

„ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” UNIVERSITY IAȘI  
FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL-POLITICAL SCIENCES

## **Doctoral thesis summary**

**Groups, communities and literary institutions in  
Communist Romania.**

**A study regarding the sociology of literature.**

**SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR**

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## **Research issue**

Literature is a complex domain, approached by many sciences: theory of literature, literary aesthetics, literary folkloristics, comparative literature, literary criticism, history of literature, psychology of literature, sociology of literature etc.

Literature is not only an artistic phenomenon, but also a human creation, addressed to the people, namely to human beings who grow up and who develop in society, so that the literature is a social phenomenon. This is the aspect which is included in the legitimate research field of sociology. The sociology of literature is the discipline of literary realities, as social phenomena.

Literature is a socio-political phenomenon not only genetically, meaning that it formed only in certain development stages of society and culture, and it did not form in forms determined once and for all, but it always changed, passing through many development stages, some of them powerfully fixed in order to not be differentiated by other human social activities having a certain independence or autonomy, which served as an aesthetic aspect, but which weakened the power of negative influence on the other parts of social life, but it never detached and it will not completely detach by the society.

Sociology analyses the entire society, any system or subsystem analyzed being reported to the whole it belongs, at its structural, functional and evolutionary connections. The sociology of literature investigates the literary phenomena or processes, both synchronically and diachronically, in relation to the entire historical society to which it belongs.

One of the responsibility of the sociology is to explain this continuous movement, this evolution of the literature, to bring to light the socio-historical causes which determines its modifications, namely the temporality or the historicity, trying to establish certain interdependencies and interactions between the society and the literature, having logical or correlational nature. This doctoral thesis „Groups, communities and literary institutions in communist Romania. A study regarding the sociology of literature” belongs to the sociology of literature. We propose to study the literary groups taking into account the fact that the project of communist power followed the identity of a single-party and the creation of a

society with no social classes and of the new man, and the literature, by default the writer, represented the important propaganda weapon to achieve this communist ideal.

The main challenge of this research is to argue that those three literary groups from the communist era („Echinox”, „Grupul de la Iași” and „Cenaclul de Luni”) had at the beginning the profile of marginal groups in the Romanian literary field, but finally they imposed in the Romanian culture, having a dominant position in the literary field, acquiring a symbolic capital that can determine the change of the literary field profile, becoming undeniable landmarks in the Romanian culture. In our research, we analyse also the role of these literary groups to regain the autonomy of the literary camp and the modalities they found to distance from the political power.

We chose these three literary groups based on a few criteria. Firstly, these groups have writers belonging to the so called *80th Generation*. (Not all of them are part of this generation, for example only a few writers from the „Echinox” group are part of this generation).

Taking into account the fact that the communist regime followed the social marginalization of the man of culture, the apparition of a new generation of writers was a surprise. Fighting with the propaganda, with the communist censorship and the ideological fight of the communist system to transform the culture in a stalinist cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the young writers had a reaction of subversion. They are the called *80th Generation*.

Secondly, these groups represented some alternative, nonconformist spaces which tried both through literary cenacles and through editorial groups, gathered (or not) around some student magazines, to enlarge the space of the literary autonomy in regard to the political field. Those editorial spaces offered to the young people the opportunity to become visibles and to realize a valuable literature that will change the face of the entire Romanian literature, and the process of becoming writers to not be blocked by the political system. The writers who joined these literary groups imposed on the literary field, so that these groups were opened, free spaces based on exchange of experience, spirit of competition, constructive criticism, issues that were useful for they to become devoted writers.

Another criterion was the form of those three literary groups to oppose to the communist dictatorship through the so called *resistance through culture*. The preoccupation of the writers from „Echinox” and from „Cenaclul de Luni” was not to create a political movement or to advance towards the political protest against the Ceaușescu regime, but to

create a very good literature that will become a landmark in the Romanian culture and will change the face of the Romanian literature. „Grupul de la Iași” was a movement of intellectuals from Iași having in common the inclination towards reading, towards the Western world literature, the desire to be in the know about the new cultural political ideas from the cultural space. But many aspects determined the group to change from one with nonconformist acts to one with dissident acts.

The *resistance through culture* organized around the important critics of the moment (Ion Pop, Marian Papahagi, Ion Vartic, Alexandru Călinescu, Nicolae Manolescu) who helped the apparition of works of aesthetic value and who sustained a normal climate in the Romanian literature despite the problems and the confusion created by the magazines assigned to the Security. To the Romanian culture, these groups offered books and artistic works having an undeniable aesthetic value, despite the continuous fight with the multi-layered censorship. The intellectuals of those 3 groups kept their criteria and their values that they won again when the communist regime allowed the liberalization in the mid 60s. Under these conditions, the party apparatus had to content with the seeming of alignment at the official propaganda given by this cult of personality and of propaganda delivered by the authors.

Another element which influenced the choice of these groups was the apparition of a valuable literature, which was uncomfortable for the regime because it was innovator, subversive, eulogized by the free world, by the Free Europe, especially through the voice of Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca, that determined artistic phenomena almost like the *underground* culture with many features specific to the *alternative culture*, but it was not a remonstrant, informal *underground*.

And the last criterion was practically. We had the possibility to interview those who were active members of those three literary groups, because most of them live in the country, are actively involved in the literary life and they have dominant positions in the Romanian literature, so that is why it was possible to contact them. Some of them belonged to the literary relationships network of Prof.Dr.Mr. Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, making easier the contact with them, which determined them to accept finally the interview.

For a such study, we considered that from the very beginning, we have to include the subject of our research in the field of the sociology of literature. Choosing the literary world under the communist regime as area of investigation, we focused our attention on the

sociological theory from the works of Pierre Bourdieu. From his sociological project, we resorted especially at the camp theory and at the concept of „habitus”, considering that they are extremely profitable to analyse the totalitarian society and the literary world as a specific field.

But to give points to the evolution of literary groups („Echinox”, „Grupul de la Iași” and „Cenaclul de Luni”) from marginal groups to groups with a dominant positions in the literary field, we resorted at building the political and literary context where those groups asserted. To offer a better image about the literary life before and after 1989, we made also a sociological study regarding the literary activity of the writers during the communism and the post-communism. The quantitative approach regarded to obtain a perspective of the writers in the communist period and also a comparison between the literary life of the writer during the communism and the post-communism.

The studies concerning the sociology of the literature do not have in their program the analysis of some marginal groups in the Romanian literary field („Echinox”, „Grupul de la Iași” and „Cenaclul de Luni”) that imposed later in the Romanian culture through works and writings having an undeniable aesthetic value, achieved a symbolic fund and a dominant position in the Romanian literary field and determined the change of the Romanian literature, becoming landmarks in the Romanian culture. They did not propose to analyse the role they had to regain the autonomy of the literary field in regard to the communist power that wanted to subordinate the literary field to the political one.

In our research, we have 12 interviews that filled the absent data from the literary studies about these groups. We took seven interviews to the writers belonging to the group „Echinox”, four interviews to the writers of the group „Grupul de la Iași” and one interview to a writer who was member of the group „Cenaclul de Luni”. The data about the history of the groups and also their biographical data were filled with other sources (literary dictionaries, literary histories, interview books and journals).

*The interviews.* The different places for the interviews were chosen by them, as the writers who were members of the group „Echinox” did. In Cluj, we took three interviews at the Faculty of Letters from the University Babeş-Boylai, one interview at the Faculty of Sociology from the same University, one interview at the magazine „Steaua”, one interview at the Cafe „Klausenburg” from Cluj and one interview through Skype, because that person

chose this method, taking into account his poor health, this method being the only one possible for this interview.

In Iași, we took one interview at the Faculty of Psychology from the University „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” from Iași, one interview at the magazine „Timpul”, another interview in the Office of the Director of the Central University Library „Mihai Eminescu” from Iași and another one at the parents-in-law of one of our subjects.

In Bucharest, we took one interview at one of our subjects.

Our subjects (in the order of the pieces of information) were: Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, Prof.Dr. at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences from the University „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” from Iași; Alexandru Călinescu, Prof.Dr. at the Faculty of Letters from the University „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” from Iași; Liviu Antonesei, Prof.Dr. at the Faculty of Psychology from the University „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” from Iași; Marius Lazăr, lecturer at the Faculty of Sociology and Social Assistance, from the University Babeș-Bolyai from Cluj; Sanda Cordoș, Prof.Dr. at the Faculty of Letters from the University Babeș-Bolyai from Cluj; Ruxandra Cesereanu, lecturer at the University Babeș-Bolyai; Corin Braga, Prof.Dr. and Dean at the Faculty of Letters from the University Babeș-Bolyai from Cluj; Ion Pop, literary critic; Adrian Popescu, editor in chief of the magazine „Steaua”; Ion Bogdan Lefter, Prof.Dr. and Dean at the Faculty of Letters from the University of Bucharest; Zoltán Rostás, professor at the Faculty of Sociology and Social Assistance from the University of Bucharest; Sorin Antohi, writer.

The interview guide had the next topics:

- The history of the group/ the magazine/ the cenacle making evident the socio-political context;
- The conditions of the name of the magazine/ the group/ the cenacle;
- The description of the editorial/ group/ cenacle meetings;
- The description of the informal meetings of the members of the group;
- The type of relationships existing between the three literary groups
- The problems of the magazine/ the group/ the cenacle with the Communist censorship;
- The role of the magazine/ the group/ the cenacle experience in the professional trajectory of the subjects;

The last method used to gather the data was the *questionnaire*. The writers belonging to the Writers' Union of Romania who started their activity before 1989 constituted the target group of the questionnaire. The item of the questionnaire included 400 subjects, but only 62 responded. We were allowed to identify the literary publicistic activity of the writers during the communism, the relationship of the writers with the communist censorship, the affiliation to the literary groups and to the literary artistic institutions of the writers and the implication in the political life of the writers.

This work is structured on five chapters. In the first chapter we spoke about the relationship between the literature and the sociology, defining the research object of the sociology of literature.

In the second chapter we analyse the concept of field from the point of view of Pierre Bourdieu and we present how does he apply this concept within the French literary field.

In the third chapter we present concisely the important historical moments of the communism, from the literary life point of view, analyzing the literary artistic institutions, like the Writers' Union of Romania and the „Mihai Eminescu” School, and also three literary groups that are not part from our detailed research: „Cercul Literar de la Sibiu”, „Școala de la Tîrgoviște” and „Grupul Oniric”. Its concisely analyse has the purpose to present the context of the three literary groups that form the object of our research: „Echinox”, „Grupul de la Iași” and „Cenaclul de Luni”.

The fourth chapter introduces us in the practical part of the work. We made the statistical analysis of the questionnaire applied to the writers who started their literary activity during the communism. The item of the questionnaire is not a representative one, thanks to the small number of subjects, but some inclinations in the communist and post-communist literature field can be observed from the analysed data.

In the fifth chapter we analyse three representative literary groups for the period of communism: „Grupul Echinox”, „Grupul de la Iași” and „Cenaclul de Luni”.

## Conclusions

This thesis started by thinking that the three literary groups from the communist period („Echinox”, „Grupul de la Iași” and „Cenaclul de Luni”) had at the beginning the profile of some marginal groups in the Romanian literary field, but finally they impose in the Romanian culture, they occupied dominant positions in the literary field and they achieve a symbolic capital that can determine the change of the literary field, becoming faster undeniable in the Romanian culture.

Our research points out the role that those literary groups had to regain the autonomy of the literary field and the modalities they found to keep the distance from the political power taking into account the fact that the project of the communist power wanted to built the identity of the single-party but also to create a society with no social classes and the new man. The literature, by default the writer, were the important propaganda weapons in achieving this communist ideal.

The first step to regain the autonomy was the attempt to the writers to get out from the aesthetics of the socialist realism and to try to gain an aesthetic autonomy. „Grupul de la Sibiu” and „Grupul Oniric” are the first accelerators of the freedom of expression, the basic principle of any form of resistance through literature. The beginning of the people from these groups is carried forward by literary groups that tried, both through literary cenacles and through editorial groups, gathered around some student magazines, to enlarge the literary autonomy space.

This fight to regain the autonomy of the literary field in relation to the political field was carried forward and ended by the literary groups „Echinox”, „Grupul de la Iași” and „Cenaclul de Luni”, that represented alternative, nonconformist spaces.

These literary groups responded substantially to the necessity of the artists having dominant positions in the literary field to get away from the legitimacy and the commitment offered by the dominant cultural courts. These groups represented something like the alternative literary organisms, innocent and guiltless at the beginning, but gathering a



symbolic capital from many writers from the group. This determined the attainment of a symbolic capital of the entire group and of a dominant position in the literary field.

In this moment, these literary groups that had a marginal position in the Romanian literary field at the beginning, have dominant positions in the Romanian literature and can change the profile of the literary field.

The literary group „Echinox” suffered significant changes in time. At the beginning it took the form of a marginal literary group in the Romanian cultural field. It started thanks to a group of enthusiast young students who initiated an authentic literary movement as a liberty form and *resistance through culture* at the communist regime. This marginal group is formed around some important men of culture: Ion Pop, Marian Papahagi and Ion Vartic, who will impose an aesthetic direction to the „Echinox” magazine that was far from the socialist realism imposed by the communist regime and who will forward the cult of value, the valorization of aesthetics, the bookish, the erudition, the critical discourse, the multicultural spirit (by the publication of articles in Romanian, German and Hungarian).

From a marginal literary group it becomes a literary group having a dominant position in the Romanian culture, so that it has as a result writers from the „Echinox” group, imposing after this in the Romanian cultural space. In time, 200 writers became part from the members of the group, most of them being editors of the magazine in its 45 years, at this moment being part of the Romanian cultural field with an important symbolic capital. The entire elite from Cluj and even Transylvania gathered around the „Echinox” magazine, therefrom the big number of well-known authors in the Romanian literature. That is why we can say that a change took place in the „Echinox” group from a marginal position to a dominant position in the Romanian literary field.

„Grupul de la Iași” is an atypical group, it was not an homogenous group, at the beginning did not have the purpose to fight against the regime, but it had in common the desire to write, to read and to do a good literature, to exchange books and new ideas. An important feature of the informal group was the inclination towards reading, towards the Western universal literature, was the desire to be in the know with the new cultural political ideas from the international cultural space. Both student magazines „Dialog” and „Opinia Studențească” provided the space necessary for the visibility and appreciation in the Romanian cultural literary space. Some of the members of the group found in the magazines from Iași the perfect

space for the nonconformist writers, the cultural-literary space where they could have write, codified, more numbered, so that it can taste from the liberty of expression in a communist regime.

The nonconformist acts of the group determines the reaction of the Security (investigations, inquisitions), and the group acquired public identity through the name received from the Security and through the reaction of the Free Europe, through the voice of Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca, that put the name „Grupul de la Iași”. Thus, from an informal marginal group changes into a dominant group as a result of violent reactions of the Security and eulogistic reactions of the Free Europe.

For the members of the group, both student magazines „Alma Mater”/„Dialog” and „Opinia studentească” were an institutional support for training and appreciation in the cultural literary field from Iași, having an influence on the national literary field and on the Romanian intellectuality from the exile.

The unequal participation at the profit of the symbolic capital gained by „Grupul de la Iași” can be the main reason of its dissolution, of its problems. As opposed to „Echinoc” and „Cenaclul de Luni” that won a position in the Romanian literary field by producing an auto-discourse, „Grupul de la Iași” did not prepare a convincing discourse for a better appreciation in the Romanian cultural literary field. However, the writers of „Grupul de la Iași” gained an important symbolic capital, both through their affiliation as a group and through their individual professional trajectory, that determined to impose in the Romanian literary field.

„Cenaclul de Luni” changes also from a marginal group into a group with a dominant position in the Romanian literary field. This group appears thanks to some young students gathered around an important cultural personality of the Romanian literature, Nicolae Manolescu. At the beginning, we read a few times, the audience was small, but in a short time, we can speak about fame in the literary space with publications of collective volumes and of second volumes.

The preoccupation of the writers in „Cenaclul de Luni” was not to create a political movement or to progress in the political protest in relation to the Ceaușescu regime, but to create a very good literature that will become a landmark in the Romanian culture, will change the face of the Romanian literature and will mark the way to the new literary movement, *the postmodernism*. They wrote a valuable literature, uncomfortable for the regime, inovator, by

default subversive, eulogized by the free people, by the Free Europe, especially through the voice of Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca, what determined artistic phenomena, something like the *underground* culture with many features specific for the *alternative culture*, but it was not a remonstrant, unofficial *underground* (so that the cenacle was official and at the beginning took place in a hall of the Faculty of Letters). The *resistance through culture* was the way to oppose to the communist dictatorship.

They published books and artistic works with an absolute aesthetic value, in a period where was a continue fight with the censorship. Besides the fact that the authors wrote an innovator poem, they were part of the actual circuit of the intellectual magazines from that time, they collaborated with all the magazines from the country, they were active participants to the intellectual world and to the general cultural movement. Taking into account the fact that the communist regime followed the social marginalization of the man of culture, the young writers made common cause, they were together in a subversion reaction. They are the so called *80th Generation*.

The 80th Generation formed in the central university literary groups from the country: București, Cluj, Iași and Timișoara, groups that were sustained most frequently by their own cultural magazines. The literary cenacle itself is an *underground* form, where the intellectual young people could form in a paradoxical freedom of the spirit taking into account the fact that the communist regime used institutional absorption strategies for the intellectual young people.

What approves also the dominant position of these literary groups in the Romanian cultural field is the reaction of the communist state that saw in this new cultural movement the first collective reaction against the imposed values system and that is why it resorted to brutal action for the marginalization or for the forced replacement of the leaders of literary groups or for the prohibition of their meetings. Another argument for passing these three literary groups from marginal groups to dominant groups in the literary field is the attention from the cultural magazines created for the communist regime and the fact that they were strongly criticizing everything that happened around these three magazines or they disclosed the coded message of the subversive texts published by the authors.

As a result of our research we can mention also other observations. The first one that we can point out is about the *formation mechanisms of literary groups during the communism*.

The first mechanism is determined by their association and their affiliation around some student magazines, formal, institutionalized spaces that offered to the writers the opportunity to train and to become visibles in the literary field.

The writers that wanted to impose in the literary field affiliated to these groups that were opened, free spaces, and even if there were also importuners, they were based on exchange of experience and the harmful spirit of competition was felt less. Reading, criticizing and having different issues were things that became useful for all the participants, no matter their place in the group.

A system of literary relationships, becoming useful for the evolution of the writers in the literary field was created in these training groups. The more the literary group that all the writers frequented had a stronger symbol capital in the literary field, the better their appreciation became easier to do in the Romanian literary field.

Another mechanism regarding the training of the groups (that can be observed especially at „Grupul de la Iași”) is the manner how certain institutions are doing their activities and the initiatives of a group of friends. Those who chose the name „Grupul de la Iași” were on the one side the communist political power, the Security, and on the other hand the one regarding the mediation; at the Free Europe they were speaking freely about „Grupul de la Iași”. It worked as an informal group, the relationships being based on trust, amity and friendship feelings, some of them being actively involved in the student magazines „Alma Mater”/„Dialog” or „Opinia Studentească”.

Another mechanism is the one that has the form of literary cenacles representing a specific form of the literary life. The cenacle is a meeting of writers, some of them having experience, others being at the beginning of their career. They meet to read their works, to submit them to the specialized audience, to exchange the pieces of information and the literary ideas.

The literary groups represented *spaces of alternative literary culture* in relation to the literature officially accepted by the political power, and in some moments they prepared the space for the manifestation of *contraculture* forms. In these literary groups existed a valuable literature, and they represented an alternative for the literature officially accepted by the political power. But in certain situations, the freedom of creation, of communication, of

thinking, of expression could have forms of contraculture, of opposition in relation to the officially accepted literary culture.

Every literary group analyzed had *a specific role to win the autonomy of the literary field*, it existed a passible distance in relation to the political power.

The literary group „Echinox” fight to regain the autonomy of literary aesthetics, coming from the socialist realism and it started to recuperate the lost literary aesthetic value.

„Grupul de la Iași” had the role of a dissident cultural movement. In certain moments, some of the members of the group were politically involved, demonstrated through the dialogue opened for the political regime between Dan Petrescu and Liviu Cangeopol from the book „Ce-ar mai fi de spus? Discuții libere într-o țară ocupată” („What else to say? Free discussions in a busy country”)

„Cenaclul de Luni” represented a space with an alternative culture almost like the *underground* culture, it was not actually a remonstrant, informal underground. In this space existed a literature, especially a poem absolutely uncomfortable for the regime, extremely innovator, by default subversive, that was changing the cultural paradigm, opinions, mentalities in our literary and cultural space, bringing our literature at the same level with the Western one.

During the communism, existed *a solidarity and a stronger cohesion among the writers* that made part from the same literary group, but also between the writers from different literary groups, now that they were having in common interests, beliefs, ideas generating an unitary mode of action.

Taking into account the fact that in the press, in the newspapers, in daily papers were published many propaganda articles and poems exalting the communist regime and the governor Nicolae Ceaușescu, discourses of the cult of personality imposed directly by the political apparatus, taking into account the tension and the conflictual situation between the collaborationist intellectuals and the rest of the intellectual world, the writers (that appeared into these literary groups) kept their criteria and their aesthetical values, that lead to the apparition of a valuable literature, to the change of the profile of the literary field and which occupied three dominant positions into the Romanian literature field.

*„ [...]the Romanian literature written during the communism is the most challenging, difficult and complicated literature written ever in the Romanian literary field, through its incredible mixture of moral, aesthetics, literary ideas and political ideology, compromises and resistance, success and failure<sup>1</sup>”*

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<sup>1</sup> Marcu Luminița, „Face to face with the literature written in communism”, *Observatorul cultural*, no. 244 from 26 October 2004.