

Changing the Representation of Intimacy under the Rise of the Romanian Communist Regime

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After August 23, 1944, when King Michael I of Romania and the leaders of the most important historical parties chose to leave the alliance with Hitler and join the Allies Armies, the entire (political) power field and literary field changed radically.

The period between August 23, 1944 and December 30, 1947 is very confused and heterogeneous. Although King Michael I was theoretically the State's Leader, in fact, it was the few members of the Romanian Communist Party, supported by the Soviet Army and the Allies' Control Commission (controlled by the Soviets), who had the key-positions of the political power. And consequently, they held the ideological monopoly of all legitimate representations of the political as well as cultural.

Many writers don't know where to turn to. It seems as if the liberty of creation was regained after four years of Right Wing Dictatorship (in politics and literature) and many cheer the alliance with the Soviets. Other writers and critics, who were in the interwar period supporters of a left wing politics, think their time has come. Both categories think there can no longer be a divorce between the intellectual and politics. Only a few writers refuse stubbornly to take a political position and mainly to write at the new Communist political command: the second wave of Romanian Surrealist poets. By prolonging the representation of the poetic self through the imagery, dreams and sexual visions, they implicitly take a most booted position in the Romanian literary field after August 23. As the ideological monopoly belongs to the rising Communists, they impose and ban at the same time certain topics: while approving the topic of war represented as the triumph of the Allies (i.e. Soviets) they ban most violently what they call inner, decadent bourgeois topics such as dreams and sex, i.e. the Surrealists' favorite topics.

The Surrealist poets Gellu Naum and Virgil Teodorescu are perceived as the black sheep of the Romanian literary field because they do not obey the new representation of the self as a social being and continue an avant-garde position which they conquered during the interwar period. Thus, critics and poets condemn them either as "fascists" or "anti-progressists" because they refuse to change their representation of the (poetical) self. The poetics of intimacy turns thus into a politics

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of intimacy, which will become the Communists' favorite way to control the human being, mainly after December 30, 1947.

This paper seeks to look into the changing in the representation of the self under the Rise of the Romanian Communist Regime, by analyzing the Surrealists' odd member position in the literary field after August 23, 1944, through December 30, 1947. Through the banning of the sexual and dream representations of the self, the Communists prepare to ban the love theme, which will be implemented after December 30, 1947, through the '60s, when this interdiction will be lifted.

1. Short (Hi)Story of Romanian Surrealism

In terms of legitimating strategies, Romanian surrealism covers two generations of poets: those who hailed Bretonian surrealism in the '30s through the avant-garde magazine *unu* (*one*, April 4, 1928 – December 5, 1932) and after August 23 became politically enrolled on Aragon's side and the Communists' and those who were their disciples in the interwar period and stubbornly refused their masters' political choice. Sașa Pană, the leader of the first surrealist generation and father to the second, is in touch with Breton in the interwar period (they exchange letters) and refuses Aragon's social and political commitment. However, he'll take Aragon's side once the Soviet Army controls Romanian politics after August 23. His shift from Breton to Aragon is meant to maintain him in a dominating position and witnesses the shift from an autonomous literary field to a heterogeneous one.

When still a Bretonian in the '30s, he fathers the second generation of surrealist poets: Aurel Baranga, Paul Păun, Gherasim Luca, Gellu Naum and Virgil Teodorescu. At that time, he refuses to put his surrealist magazine *unu* "in the service of the Revolution", although a few of his colleagues cheer this strategy. Only in the last issues of *unu* a few socially and politically committed poets appear, who will be the communist revolutionaries after August 23. Rejecting slogan poetry from an aesthetic autonomous position in 1936, Sașa Pană writes to Breton that he feels alone with his surrealist position, maintained only by the second wave of Romanian surrealists: „Cine mai e azi alături de mine? C. Nisipeanu, Gellu Naum” [Who is today still with me? C. Nisipeanu, Gellu Naum] (Pană 1973: 537). He thinks that both Naum and Teodorescu are „incontestabil, toți sunt talentați” [talented beyond any doubt] (Pană 1973: 400). However, this will not prevent him from excluding them from the magazine *Orizont* [Horizon], one of the most important magazines after August 23 due to its Communist revolutionary stand, which Sașa Pană, conducts:

Și nici paginile revistei *Orizont* nu le-am deschis acelor pe care îi consideram avangardiști întârziați [I did not open the *Orizont* for those whom I considered belated avant-garde poets] (Pană 1973: 657).

Romanian surrealists of the second generation are thus booted as the black sheep both under the Right Wing Dictatorship (1940–1944, when they are called “communists” and “immoral poets”) and the Left Wing, i.e. Communist Regime after August 23 (when they are called “anti-communists” and again “immoral” because they stay with Breton's surrealism).

2. Surrealism, an out-of-fashion position

After August 23, surrealism is declared out-of-fashion by the first generation of surrealists, now socially and politically committed after Aragon's example at the magazine *Orizont*. Gellu Naum, Virgil Teodorescu and their colleagues are not published by any magazine between August 23, 1944 and December 30, 1947, but are very present through their absence, as they are the scapegoat of the officially ideological poetic discourse. They serve perfectly for the don'ts discourse. The most striking example comes from their literary fathers, the avant-garde poets from *unu* magazine. Literary critics don't mention them in their survey articles of the 1944 and 1945 poetry, but they continuously attack them whenever poetical ideology is discussed¹.

Excluded from the literary magazines, Gellu Naum and Virgil Teodorescu become very present in the literary field due to the many volumes of poetry or poetical prose which they publish during this period.

3. Banning dreams, sex(uality) and Imagination

To better understand the surrealists' stand we can compare it to the poetry supported by *Orizont* magazine. The now hailed socially committed poetry allows only some themes, while others, such as dreams, sexuality and imagination are banned. The poetry published by *Orizont* sticks to the themes which are declared sane by *Scânteia*. Here are the themes: the war, the apocalypse (of the old bourgeois world, of surrealist poetry), the new world and the new man, the new socially committed poetry, the agrarian theme, the plants' and workers' theme, celebrating the beloved political leader, love, visionary poetry and peace. These themes are used also by *Scânteia* to rewrite history.

As one can notice, dreams and sexuality no longer figure among these themes. Moreover, the themes still allowed by Communist ideology, such as love and visionary poetry, are reinterpreted from the point of view of the grand narrative which is meant to legitimate Communist ideology. Love is a theme, but only when it means loving the political leaders such as Stalin, while visionary poetry sticks to implementing one single dream: that of the future Communist society. The only possible love is towards the Soviet leaders and the only acceptable dream is Communism.

4. Stigmatizing Surrealism

After August 23, the classicized avant-garde led by Sașa Pană has to discredit surrealism to legitimate its poetical i.e. political option. Now, Sașa Pană states that

¹ See Sașa Pană's survey article in *Orizont* [*Horizon*] and Ion Călugăru's in *Scânteia* [*The Spark*] for the 1944 poetry (Pană 1945: Sașa Pană, *Anul literar* [*The Literary Year*], in *Orizont*, 1945, 19 and Călugăru 1945: Ion Călugăru, *Cartea în 1944* [*The Books of 1944*], in *Scânteia*, 1945, 97, January 7) and Perpessicius 1946: Perpessicius, *Două semestre de poezie* [*Two Semesters of Poetry*], in *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, 1946, 1–2 (January-February) for the 1945 poetry.

„Poezia nu trebuie să aparțină vreunui partid, poetul însă trebuie” [Poetry must not pertain to a party, but the poet must] (Pană 1946). He is joined in this opinion by Tristan Tzara, himself supporting Aragon’s commitment, who claims that „poetul supraterestru nu mai există” [the sur-terrestrial [i.e. surrealist] poet no longer exists] (Tzara 1946). Leaving Breton’s surrealism means leaving the dream as a means of knowledge:

Împotriva visului Valéry aduce rechizitorii impresionante. El găsește că visul predispune spre un fel de letargie naivă și că – în nici un caz – nu poate servi unui poet adevărat [Against the dream, Valéry formulates impressive accusations. He thinks the dream predisposes to naïve lethargy and that by no means can it serve a genuine poet] (Ierunca 1946).

For the Communist ideologue N. Moraru, Aragon represents a healthy political stand, while Breton the decadent bourgeois:

Curajos, el [Aragon] smulge masca acelor care sub camuflajul „purismului”, „estetismului” și „individualismului” ascund în fond capitularea și complicitatea cu un sistem social în putrefacție” [Bravely, he [Aragon] unmasks those who, under the mask of “purism”, “aestheticism” and “individualism” hide the capitulation and complicity with a putrefying social system] (Moraru 1947).

He stands

împotriva lui André Breton, ideologul descompus al suprarealismului, împotriva lui André Malraux, transfug, etern individualist aventurier [against André Breton, the putrefying ideologue of surrealism, against André Malraux, transfuge, eternal individualist adventurer] (Moraru 1947).

Therefore, Breton can no longer be a legitimate surrealist, as „angajamentul poetului este conținut în suprarealism” [the poet’s [political] commitment is contained in surrealism], claims Tristan Tzara when he visits Romania in 1947 (Tzara 1947). Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, one of the young fervent Communist literary critics of the time, attributes to Breton the “art for art” position:

„Azi Breton trece cu arme și bagaje în rândurile (...) partizani[lor] literaturii pure” [Now, Breton moves in, bag and baggage, with the pure literature partisans] (Crohmălniceanu 1947).

To this critic, surrealism betrayed its credo:

Să începem cu perioada viselor: în locul unui om echilibrat, eliberat de toate tarele inconștientului, un om hărțuit de complexe și coșmaruri. [...] Sexualitatea exagerată ca și visul până la întunecarea omenescului [Let us begin with the dreams: instead of an equilibrated being, a man haunted by complexes and nightmares. (...) An exaggerated sexuality, as well as the dream, down to the complete darkening of the human].

5. Representing intimacy through dreams and sexuality: a means of political resistance

In this context, Romanian surrealists Gellu Naum and Virgil Teodorescu fall victim to the dichotomy of the polemical discourse, to the logic of “those who are

not with us are against us". Since they refuse the position of the socially and politically committed Communist poets, they are necessarily "fascists", "mystics", "idealists", "anti-communists", "narcissists", "decadent poets", "immoral", "purists of form", "out-of-fashion", "retrograde", "anti-humanist", "adepts of the ivory tower", "anti-realists", "anti-socialists", "reactionaries", "anti-revolutionaries", and "obscurantist". All these attributes appear in the literary magazines which continuously attack this last poetical stand, which becomes also a political stand, since the aesthetical option is the only moral option available in a literary field controlled politically.

Absent from the magazines since they cannot publish poetry, they are present through the reviews of their books. This gives way to accusations from the politically committed young literary critics such as „[Gellu Naum] cel mai slab dintre ei [suprarealiștii români]” [Gellu Naum is the worst surrealist poet] (Paraschivescu 1945), „cel mai îndărătnic dintre suprarealiști e de altfel și cel mai lipsit de talent” [[Gellu Naum is] the most stubborn and the least talented of all surrealist poets] (Cosma 1945). Their poetry makes an “imbecile of culture” („cretinizare a culturii”) (Cosma 1945).

But the most violent attack comes from *Scânteia*, in an article with no signature and which only suggests that the attacked position is that of the surrealists. All these accusations appear very early in an issue of November 1944 and will be repeated by all ideologically committed literary press (*Scânteia* 1944): their position

exprimă copios o anumită realitate, cea mai reacționară dintre toate (...) Domnul autor și amicii domniei sale. [...] Dar, autorul și destui ca dânsul apără o poziție. Poziția pe care o amenință democrația și lupta pentru libertate, pentru cultură și pentru egalitate a muncitorilor și a țăranilor. [...] Autorul apără poziția reacționară a clicei de profitori și sprijinitori ai fascismului, beneficiarii unei aristocrații de sânge sau ai unei nobleți a banului [generously expresses a certain reality, the most reactionary of all. (...) Mr. Author and his His Excellency's companions. The author and many like him defend a position. The position menaced by democracy and by the fight for freedom, for culture and for the workers' and peasants' equality. [...] The author defends this reactionary position of the clique of opportunists and hailers of fascism, the beneficiaries of noblesse and the elegance of money].

Under the Communists' ideological and representational monopoly of the human self, intimacy has no longer anything to do with the personal, the individual understood as a complex of reality, dreams and sexuality. Intimacy is banned and booed as a solipsistic means to oppose the so-called “new humanism” promoted by the official ideology. Therefore, to continue to write surrealist Bretonian poetry or poetic fiction is not only to defend an aesthetic position, but also a normal position, which means to keep literature autonomous.

I think it is fruitful to view Gellu Naum and Virgil Teodorescu's volumes in the context of the major political events, since they influence the strategies adopted by them. Until the first postwar elections on November 19, 1946, there was still hope that the political system would return to the interwar democratic one. King Michael I, tolerated at first by Stalin, was a symbol of this hope. But when the Communists falsified the elections and prosecuted the leaders of the historical

parties, all hope was gone. In terms of poetic strategies, this is reflected by the group strategy adopted by the surrealists after 1946. In 1944 and 1945, surrealists publish individual volumes. In 1946 and 1947, they publish collective volumes in French, a means of defying official directives which asked the poets to be as plain and direct as possible in their language. And addressing a Romanian public in French surely does not come to terms with the Communist credo of writing for the many, the workers and the peasants.

6. Major political events:

6.1. 1944 and 1945: August 23: Romania drops the alliance with Hitler and joins the Allies. Three military governments follow until March 6, 1945, when the first Pro Communist Government is imposed by Andrei Vishinski. Russian and Jew communists (Romanian citizens or not) control the political field with the help of the Soviet Army and annihilate all opposition (the National Liberal Party and the National Peasant Party) using every means of intimidation (large procommunist manifestations, ideological monopoly through the press and violence). Trying to force Great Britain and the United States to take seriously their role in the Allies' Control Commission, King Michael I is in "royal strike" from August through December 1945. Nevertheless, this is useless.

In 1944, Gellu Naum publishes a poetry volume, *Culoarul somnului* [The Corridor of Sleep]. 1945 is a very productive year: two volumes of poetic fiction by Gellu Naum (*Medium* and *Teribilul interzis* [The Terrible Banned]) and two poetry volumes by Virgil Teodorescu (*Blănurile oceanelor* [The Furs of Oceans] and *Butelia de Leyda* [The Cylinder of Leyda]).

Unlike Virgil Teodorescu, Gellu Naum is polemical and ironical towards the imposed Communist (poetic) ideology. For instance, he makes fun in a surrealist way of the hammer and sickle, first in the 1940 volume *Vasco da Gama*, secondly in *Medium*. Vasco da Gama says: „și zice Comandante acordă-mi cocarda/ dă-mi voie să-mi pun pe față seceră/ și pe ureche ciocanul” [Commander, do grant me the cockade/ allow me to put the sickle on my face/ and the hammer in my ear] (Naum 2004: 51). In *Medium*, he meditates on the question mark, which is represented using also a full stop. This makes it definitive and irrevocable, just like the answers supplied by the Communist ideology:

Acuz semnul de întrebare de întreaga mitozitate a culturii moderne și propun modificarea lui. Hidoasa împreunare seceră punct, trebuia să dea, prin sterilitatea ei amplă, dela început de gândit. (...) O întrebare trebuie să aducă o altă întrebare și alta și alta, o mie de întrebări, miliarde de întrebări, întrebări incalculabile, trebuie să ne înnebunească declanșarea amenințătoare a seriilor nesfârșite de întrebări iscate de o singură întrebare [I hold the question mark responsible for the entire production of myths in modern culture and I propose to modify it. The hideous fornication sickle-full stop, due to its ample sterility, ought to have made one wonder. (...) A question must raise another, and another, and another, a thousand questions, billions of questions, incalculable questions, the menacing detent of the never-ending series of questions risen by a single question must drive us mad] (Naum 1945a: 89, see footnote).

To Naum, literature is a way to exist, not only an artistic production: „Sunt infectat de literatură până dincolo de măduvă”, „n'am scris niciodată un poem

pentru un poem” [I am infected by literature beyond the marrow (...) I have never written a poem only for the sake of the poem] (Naum 1945a: 13–14). It is also a way of sexualizing the interior poetic universe: „[...] și-mi public poemele dintr’un act pur de exhibiționism erotoman” [... and I publish my poems out of a pure erotomaniac exhibitionism] (Naum 1945a: 29). Choosing the dream as the only reality, he implicitly takes a polemical stand against the committed poets: „refuzul total al oricărei alte realități decât cea a visului, a oricărui alt adevăr decât al viziunii” [the total refuse of any other reality than the dream’s, of any other truth than the vision’s] (Naum 1945a: 34). For the committed poets, the only reality is the immediate reality and the only dream is implementing the Communist society. To him, this stand shows cowardice:

o frumoasă lașitate [...] de a considera reală numai femeia care trece în soarele cel mai puternic [...] în desavantajul umbrei care stă în colțul cel mai retras al camerei și mă privește dormind [a beautiful cowardice (...) to consider real only the woman who walks through the brightest sunlight (...) not giving justice to the shadow lying in the darkest corner of the room and who watches me sleep] (Naum 1945a: 73).

As a response to the accusation of “obscurantism”, Naum writes:

Ceiace văd în lumină este noaptea. Cred că e inutil să adaug că îmi place să văd această noapte dincolo de orice simbolică obscurantistă [What I see in the light it’s the night. I find it futile to add that I like to see this night beyond all obscurantist symbology] (Naum 1945a: 149).

In *The Terrible Banned*, he is polemic to the accusation of “morbidity” and “decadency”:

În dosul nostru stă moartea, mereu moartea. Îmi place această imagine derutantă, decretată ca ieftină de toți cei pentru care totul are un preț [Behind us lies death, always death. I like this confusing image, dismissed as cheap by all those for whom everything has a price] (Naum 1945b: 15).

Naum takes one step further and accuses the Communist ideology which bans sexuality and dreams from representing one’s (poetic) intimacy of limiting idiotically the self and its knowledge:

Explicări suficiente, mituri susținute la nevoie cu ajutorul poliției, acestea au fost totdeauna ecoul epocilor celor mai obscurantiste, a celei mai sinistre exploatări, a celui mai îngrozitor reacționarism [Self-sufficient explanations, myths sustained if needed with the help of the Police, these have always been the echoes of the most obscurantist ages, of the most sinister exploitation, of the most terrible reactionary spirit] (Naum 1945b: 16).

[...] orice privire istorică în alt scop decât de a arăta inutilitatea tuturor eforturilor care tind către definitiv [...] este reacționară [...]any historical glance for other purposes than to show the futility of all efforts to reach definitiveness (...) is reactionary] (Naum 1945b: 23).

Less theoretical than Gellu Naum’s 1945 volumes, Virgil Teodorescu’s 1945 poetry offers a genuine surrealist representation of the interiority. If Naum represents it as a large dark space perfectly divided into shelves and corridors (all under the reign of lucidity, the large eye wide opened in the dream), Virgil

Teodorescu prefers the representation of interiority as body-inside-body, a concentric universe (with an aquatic imagery: shells, volutes), but also a tubular, complex structure, an underground fantastic machine, through which the sea's blood runs. The warm envelopment of the exterior body is a blood net, the poetic text's texture: „Dacă aş cădea sângele tău m-ar prinde ca o plasă bine întinsă” [If I were to fall, your blood would catch me like a well-laid net] (Teodorescu 1969: 14).

This tubular universe contains forms, coreless contours, and empty spaces (the lover's tongue is a tunnel). Interiority becomes thus a splendid mechanism of cylinders, contorted tunnels, i.e. the sleep's corridors: „E un flux în vinele mele murdar de plante și de rechini” [There's a dirty flux in my veins, with plants and sharks] (Teodorescu 1969: 54). The protecting amnion of the sea-mother is an animal fur:

Tu ești femeia în care se deschide visul/ Ca o enormă plantă de apă/ În care oasele lustruite sunt ace de cusut/ Blănurile oceanelor pentru totdeauna [You're the woman in which the dreams blossoms/ Like an enormous water plant/ In which the polished bones are needles/ To sew the furs of oceans forever] (Teodorescu 1969: 56).

Under the skin, the protecting envelopment lies the poetry of the empty body, which the poet turns into a shelter. He dressed with his lover's skin, which is a hermetic tattoo or a letter-poems lace: „Ți-am spus că ai sub piele frunze lungi de ferigi” [I told you that you've got long fern leaves under your skin] (Teodorescu 1969: 44).

Ferigi din prima eră mureau sub brațul tău [...] pământul primei ere plin de ferigi albastre/ Pe care mi-aș fi scris toate poemele [Ferns of the first era died under your arm (...) the land of the first era was full of blue ferns/ On which I should have written all my poems] (Teodorescu 1969: 35).

A step further, 1946 brings the surrealists' collective volumes as a strategy to survive gathering together in a poetically and politically condemned position.

6.2. 1946: A very dirty political campaign is meant to destroy the two historical parties: their leaders are called “reactionaries”, “fascists” and “antidemocrats” in all left wing papers. All the Communists' crimes during the campaign are attributed to them. The parliamentary elections in November 19 are falsified by the Democratic Parties Block, a sum of no-name small parties appeared after August 23, controlled and financially supported by the Communists and Soviets.

In this terrible context, Gellu Naum has still the courage to claim that „Poezia este incompatibilă cu cea mai minimă îngrădire dogmatică” [Poetry is incompatible with the slightest dogmatic limitation] (Naum 1946: 18). The poet is now a reflexive conscience, doubtful with a black humor. He mocks the socially and politically committed poet, who is perfectly sure of his political (and aesthetical option): in this moral, political and existential crisis, the poet's voice „asigură perturbațiunea necesară, îndoiala asupra cece este ținut ca evident” [guarantees the necessary perturbation, the doubt of everything that passes for obvious] (Naum 1946: 17).

Together with Virgil Teodorescu, Gellu Naum publishes in 1946 a collective volume of short surrealist poems or aphorisms entitled *The Spectre of Longevity. 122 Bodies*. It is dedicated to the non-committed social and political public:

Acelora căroră, dincolo de *hermetismul* datorit procedului elaborării acestor texte, le se relevă sensul profetic, fluidul negru care le inundă [To those who, beyond the *hermetic character* due to the technique used to produce these texts, the prophetic sense, the black fluid which runs through them, is revealed] (Naum, Teodorescu 1946: 7).

All surrealist poets of the second generation stand together in their last defensive strategy: collective volumes written in French, a means of isolating themselves in a climate all the more hostile to the liberty of creation. *L'Infra-noir. Préliminaires à une intervention sur-thaumaturgique dans la conquête du désirable* [*The Infrablack. Preliminaries to a Sur-Thaumaturgical Intervention in the Conquest of the Desirable*] is signed by Gherasim Luca, Gellu Naum, Paul Păun, Virgil Teodorescu, Trost. Stubbornly, they continue to state that the only acceptable revolution to them is that of the self, not the political one: „Poezia, iubirea, revoluția sunt totuna” [Poetry, love, revolution are one and the same] (in Naum 1999: 489).

Este vorba de a cuceri mijloacele de a face dragoste cu lumea (...) de a face să fie permanent și colectiv ceea ce până acum nu era decât miracol în transmutarea amanților și în câteva operații poetice și anonime [It's about conquering the means to make love with the world (...) to make permanent and collective what was only a miracle in the transmutation of lovers and in a few poetic and anonymous operations until now] (Naum 1999: 487).

6.3. 1947: the leaders and most important members of the historical parties are brought to trial for crimes against the new so-called democratically elected regime and convicted. Many of them die in the Communist prisons. The last symbol of a normal democratic world falls victim to the same rising power of the Communists: King Michael I is forced to leave the throne and the country.

With no hope left, the surrealists publish only collective volumes written in French: *Eloge de Malombra. Cerne de l'amour absolu* (*Praise of Malombra. Ashes of the Absolute Love*) and *Le sable nocturne* (*Nocturnal Sand*). The latter was part of *Le surréalisme en 1947*, the 1947 International Surrealism Show presented by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp.

Their poetical and political stand will no longer function after 1947, since the literary field is now officially under the political field's dictatorship with social realism as the new doctrine. In the confused, dark period between August 23, 1944 and December 30, 1947, Gellu Naum and Virgil Teodorescu's poetry and poetical fiction is a breath of fresh air. Their political resistance is an odd member case, a plea for normality and autonomy of the literary practice, in a context where the aesthetical is also the ethical option.

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Abstract

This article looks into the surrealists Gellu Naum and Virgil Teodorescu’s position in the literary and political field from August 23, 1944 through December 30, 1947 by analyzing their themes as against the accepted ideology and by comparing their position to their surrealist “fathers” from *unu* and to the literary critics’. Their literary strategy turns into a means of political resistance in a (literary) field witnessing the rise of communism.