The Recent Past of a Minor Culture: A Crossroad Culture[1]

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Abstract
The paper deals with a specific case in the larger frame of European local identities and respectively cultural diversity, the case of the Romanian culture (considered as minor on language and socio-political grounds but nevertheless a crossroad culture, subject to important influences both from East and West). More closely, the paper is interested in a moment (1945-1964 - when the cultural trend made a shift from the Modernist West to Soviet East) of radical (and artificially imposed) shift in the Romanian cultural perspective and in its history of ideas, with consequences on the current cultural identity. The paper focuses on cultural debates, polemics and interviews as reflected in the Romanian cultural press in the 1960s and the manner in which the dynamics of artificially imposed cultural (and ideologically influenced) ideas shaped a new local identity. The Romanian cultural press in the mid 1940s-mid 1960s (with a closer look on a series of major journals of the time) has recorded the convulsive phenomenon of change (in attitude and editing policies). The paper intends to connect two major concepts, that of minor culture and the circulation of ideas in Eastern Europe. The intention of the study is at a larger scale to methodologically and thematically integrate a case of local culture into the current background of cultural studies research on identity, by using an interdisciplinary approach (connecting cultural studies, journalism and history of ideas). The conclusions of the paper relate to the dynamics and the consequences of these major transformations taken place at the level of an artificially imposed cultural paradigm. The analysis also establishes some important coordinates on which its recent past has shaped this minor culture and what kind of convulsions and internal transformations or negotiations have taken place in order for it to maintain its local identity survive as a culture to a radical moment in the Eastern European culture.

1   Introduction

Developed under the slogans of a culture "*for* the people, *about* the people, *by* the people", Romanian culture is during the late 1940s and 1950s an interesting case to analyse when discussing popular cultures in relation to local identities. This becomes more challenging when approaching cultures which are considered to be minor or marginal (concept to be analysed in the current study), in this case Eastern European countries. More than the decades to follow, the late 1940s and especially the 1950s are significant for the shaping of a type of culture which was mutilated (under the dissimulating image of a mass culture) by the Communist totalitarian regime. Under the cliché propaganda discourse, the Romanian culture of the 1950s was disfigured, unrecognisable if compared to its

characteristics and tendencies before the instalment of Communism.[2] The Romanian culture – always a crossroad culture, between Western and Eastern influences – was in the 1950s forced, under political impact, to take a radical ideological turn towards the Soviet cultural model. In the late 1940s, the Romanian culture was stopped from its development towards the West and forced to enter the Soviet[3] pattern: we speak of a "captive" or beheaded culture: the elites were either eliminated (by being imprisoned, sent to labour camps or simply forbidden to publish) or forced to adjust to the official discourse.

> Suppression of the freedom of communication and travelling, wild censorship, dogmas, normative documents, bureaucratic domination, wooden language, empty slogans […], propaganda, […] the supreme horror for any writer who conceives and writes freely and independently: his transformation in a literary clerk and an obedient instrument of propaganda. He was thrown a few financial privileges. […] He was forced - especially those maintaining a reflex of independence – to duplicity and hypocrisy, opportunism and cynicism. (Marino 1996: 18-19)

In approaching this cultural shift, specialised (especially literary) press is the most genuine testimony, revealing the dramatic change of idea paradigms, the debates and subjects catching the attention of the time. However, in the totalitarian context cultural press is even more significant, as it actually shows the complex mechanisms through which official discourse was "brought to life" and propaganda put in practice, through articles, prose and poetry sections, criticism, inquiries among artists, transcriptions of meetings and so on.

Culture was meant to transform radically: it was intended to be no longer an elitist but a mass culture and therefore it was aggressively levelled (by eliminating, changing or replacing the prominent voices, in a complex mechanism of punishment or reward). Ioana Macrea-Toma accurately characterizes the new "face" of literature as subordinated to politics by observing that:

> When literature becomes the field of a forced intrusion of political ideology, its freedom of creation diminishes but its affirmation and influencing symbolic power increases. Under the imperatives of the moment, the writer becomes an agent, but also a receiver of

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[2] The Romanian culture has always been what we can call a *crossroad culture* because of its geopolitical placement between different cultural spaces. Also because of this, there neither continuity nor stability have characterised Romanian culture. Until the 19th century, the main influence on Valachia and Moldavia (as Transylvania was under Hungarian dominance) was that of the Balkans and East (Turkish influence and governments, Slavic alphabet). In the 19th century, the cultural trend was that of recovering the Latin origins (through language, Latin alphabet) and an interest in adopting the features of the Western culture. This intensified after 1866, when a German origin dynasty was founded, enduring until 1947.

[3] The Communism in the 1950s was repressing national identities, as the idea of 'Soviet' was trans-national. However, although the Soviet pattern was conceived as universal, the Romanians perceived this as "Russian" (especially because of the language, examples, motifs, personalities - see Zhdanov, books).While in the previous period Romanian culture was focusing on nationalism, during Communism had to adopt – at least until 1964 - the Soviet paradigm (which opposed the idea of nation, but protected local minorities, diminishing the importance of the state and major ethnic identity).

the both aggressive and fluctuant dogmas, being forced to make, according to his inherited capitals and institutional position created, conversions, adjustments and compromises [emphasis added]. […] A series of paradoxes govern a cultural space that, although in a crisis after 1945 (following the Soviet model of the brutal intrusion of the Power on the field of art) instead of dying under the restrictions, survives and even experiences states of creative effervescence [emphasis added]. (2009: 5)

Culture was also being purged (from people to libraries - personal or public - publishing houses and so on) and finally "captured" into rigid ideological boundaries (both physical and psychological) in order to be better controlled. One important part of these boundaries was created by the building of a strong institutional system in charge with culture. After having resolved a more urgent matter such as "the conquering and the stabilising of the power of the State" (2007: 16), in 1948 and 1949, some actions are initiated as part of the process of literature appropriation by politics. In June 1948, the Romanian Academy changed its name to Academy of the Popular Republic of Romania and in the following year, an important institution was created - the Writers' Union - centralising important resources and levels of power (funds, publishing house, and magazines). In January 1949 other radical interventions took place through some legal measures adopted by the Romanian Workers' Party (RWP) with respect to the "stimulation of scientific, literary and artistic activities" (Selejan 2007: 171). Such decrees are continuously adopted during the late 1940s (such as the decree given in January, 14, 1949, for "book editing and distribution", considered an instrument for "stimulating literary creation"). Therefore, in 1948-1949, the official press started making visible the tendency of the regime to subordinate literature (applied through legislation, institutions and so on).
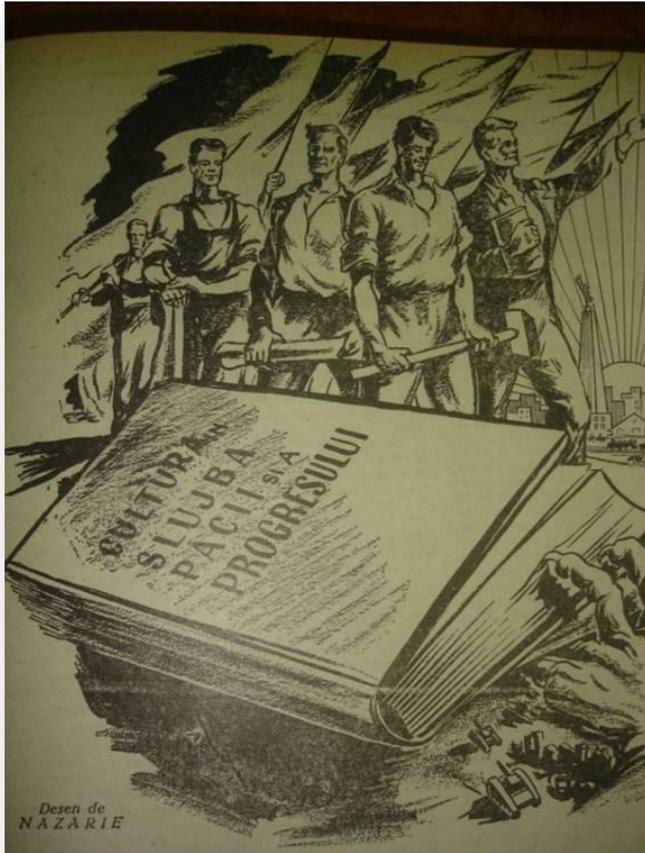
Fig. 1. A symbolic representation in the cultural publication *Flacăra* (1948) of the appropriation of culture by the political ideologies. The slogan is: *"Culture in service of peace and progress"*.

2   Explaining the Concepts

2.1   On "Minor Culture"

The concept of *minor culture* is employed in the current study at two functional levels. First of them, in a more general perspective on Romanian history, supports the idea that a culture can be perceived by the others as minor or major on a series of historical and linguistic factors but also on the basis of its relation to others, those having a "dominant discourse".[4] Being considered a minor culture can involve, as it is the case of Romania, having a language that is less familiar to other nations but especially from having a history of a small nation,

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[4] Considered as such on historical or linguistic grounds.

always threatened by a more important power due to its geopolitical position ("geographical predestination […] offers a privileged position for the concept of *boarder,* to which it adds a deeply symbolical meaning. Equally symbolical are the boarders established by people. […] A 'real' and equally 'fictional' limit", Boia 2008: 50-61).

However, beyond geopolitics, linguistics and history the concepts of *minority* and *marginality* gain significance within the discourse of *identity* and *otherness*.

> This is history: a never-ending discourse on the *others* [emphasis added]. […] The games of otherness are organised around the concept of *centre* and the axis reuniting the centre with the *periphery*. Few mythical figures are as powerful as *the centre of the world* […]. There is no use to wonder where it is situated: it lies where we decide to place it. […] Each individual materialises such a centre of the world: the universe spins around him. Each tribe, of course, each nation, each civilisation. […] Some centres prove to be more influential than others, in relation to the respective civilisations' expanding and acculturation force. […] For a few centuries, the centre of the world is the West, although with important movements from a period to another, even within the Western space. […] The rest is structured in relation to these central areas. […] The key-issue is after all, *who speaks of whom:* where is the speaker placed on the axis centre-periphery and where on this axis is the object of the discourse. […] The history of the Romanian space can offer in this respect a stimulating methodology lesson. Until the 14th century […] everything was known […] from *outside. It is a long discourse of the centre or several centres on a peripheral region. The peripheral condition seems a permanence (until the present at least, since I don't believe in fatality), with all the nationalists' hard tries to retrospectively force the movement to the centre* [emphasis added]. Here it was *an extremity* in relation to Ancient Greece, in relation to Rome, to the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire or its enemies, the Habsburg and Russian Empires, and *continues to be an extremity* (external, until 2007 and now already internal) of the European Union (2008: 54-61).

A second interpretation of the concept *minor* to be taken in consideration here refers to a meaning strictly dependant on the historical context of the late 1940s-1950s. The culture was in that time minor not for being Romanian, but because of its status as an instrument (culture *in the service of* proletarians) of propaganda. As Adrian Marino argues:

> The relationship between literature and politics is not uniform, neither homogeneous nor universal. It depends fundamentally on the political regime in which a literature activates. In a totalitarian state, such as Romania in the last decades [the study was written in 1990], literature has confronted two essential difficulties and problems: freedom and respectively being coordinated by propaganda – literature being an instrument of propaganda and political education. (1996: 126)
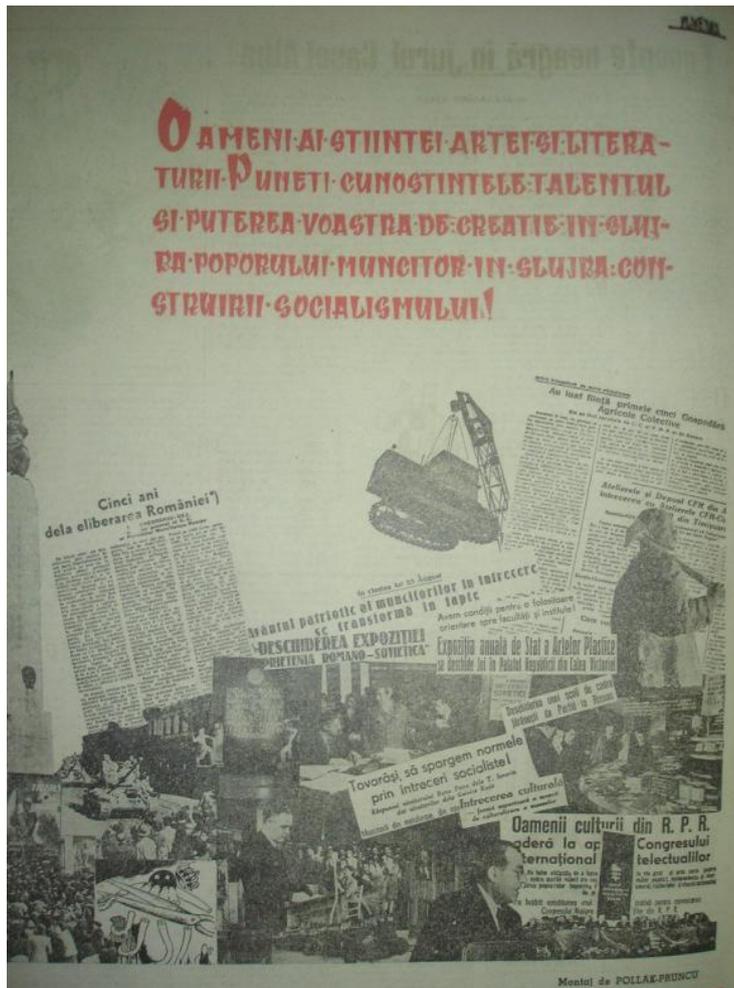
Fig. 2. "Scientists, artists and writers, bring your knowledge, talent, and creative power *in the service* of the working people, in the service of building socialism". Collage by Pollak-Pruncu, *Flacăra* (1949).

Thus, culture became minor as its aesthetic values were considered secondary and everything outside its functionality within the system was considered absurd and useless. The appropriation of culture by politics was performed aggressively, leaving no room for questioning political power and ideology.

2.2   On "Recent History": The 1950s

The decade 1948-1958[5] has a particular significance in the larger political context of Romanian Communism: it represent the period of the instalment of the Communist regime and the appropriation of culture as part of the propaganda system which was to legitimise the new power (which was lacking public support). Sorin Toma, editor-in-chief (between 1947-1960) of the Party official newspaper, *Scânteia*, wrote that the periodical "had the role to justify the politics of the Party and form public opinion in its spirit" (2004: 310), being officially submitted not to propaganda institutions, but to the leaders of the Party directly.

The decade 1948-1958 meant even more: culture was captive of the political power, but this ideological domination following Soviet models was actually imposed in a period of maximal dependence: it is the decade of Soviet troops on Romanian territory and therefore we can speak not only of a political, but also of a military pressure. The puppet-regime in Bucharest was ruled by Moscow and all "directions" in culture, economy and so on were decided there, with little compromise to the local leaders. Yet, the compromises referred in general to political details, culture being considered as subordinate to these. Gheorghiu-Dej himself and other local leaders had been Communist workers, "educated" by Moscow and saw no difference between ideology and aesthetics and understood the need for culture only as a propaganda instrument.

3   A "Captive" Culture

> *A sick landscape, but interesting in the perspective of a totalitarian aesthetics*
> (Negrici 2002: 14-15)

The appropriation of culture and its means of expression were extremely significant for the Communist regime in Romania after conquering power, in order to legitimise it. If usually ideological propaganda would lead, through persuasion, to obtaining power, in Romania the stages were reversed: ideologically influenced literature appeared after the installation of the new regime and "served not the ascension to power, but to its consolidation and legitimising" (Osman 2004: 48). As it had a very weak public support, the political regime needed culture and its language in order to persuade people and actually reshape their opinions and convictions, by controlling the truth. "By monopolising information, the Power creates and

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[5] The current study is part of a larger research plan: the project focuses on two moments of change 1950s and 1990s, the beginning and end of Communism and the large ideological paradigm shifts taking place in the two moments.

distributes a bastard entity, a *mixture of partial truths and credible lies, of reality and illusion, said and presumed – this hybrid product is* [emphasise added] *official information."* (Coman 2007: 134).

The regime created a complex control system in order to reach the minds and emotions, education and will of the receivers of the "information": propaganda (which "is the technique of influencing human action by the manipulation of representations", Lasswell 1995: 13). The purpose was to make the audience of this propaganda discourse react as expected, by maintaining it passive to some aspects while "mobilising" it towards others, but especially to control and filter whatever kind if information reached them: "the propagandist's task is to intensify attitudes favourable to his purposes, to reverse obstructive attitudes, to win the indifferent or at least to prevent them from becoming antagonistic" (1995: 18).

Intellectuals, Katherine Verdery argues, were considered necessary yet dangerous, because of their abilities to influence social values but also because their political perspective on the cultural role was different than the official one (1994: 64). Verdery adds that the talents of the intellectuals were also essential for legitimising the regime that needed the monopoly of the cultural means of production but particularly a monopoly on the language that had to be transformed into an "authorised" version, with ideological effects (1994: 65-67).

Culture was marked by limitation due to all the existing institutional, legal and ideological boundaries. Creation was no longer possible as such: it was submitted to so many rules and restrictions, which changed radically culture, from its purpose to its form. If in the later decades of Communist regime periods of controlled freedom were allowed, in the 1950s any sign of disobedience was punished in an exemplary form. Alexandru Jar's case of public discrediting can be given as an example of such practices. Jar was a writer with Communist background who had dared to ask some independence for writers: "everything had been carefully directed. […] The writers understood that actually they were the ones to be blamed […] or, in the best case, warned" (Toma 2004: 206).

Farce was not an exception but a rule in cultural meetings: everything, from roles to attitudes (enthusiasm, zeal, hatred and so on) was simulated. These role-plays were marked by a *collective* or *"organised lie"* (in Vaclav Havel's approach) or *convention* (both politically and socially based) regarding persuasion, belief and compromise. "Reality" and "fiction" were no longer easily distinguishable: *the reality,* explicitly the most important thing culture had to focus on, was actually fictionalised in this convention. In this role-play, parts were reversed:

> Propaganda was a surrogate of reality. Communist propaganda was trying […] to create a fictional world, in parallel to the daily experience and in a strong contrast to it, a world which citizens […] were *required to or at least pretend they believe in*. (Pipes, qtd. in Osman 2004: 49)

Propaganda itself represents therefore a very specific form of communication and social role distribution. A "real" culture is replaced by a simulacrum, a "fake" culture, a farce. More than hidden under these masks, culture was in fact disfigured, forced to fit in an artificial matrix and develop in a mutilated posture, being disciplined, militarily constraint to do so.

3.1 Communism: Ideology and Culture in the 1950s

3.1.1 An Identity Construct

Communism meant construction of identity: the Eastern European countries adopted the Soviet model on what I entitled 'constructing identities' policies, which meant creating a social complex matrix and its transmission, through language and other types of discourse and representations in order to shape identities of individuals and groups on ideological grounds. The complex mechanism of constructing identities was multileveled, from constructing individual identity patterns (the female, the worker, the *writer* etc.) to the construction of an entire culture *for* the people, *about* the people, *by* the people, actually a huge artificial construct.

> First of all, the identity is not essential, but *constructed*. […] The construction is radical. […] Secondly, not only the nation, but all group identities, cultural, professional, political identities and so on (classes, age groups) are *imagined* [emphasis added]. […] Thirdly, a fundamental role in constructing the identity is held by narration or by the discourse. […] *All* discursive actors have necessarily been invented. (Morar-Vulcu, 99-100)

Within culture, this reshaping or construction of an artificial group or individual identity meant – as stated below - institutionalising artists, who were transformed into paid "clerks", grouped in institutions, forced to respect plans, official normative papers and attend meetings, while discussions on culture had many times a focus on artistic "production" and paid work (privileges were meant for the "faithful" ones, but problems also existed, as a president of the Writers' Union explains to the political leader of the time when asking for a better financing: (the meeting takes place in a later period, but the situation and language are typical):

> Comrade George Macovescu: 'Our activity is being performed according to the indications you gave us. You told us repeatedly that our main task is to produce the book.

> Our production, the writers' production, comrade general secretary, is the book, the book we produce, the book that reaches the hands of our readers. We can report that this year's plan rises to 2600 literary titles to be published. […] We have to add that the number is good and we can state that we keep up with the material production, according to the state plan in our country. (Macrea-Toma 2009: 147)

If the regime was constructing identities in order to achieve the "new" man, within culture it was definitely "fabricating writers" (2009: 136).

3.1.2 S(t)imulated Debates

The situation, as cultural press reveals it, was paradoxical regarding cultural "effervescence": although real debates, contradictions, variety of ideas were not allowed (the only possibility being the use of the "wooden language" and the respect towards the ideology and the political norms on culture), simulating debates and intellectual verve was a favourite activity in the cultural press of the time. Many meetings, congresses, debates were organised, yet they could not be otherwise than empty of content, subject to the same institutionalised and normative aspects of culture. The convention was yet the opposite, press always recording "lively participation in discussions" (Selejan 1998: 8).

> These debates that have taken place this year at the Writers' Union – especially […] on poetry problems – have emphasised the importance of opinion opposition, of the help given by the group to the writers. […] In the *mass of writers* an ardent wish was born that also in the future this combative spirit, of responsibility and seriousness to animate the working sessions of the Writers' Union. To respond to this need, the Writers' Union Office, following the Soviet example, initiated the activation of creation sections. (Selejan 2007: 465)

When consulting the recordings of such discussions, the reader actually witnesses *plans* (writers always "engage" to write more and "better", in terms of ideological faithfulness) and conventional statements, everything expressed in the ideological wooden language ("this political jargon invaded language. […] Due to it, the power could mask and costume itself as it wanted" (Toma 2004: 315).

Even the measures taken to encourage and make these meetings more "dynamic" are artificial and bureaucratic (for instance, the writers' institutions start some commissions to "direct" the activity of creation, as well as debates and controversies (which are pure conventions), on imposed topics and in predictable terms, usually with the obsessive purpose to "plan" work or to be given instructions.

But sometimes, the masquerade had hidden purposes: the meeting, disguised into a working session, was actually meant to punish, to find a scapegoat for a certain problem or offer examples (see Jar's case, above, Toma 2004: 203-206). In addition to "exemplary" meetings, authors were also sanctioned in articles which, although written by critics or journalists, were commanded by political leaders:

> I received the task to write the article and the corresponding indications from Iosif Chişinevschi directly and not trough Leonte Răutu, trough which the connection to *Scânteia* was usually done. This fact itself showed me the importance that was given to the article. […] He [Chişinevschi] emphasised the fact that he was transmitting the indications of the Party leadership and that the initiative came from "comrade Dej himself". (2004: 331)

3.2 Correctional Measures and Resistance

Thus, more than establishing directions and censoring the "unfaithful" works, the regime was actually "punishing" or threatening to do so with those who dared to oppose. It is therefore interesting to see if this "resistance" existed and how it functioned and which were the correctional measures. As already mentioned, the former cultural elites (who had had pro-Western ideas and education) had been eliminated (taken form universities and institutes, sometimes even sent to labour camps), had to remain silent (no "signature right") or had to speak the new "language". While Niţescu (1995: 168) speaks of "the heroism of silence", Adrian Marino goes even further, speaking of resistance. He defined it as characterising:

> those who refused, directly or indirectly, silently or openly, to write in favour of the communist totalitarian regime; those who opposed in a way or another to the transformation of literature in instrument of propaganda; those who protested and resisted, more or less, to the directives, normative documents, censorship, legal and administrative decisions. (1996: 21)

These legal measures meant that "the ideological pressure (the Socialist Realism monopoly) was doubled by administrative pressure and even repressive measures. This way a bureaucracy with many ramifications and levels came to exist" (Toma 2004: 335). Marino's classification/hierarchy involved two main categories: passive and respectively active resistance. In the first category, the author placed first silent, passive, spontaneous and innocent resistance (the refusal to write) and secondly, an assumed, conscious refusal to write on order, festive articles and so on. In the second category (of active resistance), he places first political-literary and political resistance through literature (the explicit refusal: to sign,

collaborate, becoming an informer for the secret services, *Securitate*) and secondly, the most serious one (publishing clandestine works, sending books and papers abroad, collaborating with Radio Free Europe, adding political subtexts and so on) (1996: 21-27).

Despite the restrictions and resistance of some writers, culture (literature included) was prolific enough during Communism (hearing the numbers related to publishing, Ceauşescu comments that literature is "very productive", see Macrea-Toma 2009: 147). This happened even during the first decade (the 1950s), probably the most aggressive or restrictive in terms of ideological control. Therefore, an observation to be made is that acceptance and compromise were also common phenomena and they characterise the mainstream direction of the time. Due to the privileges offered to them (Macrea-Toma calls these intellectuals *priviligentsia*) or sometimes simply having no other choice, writers wrote as closely as possible to the ideological "guidelines". For the first category, interested in gaining privileges, to occupy a position within the state institutions or organisations, especially in the Writers' Union "meant the chance to influence the *kinds and amounts of things to be published, the formation of committees that would write school manuals and give out literary prizes* [emphasis added]" (Verdery 1995: 194).

A few very important writers of the time were even allowed - because of their talent and ideological fervent involvement - to write outside the ideological "pattern". We can speak of a *negotiation of boundaries or of canons,* as these authors used to "offer" (in exchange for this partial freedom of writing) numerous ideological articles or other works, very faithful to the official ideology. Sometimes these texts were very consistent both in dimensions and political involvement, such as Petru Dumitriu's extensive novel on the Danube-Black Sea channel, which was presented as a great Socialist work, while it was a labour camp mostly for political prisoners. Their conscious *negotiation* allowed some valuable works to appear in the 1950s, but this compromise had consequences on the respective authors' image.

As Nistor argues, "the rigid, schematic, ideological literary policy, exercised during socialist realism, would reduce book production and devoid of content the creation act. Few books during the 1950s *managed to survive artistically and even fewer survived morally"* (2009: 156). Some situations of compromise as presented in transcripts or other documents to which we gained access after 1989, place great interwar personalities in a very dramatic light. The manner in which the writers had to obey these ideological directions and bow to the political power (listening and obeying the instructions of political leaders with no equal education) is visible in transcriptions such as that of a dialogue recorded in an official meeting at the beginning of 1960 between an academy member and important interwar prose writer

(G. Călinescu) and the general secretary of the Communist Party, Gh.Gheorghiu-Dej. The academician came to speak about his book blocked by censorship and had to act as a "yes-man" while Dej was mentioning the party's involvement in establishing a "good direction" for writers.

> I annotated the part I read. I said what is wrong and what is right.[…] We don't make compromises. Compromises shouldn't be made neither in art nor with the Party spirit, that we must introduce in literature. I don't know why some writers avoid the Party spirit. […] We must direct the writers and show them how international events and fight against bourgeois ideology must be regarded.   (Dej qtd. in Toma 2004: 209)

3.3   The "Right" Way and Culture. Cultural Press and Propaganda

Dej's teaching attitude, simulating protection, towards the academician G. Călinescu (who was taught the "right" way to approach literature) was a common feature of the relation between politicians and artists. This "right" way meant some pre-established rules and the only thing to discuss when criticising a work of art was the 'degree' in which the Rule was obeyed. The criticism itself involved no longer just specialised critics but an analysis from the working class readers, even public group criticism. The purpose of all debates and meetings was to 'make' the works 'right'(see the discussion between G. Călinescu and Gheorghiu-Dej, Toma 2004: 208-210).

Artists were always treated with superiority and simulated tolerance (not only by the politicians but also by the proletarian readers), simulating the wish to become useful through their work (not so important as the proletarians' but ideologically necessary).

> One of these meetings from which our *writers had much to learn*, useful things they can use in their future creations, took place in the IOR factory [emphasis added]" (I, 179). The conclusions of such meetings are that the works can be improved and made to sound "right". This meant full acceptance from the writer of the proletarian criticism: "in my *first version* of the play, one of the characters, Ianco, dies. 'Why kill him, comrade', somebody asked, 'he is one of us, after all. Don't you think he can change with our help?' I confess, this question troubled me and I realized I had made a serious mistake. *Of course, I changed the plot* [emphasis added].   (Davidoglu, qtd. in Selejan 2007: 100)

The rules of a "good" writing meant that the form had to be simple ("write so that we could understand" is the slogan, Selejan 2007: 100), to present reality (in fact, a cliché picture of proletarian realities, written after the Soviet models) and not fictionalize (fantasy being considered a reminiscence of the "old" system of literature and a form of covering, hiding the truth).

The cultural press of the time was very much interested in the degree of covering these "real life" subjects. An "important progress can be noticed – Eugen Luca commented – especially in the short stories reflecting the life of plants and factories" (2007: 201), while the novelist Petru Dumitriu wrote a series of articles on the topic of building sites. Self-criticism was always appreciated:

> All these victories should not allow us forget the flaws that stop literature from progressing. Thus, prose has not yet succeeded comprehending the totality of important topics of the fight for building socialism and especially the main sector: the fight of the workers in the heavy industry. […] in poetry individualist manifestations are known, as criticised by the organ of the Central Committee of the Party, *Scânteia*. […] In some plays, the entire richness of today's life is impoverished […] showing the insufficient knowledge of truth. (Selejan 2007: 201)

Sometimes this self-criticism offers incredible samples of absurdity, such as this selection below, from 1953, showing that even love poetry had to be planned and became a social assignment for the writers: "Dan Costa: 'Definitely, we don't have a very good situation regarding love poetry. And this was not recognised by the criticism […]. It wasn't because we don't have a good situation regarding criticism either. But the readers told us and the poets themselves admitted it" (Selejan 2008: 263). However, such letters or references to these "voices" of the readers – if existing – are part of the same convention or collective lie.

Other absurd situations were those (beyond imposing proletarian subjects to artists) requiring intellectuals to support political measures and become interested in them (such as the example of poets writing on the benefits of *kolkhoz* policies). This was part of the policy of eliminating the "differences between intellectual and physical work".

Fig. 3. Advertising Socialist Realist novels, *Flacăra* (1949).

4   Conclusions

Mapping the Romanian cultural press of the late 1940s-1950s, we discover that the most prominent features are emptiness in content and repetitiveness (stereotypical language). Cultural press simulated "recording" a "live" phenomenon while in fact showed a propaganda convention. Culture was transformed merely in an instrument, therefore possessing a "minor" role. Aesthetics was submitted to political, ideological principles, to non-cultural factors and influences. The culture became a captive between very well organised political boundaries. Restrictions were extended on every level of culture, from organising and restricting *reading* (through the limitation of people and book circulation to purged libraries - "dangerous" books being placed in special funds) to *writing* and *publishing*. These were controlled through a centralised censorship and publishing system, as well as the institutionalising of the intellectual professions (unions, institutions, with a specific legislation) and privileges (controlled prizes, honoraries and so on).

Thus, the Romanian culture in the 1950s was suffering not only a dramatic change (from its tendency towards the West and modernism), but also an aggression and captivity (on political and even military grounds). Propaganda and ideological discourse, after the Soviet model, replaced all cultural initiatives and movements, while culture became a conventional mechanism with predicable methodologies and results. While it was meant to be a mass culture (*for* the people, *about* the people, *by* the people), actually both authors and readers were forced to adjust to the ideology and become "new people", enter individual and group patterns artificially created by the regime**.** The "disciplined" and uniform evolution of culture was just sometimes interrupted by a few exceptions, either due to resistance (which was punished) or to compromise (ideological negotiation).

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