

Abstract

Vintilă Horia, exile and creation

This thesis is the expression of my interest in the effect that historical and political aspects can exert on the humanities field. This is the reason that has determined me to study the literature of exile, in all its complexity and diversity. Drawing on the particular case of an exiled writer I believe I have reinforced the idea that every exile is different as every individual experiences this situation in his own way, which explains the polymorphism of the literature of the exile.

I discovered the personality of Vintilă Horia in the new context in which the study of the Romanian literature written in a foreign language is carried out since the 1989 Revolution. In a first instance I used the Romanian context as my baseline. However, this point of reference has been pushed towards the final part of the thesis so that it can be properly associated and compared with the results of our analysis.

Whereas other exiled Romanian writers have already been included in the national literary space, the situation of Vintilă Horia remains still controversial. That is why I tried to find out how he is nowadays represented in this space. His literary creation alone did not suffice to decipher the complex meanings of his existence. As it is obvious that Vintilă Horia is not just the author of the novels which we know about in Romania. His literary and cultural activity allows us to perceive him as a complete man of letters whose work brings him closer to the image of the medieval scholar. Especially since the linguistic diversity of his work places him at the crossroads of cultures. On the other hand, the diversity of his intellectual concerns requires an open-minded researcher who does not hesitate to abandon his premises and accept the unexpected directions that may arise from the analysis itself.

My study was initially aimed at observing the literary evolution of Vintilă Horia, writer of the exile, in two distinct spaces identified as the country of origin and the host country, Romania and France, countries between which there was already a long tradition of literary, cultural and political contacts. My choice was intended to reveal the francophone component of Horia's work, an

aspect that had not been explicitly explored previously. On the other hand, my approach quickly reached its limits because I soon found that Horia's literary destiny was exceeding the boundaries of the two chosen spaces. Hence the identification of the corpus was not able to follow the linguistic principle of work writing and I went deeper inside the texts to find the principles that would allow me to define my object of study. To this effect, I consulted texts that Horia had written in languages other than French or Romanian, but whose importance to the overall understanding of the work was unequivocal.

The essence of my approach has remained, however, twofold and the challenge was to observe the particular features of Horia's literary destiny in each of the two specified spaces, highlighting the similarities and differences between the two situations. This is how I have undertaken to find critical studies (in France and in Romania) which reflect the position of the writer and his work in each of the two countries. Although my first contact with the texts of Horia has been done through the Romanian translations, most of my thesis was developed within the French context, which has probably marked the way I understood and conducted my work.

An important part of the analyses focused on Horia and his work is composed of press articles, in France and Romania. In fact, the subject Vintilă Horia seems to be more adequately adapted to the press, where the brief text perfectly welcomes the controversies that the writer is always likely to cause. On the other hand, the situation was different depending on the time and space that we referred to. In France, in 1960 - the year of his Goncourt prize, the presence of Vintilă Horia in the newspapers was a reflection of the need to report an event of the immediate present, a true mediatized event. Consequently, there was a sense of urgency about the treatment to which the writer and his text were subject. After this date, the name of Horia Vintilă has almost disappeared from the French literary space, yet being recalled on the occasion of a new more or less controversial Goncourt prize.

In Romania, after 1989, Vintilă Horia was welcomed in an environment still uncertain and seeking to define its own principles with regard to a literature that was putting to the test its analytical tools and even its foundations. Thus Vintilă Horia was initially the

object of newspaper articles prior to convincing several researchers to dedicate larger studies to him. Certainly, the author was present in the works addressing the entire Romanian literature of the exile. Cornel Ungureanu, Eva Behring, Florin Manolescu did not fail to present him in their works. Evidently, he is also mentioned in the memoirs or journals of other famous exiles, such as Sanda Stolojan, Neagu Djuvara and Monica Lovinescu, all of whom are recalling his special position within the Romanian community in exile, which they account for by virtue of his political views that separated him even from his most sympathetic fellow countrymen. The rigidity of Horia's (political and literary) ideas was often revealed by the studies dedicated to him. On the other hand, there are voices that sought to uncover in his creation especially the aspects designed to facilitate its entry into the Romanian literary circuit. I will mention in this respect *Dicționarul scriitorilor români* (Zaciu, Papahagi, Sasu) which comes across as a balanced, reasoned and well documented text, but upon a second reading, also gives away a tendency to elevate the writer at the level of the great classics of the world literature, like Dante, the avowed model of the author, and *Dicționarul general al literaturii române* (Academia Română) that places him among the greatest minds of the twentieth century, while emphasizing on his close relationship with the Romanian literature. To this effect, he is unveiled as having affinities both with the most distant tradition and also with Blaga, Pillat, Mateiu Caragiale and others.

As regards my work, it should be noted that my analysis was organized in accordance with the French models and the return to the Romanian resources was manifested especially during the last year of my doctoral activity. If in the beginning of my research, I focused on the possible francophone side of Vintilă Horia, my quest has gradually opened up new ways providing evidence of the richness of the writer's texts. That is why I deemed it suitable not to stay within the confines of either the Romanian literature or the French literature, and instead to migrate towards the relatively new territory of the world literature. In fact, such an approach was even supported by the author's words since he enjoyed recommending himself as a "European of Romanian origin in the medieval and

Roman sense of the word¹". While preserving the feeling of homesickness, Vintilă Horia has built a new life for himself. In fact, he never disowned his country, he has never forgotten it and has consistently celebrated it throughout his work. But his perspective was different because he had chosen to place himself not only outside the Romanian space, but also beyond the time in which his countrymen had continued to live, in or outside Romania.

His work bears the stamp of this gap between the man Vintilă Horia and his time. The writer attracting today the interest of an ever increasing number of researchers is the result of a split in the society. The exile he undergoes pertains to a shift in mentalities specific to what Horia envisaged as the end of a crepuscular age. His exile is not only the result of the advent of communism in Romania; it is also a sign announcing the disappearance of a model of civilization that Horia is trying to keep alive in his novels. Through his work he constantly tried to evoke their divine essence to readers who were undergoing an accelerated process of secularization. This explains (partially) the distance that separates him from his potential audience.

The writer status of Horia Vintilă is indisputable. The difficulty appears when trying to place him in a certain space and assign to him a descriptive adjective. Is he a *great* writer? Is he an *important* writer? Is he a writer born from the exile? Or, better yet, is he the one to whom we can associate Nathalie Heinich's question: "Becoming a writer, then, is to succeed in being the writer that one is, or the writer that one was not?"² How can we know this? What criteria can we use to provide the analysis with its scientific nature?

Like other researchers before me, I discovered that there is continuity between Vintilă Horia, the writer who made his debut in a rather timid manner in the interwar Romania and the one who would fully manifest after 1945, in exile. The "timidity" I ascribed to him concerns exclusively the area of the novel, for Horia was already comfortable as a poet and journalist at the time of his debut. As regards the novel - which is the focus of my interest - he had offered

¹Horia, V., *Journal d'un paysan du Danube*, Paris, La Table Ronde, 1966, p. 168-169.

²Heinich, N., *Etre écrivain : création et identité*, Collection « Armillaire », Paris, La Découverte, 2000, p.63.

to the public only the slim *Acolo și stelele ard...*, text that did not allow the young writer to stand out among his generation colleagues. Hence it is obvious that this novel from his youth is interesting especially for its historical value and much less for its literary quality. It is in this way that I have included it in my analysis.

In fact, when I used the term *continuity* to connect the two major periods in the life of Horia, I took into consideration these elements which were potentially present in his first writings and which evolved or, on the contrary, faded out under the impact of the exile. Positive as well as negative tendencies of his work were taken into account.

In my thesis I followed and analyzed the evolution of Horia as a writer especially throughout the last part, where I relied on the study of texts. If the exile remains my starting point, however, this does not result in creating a limited and certainly not limiting perspective on the work of Vintilă Horia. On the contrary, I discovered in this phenomenon a stimulus of the creation. In addition, the exile does not constrain the writer to express himself exclusively about his drama. The one who is subject to exile seems to acquire a new power that allows him to express his views on a considerable number of topics. His special situation endows his words with the guarantee of freedom that everyone is looking for in his own way and that some can only hope to achieve.

Exile remains, despite its creative potential, an element generally perceived as bearing the mark of the negative, loss and rupture. But beyond this framework, further developments are possible. In the last part of my thesis I wanted to show the new directions that may arise within the literature of the exile. This final part, divided into three chapters, revolves around the following question: *Is he, Vintilă Horia, a writer born from the exile?* To this effect, I found it useful to mention some texts preceding the time of the exile. In fact, I discovered some short stories showing an interest in the act of creation which has never again abandoned Horia. The return to the texts of his first period also allowed me to observe a special concern for the writer characters, a tendency which will continue in his later novels and which represents, in our opinion, one of the defining features of Horia's work. The analysis of the period of the 1960 Goncourt prize and of the novel *Dieu est né en*

exil could not be absent from this thesis. Nevertheless, given that the critics (especially Romanian ones) have paid particular attention to this novel (indeed, of primary importance in Horia's career), I tried to look beyond this text in view of discovering other less explored novels of the author.

On one hand, I considered Vintilă Horia's novels as the place of establishment of a complex strategy for assuming the exile. The constituent elements of this strategy have been prioritized based on a methodological concern, since in reality their action is most often concerted. The order I put forward was, however, intended to suggest that the exile can choose between the means that bring him closer to his primitive foundations and the means designed to prepare him for a true spiritual ascent. This allowed me to focus on the religious component of Vintilă Horia's work, which should be linked with the Romanian tradition upon which the writer has continuously thrived. But the highest place in this structure is dedicated to the writing.

For the exile, the writing becomes the means by which he can finally make himself heard. This is what allows us to speak - paradoxically - about a happy exile. The writing is, for the exiled writer, both fiction and testimony. Testimony since the exile lives with the conscientiousness of a mission he would have towards his still suffering people, victim of a totalitarian regime, or even towards the whole of humanity who rushes into its own destruction failing to grasp that it is following a pathway heading downwards. Fiction since the reality of the exile is never sufficiently compensatory, forcing the exile to invent alternative worlds in which he transposes his nostalgia for the lost country. These alternative worlds often border on the mythical and Horia's novels are exemplary for this association between literature and myth.

On the other hand, Horia's novels written throughout the second half of the twentieth century fall within a trend which continues to hold the attention of readers and critics alike for several decades. I am referring here to the incorporation of his novels in what is known as *écritures du moi* (*narratives of the self*). For me, this feature of Horia's texts was associated with the issue of the *writer as a character*. One can notice that Horia hardly ever speaks of himself in a direct manner (he did so in the *Journal d'un paysan du Danube*, and he himself emphasized the personal nature of this

endeavor) and that he prefers to show himself through intermediaries chosen among his role models like Ovid, Plato, Rilke or El Greco. Although sometimes he provides the keys to reading his novels, indicating the autobiographical nature of some of his writings, there are texts that are likely to give rise to uncertainty. Textual clues that might help readers to correctly identify the nature of a particular book are rare, and I believe that in novels such as *Les impossible* or *Le voyage à San Marcos* the writer deliberately maintains the confusion as to the possible identity between his own person and his characters. Indeed, it is not uncommon that this effect of resemblance be projected not only on a single character, but several at once. The history of the character "Vintilă Horia" is thus reconstructed from fragments that must be discovered and reassembled to obtain an overview of the object under study.

It is in this final part that my work stands out even more compared to the already existing studies on Vintilă Horia. I believe that by choosing the path I have followed I did not misinterpret the nature of Horia's works, as I have only undertaken to highlight elements that had been inserted there by the author himself. I avoided (as much as possible) the controversial aspect of the analyses on Vintilă Horia and I preferred to rely in all cases on the texts in view of allowing the writer to explain himself. I explored both the French reception scope and the Romanian one. This is how my perspective has become itself a symptom of the existence in *l'entre-deux* (*in-betweenness*). The advantage of my position consists in that it has allowed me to keep my distance from both points of view (Romanian and French) and to propose an interpretation that was not necessarily intended to fit into a movement pertaining to either of the two traditions. Furthermore, I believe that the "tradition" - when referring to Vintilă Horia - is under complete construction, and I hope I have succeeded, by my thesis, to create more favorable conditions for the reception of this work still largely ignored.