

## **Representations of the modern epoch in the historiography and historical literature from the People's Republic of Romania (1948-1965)<sup>1</sup>**

The research *Representations of the modern epoch in the historiography and historical literature from the People's Republic of Romania (1948-1965)* outlines the main tendencies of those types of narration, history and literature, in a period when the writing was powerfully constrained by ideological rigors. The two components of this research, the historical and literary writing, in the beginning period of the Romanian communism, have constituted the object of many researches, so, at a first glimpse, the resumption of a past extremely present on the shelves of the specialized libraries transforms it in a banal demarche. However, the study of the cultural life from the Romanian communism, with these two components, is far from being exhausted. An approach from the perspective of the cultural history that discusses more thoroughly concepts present for a long period of time in the imaginary and in the Romanian public life, may successfully complete the analysis regarding the historiographical orientation and the literary life, in a country that was in full process of transformation.

Thus, we emphasize the manner in which, through fiction, the writers transmitted concepts and perspectives on the past. The literature and history were close and helped each other. In fact, the common points of those two narrative types, which are extrinsically different, are numerous. Both are tributary to the narration and are close through writing, through the way of organizing the text and by the influence they exert on the imagination of the reader.

This research is structured in a manner that makes visible the discourse resemblance between the historiography and the literature of that period. In order to capture the surprising connection observed between the two types of writing and to emphasize the way in which literature took historiographical concepts and made them more accessible to the public, we dedicated the first chapter to the historiographical life from People's Republic of Romania. We follow the representations of the modern epoch in this period, the measure in which a century was rethought on the base of the dialectical and historical materialism and a series of

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historical characters got entirely different dimensions, being regarded from the perspective of the socialist present.

Our research focuses on the representations regarding the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because they were the most present in the official discourse and in the public space, they created serious myths, helped building heroes as Tudor Vladimirescu and Nicolae Bălcescu and took into consideration moments that structured the modern Romanian state. We extended our research also on the representations of the uprising from the beginning of the next century because from the ideological point of view of the moment it was a major one. In the attempt to obtain legitimacy, the regime fully profited from using the memory of the year 1907, so the uprisings represented a source of inspiration for novels that became very popular like *Barefoot* (by Zaharia Stancu) and *Family chronicle* (by Petru Dumitriu). In the historical and literary representations regarding the modern epoch, the year 1907 was one of the most used moments and became very present in the public space, becoming a source of inspiration for Tudor Arghezi who came back on the literary scene, after a period in which he was excluded.

We propose this structure for the first chapter, focusing on certain moments of the modern epoch, which correspond exactly with those approached in the historical literature. In the second chapter we follow, using a similar structure, the literary works that had as subject fragments from the modern history of the Romanians. Although the transfer of concepts on which we concentrate our attention took place from history to literature, the choosing of the historical moments for analysis was determined by a reverse perspective, from the literary works to historiography.

The historical writing approached many themes, but the literature preferred only a part of them. Thus, using the criteria of the motives present in the historical literature, we chose the historiographical perspectives on which we focus our research. So, we analyze works, themes and personalities: the movement led by Tudor Vladimirescu, the 1848 revolution, aspects from time of the monarchy, the Independence war and the uprising from 1907. As an interesting fact, the Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza was present in the choices of the writers only by accident, through mentions inserted in works that had other subjects.

There were many literary works dedicated to the modern epoch, writers launched on the literary scene in the years of the socialist realism but also those famous in the interwar period wrote about different aspects of the Romanian modernity. The new demands imposed to the literature forced them to keep in mind numerous aspects in depicting the characters, but also literary and historical precepts. The writers had to inform themselves about the new

historiographical orientations in order to construct historical representations accepted for publishing but also appreciated.

Thus, we take into consideration the writers and the works without neglecting certain aspects as the social status of the writer, the capital of trust we enjoyed in the public space, the public offices held or the possible material advantages one could have had. We propose an ample perspective on the literature without ignoring the person of the writer, the constraints he had to face and the measure in which his social status influenced his decisions, especially in the context of a totalitarian regime.

After we will review, in the second chapter, the works that address each historical moment, we will continue in the third chapter with the analysis of some works representative for the manner in which the historical characters were presented to the public. Because of the prestige some of the authors had, some works remained extremely known until now, they were studied in schools by generations of pupils or were on the lists of the well appreciated contemporary writers. It is about poems, theatrical pieces or novels that became emblematic for the representation of a certain historical moment. For the analysis of the representations of the 1848 revolution, we chose as a case study the novel of Camil Petrescu, *A man among men*. The representations specific to the period of the Romanian monarchy, the Independence war and the uprising of 1907 were presented altogether because these moments are found in the same novel, *Family chronicle*, by Petru Dumitriu. For the moment 1907, we also dedicated the analysis of the novel *Barefoot*, by Zaharia Stancu, a work that enjoyed an impressive success during the period of the Romanian communism, not only in the years of the People's Republic. As an exception to the reasoning is the interpretation of the representations regarding the character Tudor Vladimirescu and the movement led by him. We were surprised to observe that, although he was a key character in the communist historical pantheon, the revolutionary was not a subject of inspiration for any important author and his personality wasn't depicted in a successful novel, resisting the test of time, which could be appreciated in the present. Instead, many novels, plays, poems were dedicated to him, works that approach one at a time the most interesting historiographic perspectives that we chose to analyze altogether, structuring them according to the vision on the characters of the revolutionary movement and of the events from 1821. The criteria according to which we chose the literary works for the case studies depended on their impact in the public space. Thus, we focused on the circulation of the works, the prestige their authors enjoyed but also the fragments of their texts present in the schoolbooks of that period. To the latter we dedicate a subchapter in which

we analyze the historical concepts that the pupils could acquire during the Romanian language courses.

So, we make an inventory of the texts that are our sources, placing the literary analysis in the political contexts and revealing the meaning of the historical concepts used in fiction. The period we study favors a deconstructive approach in which we observe how the narration, historical or literary, is actually an ideologically construction. We start from the actual analysis of the sources for following the manner in which they helped promoting the official discourse and the building of a legitimacy that the newly installed power needed. In the analysis between politics, culture and everyday life through the path politics-history-literature resides the element of novelty and the personal contribution to this kind of scientific demarche. We observe and analyze the manner in which, in some cases, the three were intertwined, arriving to support with a single voice the same principles and wished that the communist regime used in the popularization of some directions dictated by the ideology and in the building of a legitimacy that every political power needed. So, the historical myths were built and became popular through literature and were perceived in everyday life, acting as an instrument of ideology.

