art and postmodernism in other places. A second modernist generation, similar in its macropoetics to that of the interwar generation, is euphorically received in the Romanian culture of the time, with the feeling that ‘we have a great poetry.’ The informational and ideological isolation of Romanian space, although it was no longer complete, as in the 1950s, contributed to the construction of the myths of the great poets of the 1960s, of the ‘resurrection of lyricism,’ of ‘the celebration of metaphor.’”
4. As one can easily notice while reading (or even skimming) the most important critical literature on that age: Gheorghe Crăciun, Monica Spiridon, and Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Experimentul literar românesc postbelic* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 1998); Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Recapitularea modernității: Pentru o nouă istorie a literaturii române* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2001); Iulian Boldea, *Poezia neomodernistă* (Brașov: Aula, 2005); Ion Pop, *Poezia românească neomodernistă* (Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2018).
5. Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române: 5 secole de literatură* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2008), 1449.
6. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 81.
7. Marci Shore, *The Taste of Ashes: The Afterlife of Totalitarianism in Eastern Europe* (London: Windmill Books/Random House, 2013), xii: “Could the boundary between public and private, nearly effaced by totalitarianism, be restored? Could the intimate and the political be disentangled? The eclipsing of private space was among totalitarianism’s deepest violations.”
8. In her landmark book about the Ukrainian Euromaidan, *The Ukrainian Night: An Intimate History of Revolution* (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2017), 250–260, Shore reproduces a detailed account provided by Yevhenii Monastyrskyi, a young teacher from Luhansk, about his brutal imprisonment in Luhansk in June 2014 during the Ukrainian revolution; he kept his “sense of reality,” as he named it (p. 258), and the “consciousness” of his body (p. 256) by mentally reciting poems from “the private library preserved in his memory”—Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandelstam, Joseph Brodsky, Serhei Zhadan. Shore’s example brings to mind countless examples from the physical survival *via* poetry in the Gulag or in Holocaust—in those lethal captivities where poetry, contrary to what Adorno

thought, really recaptured its whole vital meaning. (But then Adorno himself made a late refutation of his own famous 1949 phrase—in his essay *Negative Dialectics*, written 3 years before his death, Adorno admits: “Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems.”)

9. Shore, *Ukrainian Night*, xiii.
10. Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation’s Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (London: Windmill Books, 2014), 372.
11. Shore aptly notices the proliferation of these “private languages,” of “multilingualism,” as she names it, in the private lives of Polish poets in the 1950s. Her case study is the Polish poet Władysław Broniewski—whose love letters to his future wife Janina brought to my mind (exactly because of their jocular “multilingualism”) the love letters written in the same age by the Romanian poet Leonid Dimov to his future wife Lucia. See Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 372: “The observation speaks as well to the young Władysław Broniewski, who . . . was writing proletarian poetry in a new language of battle and letters to Janina Kunig in a language of premodern chivalry . . . Broniewski’s multilingualism ran deep . . . an internal polyphony of voices never disappeared. Throughout his life, Broniewski maintained perhaps four great passions: for women, for poetry, for Poland, and for socialism. Their accompanying discourses—romantic and literary, patriotic, and communist—while sometimes distinct, nonetheless coexisted even in the most improbable, and inauspicious, circumstances.”
12. Aleksander Wat, qtd. in Shore, *Caviar and Ashes*, 324: “Lyric poetry begins when the platoon leader said, ‘fall out,’ when it was possible to sit down in the grass, roll a cigarette, absorb the sound of the trees, the rippling of the cornfields, the song of the oriole. . . . A soldier unifies the world just like a criminal, like a primitive: ‘ours—the enemy.’ Lyric poetry unifies the world, identifying it with itself.”
13. Miranda Sherwin, *“Confessional” Writing and the Twentieth-Century Literary Imagination* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire–New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 165.
14. *Ibid.*, 166.
15. Edward Hirsch, *How to Read a Poem and Fall in Love with Poetry* (San Diego–New York–London: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999), 180.
16. *Ibid.*, 181.
17. Christopher Ricks, *Reviewery* (London–New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 282.
18. Joan Aleshire, “Staying News: A Defense of the Lyric,” in *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*, eds. Kate Sontag and David Graham (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2001), 14.
19. Andrew S. Gross, *The Pound Reaction: Liberalism and Lyricism in Midcentury American Literature* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2015), 227.
20. Philip Coleman, *John Berryman’s Public Vision: Relocating ‘The Scene of Disorder’* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2014), 207.
21. Aleshire, 36.
22. There are of course numerous other texts which could exemplify these magniloquent metaphorical self-definitions typical for the neomodernist poets. For Nicolae Labiș, we could mention titles such as “Biography,” “Confessions,” “Humanism,” “Ballad,” “The Losses;” for Nichita Stănescu, “My Life Gets Illuminated,” “The Tenth Elegy,” “The Unwords,” “The Defamation of Evil;” for Marin Sorescu, another iconic neomodernist, “Eyes,” “Disease,” “Fear,” “Prayer,” “Poisons;” for Ioan Alexandru, “Oedipus,” “What Is the Desert?,” “I Drink Milk,” “The Colt,” “Land,” “Via Dolorosa,” “Man.”
23. Caius Dobrescu, *Plăcerea de a gândi: Moștenirea intelectuală a criticii literare românești (1960–1989)* (Bucharest: Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române, 2013), 136: “What one can

ascertain with the most self-conscious and complex representatives of the critical generation of the 1960s is a project developed between an aesthetics of civility, nourished directly from the values, protocols, nuances of a polite conversation, on the one hand, and the emergence of a *civic aestheticism*, of a liberal Epicureanism impossible to overlook in what regards its political potential, on the other hand.”

24. “In a troubling analysis of the relation between party and state directives as stipulated in the July Theses [1971] and the literature born in their wake, Sanda Cordoș (2012) reads an obligation to happiness: as long as state policy assumes the assertion of an optimistic individual which sustains with his own happiness the welfare of the people, literature has no right to talk about unhappiness.” Cordoș “understands the artistic directions of Ceaușescu’s July Theses of 1971 as a burdening obligation to assert happiness, increasingly difficult to accomplish as ‘the distance between the optimism of the command and the inner state’ of the creators gets bigger.” Mihaela Ursa, *Identitate și excentricitate: Comparatismul românesc între specific local și globalizare* (Bucharest: Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române, 2013), 63–64.

Abstract

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The study re-examines the poetry of the '60 generation, revising the major clichés attached to it by literary criticism—namely those of anachronism, escapism and non-historicism. While indeed recycling the rhetoric and stylistics of interwar poetry, this neomodernist poetry of the 1960s has a well-camouflaged sense of history and a certain political nature which have remained unnoticed so far by literary critics. By comparing it with the poetry of the 1960s in other communist countries, such as Poland, we will be able to show that its lyricism is a form of “liberal aesthetics,” a reaction to propaganda and to the specific totalitarian attempt at effacing any private language and intimacy. This lyricism was free speech—and it made possible the even freer speech of the postmodern poetry of the 1980s.

Keywords

postwar Romanian poetry, '60 generation, lyricism, neomodernism, tardomodernism, liberal aesthetics, lyricism as free speech