TRAIAN CHELARIU´S JOURNALS OR WHAT DOES A NON-CANONICAL HISTORY SPEAK OF

Ph.D. Dolgu-Ursuleanu Dana-Alexandra,
The University ”Ștefan cel Mare” from Suceava, Romania

Abstract

This paper presents the journals of an author from Bukovina, texts which put in a mirror two important historical periods and which manage to talk about literary, social and mentality problems. These representative writings brought to a comparative stage that restore personal vision of the author, trys to shape up an overview of the respective eras of literary events.

Traian Chelariu, a writer from Bukovina from twentieth century manages to note down with a model dutifulness, the events, thoughts and the moments lived in eleven years of existence, fact which took shape in three volumes of memories: My days and my shadow (two volumes) and The swan street, number 8. The first two volumes covers a part from the inter-war period (the years 1929 – 1936), and the third volume presents the author's life in some years from the post-war period (the years 1956 – 1960). The settlement in parallel of the two intervals presented by the same mind, brings a image of a Bukovina which wants to ally Romania from a cultural standpoint (not only from the territorial point of view) through a generation full of good writing and a image of a Bucharest of the early years of communism, seen from the perspective of a writer "expelled" by ideology from the circle of intellectuals.

Key words: inter-war period, communism, Bukovina, journal, Traian Chelariu.

1. Exordium

There are many unknowns in the Romanian literature. Although in the large area of the literary department each one has existed and has at one point been certified, it has soon become the victim of time and forgetfulness. Traian Chelariu, an inhabitant of Bukovina who wrote poetry, prose, theatre, meditations, and memoirs and who in the inter-war period has distinguished himself among the writers, seems to be a relevant example for this situation as he easily became a victim of history. The author of eight volumes edited during his lifetime and five after his death, student at the University of Cernauti, but also a scholar of the parisian and italian universities, editor-in-chief of ”Glasul Bucovinei” periodical, consistent contributor of the ”Junimea literară” and ”Universul literar” periodicals, assistant lecturer at the psychology or pedagogy department (at Cernăuți, Iași and Bucharest), but also lecturer at the Pedagogical Institute of Suceava since 1964 (after a period of profesional involution caused by the communist ideology), Traian Chelariu is a representative of the Romanian literary unknowns.

Out of his immense literary work, we can observe sonnets of an exemplary correctitude and peculiar sensibility, plays with Romanian taste, allegorical fictions, deep moral-philosophical meditations and journal files that depict the portrait of the inter-war and communist period

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intellectual. The memoirs are compound of three volumes: *Zilele si umbra mea* (*The Days and My Shadow*) (two volumes), that cover the 1929 – 1926 years and *Strada Lebedei nr. 8* (*The Street of the Swan no. 8*), which present the author's life between 1956-1960 years.

2. The Shadows from the Interwar Period

In spite of academic studies at the Czernowitz University and of postuniversity studies in Paris and Rome, T. Chelariu was expelled from the educational system. But his life continued in a cultural horizon, in touch with the great literature and art. This distinguishing feature can be seen in the way the author reduces his acts, thoughts and feelings to writing, just because he knew these would be a written evidence of the changes he has been through. Therefore, this man from Bukovina, a piece of land/region from Northern Romania, aged 23 started to carefully consign daily important facts until he was 60 years old. "Traian Chelariu's daily notes start in 1929 and go on a few days until his death in Suceava, (the 4th of November 1966), where he had finally been admitted as lecturer at a newly established Pedagogical Institute. There had been a few moments without writing, a few notebooks had been lost, nevertheless the thousands of pages were published into a volume which included the period between 1929-1936 (*The Days and my Shadow*, Junimea, 1976)"[1] and also into the volume *The Street of the Swan no. 8.*

The first diary *The Days and my Shadow*[2] catches the reader's attention with unique presentations about the University of Cernăuţi in the 1930's, about the existence and activity of the bukovinean's writers and also about the life of a young man having a scholarship in Paris. The second volume [3] continues the interwar story by describing his life as a scholar in Rome, as well as the publishers' intellectual life in Cernăuţi. The end of this interwar diary is registered on the 28th of December 1936, it sounds like this:"The last page, the last regret for not having written less pride and much wisdom" [4] in a way that is specific to Chelariu.

The memorialistic pages of the volumes *The Days and my Shadow* can be taken for granted as a historical confession about the interwar period, metaphorically speaking as a glance through the keyhole towards the Romanian past. These pages build up an image of past times by bringing together literature, society, mentality and politics. Romanian literature history includes portraits of famous authors such as Liviu Rebreanu, Tudor Arghezi, Gala Galaction, presentations of Bukovinean writers' activity (published poems, newspaper's articles), confrontations and polemics between writers of the young generation. Social history includes annotations about students' financial problems, dancing nights, movie, theatre, music, love and exams. The history of mentality includes conceptions about life, information about the main subjects for discussion in the intellectual circles, notes regarding rules in society. Political history includes data about royalty, parties, ministries and different events in the Romanian and European space.

Seeing the Romanian interwar period through Traian Chelariu's eyes we can observe an active era, bringing together moral values and intellectual preoccupations: meetings at "Junimea literară" ("All evening and all night…at Junimea's general meeting… just for getting the absoluteness. They gave me cum laude" [5]), visits to different art exhibitions (e.g. "I've been at Vl. Nichitovici's vernissage" [6], activity at university ("From the conference hall of the University, where there is the library of my History of Philosophy seminar, you can see the laboratories of the

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academic institutes. At all times when I look out of the window, …beyond a flame is flickering more alive, yet less shining. Someone dressed in white overall lowers above the flame and examines it closely. He gets up and writes down some notes. An assistant, of course, or a professor." [7]), discussions with famous authors ("Mr. Liviu Rebreanu speaks slowly –he seems to choose his words, he suits them fine with his mimicry and then he simply pronounces them ." [8]; "At about half past six Mr. Gala Galaction together with his daughter Mara Pişculescu visited us. He is a tolstonian head, yet he didn't impress me like Tolstoi. Because it is too … joyful, I mean it hasn't got anything essentially affected." [9])

As a matter of fact, these daily notes contain details about the modality the student Traian Chelariu provides his existence in Cernăuţi, as well as in the European cities where he has had a scholarship: "Today I received the papers that acknowledge my position as a secretary at the Pedagogical Academic Seminar starting with the 1st of October, this year. … As a secretary, I get 4,700 lei every month. 3,000 lei in addition to the salary for taking pupils help me not thinking about tomorrow." [10]; "I took today the last two scholarships: 1600 francs. I spent 600 on hygiene tools and books. I saved 100 for the probable presents, 200 to live until I go back and 700 for the journey and the days left until the next scholarship in November, which I am hoping to get in Rome." [11]

The political climate in the Romanian interwar takes shape in the diary both through an internal perspective of the notes from the period of studying in Cernăuţi and through an external perspective of the notes from the period of studying abroad: "Prince Carol at Bucharest. The most important event ever since King Ferdinand died. The end of Vintilă Brătianu." [12]; "How poorly can we govern our country. Instead of gaining the love and trust of our neighbours and national minorities within 12 years, we raised them all against us." [13] ; "The news of the day: the issue of Russian dumping, The Maniu government dismissed." [14]; "In Bucharest – bloody revolts, in Cluj, Galaţi, Braşov stir. The clerks' salary is lousy. Dirt and night everywhere and both the government and the King mock the country." [15]; "It is not responsible the Iron Guard for the abolition of the Liberal Party, but the will that imposed this condition." [16]

The Bucovinean literature from the interwar period is considerably being detached from the national literature, this center-marginal delimitation is visible in Traian Chelariu's annotations: "Spending the evening with Barbu and Silvia. We have discussed the new number of «Viaţa Românească». Just now I am seriously thinking of collaborating with a major journal. I'll try to be intentured into «Viaţa Românească»...."[17]; „«România literară» from Bucharest under the management of Liviu Rebreanu gives an eulogistic appreciation to «Junimea literară»..."[18] On the whole, the literary movement from Bucovina buildt itself on the basis of literary magazines: «Glasul Bucovinei» and «Junimea Literară», of the printing house *Iconar* and the personalities I. Nistor, Mircea Streinul, Iulian Vesper, etc: "Just like that the waters of spring clarify the poetry in our Bucovina: M. Streinul, I. Vesper, N. Roşca (I. Roşca has died), E. Ar. Zaharia. These people have something personal to bring out. Instead of M. Streinul, they are all negativists. And Streinul's «positivismul» is also lugubrious." [19]; "The printing house *Iconar* is very useful in Cernăuţi… all who stand up against this printing house strikes the Romanian writing from Bukovina." [20] The general image of the literature from Bukovina also registers the polemics between the writers

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through the articles of the magazines and letters. For example, in 1933 Traian Chelariu published an article in the journal *"*Glasul Bucovinei" "against the young generation and against the lightness of conduct and insolence" [21]. However, the literature from Bukovina tries to make its own way, to assert itself as a paradigm.

3. The Streets of Comunism

The third memorialistic posthumous publication, *The Street of the Swan no. 8* [22] reproduces Traian Chelariu's diary annotations from the 15th of July 1956 to the 5th of September 1960, "practically making a radiography of an intellectual writer's life who has been <purged> by the Communist regime (he makes his own living by doing desinfections and deratizations or teaching arithmetic for the 5th grade, for example, or translating, or stylizing, or editing for different edits, which nevertheless don't write his name on his own texts (he begins teaching or publishing only after a slow <rehabilitation> of the Communism)" [23].

Reading the book that clearly aims to identify certain historical sections, one can observe the intellectual's portrait, a person who accepts his adverse fate, also the image of a Communist country with its specific mentality and the contaminated literature by the ideological guidance. The Literary History section presents the portraits of famous authors, such as T. Arghezi, G. Bacovia, Nicolae Labiş, M. Beniuc, unknown details of the literature world (concessions, rules, censorships) and the life of a writer unaccepted by the high society. The Social History section includes notes about the financial problems of a family with a past that was unaccepted by the Communist Party, about the activities that the Party was asking for in schools, factories and as well about the Romanian educational system. The section regarding the History of Mentalities includes both the ontological beliefs promoted by the Communist ideology and the author's personal revolts against the "new man". The Political History presents Communist personalities, parties and specific events.

The literary life at the beginning of the Communist era excluded each and every author that was not a member of the Writer's Union or didn't understand that the "vocation" of literature is to educate people politically. Furthermore, the social life in those times excluded all individuals that were not accepted in the party and moreover they were isolated to the periphery of the society. Because of these compulsory rules, Traian Chelariu had to work at a deratization service for two years ("7 a.m. – 3 p.m. desinfestation and deratization. Afternoon – choosing lyric verses and writing the first scene of the play about Ovidiu. For now, I'm editing it in rhyme: octosilabic couplets" [24]). Living a wretched life ("…we don't have supplies for winter, nor money to spend on food every day. Still, they left us the underclothes, the clothing, the footwear… And no perspective of upgrading the salary! Afternoon – sketching a plan for the *Celesta Farce*." [25]). "The play" was performed in every Congress where the writers met ("talking on the phone with Eusebiu Camilar. He tells me that as soon as the Congress begins, they will incorporate the new committee of the Writers' Union. In its first session, they will solve my new request of integrating me as a member, as Camilar asserts." [26]), and the head names that represented the literary movement of the moment are now unknown ("When I think about Mihai Eminescu, the national poet, he is a demigod in comparison to Mihai Beniuc [who is a pithecanthrope in comparison to

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Mihai Eminescu, although he is the greatest Romanian communist writer!] ... I am sick of the present premises signed by M. Beniuc, M. Breslau, M. Banuş and others." [27]). The same Literary History image includes the suspect death of Nicolae Labiş, the funeral events of Bacovia and Camil Petrescu or details about T. Arghezi's personality, information about the literary publications of the day (for example, M. Sebastian) and definitions about the engaged writings ("Afternoon at «Viaţa Românească» - invited on the phone to write 2-5 stanzas against the aggression in Liban. In the morning – obeyed the command." [28]).

The Social History presents an engaged world where there has been a reversal of values in order to comply with the demands of the Party: "Knackery. Visiting different departments of the factory to collect material in order to write a wall newspaper article. All the information are precisely the following: the Autopsy Department – broken ventilation… The express delivery is not ok, the meat flour takes the shape of piles in the warehouse… And, all in all, I had to hand an article the next day saying that they do a roaring business." [29], "3 p.m. – 3.30 p.m. meeting to change the story of the abjections from Budapest, as the management of the enterprise announced"[30], Besides, there are adding up events that reinforce the rumours about the Reds. There are everywhere traitors, the Communists don't like mysticism. This docility is continuously being supervised, although there have been moments of rebellion: "I am taking part to a dialogue at the Educational Section! What on the Earth still want the jerks of the regime with me after all the injustices I've suffered since 1949?" [31].

The Political History reproduces information about the Soviet troops in other countries, dialogues of the most famous communist personalities, external news about the Middle East or the conflict between the United States of America and USSR. A shattering fragment in the book tells about the 4th of April 1958 when Bucharest has been blitzed by the Americans: „It was awful, awful, awful!!!... I was feeling how the terror settled in my heart!" [32].

4. The Uncanonical History written by Traian Chelariu

The three volume journals emphasize two totally different periods of time through which the writer Traian Chelariu has been going through. If in the inter-war period his studies were mainly literary and were concerned with cultural events and many others, in the communist period his notes show again literary concerns, but in this case, manifested in the intimate space of his private library and often blurred by the problems caused by ideology.

The literary history written by the author from Dărmănești, Suceava presents an clear involution: from the Bukovinanian movement that tried to form an alliance with the cultural spirit of the entire country, to the national communist movement which did not have the philologist's bohemia. Likewise, the social history emphasizes the discrepancy between the two periods: from the scholar from Paris and Rome, to the comrade from Bucharest employee of the Flaying House commercial firm, deratization and disinfection. The history of mentality sketches an image of decadence lived by the people of the two periods: from the ideologies about the possibility of change through culture and education, to the ideas according to which only *the new man* education is flawless. On the contrary, the history of politics seems equally litigious in both epochs,

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presenting a Romania that does not succeed to find its meaning, that gets lost in front of other political powers and that has a lot more to learn.

In conclusion, the three memoir volumes written by Traian Chelariu represent an act of recall for those who lived the moment of communism from Romania, a retrospective journey on the axis of time until the inter-war moment, all these being sketched according to four grids of reading: literary, social, politic and of mentality. Therefore, this uncanonical history talks about a major difference between the two periods, about involution, problems, frustrations and life.

,,I think about the meaning of this journal, I think about those more than one thousand pages of written journal…and on top of my head, off the sunny cliff a lucid demon laughs. I remembered a versified German parable, - otherwise mediocre, - wherein an individual suspended between the present everyday danger and the existent death, forgets a moment about his tragic-comical situation and picks, with innocent greed, the juicy grains of a plant suspended, just like him, above the nothingness." [33]

Notes:

1. Mircea Diaconu, *Traian Chelariu în căutarea unu gest de justiţie literară*, introduction at the book. *Strada Lebedei nr. 8*, Publishing House Paideia, Bucharest, 2002.
2. Traian Chelariu, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, book I, Publishing House Ideea Europeană, Bucharest, 2007.
3. Traian Chelariu, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, bookII, Publishing House Ideea Europeană, Bucharest, 2007.
4. *Ibidem*, p. 497.
5. Idem, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, book I, p. 30.
6. *Ibidem*, p. 31.
7. *Ibidem*, p. 42.
8. *Ibidem*, p. 81.
9. Traian Chelariu, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, book II, p. 343.
10. Traian Chelariu, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, book I, p. 24.
11. Traian Chelariu, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, book II, p. 106.
12. *Ibidem*, p. 71.
13. *Ibidem*, p. 83.
14. *Ibidem*, p. 109.
15. *Ibidem*, p. 255.
16. Traian Chelariu, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, book II, p. 156.
17. Traian Chelariu, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, book I, p. 233.
18. *Ibidem*, p. 341.
19. Traian Chelariu, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, book II, p. 116.
20. Traian Chelariu, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, book II, p. 224.
21. Traian Chelariu, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, book I, p. 244.
22. Traian Chelariu, *Strada Lebedei nr. 8*, Publishing House Paideia, Bucharest, 2002.
23. Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, Paralela 45, Bucharest, 2008, p. 1143.
24. *Ibidem*, p. 103.
25. *Ibidem*, p. 60.
26. *Ibidem*, p. 14.
27. *Ibidem*, p.162.
28. *Ibidem*, p.248.
29. *Ibidem*, p.49.
30. *Ibidem*, p.55.
31. *Ibidem*, p. 271.

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32. *Ibidem*, p. 204.
33. *Ibidem*, p. 195.

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1. Chelariu, Traian, *Zilele şi umbra mea*, vol I, II, Publishing House Ideea Europeană, Bucharest, 2007;
2. Chelariu, Traian, *Strada Lebedei nr. 8*, Publishing House Paideia, Bucharest, 2002;
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