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AN INFORMING LECTURE ABOUT ŞTEFAN A. DOINAŞ'S POEMS

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Abstract: *Our research aims to highlight the Marxist-Leninist manner in which an informer of the Romanian Security ("Direcţia Generală a Securităţii Poporului") interpreted Ştefan Aug. Doinaş's volume of poems, "Laokoon's Tribe" ("Seminţia lui Laokoon"), published in 1967. The document, preserved in one of the writer's dossiers consigned in the National Council for the Studies about Security's Archive ("Consiliul Naţional pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securităţii"), evinces that the agent catches a glimpse of subversive allusions, as if the poet criticizes the communist regime, but also people's cowardice to not set their back against the physical and psychological terror.*

Keywords: *Ştefan Aug. Doinaş's, "Laokoon's Tribe" ("Seminţia lui Laokoon"), communism, Security agent, informing note, political allusions.*

1. Introduction

The writers who handed rapports to the Romanian Security under conspiratorial names did not execute every time the orders received from the officers. At least Ştefan Aug. Doinaş refused to respect his obligations as the agent "Andrei Golfin". The political police detected that retractile attitude. Although the writer had been condemned to a one year jail penalty, he seemed not to have tided away his antipathy towards the state's leadership. The dossiers regarding him from the "National Council for the Studies about Security's Archives" (abbreviation: N.C.S.S.A) attest that the poet proved to be reluctant to accomplish his charges.

There are enough explanations for this behaviour, both in relation to the individual and the general context. One might take into consideration the hypothesis that Doinaş had become aware that avoiding the submission of informing notes would not affect his liberty.

2. Objectives

This article aims to spot an unknown document from the N.C.S.S.A, in which an informer makes a few statements about Ştefan Aug. Doinaş's person and books. We try to discern if "Gabriel Seranin", the responsible for this delation, was ideologically right to denounce the poet as enemy of the communist regime. Besides, we want to prove that the Security's

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Archive is indispensable when judging properly the Romanian literature between 1948 and 1989. Finally, it is our purpose to scrutinize more adequately the problem regarding the anti-totalitarian parables.

3. Material and Methods

In our research we used the writer's database from the N.C.S.S.A, which contains the evidences that he did not behave as an industrious and trusty agent, but also as challenger of the socialist measures. In addition to this, we applied to Doinaş's memoires, in order to observe his perspective about the cultural resistance and the Aesopic literature. Last but not least, we employed some suggestion offered by Nicolae Manolescu for making a solid, comprehensible and credible rereading of the poems and novels composed during Ceauşescu's dictatorship (1965-1989): "What would ultimately the revising consist in? Simply, into a rereading that requires two sides. On the first one, it is necessary describing the context when the works were published in. For the youngest readers, the «golden age» is history. […] Moreover, before the Revolution [from December 1989], literature was preponderantly Aesopic. This is the second side. […] Recovery the subtext has become necessary as the context's recovery" [7].

Consequently, contextualization is the main method. Likewise, we appeal to close readings, sociologic interpretation and close readings. We ought to mention that most of quotes are translated by ourselves. We quoted between brackets ("[]") the original excerpts, whenever we believed that there would have been understanding problems.

4. Results and Discussions

Why did Doinaş intend to separate from Security? There are several answers. Firstly, the experience had demonstrated that he would suffer no aggression. The only sanction might have consisted in making him an "objective". During the communist dictatorship, everyone who stayed in prison for political reasons was put under surveillance. Consequently, the Security decided to tighten up the monitoring dispositions. We can observe that the intellectual's calls were intercepted, as appears in a letter sent by the 11th Direction to the 1st Direction on the 14th of October 1967 [9]. The accompanying paper contains grounds for the decision. Andrei Golfin received a punishment, because he ignored the obligations he had made out of detention. The document in question illustrates the collaboration's evolution between the writer and the parent institution, from troth to a certain insurgency: "The agent has carried a satisfactory activity, providing useful materials on some elements we were interested about. Lately however (about a year and a half), has become negligent, difficult, trying to avoid meeting with us, does not fulfil the assigned tasks" [9]. It remains a question with multiple resolutions why he refused to submit to the received order. There enters into equation the attempt to redeem the dignity crushed by the despair to get back into the cultural circuit between 1958 and 1961, when the General Directorate of Press and Prints had banned the signature "Stefan Aug. Doinaş". Then comes the desire to restore trust of friends he betrayed because the obsession that, if denunciates them, he returns in the press easily and his books will appear without problems. But in 1967, the former member of the Literary Circle of Sibiu needed Security's, as he had obtained fame. A year before he got his second book, *Omul cu compasul* (*The Man with Compass*, 1966), hailed by critics from all generations, among others, Vladimir Streinu [11], Cornel Regman [10], Gheorghe Grigurcu [4] and Nicolae Manolescu [6].

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Advantaged by the success and praises gained owing to the supporters of the aesthetic autonomy, the writer sought to remove the shackles, which did not endanger his freedom (he was not menaced again by jail) and did not oblige him compose rhythms and rimes for the Communist Party, as had happened at the occurrence of his editorial debut *Cartea mareelor* (*Tidal Book*, 1964). Moreover, *Seminția lui Laokoon* (*Laokoon's Tribe*, 1967) is his first volume where the propagandistic themes are excluded.

Despite Doinaş had obtained the literary independence, Ştefan Popa (the writer's real name) was forced to serve an institution which had transformed him both into a victim and a executioner. Walking alongside a torturing and Mephistophelian organization suffocated him. Thus, he chose to riposte. On the one hand, he backed out from relating the discussions he had with people from the entourage. Others might be able to judge if the attitude's change meant an act of courage or a special type of dissidence. For the nonce, we can grasp that the author struggled to rebuild self-esteem and regain the trust of friends. He understood that Security had ceased to manipulate his literary career. On the other hand, he began to insert oracular formulas in poems, endorsing the horrors produced by the totalitarian regime. In old age, he stated that was not the only one who winked at the readers, in sign of complicity to a verse shaped attempt against "the brave new world" from the official documents, press articles and broadcasts: "Around 1965, the cultural resistance in Romania gathered way as a so called Aesopian literature: the writers propagated an ambiguous and truculent language, apparently submissive to the directives that came from «above», but which, in reality, was full of critical allusions concerning the state of facts. Obviously, poetry was the most suitable genre for this type of writing. Mythological themes and inspirations from the Greek and Roman Antiquity, predominant in my youth poems, were a favourable ground for this language which escaped the censorship's control" [3]. Did this activity shake up the country's leadership in the interval 1965-1989? Or did their actions abridge to revealing the terror, the defilation of false values, the decrepitude dressed up in gala clothes, the drift society? In my opinion, the second variant is more veracious. The public assimilated the filtered allegories. The writers made themselves understood between the lines.

Beyond debate, Doinaş was among the grim *allusionists*. We confront with a glaring contradiction between the poet's biography and its creation. This schizophrenia characterizes his whole activity as an informer since 1958, when he was recruited, until 1984, when he was excluded from the network [8]. A Security agent, who was more active than asked sometimes, redacted indictment like texts against the regime. Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu inspired him to use that method of creation: "My friend Crohmălniceanu pointed out the possibilities to slip through the wider meshes of the official vigilance. Morover: he was the one who suggested using fake mottos. Many of my poems have mottos which do not exist, from Polybius, Camus, Lord Dunsany, being invented by myself, whose purpose was to hint at a false interpretation of the lines" [3]. *Laokoon's Tribe* initiates Doinaş's road of political parables. As it distance from 1989, generations of readers recuperate less from the contextual infiltrations. Sometimes, the denouncers from the Security's dossiers develop into indispensable assistants. For instance, "Gabriel Seranin's" [8] competence facilitates detecting the anti-system mines incorporated in the above cited booklet.

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However, any accusation or elucidation pertaining him must be managed with caution. We need to ponder whether the agent has made biased comments or misinterpreted the texts, so that he would harm the poet. The annotations made by the officer who received the briefing note might open the assumption that the "source" wanted to prove his reliability and usefulness: "The material which GABRIEL SERANIN provided was delivered from his own initiative after he had read the above mentioned works. The informer published himself articles in the *HORIZON* review [rom. *Orizont*] and activated in the Iron Guard, being a former jail prisoner" [8]. The informant conducted a sort of underground process, conducted by the Security officers. The biographic data, the complex hermeneutic employed and the transcription of some replicas from the presupposed talks between the two seem to entrust us that the delator is an academic with a strong culture, possibly a close friend, maybe a confident, thoroughly acquainted with the poet's creative laboratory. "Gabriel Seranin" associated Doinaş with a non-Marxist cultural group, insinuating thus he were not among the adherents of the "new man" principle. In soviet terms, this meant he might have been against the official dogmas, according to the Manichean logic "one is either with us or against us". Consequently, these innuendos convinced Security that "Andrei Golfin" resorted to tricks and it would be very difficult to assign him new tasks. The delineated portrait certificated Doinaş's opportunism in the relation with the parental institution. He did not abjure his anti-left conviction. Once again, congruous with the communist prescriptions, "Gabriel Seranin" deemed him as the possessor of a retrograde and reactionary mentality, presenting samples from the scholar's opinions about the political issues. Maybe, those dialogues were only forged in order to convince Security's officers that Doinaş tricked them. Simultaneously, the agent blew the lid off the Aesopian preference: "His general position (I mean the position expressed in the latest five year discussions) is that of an old school intellectual, who feels to be jeopardized in his literary evolution by the actual conjuncture: «We are a sacrificed generation of intellectuals», he told me once [*the underline, made with red ball-point pen, pertains probably to the officer that read the informing note*]; «We carry the stigma of the ugliest era; the stigma of fear. That is why we have no great works of art» etc.// According to the prior affirmations, his literary work staged as a motley convoy meant to rise from the ranks in order to asseverate. Publishing his third book, the man began to come into his own (In the previous two, *The Tidal Book* and *The Man with Compass*) was not «the bearer of a message» as in the newest one" [8].

Further, the agent provides a careful exegesis around the subversive symbols from the recent volume. His analogies were flamboyant for a critic, treacherous for the poet and horrid to figure out that, regardless of age, abjection and refined culture cohabit peacefully. "Gabriel Seranin" spots the majority of nodes behind the signs. One cannot leave out the hypothesis that Doinaş communicated him the bookish insinuations: "What does the title mean? Judah's tribe (paraphrase for betrayers), Herostratus's tribe (paraphrase for destroyers) and further «Cain's tribe» (used by Victor Hugo), paraphrase for the kinds of murderers etc. etc. [*the underlines are made by the informer with blue ink*]" [8]. One who is acquainted with the Hellenic mythology or with the function exercised by the character in "The Iliad"

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does not necessitate supplementary explanations. But, the Security's employees, lacking fundamental readings and not very well endowed with knowledge of artistic subtleties, needed details. The "source" resumed the Lacedaemonians's trick to win the Trojan War, disclosing the author's hidden intention. Censorship had been eluded. But Security received the circumvention's evidences: "Laokoon's tribe? Let us examine systematically who Laokoon was. In Greek mythology, Laokoon was the son of Pryamus and Hecuba and Apollo's priest in Troy. When Greeks brought «the Trojan horse» in front of the impregnable stronghold, Laokoon advised his fellows not to take it in, but set ablaze, because it (the horse) means a nail in their coffin. No one listened to him and he was punished by the Greek gods, sending a few giant serpents that killed him and his sons (the sculptural group «Laokoon» represents the scene when the man and his son enchained by the basilisks).// What did Laokoon and his «family» commit to become martyrs? They said the truth [*the underlines are made by the informer with blue ink*]. The facts took place as he had predicted (the story is known)" [8]. *Asediul* (*The Siege*), one of the poems integrated in the volume's summary, illustrates the anterior theories. The poem begins with a motto, which is attributed to Polybios. In fact, the quotation is conceived by Doinaş himself: "And when they had come out the fortress to submit, they saw that the enemy was nowhere". Transplanted into the writer's present, the ancient story acquires other connotations than the commune ones. The surrounded soldiers were not defeated, because they believed that the Greeks had bestowed them a respectful gift, but because they had abandoned the country's interests, in favour of material rewards. Doinaş's composition is not polished. Its expression is coarse and brutal, lacking the main artistic element: the forged donation. Without receiving any temptation, the soldiers, Romanians i.e., allow to be captured by the invisible Red Army, triggering the gloomy forecasts of the contemporary priest: "Târziu, bătu şi ceasul trădării. Podul nostru/ căzu din scripeți. Laşii, cu fruntea la pământ,/ cereau iertare. Nimeni, doar luna, ca un rostru/ de navă, trecu şanțul pe creasta unui vânt,/ Şi iarăşi nimeni... Până-n a şaptea noastră moarte/ vom lăcrăma cu sânge şi vom boli ciudat/ de-un rău de porți deschise şi de ferestre sparte/ Nicicând în jur nu-i nimeni./ Dar noi, noi ne-am predat" ["Late in night, the time was up for treason. Our bridge/ fell from winches. The cowards ate humble pie/ with the forehead to the ground/ No one, but the moon, like a ship/ rostrum, passed over the dike on the crest of the wind/ And again no one… Until our seventh death/ we cry tears with blood and we suffer of strange diseases/ of an evil similar to open gates and broken windows/ Anybody is never around./ But we, we left ourselves trapped"] [2].

Next, there is the most interesting section for literary history. We come across an undisclosed and complicated book-review which, paradoxically, tends to be closest to the literary truth. The critics who commented *Laokoon's Tribe*, Gheorghe Grigurcu [5], Valeriu Cristea [1] or Laurențiu Ulici [12], could read but the aesthetic filigree, avoiding its protestant dimension. This option can be easily explained. These commentators refused any political intrusion in art, as well they wanted to protect probably Doinaş by avoiding the "lizards" (i.e. the anti-communist symbols). "Gabriel Seranin" astonishes with his background about the techniques the poets utilize to camouflage

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their words. It is obvious that he noticed Doinaş had created a mechanism to unveil the authoritarianism. One might become perplexed because the informer did not seek to defend the propagandistic reality. On the contrary, he highlighted the idea that "Andrei Golfin" was rebelling against restricting rights: "Ştefan Aug. Doinaş is not an innovator. As many others, he recourses to mythology (therefore to legend) in order to suggest contemporary things [*the underline, made with red ball-point pen, pertains probably to the officer that read the informing note*].// Who is «Laokoon's tribe?». His ideational descendents, people who tell the truth at any cost [*the underline, made with red ball-point pen, pertains probably to the officer that read the informing note*]; the heroes who lay their life for the fortress's «sake». The hint is transparent! Besides, the entire volume is an hymn to fight against oppression; the fight waged by an isolated individual (it smells like a manipulated «genius») [*the underline, made with red ball-point pen, pertains probably to the officer that read the informing note*]. There is no word about the work in collective, about nation or about today's reality" [8]. In the investigation, "Gabriel Seranin" takes seriously his role as an unpaid attorney, indicating the book's uncomfortable and indictable passages. The informer accused the poet he embodied a public scourge, gathering most of the negative features stated by the Marxist-Leninist ideology. *Laokoon's Tribe* would have threatened the Socialist Republic of Romania, being as dangerous as sects or para-orthodox organization. Furthermore, Doinaş's poems would have instigated the other writers to revolt and to street protests. Also, this literature would have affected youngsters, removing their communist beliefs. Finally, the agent emphasizes Doinaş's duplicity in accomplishing his tasks. He had never composed realist-socialist lines because the Security frightened him, but to prove he was zealous to the socialist cause. He was believed to have considered that a fake fidelity would facilitate the access to publication. "Gabriel Seranin" carried out a few close-readings, specifying how to grasp the meanings of metaphors: "But let us follow the text.// At p. 8 [*in fact, it is p. 9!*], in *Nocturna I* [*The First Night*] there is an Indic like wisdom message or: «The departed husk new star in their mouth/ And we, who are captive in an iris, do not have the courage/ To wrench off the eyelash that blink above us»; «...our star is shaking, befallen/ by the a full of flies [*the underlines are made by the informer with blue ink*] breath from the gods». (Which gods is he talking about? He is writing about the present here!)" [The original form of the lines quoted by "Gabriel Seranin" is the following: "...Cei morţi dezghioacă în gură stele noi/ Iar noi, captivi în iris, nu mai avem curajul/ Să smulgem geana care clipeşte peste noi."; "...steaua noastră se clatină, lovită/ de răsuflarea plină de muşte a unor zei."] [8]. Doubtlessly, the lines are related to people's acquaintance with dictatorship. Evil produces inertia and habitude with abuses. The next declaration points the finger at Doinaş as a "national enemy", claiming that several fragments evince Europe's split in two spheres of influence: "In the poem *Toamna* [*The Autumn*] (p. 18), the prophet Jeremiah is invoked, but the most eloquent evidence remains the poem *Singurătate* [*Solitude*] (p. 20), in which the author sustains frankly: «…Today's miracle's sun ebbed/ And music's harmony of spheres/ with broken strings/ stretch a huge boundless mesh of

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silence». When other poets sing the actual world, praising it as a truthful golden age etc., Doinaş's poetry is showing… today [*there are two underlines made by the informer with blue ink*] unambiguously: the son faded and he speaks about the mesh of silence as if it were «the Iron Curtain» (this is the impression after reading)" [The original form of the lines quoted by "Gabriel Seranin" is the following: "...Azi soarele minunilor s-a stins/ Iar armonia muzicii de sfere/ cu strune rupte-ntinde-n necuprins/ o plasă uriaşă de tăcere"] [8].

5. Conclusions

There are enough data that Ştefan Aug. Doinaş vaccinated his volume with challenging antibodies. *Laokoon's Tribe* had spread the rumour that the country did not bathe in milk and honey and that no one is sure to swim in calm waters. There is always someone ready to drown the daredevils. The metaphoric denunciative rhetoric characterizes the beginning of the poet's cultural resistance. The climbing point would be reached in *Falconry* (*Vânătoare cu şoim*, 1985), when the author applied to the "reflector bulb" strategy. Nevertheless, the temporal distance does not hinder anyone to deny this literary hostility. It seems strangely that an informer blamed the communist regime. But, one should not forget that the work as agent was part of Doinaş's secret identity. The writer was interested in consolidating his public activity, trying to gain sympathy and respect among the readers and the critics. Of course, this is a histrionic behavior. Andrei Golfin lost discernment. Ştefan Augustin Doinaş saved his lucidity. Escaping Security's and Censorship's guardianships, the poet disseminated insubordinate statements, being aware the fact that each intellectual's public image always depends on community. And the community called for opponents against communism. From our point of view, no one can circumvent this remark when judging the Romanian cultural resistance during communism.

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