

Silviu LUPAȘCU*

**FREEDOM OF WRITING IN A FREEDOMLESS COUNTRY: THE
JOURNAL *OPINIA STUDENȚEASCĂ* [THE STUDENTS' OPINION]
DURING THE LAST DECADES OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN
ROMANIA**

– *Abstract* –

During the last decades of the communist regime in Romania, at “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi, Romania, a marvelously unexplainable event occurred, with considerable impact in the fields of academia and mass-media. In a paradoxical way, freedom of writing became possible, during the 1970s and 1980s, in the editorial office of the “Students' Opinion”, a journal edited by the Union of the Communist Students' Associations from Romania (UCSAR). The members of the editorial staff, all of them teachers and students enrolled in the universities of the University Center of the city of Iasi, built a mass-media, literary, philosophical, cultural discourse consisting of several semantic layers. An apparently innocent layer addressed the censors of the Communist Party of Romania. A subversive, anti-communist, layer addressed the readers of the journal residing in the Romanian Western diaspora. A layer of a perpetual intellectual feast of the ideas circulated among writers and philosophers in the West, in the free world. The editorial staff was constituted by the writers who formed the nucleus of the anti-communist group of Iasi (Luca Pitu, Liviu Antonesei, Liviu Cangeopol) and students enrolled in various BA programs. Most of the authors who contributed to the journal gained notoriety in the realms of mass-media and literature, in Romania, after 1990.

Keywords: “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Romania; “Students' Opinion”; the nucleus of the anti-communist group of Iași; Communism; anti-Communism; mass-media; literature.

* “Dunărea de Jos” University of Galați (slupascu@yahoo.com).

Paradoxically, freedom of writing became possible, during the 1970s and 1980s, in the editorial office of “Opinia studentească” [“The Students’ Opinion”], a journal edited by the Union of the Communist Students’ Associations from Romania (UCSAR). The journal’s ideology was as simple and profound as a Zen aphorism: to be alive, to be truthful, to be free. The members of the editorial staff, all of them teachers and students enrolled in the universities of the University Center of the city of Iasi, built a mass-media, literary, philosophical, cultural discourse consisting of several semantic layers. An apparently innocent layer addressed the censors of the Communist Party of Romania. A subversive, anti-communist, layer addressed the readers of the journal residing in the Romanian Western diaspora. A layer of a perpetual intellectual feast of the ideas circulated among writers and philosophers in the West, in the free world. The editorial staff was constituted by the writers who formed the nucleus of the anti-communist group of Iasi (Luca Pitu, Liviu Antonesei, Liviu Cangeopol) and students enrolled in various BA programs. Most of the authors who contributed to the journal gained notoriety in the realms of mass-media and literature, in Romania, after 1990.

The case study on the journal “Opinia studentească” includes the issues published from 1985 to 1989. The journal was managed by Daniel Condurache and Valeriu Gherghel, members of Iasi University Centre. The editors-in-chief, selected from the students’ ranks, were Ștefan Berbece, Florea Ioncioaia and Dan Radu. Among the members of the editorial board, one should mention Silviu Alupeș, Constantin Andrei, Sorin Aniței, Viorel Arhire, Liviu Avram, Sorin Avram, Dorina Băeșu, Dumitru Buzatu, Cezar Caluschi, Elena Ceucă, Anca Comoți, Adrian Costea, Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru, Adrian Eremei, Valentin Gora, Marius Hergelegiu, Eduard Iricinschi, Constantin Largu, George Lazăr, Alexandru Lăzescu, Silviu Lupașcu, Silviu Lupescu, Doru Mateiciuc, Dan Mititelu, Puiu Moșneagu, Alina Mungiu, Cristian Mungiu, Adrian Necula, Cătălin Ochișor, Lucian Pal, Antoniu Petriș, Cornel George Popa, Sterian Pricope, Liliana Soroceanu, Alina Sorohan, Monica Spiridon, Radu Eugeniu Stan, Ovidiu Șimonca, Dorin Țigănaș, Victor Țurcanu, Camelia Varvara, Florin Zamfirescu.

Inside the communist panopticon, students and professors together built an intellectual rebuff, by bringing back the freedom of thinking, speaking and writing, by shiny humor and irony polychromies against the grey background of campuses, by juvenile bohemism and humorous fronde thanks to whom young voices were crying out, not in the desert, the common

denominator of the Western and Eastern European writers, artists, intellectuals of the 1970s-1980s: to be alive, creative and free. Paradoxically, this discourse, propagated within the rigid and potentially annihilating boundaries of communist censorship, released a surprising alternative to communist propaganda. In the communist postmodernism, Noah's Ark was no longer "a ship of fools"¹, but a paper boat soaked in ink, which carried some of the scintillations of human intelligence from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, from nowhere to nowhere, in the space-time archipelago.

Reportages, prose, journalistic bits. Salingerian narrative techniques are employed in a collection of reportages on the students' summer holiday (*One Hundred Days*), published in "Opinia studentească", issues 5-6 (86-87) / 1985. Against the background of erotological revolt against the sexual blocking of the communist era, the texts evoke the period of time in which an American warship tied in the proximity of the Romanian shores of the Black Sea. In the night, on the beach, in a community of post-hippie students gathered around guitars, a girl is wearing the cap of an American marine, "Jim, Pennsylvania", a vestige of the civilizing-liberating heroes emerged from sea foam, while the last part of the reportage focuses on a tent in the camping, exhibiting the visual rhetoric of a grand blue eye and of the American flag².

By employing the narrative bas-relief of the reportage, "Opinia studentească", issues 7-8 (88-89) / 1985, brings back to mind portraits of artisans and craftsmen, Chekhovian identities anonymously inserted among the greys of the city: a woman sharpener, a barber, a cartman, a chainsaw operator. A subversive note is inserted through an intended confusion between dead dictators and the (still) alive dictator: "But there's a moment when not only are bad dictators called to heavens, but also good sharpeners³."

In "Opinia studentească", issues 3-4 (92-93) / 1986, Radu Eugeniu Stan entwines the art of pamphlet with literary criticism, fighting rhetorically and humorously with a monstrous *blocage d'écriture*, much in the way Don Quixote was fighting the windmills: "I'd throw away these papers if I were

¹ Sebastian Brant (1458-1521), *Stultifera navis (Das narrenschiff)*, 1494, quoted in Katherine Anne Porter, *Ship of Fools*, Little, Brown & Company, Boston-Toronto, 1962, Eugen H. Marian (trans.), *Corabia nebunilor*, București, Cartea românească, 1975, p. 6.

² Silviu Lupașcu, *Seri reci de septembrie [Cold September Evenings]*, in: "Opinia studentească", issue 5-6 (86-87) / 1985, p. 4.

³ Silviu Lupașcu, Florea Ioncioaia, Ștef Anberg-Radu, Sterian Pricope, Silviu Alupei, Constantin Andrei, *Meșteri la roata lumii [Craftsmen on the Wheel of the World]*, in: "Opinia studentească", issue 7-8 (88-89) / 1985, pp. 10-11.

you! You're too serious, too dour, you sound like a pht physiology treatise. Where are the punch lines, nowadays, if you don't have punch lines, you're nothing! Razzing, as much razzing as possible! Look, he'd thrown a pun here – if you really want to know, all brainies of today make puns, subtleties that I see you're missing – when you speak of Gonzalv Ionescu, spell it like this: Io(a)nESCU. You got it, didn't you? Oh, aren't you dense? *Ioan* from *Ioanide* and *Escu* from Călinescu, and this way you wipe the dude out really subtly⁴!”

In a reportage on students' agricultural training, published in “Opinia studentească”, issues 5-6 (94-95)/1986, Cornel George Popa describes the shiny autumnal apocalypse of the apple orchards on the hills near Iasi in impressionist, post-impressionist and expressionist tones: “The fruit farm “Galata” is very close to Iasi, from its hills, the city can be seen clearly, shrouded at early hours in a bluish fog that diaphanously dims the tall buildings only to highlight the smaller ones. The orchard is an inebriation of green, yellow and red, the trees are literally weighed down of fruits, the straight, perfectly parallel rows geometrizing your soul and senses, an oasis of silence, serenity and harmony (...)”⁵.”

Essay, philosophical texts, prose, poetry. In “Opinia studentească”, issues 5-6 (86-87) / 1985, Liviu Antonesei launches the project of reconstructing the history of culture through the eternal return of the historical time meant to restore the name of the city Konigsberg, ephemerally-politically metamorphosed into Kaliningrad: “But just as today Konigsberg has metamorphosed into Kaliningrad, probably the *Critique* would have suffered impulses from the historical avatars of philosophy. I am particularly thinking about the metamorphoses of Kantianism in the works of two philosophers of culture from the former half of this century: Ernst Cassirer and Lucian Blaga⁶.” Liviu Antonesei continued this exegetic Kantian argument in “Opinia studentească”, issues 7-8 (88-89) / 1985: “If we ask ourselves now what exactly is Kantian is Blaga's demarche, the answer can only be this: the category perspective which edifies his central concept – the stylistic matrix. This is an odd Kantianism, as the matrix leads Blaga to particularizing approaches to cultures, to typologies, to mapping distinctions,

⁴ Radu Eugeniu Stan, *Nu pot să scriu!* [*I Cannot Write!*], in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 3-4 (92-93) / 1986, p. 20.

⁵ Cornel George Popa, *Șefu' cară tu scara!* [*Boss, You Carry the Ladder!*], in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 5-6 (94-95) / 1986, p. 4.

⁶ Liviu Antonesei, *Blaga și Cassirer: premise kantiene în filosofia culturii (I)* [*Blaga and Cassirer – Kantian Premises in Philosophy of Culture*], in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 5-6 (86-87) / 1985, p. 16.

whereas Kant discusses the matters at the level of the epistemic subject, of generic conscience. What was with Kant a form of “genetic epistemology” and with Blaga, “an abysmal noology” will become the image of a “cultural epistemology” in Cassirer’s case⁷.”

In the same issue, “Opinia studentească”, issues 7-8 (88-89) / 1985, Luca Pițu (1947-2015) tackled with *gai savoir* and unforgettable virtuosity of polymorphous erudition the linguistic erotology of the Humulești stories: “My sons, the Humulești stories glide on an aspect of tongue. OK? Of the tongue, yes, yes, yes, *Zunge*, not *Sprache*, *tongue*, not *langage*, as – misguided by the sly title – you would expect. Then? Well, then, the tongue, as an organ susceptible of metaphor-ization, metonymy-zation, synecdoche-ization and all kinds of irization. It eases our access to the symbolic wounds of Humulești, although there is phallic primacy in *Povestea poveștilor* [*The Tale of All Tales*], that I will otherwise gloss over later, not before launching the theorizing bit, i.e. how Bruno Bettelheim, in his *Symbolic Wounds*, by reversing the phallocentrism of the Vienna man, perhaps partly replacing it with yonicentrism, shyly whispers that *el machi*, the bearded man, has *Yonineid*, not just the woman *Linganeid*: hence, rituals, symbolic mutilations, bracelets, long hair, various scars, so many ceremonies of symbolic fertilization, innumerable as the kernels on the native corn cobs⁸.” Luca Pițu continued this ludic-hermeneutic discourse in “Opinia studentească”, issues 6-7 (103-104) / 1987: “The postulate is, you’re right, a classical one. Between poetry and prose, the difference is only quantitative, as revealed by the Barthes-Jourdain equation, if squeezed a little bit: Poetry = Prose + (a + b + c), the inference being that Prose = Poetry – (a + b + c), where a + b + c = ornamental parameters of language – meter, rhyme, rhythm, figures of speech. The classical man has a spatial conception of the difference between PL and non-PL, between poetic and non-poetic language; the former seems to him higher, more elevated than the latter; he perceives poetry as a decorating variation of prose, as an exercise that can be taught and learnt. He writes prose unknowingly, he is born, unlike the Wallach, a prose writer⁹.”

“Opinia studentească”, issue 1 (90) / 1986 reprints Mihail Sebastian’s (1907-1945) article from “Cuvântul”, issue 2503 / 1932, on the intellectual

⁷ Liviu Antonesei, *Blaga și Cassirer: premise kantiene în filosofia culturii (II)* [*Blaga and Cassirer – Kantian Premises in Philosophy of Culture*], in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 7-8 (88-89) / 1985, p. 17.

⁸ Luca Pițu, *Eseu în limba povestirilor humuleștene* [*An Essay in the Language of Humulești Stories*], in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 7-8 (88-89) / 1985, p. 20.

⁹ Luca Pițu, *Atențiune!: traducerea, din nou, perfectă* [*Attention! The translation, perfect again*], in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 6-7 (103-104) / 1987, pp. 18-19.

association “Criterion”, a name denoting, by extrapolation, the Criterion generation: “Initially conceived as a sort of trust of our artistic and literary life (...) “Criterion” quickly moved from the fantasy projects phase to a more serious phase of a clear, well-thought and plausible program (...) “Criterion” aims at practically framing the activity of the young writers, artists, sculptors, painters, musicians. (...) All those misfortunate enough to dedicate themselves to writing or arts, at a time and in a country that couldn’t care less about it, decided to give up their classical bohemian indolence and start working¹⁰.” The same issue of the journal features the answers given by Constantin Noica (1909-1987) and Nicolae Steinhardt (1912-1989) in the “Destiny-Books” survey. In a dialogue with himself, Constantin Noica confesses that, during his youth, he was arrested for good by speculative thinking: “The patient admits that he read Kant when he was 18 and that he felt arrested for life by speculative thinking. (...) Asked whether he had felt the usual feelings of love and attraction of young men, he replied that he felt just like the others. (...) He actually advanced a theory of Don Juan-ism by non-winning one’s heart, just like he advanced a theories of sorts of the non-act and non-possession, whose vocation he was lucky to have – he admitted given the historical situation in which he lived. (...) All these took place under the pretended calm of the early youth. Wasn’t he drawn – I asked him – to ecstatic, fixating experiences? He admits that he avoided them, as they were too tempting, sticking to speculative ecstasy, which he felt that he could only obtain after years of “practice”¹¹.” Disarmed and ingenuous towards the readers’ reaction, Nicolae Steinhardt argues his own encounter with the matrix, formative text: „Yes, there is such a decisive text for me – and I’ll ask my potential reader not to smile: it is no other than the Foreword to *Întunerici și lumină* [*Darkness and Light*] by Ioan Al. Brătescu-Voinești. I can, without suspecting myself of simplifications and scholarly intransigency, declare that the Foreword determined (...) my life. (...) Just as the narrator of the Foreword, I, too, stood (imaginarily, of course), in the pale light of a modest platform of a nocturnal small train station. And, with the lightning speed, the shiny tumult of the express train carrying luxury, wealth, power, adventure and immense hopes passed in front of my eyes. The speed, the vibration, and the whistle made up a sort of a psychic bang, suddenly softened (*prête-moi*

¹⁰ Mihail Sebastian, *Criterion*, in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 1 (90) / 1986, p. 9.

¹¹ Constantin Noica, *Cărți-destin* [*Destiny-Books*], in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 1 (90) / 1986, p. 10.

ta grande allure si douce) and defiant, of a traumatism hitting hard and thrusting deep into the most uncontrolled regions of my own oneiric area¹².”

In “Opinia studentească”, issues 3-4 (92-93) / 1986, Liviu Cangeopol pessimistically versifies revolts and boudoir contemplations, claiming the meaninglessness of post-hippie bibliography and sexuality as a strategy of freeing oneself from the tyranny of the communist archons: “Our embraces on the carpet/ in the library. (...) / Your moaning when I wanted/ to pull you up from the burdens of the night./ But in that insipid mud, / over the filth of our awakenings,/ you were living in a word of uncertain suffering./ You, metaphor of day and night,/ fusion of an angel and a whore/ laying lewdly on the bed of my dreams./ This evening will be a poem one day/ maybe the last one in a long line of betrayals¹³.” A polyphonic lyrical revolt against the communist bureaucracy and authority bursts out from Ovidiu Nimigean’s poems shaped as Camusian glosses *à rebours* that bring to mind the pessimistic and desperate ontological relief of the freedom of writing: “from basements/ rats wearing ties emerge/ they consume and consume us/ without paying a bill // I don’t know how much nausea is there/ or how much fear it is/ rats coming out of basements/ grey necklace/ they reached my chest yesterday/ and started licking around my heart/ where are you to stretch your arms, your bridges/ to free me/ where are you to clad the city/ in the ivy of your perfume/ the rats are coming out, the moon is rising/ as an executioner’s axe// alas, this plague murders the ink/ the ganglia of words explode/ on brains, on hands, on frontons/ on flags hanging on poles// the rats are passing through the honeyed pus/ so meek, so fat/ they ascend to the sky/ where are you to hide together in the grains basement of this town¹⁴.”

Fragments from Mircea Mihăieș’s literary diary were published in “Opinia studentească”, issues 6-7 (103-104) / 1987: „Autumn. The sentiment of death looking in the mirror. Every time, a cold, thin wind wavers through the corridor like a tunnel, like a spyglass. Precisely in the time and space between one’s own eye and the one in reverse, which returns a still, glassy, wonder-struck image of the former. The gaze. And when two mirrors face one another – the abyss. The mirror – a tinfoil, a lie, without showing you for

¹² Nicolae Steinhardt, *Cărți-destin*, in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 1 (90) / 1986, p. 10.

¹³ Liviu Cangeopol, *Iubita în chip de muză [The Lover as a Muse]*, in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 3-4 (92-93) / 1986, p. 14.

¹⁴ Ovidiu Nimigean, *Noapte la Oran [A Night in Oran]*, in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 3-4 (92-93) / 1986, p. 15.

what you really are, without truly showing your soul. A great self-deceiving¹⁵.”

In “Opinia studentească”, issues 1-2 (106-107) / 1988, Adriana Babeți argues narratively the symbolic proximity or the ontological continuity between women and fortresses during a visit to *Musée des plans reliefs*, the fortresses museum from Paris: “The great fortresses from France and Flanders, rebuilt just for fun by hands of a master. Elevated on pedestals or directly on the floor. (...) Hall after hall, model after model (construction year, the builder’s biography, a short history of sieges), scaled down. What scale? The scale of time. The scale of the game. A mere juggle with the balls of words. But beyond it, suspended in the abyss, the thought of past. A definite past. Just like the game. Without any chance to return. Maybe only this way. In writing. In this type of writing? Who can possibly know?¹⁶”

World Literature, World Philosophy. “Opinia studentească”, issues 5-6 (86-87) / 1985, reprints a fragment of the novel *Adorable roumaine* by Isidore Isou (b. Ioan-Isidor Goldstein; 1925-2007), “Pope” of Lettrism, an innovative literary movement based on the symbiosis of the art of letters and the art of music, defined as “the system of a poem and of music with letters, and – after abstract and figurative painting – a painting of signs, of Latin alphabets at first, and then of all writing types”¹⁷.

Charismatic stories by Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) close “Opinia studentească”, issues 7-8 (88-89) / 1985 through the bibliographical maze of the Simurgh: “Ferdousi, in *The Book of Shahs*, which compiles and verifies the old Persian histories, considers the Simurgh the adoptive father of Zal, father to the hero of the poem; Farid al-Din Attar, in the eighteenth century, elevates the Simurgh to the rank of a symbol or mark of divinity (in *Mantiq al-Tayr* or *The Conference of Birds*). The plot of this allegory, made up of 4,500 couplets, is bizarre. The presumptive king of birds, the Simurgh, drops a wonderful feather in a region in the middle of China. The birds decide to look for the king, discontent with the anarchic state they were in. They knew that the name of their king signified “thirty birds”, they knew that his palace

¹⁵ Mircea Mihăieș, *Fără arhive* [No archives], in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 6-7 (103-104) / 1987, p. 19.

¹⁶ Adriana Babeți, *Îmbărbătare* [Encouragement] (Fragment from the volume *Despre arme și litere. Pseudostrategikos/ On weapons and letters*), in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 1-2 (106-107) / 1988, p. 19.

¹⁷ Cf. Isidore Isou, *Adorable roumaine*, Paris, Eurédif, Collection Aphrodite classique, 1978, Gabriela Irimia, Adriana Muscă (trans. fragment), *Isidor Isou, acest novator infatigabil* [Isidor Isou, this unwearying innovator], in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 5-6 (86-87) / 1985, p. 24.

was in Kaf, a mountain or a mountain range surrounding the Earth. (...) Many of those who had begun the journey gave up, while other perished during the long journey. Thirty of them, purified by pain, eventually gain access to Mount Kaf. And it was that very moment that they realized that they were the Simurgh and that the Simurgh was each and every one of them, and the Simurgh was them, all together¹⁸.”

The a priori antagonism between the totalitarian and the free world is emphasized by Karl Jaspers's (1883-1969) philosophical discourse in the volume entitled *La bombe atomique et l'avenir de l'homme*, in “Opinia studentească”, issue 1 (90) / 1986: “It is indeed about a new world state, and not about a new man. The old man, immutable, placed in new circumstances, will give up in fact – not out of conviction – war because he will be forced to do so. Fear and the minimal intelligence that comprehends the absurdity of collective suicide are enough. What shape will take, at the same time, the present day opposition between the totalitarian world and the free one? Will the totalitarian world slowly decay from within or is the atmosphere of freedom supposed to create somewhere else, also from within, another form of totalitarian idea? These are some issues of political evolution which, regardless of their solving, will never abolish the condition of politics as it is foreseeable from now on, that is: international relations exclude the war between great powers without this being acknowledged by an act of full disarmament¹⁹.”

„Opinia studentească”, issues 5-6 (94-95) / 1986, is concluded with a few lines from a poem by Federico García Lorca (1898-1936): “The shadow of my souls/ flees through a sunset of alphabets, a mist of books and words. /The shadow of my soul!/ I have reached the line where nostalgia ceases,/ and the teardrop is transformed into spiritual alabaster²⁰.”

These lines do not compile an exhaustive anthology but a selective one, intended to provide a general overview of the spirit of the journal

¹⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, Margarita Guerrero, *Manual de zoologia fantastica*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1971; Daniel Lascu (trans. fragment), *Simurgul*, in: “Opinia studentească”, issues 7-8 (88-89) / 1985, p. 24.

¹⁹ Karl Jaspers, *La bombe atomique et l'avenir de l'homme*, Paris, Buchet-Chastel, 1963; Brândușa Sumănaru (trans. fragment), *Apel pentru transformarea morală a omenirii [Towards the moral transformation of mankind]*, in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 1 (90) / 1986, p. 12.

²⁰ Federico García Lorca, *Poesia completa*, Vintage espanol, 2012; Daniel Lascu (trans. fragment), *Umbra sufletului meu*, in: “Opinia studentească”, issue 5-6 (94-95) / 1986, p. 24. The English version quotes the translation, *The Shadow of My Soul*, in the bilingual *edition Book of Poems (selection)/ Libro de poemas (seleccion)*, edited and translated by Stanley Appelbaum, 2004, New York, Dover Publications, p. 31.

“Opinia studentească” during the years 1985-1988. The *underground* dimension of the quotes suggests the polysemy occulted for the external meaning, the official one, subject to censorship. In search for the Simurgh, the authors of the texts identified themselves with the Simurgh.