Infernal Archives. The Securitate Files on Writers

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1. Introduction

Among the high-profile Securitate files that have come into public attention in the past decade, Dorin Tudoran's file, published in 2010 under the title *I, Their Son* (*Eu, fiul lor*), stands out as particularly relevant, given the writer's status as one of Romania's best-known dissident intellectuals. My aim is to question the type of reading the volume demands and the manner in which it reflects the public and intellectual impact of the access to the Securitate archives. Another central point of my exploration would be to investigate the structure of this rather unusual work and the fictional potential of the narrative generated by the cumulative writing and rewriting present at the core of the file.

For researchers studying the history of Romanian communism, Tudoran's file is an important source of documentation concerning the connections between writers and intellectuals and Ceaușescu's secret police. Read as a book, a story, a collection of texts that share an inner coherence generating a cursive narrative, the file is problematic from many perspectives. It can be seen as an example of baroque, postmodern, even Borgesian textual proliferation that, instead of revealing truths, enforces various strategies of concealing them, leading the reader towards deeper uncertainties while at the same time entertaining the illusion that, given their nature, documents are revelatory and illuminating. The infernal nature of the file as an element of the archive lies not only in the immediate sense of its malignancy, but also in its potential as an instrument of deception.

2. The Securitate Files as life story

The published version of Tudoran's file comprises a selection of official documents from the Securitate archives, i.e. approximately 500 pages out of a total of 9.852 pages – from the first 5 volumes of a 18 volumes long record. The file reveals in minute detail ten years of informative surveillance activities carried out by the Securitate (secret sources, identified by codenames, officers and officials)

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between 1976–1985. Although Tudoran's surveillance officially started in 1982, initiated by the Romanian Department of State Security, numerous documents prove that, in fact, the first transcript of a phone conversation tapped by the Securitate dates from 1976. The book is intriguing from a number of perspectives, the first and most striking one concerning the choice of materials included in it. In an editorial note opening the volume, Radu Ioanid states that "the documents that have not been included in this book will be published in separate volumes" (Ioanid in Tudoran 2010: 7). Until now, no other volumes have been published. The selection of documents comprising this volume unavoidably represents an incomplete version of the facts and circumstances of importance to Dorin Tudoran's case. However, the general public's access to the Securitate Archives is very limited, and books such as these are the only easily available sources that can offer insight into the workings of the communist Secret Police. This is an important argument concerning the responsibility associated with the publication, reading and interpretation of the file. Given the significant public interest in the Securitate files, and, in a more direct manner, in the identity and activity of its informers and collaborators, the publication of Tudoran's file drew a lot of attention upon the names of important Romanian cultural figures revealed as Securitate informers. Besides the writer's own dramatic history as subject of Securitate surveillance, the file also brought into the spotlight the case of the renowned dissident intellectual Mihai Botez. As it has been pointed out by Gabriel Andreescu, a critical reading of the file is imperative in order to grasp the complex realities unveiled by documents. Erroneous readings might lead to a "manipulation of the Securitate Archive" (Andreescu 2013), resulting in a misguided interpretation of the activity of some intellectuals in their collaboration with the Securitate.

3. An amazing cobweb

In order to discuss the case of Tudoran's file and its potential as narrative blurring the limits between factual truth and fiction, a brief synopsis is in order. Dorin Tudoran made his debut in 1973, and until his emigration to the United States in 1985, he had a successful literary career, was a member of the Leading Board of the Writers' Union between 1974 and 1982, and gradually consolidated his status as one of the most prominent opponents of Ceaușescu's regime. In 1983 he resigned from the Communist Party and in 1985, after a 40 days hunger strike, he immigrated to the United States with his family.

The issue concerning the file as narrative has been raised by Tudoran himself. "This is the only book I shouldn't have written. It is enough I had to live it" (Tudoran 2010: 9), Dorin Tudoran declares in the *Preface* to the massive collection of documents, blurring the lines between author, writer, and character. Indeed, he did not write his Securitate file, the informers and officers did. In a brief explanation of this rather dramatic positioning towards the instrument of Communist control, Tudoran sees himself as the "product" of an intricate process that turned him into an "objective", an "element", "the enemy of the people", or, simply "TUDORACHE", as he was named by the sources and officials that collaborated to create the file. "I was written by this book" (ibid.) he continues, referring to his growing awareness

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that, as the main character of a narrative equally focused on his intellectual dissidence and his everyday life, he had indeed become a verbal/textual construct. Moreover, the numerous repetitive, overlapping, sometimes contradictory accounts of the same occurrences weaken the credibility of the narrative voices.

The first time Tudoran was, in his words, "written", was, obviously, when he became the main character of his strange biography designed by numberless authors. The second "writing" was mediated by the reading of the file – "when I plunged into the ocean of poison, I thought I could face with humor. Now I know – nobody can have enough humor to safely overcome the impact of ten thousand waves of venom. It's an immense monster" (*ibidem*). It is, however, clear that Tudoran's involvement in the reading of his file implies a subjective understanding of facts, rather than a distant, critical one.

In this uncommon textual world, not only the main character, as subject and, ultimately, reader of his file is challenged by uncertainty and doubt, but also the "external" reader, not necessarily familiar with archive documents, who tries to find meaning in an obscure labyrinth of half-truths and mystifications. Moreover, as Cristina Vătulescu points out in her book *Police Aesthetics. Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times*, the simple act of reading the file involves the "risk of bringing to life once again the secret police's writing on the subject, the risk of becoming co-creators of this story by reading it on its own terms" (Vătulescu 2010: 193). The file comes with a set of appendixes and introductory notes (one, written by Tudoran himself is entitled *a Guide for the long-distance reader*, suggesting the dangers of marathon through a murky past), their role primarily being that of helping the reader discern between facts and fabrications, between truths and fictions, with the necessary mention that these fictions had an actively negative potential – their aim was to discredit, isolate, harass, even arrest or imprison the subject, turned into an "enemy of the state." However, Tudoran's *Guide* and Radu Ioanid's contextualizing preface are not neutral texts that would not guide the reader's interpretation of the text. On the contrary, as it has already been argued, there's a clear intention to impose a certain understanding of facts and contexts, especially with readers who have limited knowledge of the larger cultural and historical framework presented.

In an interview for a Romanian cultural magazine, *Suplimentul de cultură*, Tudoran exclaims "It's an amazing cobweb" (Tudoran in Vlădăreanu 2010), referring to the unprecedented complexity of the Securitate network, which included hundreds of thousands of informers in its most prolific age. He then details on the actual growth process of the file, on the methods of controlling information inside a discourse that would constantly change its shape and meaning. Expressing his own understanding of the way in which the file takes shape and develops, he speaks of the file's

> evolution […], from the initial informer to the moment it lands on the desk of the high-ranking officer in charge of the case. In my situation, a document was handed to the Head of the Securitate, general Vlad, who, in his turn, gave it to Ceaușescu. Therefore, from the initial "ratting" to the final report, the document passes through so many hands, so many transformations, each of them adding what they consider would make you more of a fool or a danger, in order to hurry a decision

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> resulting in your quick disappearance from the surface of the earth, as you cause too much trouble. Some of them (i.e. the informers) did paradoxical things: on the margins of a document, they wrote: „Not true", or „it didn't happen like this", or "to be checked", "the source is not credible", "and you found out about this now? It's been known for a long time! (*ibidem*)

The file is a unique type of text revealing a singular type of literature, one that, despite its undeniable realism, has a remarkable fictional potential. In an act resembling the textual games of a postmodern unreliable narrator, the officer would sometimes doubt the truthfulness of the information provided by a source. For example, the information provided by a source named "Martin", whose identity is not revealed in the appendices, is seriously doubted in an explanatory paragraph at the bottom of an informative note:

> The source has begun collaboration recently and he is part of a group of Tudoran's opponents. He is frustrated that he does not have the same opportunities for affirmation. This results in a certain subjectivity present in his informative notes. It is necessary that in the future, he is guided towards a more objective attitude. Other sources around the objective are to be used as well (Tudoran 2010: 62).

This note is a possible example of the manner in which the officer assumes that he can influence the source's view upon facts and events, like an overpowering authority capable of interfering with the informer`s essential perception processes. Mădălin Hodor's remark concerning the mystification process, is quoted by Radu Ioanid in order to emphasize the manner in which information would "grow" inside the file: "By serving a system for which mystification had become current practice, the Securitate officer, in his turn, does not hesitate to mystify reality, as well" (Hodor in Ioanid 2010: 10). Hannah Arendt's argument from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (also quoted in Vătulescu's study) immediately comes to mind: 20th century police states transgress the categories of "the real" and "the possible" in order to replace them with a fictional world (Arendt 1968: 90).

The concrete methods employed by the Securitate have been the subject of several explorations, coming from both writers (Herta Müller) and scholars (Dennis Deletant, Vladimir Tismăneanu, Gabriel Andreescu and, particularly for Müller's case, Valentina Glajar). During the surveillance process, the refashioning of the "objective`s" life usually began by infiltrating sources at all levels of his/her private and professional life, with a clear preference for colleagues and friends. They would provide the Securitate services with various types of information, from descriptions of events where the "objective" was present, to details and speculations concerning his/her position or opinion on various matters of great interest to the system. In the case of writers (and Tudoran was no exception) his informant-peers would write concise interpretations of their writings, usually meant to identify subversive double meanings or dangerous metaphors – Romanian term "șopîrle" ('lizards') – subversive meanings in disguise.

Tapping telephone conversations, round the clock following were the norm and, from the 1970's, more sophisticated means of surveillance, such as aural surveillance methods were employed by breaking in private homes, in a ruthless breach of fundamental human rights. "Life means private life. There's only so much life

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as there is private life" Tudoran states in his *Guide for the reader* (Tudoran 2010: 9), hence his impression that those years were confiscated by this ubiquitous enemy.

Compromising, discrediting and isolating the "objective" by weakening his credibility, infiltrating agents that would spread rumors and claim that the victim was, too, working for the Securitate, were especially relevant as means of generating malignant fictions in Tudoran's case. His collaboration with Radio Free Europe and the Romanian intelligentsia abroad (particularly Monica Lovinescu, Virgil Ierunca and Paul Goma) were the constant focus of the Securitate's attention and countless notes and reports detail their plan to isolate Tudoran from these "enemy" elements.

The anatomy of the file reveals a predilection for administrative rigor, despite the rich narrative content of the informative notes. Most documents contain standard formulations: they begin either with a short biographical presentation of the "objective" – name, parents' names, address, profession – or a more elaborate, and implicitly more incriminating characterization.

A document from August 3rd 1980, probably meant for the Head of the State, Ceaușescu, stated:

> With the approval of competent party organs, Tudoran Dorin is being worked through an informative surveillance file, as there is data showing he has adopted an inappropriate political position on the occasion of various activities organized by the Writers' Union, in private conversations with fellow writers and has suspect connections with enemy elements from the emigration (Tudoran 2010: 144).

As a consequence

> actions will be targeted towards discrediting TUDORAN DORIN before the "Europa Liberă" Radio Station and the emigration, but also before writers inside the country, especially those in his entourage by creating dissension among them. For this purpose, the following measures will be taken: letters that show that Tudoran's activity is directed and managed by the Securitate, who uses him in order to know the activity and position of "non-confromist" writers; the Securitate intend to inflitrate Tudoran in "Europa Liberă" and the "reactionary" emigrants abroad; that explains the approval of his travels to West Germany; the author of these letters must seem to be an anonymous friend of Tudoran and they will be sent to Europa Liberă, Monica Lovinescu and Heitman Klaus from the Heidelberg Goethe Institute; his acquaintances will be informed that he is in contact with the Securitate (meaning he is an agent). Officer Achim Victor from U.M. 0610 will befriend Tudoran without him knowing his real mission, while his acquaintances will be made aware of his official purpose (Tudoran 2010: 143).

In a *Stage Note* ('Notă de stadiu') from 2.04.1981 (Tudoran 2010: 144–146), the Securitate officer mentions that Tudoran found out about the plot and officially complained at the Writers' Union that he was being harassed by the secret services.

A first fight at the Writers' Union staged by a group of opponents from the "official wing" (official writers of the system, such as Eugen Barbu, Adrian Păunescu or Corneliu Vadim Tudor) who sent a delegate Iulian Neacșu, to start a fight with Mircea Dinescu and use physical violence. The moment is narrated as a slow-motion depiction of a cinematographic sequence of movements and dialogues, narrated in a dry, realist manner by an apparently objective observer with the code name Grigoriu Sorin (according to Dorin Tudoran, an acquaintance who was

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electronics engineer and probably helped the Securitate bug his house). This is, in fact, a far-fetched account of a provoked incident meant to bring Dorin Tudoran and Mircea Dinescu to trial, so that they could be sentenced and isolated. It can be easily deduced that not only texts can be "tainted" and fictionalized, but also real events and their implicit narrative accounts.

Following this logic, an unsigned "note" describes events rather differently, claiming that I. Neacșu was attacked by Dinescu and Tudoran out of revenge for his declarations regarding the situation at the Writer's Union during a hearing with the Party's Leadership. A week later, Grigoriu brought new information regarding the aftermath of the event, following the already standardized practice of rewriting events by changing details in order to shed an unfavorable light on the victimized "objective". The fictional potential of a biography "written" by the Securitate was tackled by Gabriel Liiceanu (2013) in a recent book, a docu-fiction text called *My Dear Informer* ['Dragul meu turnător']. The writer turns the experience of having read his Securitate file into a source of fictionalizing his own past, a self-centered enterprise rather than a critical reading of this significant experience.

4. Conclusion

An immediate conclusion would be that by changing the perspective in reading one's file, the Securitate's project of mystifying, dismantling, deconstructing and refashioning one's existence can be read as a labyrinthine, yet comprehensible account of a relevant interval in recent history. In *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, an exemplary novel on the fictionalization of history, Danilo Kiš wrote: "The documents we use speak the terrible language of facts and in them the word „soul" has the sound of sacrilege" (Kiš 2001: 10). This could be read as a double-edged metaphor in connection to Tudoran's file, which is an eloquent example of documents speaking the terrible language of facts: even if Dorin Tudoran was the main focus of surveillance and the main character of the narratives in the informative notes, it would be superficial and dismissive to consider the complex narrative structure of the file as an arid territory of cold, immoral collaborationism. It is rather a vivid map of intricate human relationships reacting to the great pressures of a dire historical context, much like Dante's *Inferno*, but without foreseeable redemption.

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Abstract

The Securitate files are incontestable proof that the Romanian Communist Secret Police was repressive organ of state security. The Securitate specifically targeted so-called "enemies of the people", commonly public figures who could endanger, in speech and in writing, the seemingly unchangeable political order. Dorin Tudoran, a Romanian writer who lived under Ceaușescu's dictatorship, is the main character of his own Securitate file – a complex narrative revealing the inner workings of a highly efficient oppressive system. I intend to explore the significance of this type of document in a post-communist reading of the Romanian 70s and 80s. I also intend to argue that the Securitate file could be read as a dynamic, flexible account that obliterates the truth but documents the tools and strategies of a totalitarian regime.

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