CONFLUENCES

FĂNUȘ NEAGU - *ADDENDA* TO THE VOLUMES PUBLISHED BETWEEN 1959 AND 1962[1]

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Abstract:

As it is well known, Fănuș Neagu published between 1959 and 1962 three volumes of sketches, short stories and tales (Ningea în Bărăgan, *Somnul de la amiază* and *Dincolo de nisipuri*). The three books have been generally well received, and although almost every chronicle included a fair quantity of criticism, they acknowledged the author's "robust" talent, his ability to build strong narrative conflicts, and his particular style, which was to become unmistakable. Some pieces of his storytelling failed to be totally adequate to the reality of that time (socialist realism) and exhibited a certain attachment to the past, visible in his passion for evoking human relationships within the Romanian village before the Liberation (from the fascist occupation). Therefore, the "reception" of the artistic message, the chronicles, reviews, or critical studies that have been dedicated to the literature in these first volumes should be regarded with a certain circumspection, which should also be applied when considering the obvious adherence to the ideology of the moment in some of his narrative works which were mostly praised. We should agree to the fact that those were times when writers were forced to adapt to, be it out of conviction, or opportunism, or with the wish of acceding to privileged positions. Without abiding completely to the party guidelines, Fănuș Neagu witnessed the bleakest phase of the communist experiment in our country by writing… in a

[1] This work was made in connection with the Project Romanian Literary Patrimony Preservation and Valorization by using Intelligent Digital Sollutions for Extracting and Systematization of Knowledge (INTELLIT). PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017 -0821/Nr 54 PCCDI/2018.

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different manner. The sketches and short stories he wrote in this early period of his life revealed how his memories and his consciousness were able to fill an empty page with grotesque images and situations, at the high time of the communist sleep of reason. Since many of the events that intersected the writer's biography have not been interconnected with the critical reception of the three volumes, they will be inventoried in an Addenda to the critical reception.

Keywords:
Literature, prose text, socialist realism, debate, ethics, Fănuș Neagu.

Further comments regarding the writer's participation to literary life, or in connection with his work – not necessarily with the three volumes – shall be presented below. The series of events that occurred in this period of time (round tables, debates, public statements) are illustrative for the evolution of the short prose genre. Some of the works by Nicolae Velea and Fănuș Neagu were at the centre of the discussion about "*the ethical conflict*", which they, in fact, triggered and which was held in parallel with the critical reception of the volume Somnul de la amiază.

[Dec. 25 - 26, 1960] *The IIIrd Meeting of Young Writer*s takes place in the assembly hall of the Central University Library. The event is covered by the literary magazines „Luceafărul"[1], „Gazeta literară"[2] and „Viața românească"[3]. One of the main guidelines addressed by many speakers at that meeting was the connecting of literature to the ideological requirements stated by the third Congress al P.M.R. [En.: Romanian Workers Party]. Referring to Prose Texts and the Problems of Actuality, Aurel Mihale, the secretary of the Writers' Union of R. P. R. [En.: Popular Republic of Romania], expressed a certain discontent towards the work of the union members, considering that although

"*they reflected various issues and aspects of life, they do not reveal sufficiently enough of the everyday life of the artisans of socialism, in its great complexity and richness*".

The young writers have been reminded that:

[1] „*Luceafărul*", IV (1961), nr. 1/1 ian., pp. 6-7.
[2] „*Gazeta literară*", VIII (1961) nr. 2/ 5 ian., pp., 3, 6; „*Gazeta literară*", VIII (1961), nr. 3/ 12 ian. pp. 3, 5.
[3] „Viaţa românească", (1961) , No. 1 (January), p. 127-147.

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"*any attempt to find poetry and novelty beyond the social issues of the reality and beyond the people's struggle to build a socialist era is doomed as sterile*".

Nevertheless, he mentioned following authors in the category short prose genre: Dumitru Radu Popescu, Nicolae Velea, Fănuș Neagu, Nicuţă Tănase, and Corneliu Leu.

[May 25, 1961] The literary magazine „Gazeta literară" conducted a survey called An Inquiry about the Literary Sketch[4]. One of the respondents was Fănuș Neagu:

(1) "*The sketch can and must operate in all fields of human activity, especially nowadays when the reportage, a genre finely cultivated by many writers, tends to totally captivate public's attention. There are no proper fields of reality that are more suited to be tackled by this genre, as implied by the question. I would rather say there is a thematic specialisation of the writers dedicated to it – may be due to their lack of experience or to their lack of profoundly understanding the social environments. As far as the capacity of sketches to capture the characteristics of building a socialist consciousness, I declare that I personally know at least ten sketches that are above ten novels from this point of view. (2) The basic rules of a literary sketch are that it has to be short and it has to be written with talent. Otherwise ... (3) Using a symbol is a generally accepted practice, which, I think, will not be aborted by the many generations of writers to come. However, I think that sketches that are built around a «punch line» demonstrate superficiality, lack of craft, and factual poverty. (4) Perspectives? A simple survey of the literary press and a quick reading of the editorial plans for the current year are edifying. I personally consider that the most interesting young writers who embraced the short genre are: Vasile Rebreanu, N. Țic, D.R. Popescu, Teodor Mazilu, N. Velea, Radu Cosașu, Pop Simion, H. Zincă, Ștefan Luca*".

[Oct. 1, 1961] Writing on *The Passion for the Values of the New Man* under the *Discussions* column of a literary magazine, Radu Cosașu[5] analyses the epic style of young writers, considering it as being strongly influenced by Marin Preda:

"*Beside the qualitative leap that the literary sketch made with regard to its substance, one should also add a series of new features that enrich the*

[4] „*Gazeta literară*", Year VIII (1961), No. 22 / May 25, p. 1, 4.
[5] „*Luceafărul*", IV (1961), No. 19 /Oct. 1, p. 4.

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artistic expression have and that are strongly connected with a great literary experience: Preda".

Some Tis connection is described by aspects such as: "the comical decantation of the word", the orality of discourse, "the passion for monolog" etc. Nevertheless, the prose texts of our young writers go well beyond just "blindly acting as Preda's servants":

"*Fănuș Neagu is the most inclined to poetising the reality, yet preserving a picturesque quality; in his texts, the nature has a place which unknown to other fellow writers*".

[Oct. 1, 1961] The literary magazine "Viața românească"[6] organizes a debate on the topic Current Problems of the Development of Prose. The participants are Eugen Barbu, Radu Cosașu, Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, Mihai Gafița, Silvian Iosifescu, Remus Luca, Ștefan Luca, Teodor Mazilu, Nicolae Tertulian, and Ion Vitner. The tendency to split between two literary "camps" becomes obvious. One camp is built around Marin Preda, the other around Eugen Barbu. The latter points out:

„*I regret not seeing amongst us some of our young and interesting writers such as Velea, Fănuș Neagu, and Ioan Grigorescu, since a discussion like the one we are having today concerns their work, too. [...] It might be said that this is a style which is typical of Faulkner, a writer who is rightly considered as the founder of a very interesting literary school of thought, and whose style Marin Preda adopted in a very honourable fashion, already establishing a tradition. I join the positive evaluation and praises that have been brought to the novel Moromeții. [...] Yet, I think it is not rational that everybody should now start writing as Marin Preda does. As far as I am concerned, I have tried and will try to change my writing technique from one book to another, but without abandoning my personal style. I demand originality from our fellow writers, I demand that each have their own voice that makes them noticeable [...] Therefore, as already said, I am surprised that writers like Fănuș Neagu, Velea, and Ioan Grigorescu are not here or that they have not been invited. They wrote some very interesting pieces. I think that a short story like La groapa de fumat would be worthy of a discussion at least as extended as the one dedicated to Bariera. I think that Grigorescu's coverage about Orașul paranoic was also worthy of a greater attention. Likewise, I believe there is a literary sketch or a short story – I*

[6] Probleme actuale ale dezvoltării prozei (debate), in: „*Gazeta literară*", XIV (1961), No. 10 October / p.115-141.

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cannot tell the difference between the two genres very well – called Clar de lună (En.: Moonlight) (sic!; the actual title is În văpaia lunii, En: In the Moonglow, translation mine, L. Ch.), written by Fănuș Neagu, which also deserved more ink".

[Nov. 16 - 23, 1961] Two successive issues of the literary magazine "Gazeta literară"[7] publish an enquiry-debate called *Prose Writers on Critics and Prose*. The participants are Eusebiu Camilar, Domokoș Géza, Al. I Ghilia, Dumitru Ignea, Fănuș Neagu, Șerban Nedelcu, Pop Simion, Ion Marin Sadoveanu, Mircea Șerbănescu, Nicolae Velea (Nov. 16), Eugen Barbu, Ury Benador, Vladimir Colin, Radu Cosașu, Remus Luca, Vasile Nicorovici, Titus Popovici, Szemlér Ferenc, Ieronim Șerbu, Al. I. Ștefănescu, Nicolae Țic, Petru Vintilă. (Nov. 23). They have to answer five questions regarding (1) the role of literary criticism (2) its forms of manifestation in "supporting" the authors, (3) the importance of documentation for understanding life, as "a fundamental prerequisite for writers", (4) our prose writers' attitude toward the "requirement to reflect the socialist everyday life" and (5) the most remarkable pieces of the genre of the last three years (1959-1961). Fănuș Neagu does not address questions 3 and 4 regarding writers' engagement and the prerogatives of the socialist realism:

(1) "Literary criticism performed its duty, generally speaking. [...] Yet, very little and only superficially has been written about the literary sketch and the short story, about the artistic level reached by them, and about their future. Guilty for that are primarily the young critics; I think, it is their duty to caringly and understandingly focus on the rich production of literary sketches and short stories. They should understand, as a fellow prose writer says, that «a time will come when love does not need words anymore». (2) Yes. Paul Georgescu, S. Damian, and Eugen Luca were the first to show me, with a little maliciousness - I agree, the pluses and minuses in my two volumes of short stories that I have published. My young colleagues, however, those who cared to give me o moment of their attention, rushed to finding my literary parents. And I successively found myself as a descendant from Sadoveanu, Panait Istrati, Hemingway, Slavici, Șolohov, Marin Preda, Leonid Leonov, Rebreanu, plus other eight writers, amongst whom ... Eugen Mandric. I hope that by my third volume I would have received four or five additional fathers, would have attended four or five schools and expelled from

[7] „*Gazeta literară*", VIII (1961), No. 47 /Nov. 16, p. 3; „*Gazeta literară*", VIII (1961), No. 48 / Nov. 23, p. 2.

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as many – since paper is able to endure a lot and the searching passion of Ion Lungu, Leonard Gavriliu, and Alexandru Oprea are eternal. (5) I shall focus on the works of young writers only. The most interesting for me seems the literature written by D.R. Popescu, Nicolae Țic, Mazilu, Velea, V. Rebreanu Radu Cosașu. One of the worst books, even though it may have been published a little earlier, in 1958, is Cartea cu ochi albaștri by Octav Pancu-Iași, which interprets the psychology of children and teenagers in a distorting way. Writers of children's books bear a great responsibility as far as children's education is concerned – and that is why publishing any bad book in this field should worry us all. In this case, it would have been desirable for literary criticism to manifest a stronger attitude in revealing the minuses of that book".

There are two aspects for which Fănuș Neagu's answers are relevant. The first one regards the amusement created by the attempt of some literary critics to find the parentage for his work, although the writer does not hesitate in "settling the scores" with the relentless critics Ion Lungu, Leonard Gavriliu, and Al. Oprea. The second aspect refers to the remarks he made with regard to the reception of children's literature, a genre that he would embrace in the following years. On the other hand, since between 1959 and 1961 the writer was – so to say - the centre of attention, the interviewers' answers to question 5 are of a particular interest. In our opinion, they vary a lot, thus demonstrating the solidarity of a generation. If the preferences are reaching out of this frame, they are accompanied by an attitude of slight reservation, as it happened for example in the case of Dumitru Ignea, who indicated Fănuș Neagu, D.R. Popescu, and Pop Simion amongst his favourite writers, though he insidiously added that "the fundamental changes performed in their way of thinking have yet remained, from my point of view, still insufficiently reflected in our narrative literature". In other words, those writers did not ascent to the ideological goals offered by the time they were living in.

Pages 1 and 6 of the same issue of the literary magazine "Gazeta literară" display an extended article signed by S. Damian and called The Prose and the Everyday Life. The article is distinguished by the caption Thematic Orientation and the Positive Hero, and by many subtitles. The last one, *Young Prose Writers*, includes some observations on Fănuș Neagu's work, as follows: "Fănuș Neagu's pathos in writing short stories originates in an emphasized romantic vision, in which unusual situations are predominant and exhibited with a poetic aura".

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[Nov. 24, 1961] The literary magazine "Contemporanul"[8] presents *13 Young Writers*, professionally acknowledged by being included in a Biographic Dictionary of Works and Authors. Fănuș Neagu is amongst those present at this 'literary table'.

[Nov. 30, 1961] Under the same heading (*Prose and the Everyday Life*), the literary magazine "Gazeta literară"[9] publishes articles by Mihai Gafița, S. Damian, Mihai Petroveanu, Haralamb Zincă on the respective topic. S. Damian is writing about some Problems of the Prose Texts Written by Young Writers and as far as Fănuș Neagu is concerned, the critic makes the following comment: "Especially in the short stories written by Fănuș Neagu, or by Vasile Rebreanu occur lyrical aspects in connection to the subject. In Fănuș Neagu's stories, for example, confessions are accompanied by rhetoric gestures, gusty gallops, reveries and nostalgias, in which the pathos is hardly suppressed. Impressive is the luscious language. [...] We appreciate the fact that Fănuș Neagu is scrupulous and his writings never fall below a certain level; yet, sometimes, the lyrical vibration allures a little too much and evades the contemporary realist frame (for instance, in the literary sketch Fântâna published in «Luceafărul»)".

[May 15 – Jul. 15, 1962] The "Luceafărul" literary magazine publishes Nicolae Velea's sketch *În treacăt*[10], which provokes a series of comments for and against throughout the whole year. In view of its substance and its typology, Velea's prose text overturns almost completely the epic and thematic frame of the time. Therefore, the magazine publishes **an editor's note** on the same page on which the sketch was published:

"*Readers are kindly asked to send in writing to our editorial office their opinions and observations regarding the issues raised in this sketch, as well as regarding other matters of young people's life and the way they should be reflected in literature*".

Moreover, on the same page of the magazine, another text written by Marin Bucur is published. The critic dismissed the text as a whole, highlighting exactly its reluctance for the ideology of the time:

[8] *13 scriitori tineri* (Portrete) [Florența Albu, Paul Anghel, Cezar Baltag, Ștefan Bănulescu, Ilie Constantin, Fănuș Neagu, Leonida Neamțu, D.R. Popescu, Ilie Purcaru, Vasile Rebreanu, Nichita Stănescu, Gheorghe Tomozei, Nicolae Velea.], in: „*Contemporanul*", 1961, No. 47 / Nov. 24, p. 3.

[9] S. Damian, Orientarea tematică și erul pozitiv (*Proza și actualitatea*), in „Gazeta literară", VIII (1961), No. 47 (Nov. 23 / p. 1, 6.

[10] Nicolae Velea, În treacăt, „Luceafărul" V (1962), No. 10 / May 15, p. 4.

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"*I think that Velea flopped here to a grotesque tragedy. [...] The main character dives into death as the only solution available. Instead, the author should have been able to lively debate this situation and to find a clear and significant solution in accordance with the ideological perspectives of the socialist era. [...] Such cases could rather appeal to the bored people populating the contemporary bourgeois novels than to our healthy generations of young people full of energy and revolutionary impetus*".

The fact that such texts are being published anyway, along the discussions raised by them, is almost symptomatic for the ambivalent environment on the literary scene in the period 1961-1964, when tendencies toward liberalization are permanently accompanied by vigilant or just cautious admonishments, but also by increasingly stronger encouragements.

Fănuș Neagu offers the same literary magazine the text called O sută de nopți[11], which is being published, thus causing a 'whirlwind' discussion around it. In the context of these extended debates, contesting and defending the two writers are actions that are being performed simultaneously.

[Jul. 19-26, 1962] The literary magazines "Tribuna"[12] and "Gazeta literară"[13] organize in partnership a round table called Innovation and Literary Creation – *On the Issue of Innovation in Literature*. A few editors from the "Steaua" and "Utunk" literary magazines are also invited. The speakers are Ion Lungu, Ioan Oarcăsu, Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, Kovàcs György, Teofil Bușecan, Josef Átila, Al. Căprariu, Matei Călinescu, D.R. Popescu, Ion Mănuțiu, Dumitru Mircea and their interventions are published in the literary magazine "Tribuna" in the form of a detailed report. The debate, rather more theoretical, did not especially concern the two writers analysed in the present paper.

[Jul. 19-26, 1962] Studying the Relationship between the Writer's Point of View and his Unitary Artistic-ideological Vision, "*in the light of some examples taken from recently published sketches and stories*", is the topic that concerns S. Damian[14] in two consecutive issues of the literary magazine "Gazeta literară". He comments as follows:

"*It must be said that the short prose genre was boosted by the last years' publications of young writers (T. Mazilu, Al. I. Ghilia, N. Țic, D.R.*

[11] Fănuș Neagu, *O sută de nopți*, „Luceafărul", V (1962), No. 14 / Jul. 15, pp. 6-7.
[12] „Tribuna" VI (1962) No 29/ Jul. 19 , p. 1, 3, 4, 5, and No. 30/ Jul. 26, p. 4-5, respectively.
[13] „Gazeta literară", IX (1962), No. 29 /Jul. 19, p. 1, 6, and No 30/Jul. 26, p. 4-5, respectively.
[14] S. Damian, Unghiul de vedere al scriitorului „Gazeta literară", IX (1962), No. 29 /Jul. 19, p. 6, and no.. 30 /Jul. 26, p. 4-5, respectively.

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Popescu, N. Velea, Pop Simion, Fănuș Neagu and others) who invested passion in reflecting the phenomenon of reality and celebrated the victory of the socialist consciousness against the conflicts of our times. All of them have a crystallised or almost crystallised style of writing and exhibit interesting and fruitful aspirations. In conclusion, I would say that an important role of literary criticism is the detailed and perceptive research of the issue of the plurality of styles in the context of socialist realism".

[Aug. 1-15, 1962] The two prose texts are getting to be again contested by critics on the occasion of the round table[15] entitled The Short Prose of Young Writers and the Contemporary Ethical Conflict I, II. Event organizer was the same literary magazine that published the texts, and the panel takes place (even) in the presence of one of the authors, Nicolae Velea. Besides Velea, other authors are present, such as: Mihai Novicov, Matei Călinescu, Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, Mihai Gafița, Dan Hăulică, N. Tertulian, Savin Bratu, Ion Lungu, Radu Cosașu, Eugenia Tudor. Mihai Novicov:

"*I would further mention, that in the context of the extended series of examples in this regard, the more susceptible to be seriously criticised seems to be Fănuș Neagu's sketch, which has been recently published by «Luceafărul». I must confess that after reading the first three columns of this literary sketch, I found myself wondering when does take the action place. I could not figure it out until a comrade made its appearance into the plot. Till then I thought I was in the same environment as in Europolis. I think that our young writers' concern for theoretical subjects is to be welcomed, in accordance with the guidelines of the III-rd Congress of the Romanian Workers Party, which specified that the writers' main social task is the struggle to cultivate and develop the socialist consciousness. This involves fighting against everything that is under influence of concepts and habits of the past. In other words, it is expected a representation of the conflict between the socialist morals and the bourgeois one, which provides writers with an unending source of dramatic conflicts. [...] As I finished reading Fănuș Neagu's sketch, I had a strange feeling: the characters had gathered again for a glass of vermouth, implying that everything is, was, and shall be exactly the same, and that nothing depends on the actual social-historical conditions. These young writers should understand that their writing would acquire the necessary substance and reach the highest artistic level only when it is demonstrated, by all its constitutive elements, that the issues raised are*

[15] „Luceafărul", V (1962), no. 15 / Aug. 1), p. 1, 6 and no. 16/ Aug 15, p 1, 6 , respectively.

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acutely contemporary." Mihai Gafița: "I subscribe to the opinion of Comrade Novicov regarding Fănuș Neagu's sketch, since many such sketches have been lately published and this fact should be worrying." Eugenia Tudor: "To me it was also obvious the fact that some «daring» ethical issues have been addressed by Fănuș Neagu's sketch published in «Luceafărul», O sută de nopți [En.: A Hundred Nights, translation mine] (by the way, I don't know why nights are so «trendy» nowadays). Only that here the writer, whose picturesque and strong talent I admire, stopped at the halfway. [...] The author preferred to leave the conflict in suspension. And to speak again of the atmosphere, everything is picturesque in Fănuș Neagu's writings, yet a lascivious and anachronistic ambiance is heavily striking. It may probably be the same in real life. But where is the critical attitude of the writer? I would like to conclude by saying that this «boldness» in addressing some delicate issues remains short of brilliance and value, when it does not reach the factual essence."

Ion Lăncrănjan:

"*The topic here was Fănuș Neagu. I was also surprised by his short story published in «Luceafărul». Not because of his manner of describing the ambiance – by the way, the places here along the Danube river were and will always be a little more picturesque and particular than others –, but because of the falsity and lack of consistency of the conflict. I do not assess a piece of literature after reading two or three columns and I am not shocked by the fact that Fănuș Neagu's characters gather again at the end to drink a glass of vermouth. Yet, I am shocked by what is happening in this story or, better said, by what is not happening. [...] While reading the story, one get the idea that the author has many times oscillated and changed his point of view. This may be the reason why nothing is really happening in the story – in other words, no drama is consumed, no issue was raised -, this may be the reason why the characters meet and separate all the time, without adding substance to the conflict. [...] Did he want to raise any issue? If yes, which one exactly?" Al. Oprea: "I would also criticize Fănuș Neagu's story O sută de nopți. [...] The critique I would bring concerns the fact that the idea of the story, which is very interesting, is only floating on the surface and is not really incorporated into the narrative substance. The concern for a certain picturesque vision is obvious here, but its limited significance cannot be hidden by Fănuș Neagu's virtuosity as a narrator. The story lacks the author's sharp and combative attitude, which could have granted a deep resonance to the topic. It is very curious, as proved by many writings received by our editorial office, how*

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young people try to use exactly a literary sketch that displays ethical problems – in which the habits of the past should be implacably confronted with the morals of the socialist era – as an easy instrument to avoid the sharp fight between old and new within people's consciousness!"

[Sept. 6, 1962] In the literary magazine "Gazeta literară"[16], Matei Călinescu publishes the second part of the article The Ethical Conflict in the Sketch and the Short Story. The critic's intervention constitutes a pretext for the magazine to assert its position on the two more or less criticised texts of that year: *O sută de nopți* by Fănuș Neagu and *În treacăt* by Nicolae Velea. As far as Fănuș Neagu is concerned, he is mostly criticised for the cosmopolitan atmosphere in his writings:

"*The writer delays, probably deliberately, the introducing of the conflict to the reader, and he prefers to only suggest, in the first part of the story, the picturesque ambiance of a Danubian port, in the tradition of an established literary convention (Jean Bart, Panait Istrati) rather than in the attempt to discover new perspectives. [...] The story plot takes place in our times, but the atmosphere – as also noted by Mihai Novicov – resembles the one in Europolis; there is a serious divergence here, which also influences the conflict, by falsifying it. [...] Under the clustering of strange, spicy, extravagant, and colourful details, the conflict – which was proposed for debating – gets deviated and loses its meaning, interchanging the natural relations between main and secondary, or between substance and frame. The author has an excessive taste for eccentricities, he allows himself too many exaggerations that resemble the baroque polyps on a rather weak epic trunk. The worthless hyperbolism and the obsession for the picturesque eventually get to overflow the writer's dialogue with the contemporary reality, they also get to alter his psychological sense and his power of observation. His characters lack human substance (even though they are described with many explicit details) and his vision becomes sadly narrow.*"

[Sept. 17, 1962] In „Luceafărul"[17], Stancu Ilin publishes a Retrospective of the magazine contributions in various fields of the literary life: "*It is common knowledge that a series of new names have appeared in our literature and rapidly gained public recognition. As far as the prose genre is concerned, the first ones to be named are: Fănuș Neagu, Nicolae Velea, Vasile Rebreanu, Ștefan Bănulescu. Each of these young writers have already*

[16] „Gazeta literară", (1962), No. 33 /Sept. 6) p . 6.
[17] Stancu Ilin, Retrospectivă „Luceafărul", V (1962), no. 17 (Sept. 1), p. 2

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published in the literary magazine Luceafărul, some of them, as is the case of Fănuș Neagu, owing it their popularity almost entirely. It is important to note that many sketches, short stories or coverage reports that have been published in Luceafărul have also been included as main pieces in the future volumes published by these young writers: Ningea în Bărăgan by Fănuș Neagu, Covor oltenesc by Ilie Purcaru, Ochelari de împrumut by Nicolae Velea".

[Oct. 11, 1962] In the literary magazine "Tribuna"[18], Mircea Braga publishes the text The Ethical Conflict and the Life Requirements. The author contests (rather through intermediaries) the "veracity of the conflict" in the two very much discussed prose texts of the year. Regarding Fănuș Neagu's *O sută de nopți,* Mircea Braga says:

"*The lack of congruence between the conflict and the environment determines the writer to «betray» the subject of life, as M. Novicov also said on the occasion of the «round table» organised by «Luceafărul». This fact becomes more visible in O sută de nopți, where the plot – according to the same critic – seems to take place in Europolis. [...] Both the manly characters and the strange Maja seem to originate in a vaguely exotic art gallery, with delineations of character in this direction, yet not appropriate to the mentality and the attitude in the Romania of the year 1962; hence the feeling of falsity perceived by the reader. [...] The falsity resides in solving the conflict by appealing to characters that are exterior to it and that are required to make ethical efforts unfounded previously by the character's development in a certain direction (i.e. in the expected ethical direction). We think that the artificiality of the two stories discussed here is somewhat unilateral. It is not to be found in the conflict – which, as already said, is truthful and matching our socialist reality -, but in the characters who do not identify themselves with the life situations they are in. And, obviously, the talent of the two writers has not been able to save the stories at all.*"

[Oct. 25, 1962] Leonard Gavriliu also addresses the topic of the ethical conflict[19]. After an overview of the ideas exposed in the previous interventions, Gavriliu exaggerates when speaking about Fănuș Neagu's incriminated story:

"*However, there are also cases in which avoiding or minimising the ethical conflict should be regarded as a felony, a serious breech from the rules of artistic performance. This is in my opinion the main deficiency of*

[18] Mircea Braga, Conflictul etic și cerințele vieții, „Tribuna", no. 41, Oct. 11, p. 3.
[19] Leonard Gavriliu, Despre conflictul etic „Gazeta literară", IX (1962), no. 43 (1962), /Oct. 25, p. 6.

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Fănuș Neagu's sketch O sută de nopți. Critics dedicated it a rigorous analysis, which allows me now to skip the details. [...] A subsequent sketch published in «Gazeta literară» (Drum întins, No. 29/ 1962) still does not correct this deforming vision. [...] I am convinced that the ethical conflicts and the analyses of one's conscience will extend within the prose of our times and that they will make use of various means and methods in doing so. In a time when the party and the state increasingly relies on the power of understanding, on the conscious responsibility of man for his own work and his own life conduct, on the development of the individual's capacity to objectively judge his own intentions and actions, to control his attitude and his behaviour in accordance with the principles and norms of the socialist cohabitation, it is normal for writers to seriously focus on ethical topics, exploring them in their intimate manifestations. Without cultivating a high communist consciousness which has no need for administrative sanctions, there is no discussion about living in a superior civilisation, which we all dream of and which we are currently building."

Such statements, if formulated ten years before, would have sent Fănuș Neagu directly to prison.

[Nov. 1, 1962] Issue no. 44 of the "Gazeta literară" dedicates a whole page to the Discussions about the Conflict. Those who signed the articles included here are Paul Georgescu[20], Eugen Luca[21], and G. Dimisianu[22]. Paul Georgescu's intervention originates in the Report at the III-rd Congress of P. M. R. and in the allocution given by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej at the Writers' Country Conference. He interprets the above mentioned texts in a specific manner:

"*Literature is not a flat description of some petrified and equal entities, but the passionate reflection of some complex processes, and of phenomena which are live and in motion. Therein old and new are in a necessary conflict. [...] Hence, regardless of the spatial or temporal duration of the plot, the writer's vision should remain synthetic, global, and foremost dialectic. [...] The literary conflict is a reflection of the conflicts existent in real life and only as such it can be strong, authentic, and convincing. The conflict – as an aesthetic category – is a dominant element of all creation, of*

[20] Paul Georgescu, Însemnări despre conflictul contemporan (I) „Gazeta literară" IX (1962) no. 44 /Nov. 1, p. 3, (II) no. 45/Nov. 7, p. 6, (III) nr. 46

[21] Eugen Luca, Profunzime și spectaculozitate, Gazeta literară" IX (1962) no. 44 /Nov. 1, p. 3.

[22] G. Dimisianu, Cum definim conflictul literar, Gazeta literară" IX (1962) no. 44 /Nov.1, p. 3.

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the work of art, because other important elements, such as composition, characters, plot etc. are determined by it". In the second part of his article[23]*, Paul Georgescu attempts a classification of contemporary prose texts according to the conflict type they involve: "There may be three types of sketches (and short-stories) depending on the type of conflict and the characters' way of life: the type of character with a monotonous life, an example of stereotype and hidden conflict; the violent conflict, the direct and «spectacular» confrontation; and the type of consciousness that changes slowly by quantitative accumulations". Fănuș Neagu falls within the second category, together with Marin Preda (Îndrăzneala) and D. R. Popescu (Mări sub pustiuri). In the third part of his article, the critic focuses on strictly analysing the conflict in the prose texts of Nicolae Țic, Vasile Rebreanu, and Teodor Mazilu. Surveying the vast area of discussions, Eugen Luca explains from the beginning the cause for the proliferation of divergent opinions. The critic notices that "the majority of interventions do not reveal the effort of applying the principle of generalization to an experience, or of considering the specific phenomena of literature from a theoretical point of view, but rather a tendency to let oneself dominated by those phenomena. With some exceptions (Ion Lungu, S. Damian, Lucian Raicu), the participants do not discuss issues, as it would have been normal, based on the literary realities, but rather analyse with more or less dexterity a certain and specific literary fact. The issue does not constitute a preoccupation for them; it is merely a pretext and an architectural artifice, which in their opinion would help them organising their few critical writings into a unitary and harmonious whole. When a critical writings is proficient, it has its own unity, when it is not, it does not deserve further discussions. The critics' efforts should tend to synthesis, yet they are only spent on the analysis*".

G. Dimisianu, in turn, starting from the analysis of two short stories published in "Gazeta literară", *A plecat* Ștefan by Corneliu Leu, and *Drum întins* by Fănuș Neagu, makes a few lexicographic observations in his article *How to Define the Literary Conflict.* The dissociations operated by G. Dimisianu are frequently mentioned within the extended debate both in the cultural press and in the governmental one, since they somewhat clarify the semantics of the words conflict and contents:

"*Hence the conclusion: since not every sketch or short story is*

[23] Paul Georgescu, Însemnări despre conflictul contemporan (II) „Gazeta literară" IX (1962) no. 45 /Nov. 7, p. 6.

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compelled, as is commonly believed, to exhibit a decisive contradiction, or a moment of extreme tension, they have instead the duty to suggest in one way or another that the depicted facts possess a very strong factor of ethical or social determination and involve profound meanings. After examining the two texts in parallel and returning to the issue of defining the literary conflict, let me conclude by saying that the conflict should be considered as a constitutive element of the creation, the substance of the work of art. Relations between characters, plot twists, and everything related to the «action» within a narrative – these are not the same as the conflict, but rather its forms of epical manifestation. The vigour of the conflict depends on the quantity of life involved in a piece of writing, on its dramatic character and on its substance. The absence of the conflict equates with artificiality and conventionalism of the creation, and ultimately with the absence of artistic truth".

[November, 1962] Eugenia Anton has an intervention on the same topic in "Viața Românească"[24]. Since critical opinions varied widely, the author defends the writer in the passage in which she comments on the sketch *Drum întins*:

"*The literary magazine "Gazeta literară" published some time ago a literary sketch by Fănuș Neagu, a talented prose writer whose writings distinguish themselves by the boldness with which they address new subjects of life. The sketch called Drum întins is accomplished due to its interest to human problems and its originality*."

Although less strong than other participants in her intervention, Eugenia Tudor resumes her critical attitude with regard to the short story O sută de nopți, by finding enough flaws in it. Eugenia Tudor's article, which refers to other authors as well, restates that "the permanent duty of literary criticism" is to supervise the manifestation of the ethical conflict in literature:

"*There have been maybe too many discussions about Fănuș Neagu's sketch, O sută de nopți, which is very interesting and has a daring starting point. Many critics dismissed it, blaming the author for the details clustering when describing the set and the atmosphere, which has presumably led to a rather melodramatic character of the conflict. We are not bothered by the exaggerated «picturesque» nature of the sketch (see Matei Călinescu's article in the «Gazeta literară»), but rather by the fact that the author did not reveal deeply enough the social essence of the moral phenomenon described there.*

[24] Eugenia Tudor, Caracterul social al conflictului etic „Viața românească", 1962, no. 11, Nov., p. 123-127.

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The issues raised by the author are really interesting and worth tackling. The existence of young intellectuals such as the ones described by Fănuș Neagu in O sută de nopți is very possible. Why should we not agree to the fact that there are still such young individuals, who live a comfortable life, with no perspectives, or that there are others who exhibit no interest for the essential aspects of our time, who indulge themselves in a lascivious vegetation at the outskirts of life, who spend their time in the company of bored women and lead a life based on lies? It is, therefore, justified the author's interest for such throwback aspects of life, as much as his attempt to tackle it artistically is a bold one. Too bad that his attempt to putting it through rigorous examination remains unfulfilled. Because the depicted phenomenon itself seems unilateral, since the author examines the intimate life of his characters, yet not critically enough – it would seem that their lives unfold somewhere inside a closed circle. The social determination of the moral phenomena described in the sketch – the lying and the covering up – would have obviously been highlighted if only the author would have allowed the heroine to examine her conscience, to conduct a search though her intimate life, instead of wrapping her with a mysterious aura. The ethical conflict would have thus gained more depth and value. It is only natural that by neglecting such an essential aspect, the conflict appear deficient. [...] The debate around the ethical issues of the conflict and its social implications have a real importance for the progress of our literature and should be further carried out as a permanent duty of literary criticism".

*

From these short comments made in the *Addenda*, it follows that – obviously, beyond the aesthetic circumspection and ideological criticism that have been here displayed – Fănuș Neagu had entered, even from his literary debut, in the circle of the young writers who became successful both in the eyes of readers and in those of critics, regardless of the said consequences.

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