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THE POLITICAL FUNCTION OF STUDYING LITERATURE IN THE COMMUNIST ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The article sustains that teaching Romanian literature during the Communist regime has a political function. In the communist Romania, a single party holds the complete political power. The activities in all domains, including education, are controlled by the state. Subsequent to the Education Reform in 1948, teaching Romanian is subordinated to propagandistic objectives, rather than educational ones. The Romanian teachers play an important role in shaping the communist consciousness. The ideology is very present in the schoolbooks and has the function to indoctrinate young learners.*

Key words: *Communism, ideology, literature, curricula, methodology.*

The establishment of the totalitarian communist regime in Romania brings major changes in the way the educational system is conceived. Romanian institutions, in their evolution between 1859 and 1944, are abolished by force and replaced by those of the Soviet model state.

After 1948, the Romanian Communist Party is facing the need to put in line the administrative, economic, cultural and educational state apparatuses with the new created power relations and the up to date ideology.

The education in People's Republic of Romania, according to the Constitution of April, 13 1948, becomes an exclusive activity of the state, and the 1948 Reform sets the educational process on scientific, dialectical-materialist bases.

One of the teaching methodologies of the Romanian literature published during the communist times summarizes the changes in the Romanian education: "After August 23, 1944 the new, popular-democratic and scientific realist educational system was founded, linking school to life, to production and, in this way, the compulsory public general education system was founded. Organizational factors have been prepared to provide the material basis of the new school and the appropriate curriculum. The Party's concern was reflected in the guidance of the activities taken to continuously improve programs, textbooks and teaching methods." (Caroni 63)

All the textbooks published before 1947 are obsolete and, consequently, replaced by new unique books and new curricula designed by the Soviet model. In fact, the identical application of the new Russian school system had negative results on education.

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A major role will be given during the communist times to Romanian language and literature study in middle school, the subject having the role of massively contributing to the pupils' civic education. Moreover, in the curriculum of elementary schools, the Romanian language was the main object of study.

In the speech held at the April 10, 1952 Congress of teachers of Romanian People's Republic, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej says: "We must pay particular attention to the study of Romanian language in schools, forged by the people, through the efforts of dozens of generations, the classical and contemporary progressive literature, reflecting the aspirations of the people, its fight and its conquests, of Romanian history, showing people's long standing struggle for freedom." (Gheorghiu-Dej 459-460). The values promoted by the communist society are brought to pupils' knowledge through the literary texts they study.

Using a number of rhetorical questions the 1950 *Method of Teaching Romanian Literature in 5th-11th grades* emphasizes the role of Romanian literature in the spiritual growth of the communist pupils: "What is the contribution of teaching literature to the formation of pupils' scientific conception of nature and society, to their ideological, political and moral development, to the improvement of their thinking and speaking abilities? What must my lessons include to help the communist education of these 40-50 children in my class, who direct their gaze curiously at me, a new man to them?" (9-10)

Another method of teaching that was also published in 1950 highlights at the same time, the role of the Romanian literature in "educating real people, fighters that are aware of the building of a socialist society." (*Methods of reading for elementary school (grades I-IV)* 5)

The school in the communist era is a method of influence and manipulation of the pupils. The ideological message has a greater resonance as it is addressed to younger minds. They are more vulnerable, easier to be indoctrinated, more likely to be changed, less able to filter the received information.

The main goal of the Romanian language and literature as taught subject is, therefore, the pupils' patriotic and atheistic education. The other objectives that should be priorities (i.e. improvement of the taste and the habit of reading, improvement of oral and written skills in compliance with the rules of literary language, the formation of literary text analysis skills, the improvement of creating various types of compositions etc.) were set only in the background: "The purpose of studying the Romanian literature in general knowledge school is the formation of the aesthetic taste, as part of the communist education of pupils." (Parfene 24)

After 1962, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej cautiously starts to lead a nationalist policy, which will be continued by his successor, Nicolae Ceauşescu. The latter, discovers that "the call to the national feeling is an efficient mechanism of social control and personal dictatorship." (Deletant 137)

Textbooks present passages in Romanian language and literature that serve the purpose of educating the pupils' patriotic spirit: "In the thematic area of patriotic education a special segment is held by the texts glorifying the P.C.R.'s struggle for social and national liberation of our people, its role as a much-tried and wise leader in the great work of building the new socialist

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life on the grounds of our country, lifting it higher and higher on the heights of progress and civilization." (Blideanu & Şerdean 152)

The politicization of education is reflected in demagogic formulas and the teaching process undertakes an ideological training procedure. Linked to the social and political realities of the times, the methods of teaching highlight, after 1965, the year the new Constitution proclaimed Romania as a Socialist Republic, the crucial role of the Romanian literature in shaping the socialist consciousness: "The ultimate goal of teaching literature in schools should be the training and the development of socialist consciousness of the pupils' new attitudes towards work and society, removing the influence of bourgeois ideology and the emergence of the new man." (Lăudat 148)

An utmost important role is given in the communist school to the training of the Romanian literature teacher because he/she has the task of forming/ instructing young spirits. The efficiency of education and especially of the effective propaganda is given by the quality and quantity of knowledge that the teacher holds and the ability to transmit it, of his professional knowledge, emphasising the ideological one, the talent that he lays in the use of all the resources of the taught subject.

The majority of the teaching methodology books for Romanian language and literature published during the communist era, offer at least a chapter dedicated to teacher training and his role in the teaching of the subject. He is the one that controls and runs the process of training and education, he contributes to the overall goal (for over forty years) of school and that is the communist education of the younger generation: "The most important task of the literature teacher is to help pupils to deepen their understanding of the best works of our writers and the Soviets', making our current literature and the Soviet literature, one of the basic weapons of communist education.

Literature accomplishes its high role of socio-political, cultural and artistic education of the people only when is inspired by the ideas of class struggle of the proletariat, by the great ideas of Marxs, Engles, Lenin and Stalin." (*Teaching Romanian literature Methodology in 5th-11th grades* 22)

Although the steps made by the Romanian Communist Party in its policy together with those of the educational one are different during the over forty years of totalitarian regime in Romania, the details regarding the methods of teaching Romanian language and literature related to the role of the teacher aren't much different. The ideological issue is strongly and continuously emphasised, binding professional evolution at the expense of understanding the freedom of teacher's own opinions. The literature teacher, through his education and training, ensures the quality of the lesson, the basic form of the educational process. His professional training involves acquiring the political and ideological message, methodical, pedagogical, scientific and comprehensive guidance in teaching.

The ideological dimension that involves the act of teaching a subject has been explicitly expressed by the General Secretary (since 1965) of the Romanian Communist Party, Nicolae Ceauşescu, "the teacher's mission is not limited to the activity of knowledge giving, it requires both a great responsibility for shaping the personalities of the new generation of

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intellectuals and for shaping their civic awareness, to cultivate among future specialists high ideals of freedom and social progress." (Ceauşescu 65)

Nothing is left out of sight because on today's efficiency of indoctrination will depend the future of the party tomorrow.

Ideological suggestions of teaching Romanian literature in the teaching methodologies can be easily related to the one-party politics. If in the teaching methodologies issued immediately after 1948, the Soviet model is constantly present, after 1960, a stage reflecting Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's political views followed by Ceauşescu's, we notice a distancing attitude from the Soviet Union with less influence of the Stalinist legacy.

Ceauşescu' "suggestions" are euphemisms for his dictates: "The Romanian Communist Party documents, the Party's General Secretary, Comrade Nicolae Ceauşescu's vision, include precise instructions on upgrading the educational process continuously. The fundamental principle is, of course, integrating education into research and production that is, with the practical work from the social point of view.

The creation of the man of the multilaterally developed socialist society, capable of becoming, in the future, the bearer of the design and implementation of communism requires permanent integration in the education of the today's scientific-technological revolution acquisitions, not only in terms of expertise, but also under the same methodology and technology. In this framework, real modernization problems are required to be dealt with, in terms of both institutional and daily activity, in terms of improving the teaching and learning process to update the educational process in its constituent links." (Bojin 5)

These observations reflect that since 1948 education has had a different purpose, namely the formation of secondary and higher education staff to implement the party program in all the working fields. Ideological training of the teaching staff of all levels, regardless of age and grade, started in 1948 and will continue until December 1989.

The Romanian literature teaching methodologies published during the communist times are ideologically injected. They include step by step instructions, directives, and guidelines for the making of the new man to serve in the future the One-Party. Learning ideology is self-evident: "The steps of dialectical knowledge are widely known and captured by Lenin's: from living contemplation to abstract thought and from this in practice." (Parfene 68)

The guiding nature of the Romanian literature lessons is overshadowed by their informatory and propagandistic nature: "Literary works from the reading books have a great educational influence on pupils. Many literary texts reflect the moral features of the new man, a builder of socialism, a work lover, a devotee to the people and the party, his courage, manliness, revolutionary optimism and his ability to overcome any difficulties." (*Teaching the Romanian language 1st - 4th forms. Pupil's book for Pedagogical High Schools* 9)

The propaganda message is out of place, excessively patriotic and puerile.

The "de-Stalinization" process that began with the death of Stalin in March 1953 was not the beginning of a liberalization of the educational policy or an abandonment of ideological orthodoxy.

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After a trip to China and North Korea, Ceauşescu suddenly abandoned all reform efforts and decided to restore full control of the Communist Party over culture and society. (Tismăneanu 174)

Ceauşescu's "Theses" from June 6, 1971 which, according to the author, had to contribute to the improvement of the political ideology and cultural education, lead in fact to the strengthening of the party's influence in humanistic and scientific fields.

Despite the frequent changes that will take place in education during the more than forty years of communist regime in Romania (in the curricula, textbooks, the methodological guidelines etc.), one element remains constant, the perfect control of everything, the presence of ideology to saturation.

In conclusion, the basis of studies that make up the methodical teaching manuals is the guidance given by the party documents regarding the role and the tasks of Romanian language and literature in school, the materialist-dialectical conception according to which all the phenomena of Romanian language and literature must be filtered in the learning process.

All deviations from the rules of the totalitarian state represent a mistake, and the party controlled teaching system is primarily focused on ideological education. One-party monopoly is expressed not only in politics, but also in the literary life. A literary work has a social and an educational function, its purpose being the communist education of pupils by means of their aesthetic art of writing.

The education in communist Romania has the function of indoctrination. The training of the pupil's critical thinking, creativity and spontaneity is not at all taken into account.

The covers of the teaching guiding books hide a deep forgery regarding propagandistic information because there is no alternative to what communism proposes and imposes and that is a secularized religion.

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