Side notes from a manuscript; moments from the life of Ilie E.Torouţiu

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Résumé : L'article présente la découverte d'un manuscrit d'Ilie Toroutiu (phylologue certifié à l'Université de Cernauti, parleur de langue Allemande, directeur de la revue « Convorbiri literare », auteur de quelques études de littérature comparative, etc.) Il s'agit d'un roman autobiographique de parcours professionel de ce Roumain avec d'incontestables mérites culturels dans l'histoire et dans la critique littéraires de la période entre les deux guerres mondiales.

Mots-clés : *roman autobiographique, histoire littéraire, Bucovine, érudit roumain, histoire vivante, philologie.*

Ilie E. Torouţiu's name is virtually unknown both on a general scale, in Romania, where only keen philology specialists and bibliophiles can offer some information on him, and locally in Suceava, his birthplace, where only a handful of academics have heard of his name and achievements.

Born on June 17, 1888 in a poor family in Solca, Ilie E. Torouţiu, with his exemplary existence, was one of Bukovina's most eminent scholars, and one of the most prominent personalities of our history from the first half of the last century. Though he was a notable figure of the rich cultural life that marked the interwar period, little remains known of him in his beloved Bukovina nowadays.

He was a correspondent member of the Romanian Academy (1936), awarded by the Society of Romanian Writers (1937); he gave *Studii şi Documente Literare (Literary Studies and Documents)* to the Romanian culture, a unique collection for which Perpessicius called him the "literary Hurmuzache" (Perpessicius, 1931: 277); he led *"Convorbiri literare*" (*Literary Conversations)* during the difficult years of the war (1939-1944); he collected folklore and carried out historical-sociological studies on Bukovina; he was a redoubtable polemist who did not shy away from contradicting, with indisputable arguments, names that were

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becoming increasingly popular in the years leading up to the war (George Călinescu, for example); he set up and ran a distinguished printing house during the interwar period, providing free books to numerous schools, as well as to several libraries especially in the outlying areas of Romania (Bukovina, Maramureş, Quadrilater, Bessarabia), thus contributing to the consolidation of Romanianism in those multiethnical spaces.

As a man with a broad cultural horizon, a polyglot with thorough philological and philosophical studies, he admired and popularized great cultural names belonging to various Romanian cultural spheres. Whether of Romanian, German, Jewish, Polish, Czech descent or other backgrounds, they all received equal admiration from the man for whom they were true models of hard work, honesty, fairness, dignity and devotion. Both big names, like Goethe or Heine, and lesser-known names (Solomon Segall, for example, or Iaroslav Kramerius), were introduced by Torouţiu to the general public, or to conference audiences, with their greatest achievements and everything they stood for. This is how he celebrated their great lives, by showing others virtuos paths they can take. This is how he created role models.

He remained unknown to future generations for a long period of time. His name as a historian and literary critic, folklorist, translator, editor, polemicist, academic and, in particular, Professor (as the workers of the Institute of Graphic Arts *Bucovina* called him), was archived during the Communist period. Not only in an *index librorum prohibitorum,* as in the medieval times, but also in an *index nominorum prohibitorum* which achieved its purpose, leading to the marginalization and then concealment of a human existence and its meritorious work

Fortunately, although much later than Torouţiu expected (who did not live to see the evil defeated), the communist regime subsided (although its effects will be seen for a long time, having killed elites and destroyed institutions). The name of the scholar born in Solca begins to be mentioned more and more among those who contributed to the settlement of the Romanian nation and culture in their rightful place.

Recently, Mrs. Maria Olar, president of the *Leca Morariu Foundation* in Suceava, the custodian of the inheritance left by this exemplary family, a descendant of the Patriarch of Pătrăuţi, as Nicolae Iorga used to call Father Constantin Morariu, discovered in the foundation's archive a manuscript of Ilie Torouţiu. He was the brother-in-law of Leca Morariu[1] (Torouţiu's wife was the younger sister of the professor Morariu). It is the manuscript of an autobiographical novel, most likely written in the last years of the scholar's life (he passed away on November 23, 1953). He spent his final years retired in his home library on 39 Argentina Street, in Bucharest, hardly surviving a regime of deprivation imposed by a political regime that he did not agree with, the Communist one.

The manuscript consists of several dozen pages divided into 17 separate files, with stapled sheets, with a white sheet on the outside for protection. Each file is numbered, in the lower left corner, and carries a title in the lower right corner, on the protective sheet, as well as on the first page of text. The work, wrapped in a hardcover, has no title.

Ilie E. Torouţiu's wish to write an autobiographical novel is expressed in the correspondence he kept with his brother in law, Leca Morariu, and for a long time no one knew whether the wish had materialized or not.

He talked of his village sheltered by Solca valley, as if in the palm of a divine hand, and of the people he knew and cherished, whose library he had endowed and whom he had given a new bell for the church of Tomşa Voda. He talked about the "long winter evenings, shortened with fairy tales and stories and sweetened with songs" and about the

[1] Alexandru (Leca) Morariu (1888-1963), professor at the Department of Modern Literature and Folklore of the University of Cernăuţi (1922-1940), dean of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy (1936-1938), president of the "Armonia" Society and director of the National Theater in Cernăuţi (1933-1935).

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school that gave him his first systematic teaching, about his adolescence rebelieng against injustice and about the Chernivtsian youth that defined his nationalist identity, about the grief in which he felt himself thrown by the war and about its later misgivings.

He also reminesced on Pătrăuţi, home of the Morariu family: "I have some memories from Pătrăuţi too, only a few though, as I did not live through the peak of those times. I knocked on their welcoming door as a latecomer, when the younglings had already spread their wide wings towards their dream lands. "Glad to receive such words that pointed to Torouțiu's positive state of mind, to a renewed creative spirit which was his trademark in the years before the war, Leca encourages him: "Memories from Pătrăuţi, Ite? How I look forward to reading them!"

I am reading the manuscript. I imagine the hand that wrote it down on the white, almost transparent sheets, in neat rows, like soldiers marching, in small, round and clear letters, and I remember the calligraphy lessons of my bygone childhood. The text flows fluently, as if it were written from dictation and not directly, under the inner pressure of a troubled soul, full of contradictory feelings and experiences, of accomplishments, hopes, disappointments, fears, sufferings. Here and there only a few corrections, deletions made by the author (it is usually the same ink and the same spelling) or additions to some ideas.

They are fragments of a frugal existence, with ups and downs, which seems typical for the Romanian society of the twentieth century, with the tragedies of the two world wars that swept away the grain of welfare that preceded them. With its economic and social crises and the liberalization of the society in a period (the interwar one) which became the standard for future comparison. With the terrible Communist experiment conducted in a nation already tried by a war that took away not only the people from their homes and the food from their pantry, but also their land, their faith, and, for many, their personal dignity.

I read the scholar's words and I shiver. I did not know the madness of the early years of Communism in Romania, except from the readings to which I gained access late, after the fall of the red regime. However much I read, though, I can only begin to imagine the realities that marked the post-war Romanian existence. An existence that you cannot be ashamed of, one that cannot hurt you, one that cannot avoid yelling questions addressed to the whole of humanity, questions that ask for more than mere explanations, questions that hurt, that warn, that accuse.

The scholar's dozens of pages reconstruct a world that we no longer know. We begin as the barefoot children of Solca from the end of the nineteenth century. We meet people and customs of the late nineteenth century and enter a world that one can only draw from postcards and historical writings. It is the world of the patriarchal Romanian village, with people of different ethnicities and beliefs, with hidden hopes and desires, with sufferings and disappointments, with the small joys of simple people, who follow their own philosophy of life.

We then accompany Luca/Ilie to Suceava, where he arrives having walked barefoot tens of kilometers from Solca to Suceava, dressed only in the shirt made by his mother. He arrives with his father, with his soles full of beats and with his head full of dreams. We attend his German exam and we rejoice by his side at the congratulations received from the examination committee, which filled him with self confidence. The highschool in Suceava was, at the time, a truly reputable institution, even beyond the KKObergymnasium walls erected just before the late 1800s. It was a tough school, which involved a lot of work, suffering, and sacrifices, but also ambition, determination, and the incredible will of a seemingly weak and helpless child.

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We follow his efforts to meet the demands of his teachers and we suffer, alongside, the hunger that almost put him down. We are happy for his excellent school results and we are hurt by the humiliation to which he is sometimes subjected by those who consider themselves superior. We walk with him through the gates of the Chernivtsian University and meet the people who have marked his life: Sextil Puşcariu, Silvestru Octavian Isopescul, Mathias Friedwagner. We join him and his parents in feeling nervous and anxious, but also curious, in travelling to the University of Frankfurt am Main. Here he continued his studies between 1911 and 1913, and led the Romanian language lectureship established by Professor Friedwagner.

We do not find, in the pages of the manuscript, stories from the First World War front, where he entered as a soldier of the Austro-Hungarian army. As he could not continue fighting for a king who was not his and against his own people, he fled to Bucharest. Neither do we hear of the years of refuge in Bucharest, or of the period when he was a student at the School of officers from Botosani, an unpleasant experience for a young man who was regularly ill. His optimistic nature made him forget his sufferings, the humiliations he had to endure, and to go beyond the horrors of a period that knelt down humanity and made evil, for a time, dominate.

Many of the pages reveal the infernal machinery that led to the establishment of Bolshevism in Romania, a regime that would take everything from Torouțiu, including almost his liberty. The new rulers were not satisfied with theft, but wanted to be seen as apostles of justice, staging a process that terrified the scholar. Once again, strangers swarmed over the lands and nation he had helped build, changing its course of history. Unfortunately, these changes extended, unseen, to the subconsciousness of people. Behind the barriers of their frozen souls, many have made a new way of living, disdainful and cowardly, out of delusion, flattery, and scorn. A life built on the backs of their victims, the weak ones, terrified by the prospect of being sent to an imported Gulag. The principles in which he believed and the values he promoted were no longer in demand, despite justice being one of the pillars proclaimed by the apostles of the red ideology. Culture was no longer of value in the ignorant eyes of the new leaders, who threw Romania into a new feudalism, in which the truth was no longer heard, and human dignity was mocked in order to cancel it.

The manuscript is currently being edited and we want it to be printed as a modest tribute to its author in November 2019, when the death of the scholar will be commemorated.

Ilie E. Torouțiu's novel is not a masterpiece of the genre. There is no genius behind the words. His only volume of short stories, *Chipuri*, published in his youth, did not reveal a profound literary talent, as neither does this autobiography. His novel, still untitled, is, however, the echo of a life lived intensely, deeply, a life unfolding according to principles from which he did not depart and for which he made no compromises. Its pages are sequences of history lived by a hard-working and dignified man, for whom Country and Nation have always been capitalized.

Luca Teişor, the main character of the novel, is, above all, a model. He is the model child, the model schoolboy, the model teenager, the model youth, the model teacher, the model entrepreneur: hard-working, persevering, a follower of economic modernism, which allowed him to strive for quality, strict with others as he was with himself, but the owner of a generous heart, who was always willing to help those who opened the door to his house and to his soul.

The time of his political anathema has passed, it is time for Torouţiu to return to the world for which he lived with his whole being. As Andrei Pleşu stated in the foreword for *În căutarea Atlantidei (In Search of Atlantis),* the novel of another cursed Romanian from

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Bukovina, Traian Chelariu (*apud* Diaconu, 2004: 13): "[…] in spirit, no destiny can be lost; it can only be postponed until history quiets down and people regain a sense of respect."

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