

Rearticulating Socialist Subjectivities

**Class and Gender in Romanian Fiction during
Communism**

by

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I, Alexandru Demirel Emil Boican confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

This thesis proposes a socio-cultural analysis of the articulation of socialist subjectivities in Romanian fiction during the communist period. The question underpinning my research, therefore, concerns the way in which the literary articulation of subjectivity changed across two historical divides: from the inter-war period to Socialist Realism and from Socialist Realism to the literature of the troubling decade. This thesis will be argued over four chapters, two of which will examine the works of Mihail Sadoveanu while a further two will dissect the works of Augustin Buzura. Through the close reading of the works of Sadoveanu and Buzura, whose careers span the two aforementioned historical divides, this thesis will trace the complex rearticulating of class and gender subjectivities as they evolved throughout the communist period, as well as the importance of the communist regime's social legacies as regards the understanding of post 1989 social developments in Romania. Central to the communist regime's project of social transformation was the creation of an egalitarian society by default of the abolition of capitalist classes and gender inequalities. While the regime claimed that the material basis of these inequalities had been eliminated and social emancipation was well advanced, critics considered that the official egalitarian discourse had erased social and individual differences and engendered the so-called "faceless masses". In contrast to these views, this thesis will argue that the communist regime did indeed transform social relationships in many ways, generating new class and gender inequalities, rather than eliminating them. Thus, far from being uniform, socialist societies were heterogeneous, fragmented and were straddled by social antagonisms. This thesis will thus argue that the changes that took place in the literary articulation of class and gender during communism are of significance to both the understanding of the communist regimes as well as their lasting legacies.

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INTRODUCTION | Competing Theoretical Frameworks for Articulating Socialist Subjectivities

The fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe led to rapid political and economic changes that subsequently transformed these societies beyond recognition.¹ Yet, the legacies of the communist regimes have persisted long after their demise, and they have influenced post-communist social developments. It is therefore no surprise that the communist regimes' transformation of subjectivity – the individuals' relationships with themselves and others – has been the subject of debate and controversy. This thesis addresses this issue through an investigation of the discursive articulation of subjectivity in Romanian fiction during communism as it evolved in the officially sanctioned works. The approach this thesis takes goes beyond the prevailing view that disregards as ideological lies the officially sanctioned literature of the communist period. Taking the view that these works were no more and no less ideological than any comparable works of literature, for example, those of the inter-war period, this thesis dispenses with the problematic opposition between works of ideological propaganda and “true art” and, instead, seeks to answer the question of what articulations of social reality and subjectivities they promoted. In this vein, this thesis will ask whether the drive for social emancipation – the rhetoric of which was, as will be shown, central to the communist regime's discourse – was reproduced in the literary forms discussed, and if so, in terms of ideological containment, was transfigured into hierarchical power structures.

All art forms from painting and sculpture to film and music played an important role in the communist regimes' articulation of socialist subjectivities; the so called “New Man”. However, it can be argued that literature held a privileged place among them. This is illustrated by the fact that the term “Socialist Realism”, which described the new socialist culture of the Soviet Union, was launched in 1934 at the Soviet Writers' congress, where it was also proclaimed that writers were “engineers of the human soul”.² In this way, literature was recruited as a pivotal tool in the creation of the new socialist subjectivities. Therefore, literature is an important

¹ See the analysis of the balance between legacies and changes mapped out in the essays collected in *Historical Legacies of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Mark R. Beissinger and Stephen Kotkin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). Also, Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, And What Comes Next?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

² Andrei Zhdanov, ‘Soviet Literature – The Richest in Ideas, The Most Advanced Literature’, in Maxim Gorky and al., *Soviet Writers' Congress, 1934: The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), pp. 15-24.

source for the exploration of articulations of subjectivity during communism. The dialectical fulcrum for analysis in the succeeding chapters, therefore, will be the articulation of class and gender in the works discussed, contrasting and comparing these as representative of wider social and ideological changes under successive political regimes. The twin axis of gender and class, which are used – both in ideology and literature – to articulate subjectivity, were specifically targeted by the communist regimes for transformation: the declared aims of these regimes was the elimination of class and gender inequalities. This thesis will argue that the communist regimes significantly transformed social relationships; however, far from eliminating differences, inequalities and injustices and instituting social uniformity – the so called “faceless masses” – they have engendered new social divisions and hierarchies of power.³ Socialist societies were heterogeneous, stratified and conflicting, and this situation was concretely articulated in the fiction produced during communism. The analysis of the ways in which the articulation of subjectivities in fiction was transformed by and evolved during the communist regime will aid a better understanding of the dynamics of socialist society and its underlying conflicts.

In order to grasp the dynamic of these transformations – both changes and continuities – two key periods of transition will be explored: from the literature of the inter-war period to the first decade of communist rule dominated by Socialist Realism, and from Socialist Realism to the literature of the troubling decade (*literatura obsedantului deceniu*) that emerged in the late 1960s and dominated fiction in the 1970s, and to a lesser extent, until the demise of the regime in 1989. The focus of this thesis will be the work of two authors whose careers spanned across these two periods of transition in the literary field: Mihail Sadoveanu and Augustin Buzura. Mihail Sadoveanu was one of the most important inter-war authors, and he went on to write the first canonical work of Romanian Socialist Realism, the novel *Mitrea Cocor* (1949). Augustin Buzura’s debut volume of short stories, *Capul bunei speranțe* (The Cape of Good Hope, 1963) developed his particular vision within the Socialist Realist horizon. However, with his first novel, *Absenții* (The Absent Ones, 1970), Buzura became one of the most celebrated authors of the literature of the troubling decade. The selection of only two authors for this thesis – regardless of the fact that they are as important as Mihail

³ See for example, Mihaela Mudure, ‘A Zeugmata Space: East/Central European Feminisms’, in *Gender and the (Post) ‘East’/ ‘West’ Divide*, ed. by Mihaela Frunză and Theodora-Eliza Văcărescu (Cluj-Napoca, Editura Limes, 2004), pp. 23-24; and Gail Kligman, *Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1998), p. 33.

Sadoveanu and Augustin Buzura – cannot do justice to the literary developments of the time. Nevertheless, the choice of a small selection of works is justified through the employ of close reading; this thesis will demonstrate that through this method the literary works of the communist period and their articulation of subjectivities are complex and conflicting constructs.

This introduction will situate the argument of this thesis within the context of the main theoretical frameworks that have been employed in understanding the communist regimes' impact on subjectivity and literature – both generally to Eastern Europe and specifically to the Romanian case. An analysis of the development of the dominant framework of the individual versus party/state, highlighting both its contributions and shortcomings in understanding the communist transformation of subjectivity and its articulation in fiction will provide a preliminary context. The identified lacunae of the individual versus party/state framework will then be productively addressed through the employment of the post-Marxist theory of discourse analysis formulated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Drawing on their theory, the argument will then be made that the evolution of subjectivity during communism is best understood as developing at the intersection of different and often conflicting discursive articulations of social relations, and that, moreover, the socialist subjectivities were open and dynamic: i.e., in a state of constant rearticulation in response to the changing historical context. Finally, an analysis of some of the class and gender theories proposed for the understanding of social structures in socialist societies will then be made with a view to arguing for their usefulness in the understanding of the evolution of the articulation of subjectivity in Romanian fiction.

1 Literature and the Individual versus Party/State Framework

The individual versus party/state is most often associated with the criticism of the communist regimes. However, what is often surprising is that the communist regimes used the individual versus party/state framework in their self-interpretation, and placed this structure at the centre of their vision of literature. Illustrative of this is Andrei Zhdanov's speech at the writers' congress in 1934, when the method of Socialist Realism was formulated.⁴ This vision was subsequently imported into Romania after the Second World War, and continued to inform the official discourse

⁴ Zhdanov, 'Soviet Literature', pp. 15-24.

throughout the communist period, as is evidenced by Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches on art and literature.⁵ In his presentation, Andrei Zhdanov based his view of literature on the Soviet regime's achievements in social transformation. However, Zhdanov deemed that the consciousness of the people appeared to be lagging behind these achievements as petty bourgeois mentalities persisted. It was the duty of writers, who were deemed to be "engineers of the human soul", to participate in the education of the people in the spirit of socialism; i.e., the creation of the new socialist consciousness in the form of the New Man. Zhdanov acknowledged that the heroes of the new Soviet literature were diverse: the toiling masses; the men and women workers and collective farmers; the engineers and business managers; the political activists; members of the Young Communist League; and pioneers.⁶ However, these differences were merely formal; underneath was to appear the singular and united subjectivity of the Soviet New Man. While in this vision, Zhdanov promotes egalitarianism, this is far from the accusation of the "faceless masses" usually made against Socialist Realism. The real problem was that this vision of social equality formulated in terms of the universal Soviet subject was undermined by the imposition of a rigid social hierarchy; that of the toiling masses led by the party and its leader. This structure of power was simultaneously political, intellectual and social. The centrality of the intellectual element in the constitution of the socialist hierarchical order was based on endowing the leader with genius; i.e., the correct knowledge and vision of the future communist world. The communist regime was not simply one of brute power, but one of power based on a discourse of knowledge. Moreover, the hierarchical organisation of society shows that the relationships between individuals were mediated by the relationships between the individual and the party cadres – especially the leader – rather than between each other. The term "toiling masses" does not designate a set of substantial social relationships between individuals. The individual enters into a social structure only through their direct relationship with the party and the leader. As such, it is clear that the official framework was the individual versus the party. In this formulation, the capitalist inequalities and class differences as well as gender inequalities have been eliminated and replaced by other hierarchical structures of power and knowledge; however, these new inequalities were not presented as sources of conflict. The only conflicts acknowledged were the fight against the remnants of petty bourgeois mentality, and the struggle for the construction of socialism. It can be argued that the communist regime employed the framework of individual and party/state for two

⁵ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Art and Literature* (București: Editura Politică, 1984).

⁶ Zhdanov, 'Soviet Literature', p. 20.

reasons. First, in order to divert attention from the multiple social inequalities and antagonisms generated by its reorganisation of society, and second, as a form of mobilisation and disciplining of the people; these are in fact two sides of the same process. The question this dissertation seeks to answer is how Socialist Realist literature engaged with this dogma. Did writers simply replicate it, or did they mould it in the creative process in order to adapt it to the differences and conflicts through which socialist societies and socialist subjectivities were constituted?

Most critics of the communist regimes, rather than question the official claims, have used the same individual versus the party/state in a reverse evaluation: while the official discourse claimed that the party led individuals, critics claimed that the party oppressed individuals. This critique was central for the post-communist social transformations from dictatorship to democracy and from planned to market economy.⁷ This view has been gestating since at least the end of the Second World War. In her review of the evolution in the field of Soviet studies, Sheila Fitzpatrick has identified three main perspectives: totalitarianism, the sociological revision of the 1970s, and the cultural revision since the 1990s.⁸ While all these employed the same framework of the individual versus the party/state, each perspective has enlarged and added complexity to the understanding of the communist regimes. A brief overview will prove beneficial in highlighting the gains as well as the shortcomings inherent in these perspectives.

A product of the Cold War, the totalitarian perspective emerged from the field of political science, and dominated the subject for much of the first decades of the post-war period. Even today it remains a central construct when interpreting the communist experience. Drawing on the foundational works of Hannah Arendt and George Orwell, the totalitarian approach regards the communist period in terms of a repressive state and resistant individuals. This approach is constructed around a series of binary oppositions, distinguishing between ideology and reality; between ideological propaganda and true art; and between false subjects articulated in the official discourse and authentic subjects articulated in dissident discourse. In the totalitarian perspective the three levels of politics, subjectivity and literature are intrinsically related. Literature is identified as a site of either repression or resistance, and texts are valorised accordingly.⁹

⁷ Michael D. Kennedy, *Cultural Formations of Post-Communism: Emancipation, Transition, Nation and War* (London and Minneapolis: Minneapolis University Press, 2002), p. 1.

⁸ Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'Introduction', in Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 2.

⁹ For an early application of the totalitarian perspective see Rufus Wellington Mathewson, *The Positive Hero in Russian Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); and

The shortcomings of the totalitarian framework are illustrated by the divided and contradictory opinions this framework generates as regards an understanding of how the communist regime actually transformed subjectivity. On the one hand, it is stipulated that the “New Man”, dedicated to the communist cause, was a fiction and not a reality.¹⁰ In this sense it appears that the communist project failed to create a new subjectivity. On the other hand, it is argued that the ideological “brain washing” enforced by the regime was successful in replacing the old subjectivity with the “good communist brain”.¹¹ This seems to imply that the new subjectivity was successfully created, and that, moreover, it continued to function after 1989. Therefore, a process of “ideological detoxification” is necessary in post-communism.¹² The former view reduces the regime to one of terror, where the regime did not produce any changes, but simply coerced people into obedience. The latter position considers that the regime not only changed the structures of subjectivity but that, in an Orwellian manner, had complete control of it. If this were the case it remains to be explained why the regime collapsed and a new period of historical change followed.

The first revision of the totalitarian model came in the 1960s and 1970s from a sociological perspective. Researchers have sought to overcome the top down form and revealed the way in which people did participate in a bottom up manner in the formation of the regimes. Through a reading of middlebrow literature, Vera Dunham has argued that the post-war Stalinist values have emerged out of a compromise forged during and after the war between Stalin’s regime and the professional middle classes.¹³ In a similar vein, Sheila Fitzpatrick has explored the importance of education and social mobility during the first decades of the Bolshevik regime.¹⁴ She argued that the changes in education policies were the result of the interaction between the needs of the regime for professional cadres and the people’s desire for social mobility. Examining the case of post-war Eastern Europe, Mark Pittaway has argued that, despite the communist assault against the former

for a more recent application of the totalitarian perspective see Cristina Sandru, *Worlds Apart?* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012).

¹⁰ Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2008), p. 895.

¹¹ Ruxandra Cesereanu, ‘Dezintoxicarea creierelor’, in, *Concepte și metode în cercetarea imaginarului: Dezbaterile Phantasma*, ed. by Corin Braga (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2007), p. 216.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 216.

¹³ Vera Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

¹⁴ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union: 1921 – 1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). See also Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

middle classes, the need for professional cadres demanded by the programmes of industrialisation meant that they managed to preserve their social position and some privileges.¹⁵ A corollary to this revision has been the view of socialist subjectivity as double life. For example, Gail Kligman postulated that during communism individuals participated in the rituals of the official public life and at the same time had a personal experience of life.¹⁶ This idea of the double life imposed by the regime was already at the centre of the critique formulated by anti-communist dissidents, such as Czeslaw Milosz in *The Captive Mind*, and Vaclav Havel in 'The Power of the Powerless'.¹⁷ Milosz analyses this double structure of the subject under the term *ketman*, and sees it as a form of survival and thus a preservation of the self, however precarious. In contrast, Havel criticised this doubling of the subjectivity, arguing that the participation of the individuals in the official rituals was immoral and amounted to the renouncing of the individual's self. The separation of life into official discourse and personal experience can be seen as the sociological ground on which jokes thrived and developed during communism: in the Romanian context, the literary phenomenon of the "lizard" evolved out of this dichotomy. As Maria Ioniță has described it, the lizard was "a type of short, highly codified, oblique text, often humorous or ironic, 'planted' in a seemingly innocuous literary piece".¹⁸ The lizard can be seen as a rhetorical device in which personal experience found expression by being camouflaged in the official discourse. The lizard was and continues to be perceived as a device subverting the official discourse, representing a form of cultural resistance. However, the view of the lizard as a form of subversion has been contested. Dan Lungu has argued that the censors were not blind to these rhetorical devices, but that they might have been complicit in their circulation.¹⁹ The censors were also part of the cultural space that rendered the lizards functional, and hence they were able to decode them. The lizard was an integral discursive part of socialist society, and not something emerging in opposition to it. On this basis, it can be argued that the camouflage of personal experiences within the official discourse not only worked towards the subversion of the latter, but also blurred the clear

¹⁵ Mark Pittaway, *Eastern Europe: 1939-2000* (London: Arnold, 2004); especially the chapter 'Consolidating Socialism', pp. 63-85.

¹⁶ Kligman, *Politics of Duplicity*, p. 33.

¹⁷ Czeslaw Milosz, *The Captive Mind* (London: Penguin, 2001); Vaclav Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless' in, Vaclav Havel et al., *The Power of the Powerless*, ed. by John Keane (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1985).

¹⁸ Maria Ioniță, 'Hunting Lizards in Romania: Oblique Speech and Humour in Ioan Groșan's 2084: A Space Epic and Planet of the Mediocres', *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 25, no. 4, November 2011, p. 704.

¹⁹ Dan Lungu, *Incursiuni în sociologia artelor* (Iași: Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2004), pp. 65-67, pp. 68-70.

boundaries between them. Moreover, it shows that the official discourse played an intrinsic part in the articulation of personal experience. These uncertainties about the meaning of this double life raise the question of where to draw the boundary between the dual lives of the individual.

This question was taken up in the second revision of the totalitarian model, which came in the 1980s from the cultural turn in the humanities. Employing different theories from psychoanalysis and Foucault's theory of power to theories of performativity, scholars were able to deconstruct the clear opposition between the regime and the people. Their works explored the transformative impact of the people's engagement with the official ideologies. Jochen Hellbeck in *Revolution on my Mind* revealed the way individuals positively engaged in diaries during Stalinism²⁰ with the revolutionary ideology in constructing their identity. In *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade*, Lilya Kaganovsky analysed the changing articulations of masculinity in Soviet and post-Soviet cultural products, literature and especially cinema.²¹ Julia Hell in *Post-Fascist Fantasies: Psychoanalysis, History and the Literature of East Germany* traced the origins of the authentic voice articulated in the work of the celebrated East German author Christa Wolf to the Socialist Realist literature of the post-war period.²² In *National Ideology Under Socialism*, Katherine Verdery combined the sociological and cultural revisions.²³ She argued that the employ of national ideology by Ceaușescu's regime was not a top down strategy imposed on the people. On the contrary, the communist regime made use of the national ideology in its claim for political legitimacy because this was already the established framework prior to the regime's coming to power. Moreover, regardless of their position in respect to the regime's policies, the intellectuals' participation in the discourse about the nation reproduced national ideology as the prevalent cultural framework. In other words, national ideology was imposed on the regime by the historical and cultural context. In addition, the employ of national ideology, by both party and intellectuals, introduced in the public debate various conflicting opinions. In this way, national ideology proved a centralising force and at the same time it provided the space for the formation of different intellectual factions competing over the definition of the national specificity. Verdery's analysis shows

²⁰ Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2006).

²¹ Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

²² Julia Hell, *Post-Fascist Fantasies: Psychoanalysis, History and the Literature of East Germany* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997).

²³ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu's Romania* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1991).

that the boundary between the official discourse employed by the regime and the people's discourse was not clearly defined. Moreover, far from erasing discursive differences, the communist regime engendered them.

Alexei Yurchak in *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, explored the ways in which individuals participated during the late Soviet period in the official structures of life without losing their critical distance and agency.²⁴ Central to Yurchak's thesis is a criticism of Vaclav Havel's condemnation of the individual's participation in the official structures of power as immoral.²⁵ Drawing on John Austin's performative theory of language, Yurchak argues that in participating in these structures individuals were in fact manifesting their individuality rather than abandoning it. Their participation was not submissive but performative; it helped them gain the agency to shape their lives beyond the officially imposed boundaries.

Another important issue revealed in Yurchak's work is the understanding of the central contradiction of the societies constructed by communist regimes. He considers that, on the one hand, the official ideology promoted an emancipated individual whilst on the other hand it fully subordinated the individual to the party. However, while emphasising the individual's agency to shape their lives, Yurchak overlooks the social inequalities, tensions and conflicts developed during the communist regimes and their impact on the articulation of individual subjectivity. The contradiction between emancipation and subordination cannot be understood outside the social inequalities structuring Soviet-style societies.

The shortcomings of the individual versus party/state framework are also reflected in its application to the understanding of literature. Since 1989 the literary field in Romania has been dominated by the hypothesis of cultural resistance (*rezistența prin cultură*). Carmen Mușat has argued that, unlike in other East European countries, Romanian resistance to the communist regime did not take a political form but was manifested mainly in culture.²⁶ Katherine Verdery argued that the idea of cultural resistance was already established among Romanian intellectuals before 1989.²⁷ She sees this strategy of resistance as having been ambivalent. In Romania intellectuals were primarily concerned in defending their elite status, and while this might have impeded the purpose of the regime, it also

²⁴ Alexi Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

²⁵ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 17.

²⁶ Carmen Mușat, *Strategiile subversiunii: Incursiuni în proza postmodernă* (București: Cartea Românească, 2008).

²⁷ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism*, p. 310.

prevented the forging of alliances with other social strata as it happened in other Eastern European countries.

The generally accepted framework for the hypothesis of cultural resistance was proposed by Ion Simuț who distinguishes four categories: the opportunist, the subversive, the escapist and the dissident.²⁸ The opportunist category refers to the literature which lent ideological support to the regime. The use of the term “opportunist” suggests that the ideology espoused was not the belief of the author, and thus was not authentic but a form of corruption. Socialist Realist literature is mainly placed in this category. The subversive category refers to works that, although not openly attacking the regime, by virtue of the integrity of their representation of the actual state of affairs during socialism subverted the official representation and thus the legitimacy of the regime: this refers mainly to the literature of the troubling decade. The term “literature of the troubling decade” denotes a trend dominant in Romanian fiction in the 1960s and 1970s. It refers to works which looked back from a critical position on the first decade of the communist regime.²⁹ The escapist category refers to works which neither lend ideological support to the regime nor tried to undermine it. Rather these authors sought to escape into imagination by employing generic formula (adventure, romance or detective fiction) or by engaging in formal experimentation. This includes popular fiction as well as the aesthetic novel of the 1960s-1970s and the experimental fiction of the 1980s. Finally, the dissident category refers to works that openly criticised the regime. This category, in the case of Romania, contains only works published abroad as there were no un-official channels of publication and distribution, of the type that were available in other communist countries, such as samizdat in the Soviet Union.³⁰

While this theoretical framework was generally accepted there were challenges as to what was subversive and what was escapist. The main challengers

²⁸ Ion Simuț, *Incursiuni în literatură actuală* (Oradea: Editura Cogito, 1994).

²⁹ For an analysis of the ambiguities surrounding the literature of the obsessive decade and its relationship with the political regime in the historical context see Dennis Deletant, ‘Cheating the Censor: Romanian Writers Under Communism’, *Central Europe*, Vol. 6, No. 2, November 2008, pp. 122-171.

³⁰ The absence of a samizdat culture in Romania is usually blamed on the harsh repression imposed by the regime. This remains a little-researched area that is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, it can be speculated that, at least under Nicolae Ceaușescu’s rule, the regime worked to coopt writers into the system through a more diversified distribution among different factions of intellectuals and writers of resources, including cultural journals, magazines and publishing houses. In this way the regime used both incentives and threats to close off the space for the emergence of unofficial cultural activity. For an analysis of the cultural field and the different factions of intellectuals during Ceaușescu’s rule, see Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism*.

were the postmodern critics. Carmen Mușat argued that the literature of the troubling decade was telling only half-truths, and she asserted that the true subversive literature was the literary experiment with form.³¹ Through its playfulness and irony this literature presented a vision of open multiplicity and uncertainty that was wholly incompatible with the official vision of a single truth.

A less polemical view is that of Marcel Cornis-Pope, who examines the various narrative strategies writers employed to subvert the official discourse.³² He gives credit to the writers of the literature of the troubling decade and to the postmodernists. In this way, he formulates the most radical variant of the “cultural resistance” hypothesis, in which writers from Marin Preda and Augustin Buzura to Mircea Nedelciu are equally celebrated for their creative and stylistic diversity and placed in opposition to the political regime. At the same time, Cornis-Pope reveals the richness of the narrative strategies that developed under the communist rule which was supposed to have imposed uniformity on the literary field.

Other critics were decisively sceptical of any form of resistance through culture when one talked about works published officially. The most prominent formulation came from Eugen Negrici, who started from the assumption that during the communist regime, ideology tainted and perverted all literature published in the country.³³ Nevertheless, in order to account for the conspicuous differences between the works produced during communism, Negrici distinguished between subservient and tolerated forms of literature. The problem is not so much that he reintroduces the same categories as those of the resistance through culture hypothesis in diluted form, but that in his reading dozens and dozens of so called tolerated works are to be found, many of which were part of the official cannon of the time. Ironically, the diversity of works catalogued by Negrici and other critics contradicts their claim that the communist regime imposed a damaging uniformity in the literary field.³⁴

³¹ Mușat, *Strategiile subversiuni*, p. 278.

³² Marcel Cornis-Pope, ‘Critical Theory and the “Glasnost” Phenomenon: Ideological Reconstruction in Romanian Literary and Political Culture’, *College Literature*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1994, pp. 131-55; *Ibid.*, ‘Narration Across the Totalistic Gap: On Recent Romanian Fiction’, *Symposium*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1989, pp. 3-19.

³³ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura româna sub communism* (București: Editura Fundației PRO, 2002), pp. 399-407.

³⁴ See the cited volumes dedicate to the communist period by Nicolae Manolescu and Eugen Negrici. Also Alex Ștefănescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane, 1941-2000* (București: Mașina de Scris, 2005); Mircea Cărtărescu, *Postmodernismul românesc* (București, Humanitas, 1999); Virgil Podoabă, ed., *Cărțile supraviețuitoare* (Brașov: Aula, 2008). In this last volume are listed 38 authors whose works, is claimed, remain valid after 1989.

Attempts to draw a clear distinction between the representations of Socialist Realism and the socialist social reality are hampered by the same difficulty. In the article, 'The Industry of Truing: Socialist Realism, Reality, Realisation', Petre Petrov discusses the case of Soviet Socialist Realism.³⁵ Petrov starts by questioning the use of the epistemological understanding of "truth" as the correlation between mental representation and external reality in the denunciation of Socialist Realism as a "lie" and "premeditated rape of the real".³⁶ As he convincingly argues, the distinction between "the lie" of the official representations and "the real" underlying the criticism of the Soviet official representations consists in a separation between various elements coexistent in the Soviet reality.³⁷ Yet, Petrov's own reframing of Socialist Realism reproduces the binary opposition in a different way. Employing Heidegger's ontology, Petrov argues that what was being brought forward in Socialist Realism was the manifestation of the "socialist essence". In contrast to the "socialist essence" stood an "anti-Soviet, alien essence", which came to reality in the work of the so called "dissident" authors: both literary articulations brought forward different essences in a truthful manner. Petrov's argument presents a faithful reproduction of the Stalinist discourse. His account overcomes the opposition between "lies" and "reality". However, he reproduces a binary opposition which again splits the heterogeneous Soviet reality into two homogeneous discourses: the socialist/Soviet and an anti-Soviet essences and their material realisation in the works of writers. Petrov fails to interrogate the boundaries between these two essences/discourses and hence establish their clarity. This is important because – as John Haynes has argued – far from being dogmatic – Socialist Realism was highly arbitrary.³⁸ The party leadership's pragmatic practice of readjusting the boundaries between the Soviet and the anti-Soviet essences/discourses, makes the talk of the realisation of an essence, and therefore of discursive unity untenable.

³⁵ Petro Petrov, 'The Industry of Truing: Socialist Realism, Reality, Realism', *Slavic Review*, vol. 70, no. 4 (Winter 2011), pp. 873-892.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 874.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 876.

³⁸ John Haynes, *New Soviet Man: Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 7. The inherent arbitrariness of Soviet literary criticism/censorship was also noted by Alexander Solzhenitsyn; see the discussion in Francis Barker, *Solzhenitsyn: Politics and Form* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1977), pp. 45-46.

2 The Discursive Articulation of Subjectivity

The important thing revealed by these debates is the uncertainty of where to draw the line between true art and ideological propaganda; between the discourses of the authentic and the inauthentic individual subjectivity. They become entangled in the instability of any clear markers and the multiplicity of fractures, discontinuities and conflicts around which the official cultural field was constituted during communism. The problem is not that the individual and the party/state were not relevant structures, but that their application imposed a forced uniformity; it was as though all individuals were formed in the same way and entered into a singular relationship with the party/state. To tackle this issue, this thesis will make use of a body of theoretical work which addresses specifically the question of the discursive articulation of individual subjectivity. Much theoretical work since the 1960s, which has gathered various theoretical directions under the term post-structuralism, has argued that “the individual self” is not a unitary and universally given entity, but always socially situated; i.e., articulated in terms of various relationships, such as class, gender, race, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, etc.³⁹ Central to this view has been the importance of language in the constitution of subjectivity. Here the employment of the theory of discourse analysis put forward by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which was developed in subsequent works⁴⁰, will prove insightful. The use of Laclau’s and Mouffe’s theory is legitimised by the fact that at its core it is a critique of the Marxist theory, which formed the basis of the doctrines of the communist regimes. Laclau and Mouffe critiqued Marxism’s totalising tendency in interpreting history and society through its economic determinism. At the same time, Laclau’s and Mouffe’s theory can function also as a corrective of the individual versus party/state framework especially where it relates to the totalitarian perspective.⁴¹ Laclau and Mouffe, by emphasising the heterogeneity of discourses structuring modern societies, provide a theoretical framework that can account in an open way for the complex differences and

³⁹ See the discussion of the theories of subjectivity of Derrida, Foucault, Lacan and others in, Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 159.

⁴⁰ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Verso, 2001). Also Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London and New York: Verso, 2007); and Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London and New York: Verso, 1990). For a synthetic analysis of the “theory of discourse analysis”, see Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); Simon Critchley and Oliver Marchart, eds, *Laclau: A Critical Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁴¹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, p. 4.

tensions through which subjectivities were articulated during communism. Laclau and Mouffe's theory is complex and multifaceted, but for this thesis three concepts are central: articulation, hegemony and social antagonism.

"Articulate", as both adjective and verb, has two principal meanings in the English language. First, it refers to speech, and describes speaking in a fluent and clear manner. Second, it denotes the technical meaning of having or forming joints. Laclau and Mouffe use the term in both senses to describe discursive practices. To articulate is the general discursive practice to produce meaning through the setting/joining of elements into relationships. While the existence of elements, such as individual human beings, is external to the discursive articulation, their meaning is affected by the articulating process. Moreover, the meaning of an individual element is not given but historically contingent, and potentially always open to contestation. The contestation over the meaning of an element, between different articulations, is what gives rise to social antagonism. The radical indeterminacy of meaning postulated by Laclau and Mouffe has been seen as leading to an unlimited possibility as regards articulations, and criticised for not recognising the historical and social limitations imposed on individuals that find themselves situated in a particular social context.⁴² However, this criticism is not entirely founded. For Laclau and Mouffe, the social space is always under the domination of certain articulations, a phenomenon to which they refer to as hegemony. They define hegemony as the elevation of a particular articulation of social relationships to the status of the universal. In this sense, hegemony is that which is immediately apparent and meaningful. The emergence of a certain articulation as hegemonic does not happen in a vacuum, but rather through a struggle in an already populated social/discursive space, most often by a previous hegemony. In this sense, the rise of a hegemonic order is a dislocating process; the disarticulation of an old order, and the rearticulation of a new order. However, hegemony is not only a limiting phenomenon, but also a horizon of meaning that provides the space for the production of new elements and articulations.⁴³

Laclau and Mouffe stress one important thing about their theory of hegemony: it never manages to close off the field of articulations, but remains a project that attempts to articulate and bring within its horizons all existing elements.

⁴² See Stuart Hall position expressed in Lawrence Grossberg, 'On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 145-147.

⁴³ For my idea of "horizon of meaning" I draw on Roland Barthes' view of language he develops in *Writing Degree Zero* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

As such, any hegemony is characterised by both a drive towards totalization and the endless production and reproduction of differences that make such a closure impossible. Moreover, hegemony is not the elimination of differences, but rather a discriminating articulation of differences; the privileging of some at the expense of others.

Historically, various social orders have privileged certain subjectivities over others and presented them as both natural and universal. For example, in modern western social order the universal individual subject was taken to be a white, middleclass, heterosexual male. The privileging of this particular articulation of subjectivity meant that all other races, classes, genders and sexualities were subordinated to it. From this perspective, the central question of this research is threefold: how did the communist regime transform the articulation of subjectivity?; were class and gender inequalities erased by an egalitarian discourse?; if not, how were they transformed and how did they change over time? These questions deconstruct the reductive framework of the individual versus the party/state and seek to reveal the class and gender differences and inequalities structuring socialist society.

A similar argument has been made for the state. Marxist theorists such as Nicolas Poulantzas and Göran Therborn have rejected the understanding of the state as an autonomous institution or as a political tool. Instead, they understand the state as a relation; “a materialised concentration of class relations of a given society”.⁴⁴ The state, including the political organisation of parties, is not a unitary entity but made of different state apparatuses through which power is exercised. This Marxist view of the state as a relationship can be extended to other social relationships. From the feminist perspectives the state can also be seen as the materialised concentration of patriarchal gender relations. As with the case of the individual, the state develops at the intersection of different social relations that are often conflicting. If the individual and the state are no longer regarded as autonomous entities, then the relationship between them must be deconstructed as well, and the multiple and conflicting articulations through which this relationship is constituted must be examined.

The post-structuralist perspectives have had an impact also on the reading of literature. Rather than the distinction between the view of literature as objective representation of reality or as a subjective expression of individuality, literary texts are read as sources of discursive articulation, contributing to the shaping of visions

⁴⁴ Göran Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), p. 34.

of social reality and individual subjectivity.⁴⁵ However, the relationship between literature and society was also divided between concerns of content versus form. As Fredric Jameson has remarked, it is not an uncommon idea to acknowledge the presence of social elements in works of literature.⁴⁶ It is more uncommon to claim that literary forms – for example a certain type of drama or the novel – are social formations, or, as Jameson puts it, that literature is a socially symbolic act.⁴⁷ In other words, this claim means that a literary form is the synthetic articulation of historical social structures. There is a long tradition of this type of critical approach to literature. Some examples are Georg Lukács' *The Historical Novel*, Lucien Goldmann's *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, and in other domains, Theodore Adorno's *The Culture Industry*.⁴⁸ These authors relate the evolution of Western artistic forms, literature and music, to the evolution of bourgeois society and capitalism. The debate over the social role of literature has been central to modern Romanian literary criticism since its nineteenth century origins. While the two founding fathers of modern Romanian literary criticism, Titu Maiorescu and Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, were supporting opposing views – the former the autonomy of the aesthetic the latter an engaged art – both nonetheless argued about what kind of literature, and what social class, was best suited for the representation of the national character.⁴⁹ In the interwar period, Eugen Lovinescu continued on the footsteps of Maiorescu and argued for the autonomy of the aesthetic in literature. However, he also placed emphasis on the social aspect of literature and argued for an urban bourgeois aesthetic.⁵⁰ In the late 1970s, Nicolae Manolescu, another supporter of the aesthetic autonomy, proposed a model for the novel that mapped out social history: specifically, the bourgeois social history.⁵¹ However, both the Western and the Romanian models suffer from a totalising tendency that allocates one essential form to a historical epoch. This leads to the problem of overlap, as in the case of Nicolae Manolescu, who found that in the

⁴⁵ Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 7-13.

⁴⁶ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p.1.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁸ Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London, Merlin Press, 1989); Lucien Goldmann, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977); Theodor Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening', in *The Culture Industry* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁴⁹ See the analysis of this debate in Alex Drace-Francis, *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture: Literacy and the Development of National Identity* (London and New York: Tauris, 2006), pp. 178-95.

⁵⁰ Eugen Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane, 1900-1937* (București: Editura Minerva, 1989).

⁵¹ Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca lui Noe* (București: Editura Gramar, 2007), p.731.

interwar period in Romania one could find all three types of the novel he referenced. Another example of overlap is the debate between the supporters of Realism – either critical or socialist – and those of Modernism in the twentieth century: each side claimed that one form or the other was best suited to capture the socio-economic structures of their historical epoch, and was therefore the most politically progressive.⁵² In contrast to these totalising attempts, a more open view has been formulated by Franco Moretti in his books: *Signs Taken for Wonders*, *The Way of the World*, *The Modern Epic*, and *The Bourgeois*.⁵³ Throughout his work, Moretti argues that a specific age or epoch does not have to have a single and essential literary format. Some formats might become more prevalent, but even in such cases there are various interrelated developments. For example, in *The Way of the World*, Moretti considers that while the *Bildungsroman* was a prevalent form of the novel in nineteenth century Europe, it generated different and contradictory versions, each reflecting the changing and competing forms of socialisation.⁵⁴ In other words, for Moretti, literature being an attempt to disentangle the contradictions generated by historical change and social conflicts, the history of literary forms is “the history of conflicts in the sphere of aesthetic forms”.⁵⁵

Returning to Moretti’s discussion of the *Bildungsroman* emphasises the role of literature in the process of socialisation and the articulation of subjectivities and in this way proves that the distinction between content and form is potentially misleading. The tragic hero, the hero of the *Bildungsroman*, Lukács’ problematic individual, the superfluous man, and the positive hero of Socialist Realism, are all literary forms and social articulations of subjectivities.⁵⁶ In modern Romanian literary criticism, the debate between aesthetic autonomy and socially determined art was actually about the appropriate subject for national literature – whether this should be the peasant or the urban dweller – and what form the literary representation should take – idealised or realist.⁵⁷ Thus, it can be clearly shown that the literary character develops at the intersection of the literary and the social, the form of the subjectivity articulated in literature lending it a social dimension. This view can also be drawn

⁵² The debate is summarised in the articles collected in Theodore Adorno et al., *Aesthetics and Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 2007).

⁵³ Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: On the Sociology of Literary Forms* (London and New York: Verso, 2005); Ibid., *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, new edn. (London and New York: Verso, 2000); Ibid., *The Modern Epic: The World System From Goethe to García Márquez* (London and New York: Verso, 1996); Ibid., *The Bourgeois* (London and New York: Verso, 2013).

⁵⁴ Moretti, *The Way of the World*, pp. 3-13.

⁵⁵ Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders*, p. 8.

⁵⁶ For an analysis of the Russian superfluous man and Socialist Realism’s positive hero, see Abram Tertz, *On Socialist Realism*, pp. 43-69.

⁵⁷ Drace-Francis, *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture*, pp. 186-92.

from the application of Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's theory of discursive articulation of social relationships. Literary texts are engaged in struggles over the articulation of social order and subjectivity. As Franco Moretti has argued, the value of literary works is judged by their success in giving shape to the cultural contradictions generated by historical change and social conflict.⁵⁸ In light of these literary debates, the communist regimes' insistence on the social role of literature, its articulation of subjectivities, no longer appears as deviation from the literary norm. The difference between the aesthetic ideology of Socialist Realism and other aesthetic ideologies is in the type of subjectivities literature should articulate. This thesis will explore the intersection of class and gender relationships and their transformation during communism. Rather than reading the officially sanctioned literature produced during communism as ideological falsification of reality and as articulation of inauthentic subjects, this thesis explores the differences and conflicts underlying their articulation of socialist subjectivities. The hypothesis put forward in this thesis is that the officially sanctioned literature – precisely because it is ideologically engaged – is a propitious basis for the analysis of the class and gender differences and conflicts articulated during the rule of the communist regime. In what follows, the frameworks used in the understanding of the communist regimes in terms of historical change and class and gender structures will be analysed.

3 Literature and the Historical Frameworks for Understanding Communism

The prevailing historical framework since 1989 describes the communist regimes as deviations and representative of a regression from modernity. In the case of Romania, the essence of this view has been formulated by Keith Hitchins who proposed a geopolitical framework.⁵⁹ Hitchins sees communism in terms of the opposition between West and East; between liberal capitalism and Byzantine patriarchy. Following on from a popular viewpoint, he argues that from the middle of the nineteenth century Romania entered a path of development after the Western model and broke from its Eastern background. The installation of the communist regime in 1947 marks the end of the Western modernisation period and the start of the regression to Eastern forms of, presumably, Byzantine patriarchy.

⁵⁸ Moretti, *The Way of the World*, p. 243.

⁵⁹ Keith Hitchins, *Rumania 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

The same view was also prevailing in the historical framing of the evolution of Romanian literature in the twentieth century. The central concept was “synchronisation”, which was first proposed in the inter-war period by the literary and cultural critic, Eugen Lovinescu.⁶⁰ Synchronisation refers to the process by which backward nations like Romania bypass evolutionary stages and directly assimilate, through the creative process, Western values. Lovinescu characterised the ideal form in terms of an urban bourgeois literature modelled on French Modernism. In his view this synchronisation had already been achieved in the inter-war period in the works of writers such as Camil Petrescu and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu. After 1989, the term synchronisation had been taken up again – especially by the generation of postmodern critics and writers such as Ion Bogdan Lefter, Carmen Muşat and Mircea Cărtărescu. In their interpretation, the imposition of Socialist Realism after the war meant a break with the modernist tradition and the autonomy of the aesthetic, a regression to nineteenth century Realism, and the return to a socially determined art form.⁶¹ With the ideological liberalisation that took place in the 1960s leading to a reappraisal of Western influences the process of re-synchronisation had begun. However, the experiments of the 1960s and 1970s were a process of rediscovery of inter-war Modernism; it was only with the emergence of the 1980s generation of experimental writers that the synchronisation with American Postmodernism was accomplished.⁶²

⁶⁰ Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane 1900 – 1937*; also, *Ibid.*, *Istoria civilizației române moderne* (București: Editura Științifică, 1972).

⁶¹ The most direct formulation is articulated in Ion Bogdan Lefter, *A Guide to Romanian Literature: Novels, Experiment and the Postcommunist Book Industry* (Pitești: Editura Paralela 45, 1999), pp. 36-50. A more elaborate argument for Socialist Realism as regression rather than revolution is proposed by Sanda Cordoș, *Literatura între revoluție și reacțiune* (Cluj-Napoca: Biblioteca Apostrof, 1999). It is useful to compare this view with that formulated by the Soviet writer Andrei Siniavskii under the name Abram Tertz in *On Socialist Realism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960). Siniavskii argues that stylistically, Socialist Realism is akin to eighteenth century Classicism rather than to nineteenth century Realism. This not only reflects the differences in the histories of Russian and Romanian literature but also the politics of the critics. Romanian modern literature starts in the middle of the nineteenth century and never knew a classical period. Moreover, the critics formulating the critique were either adepts of Modernism or Postmodernism, and their target was Realism, which they envisaged as a socially determined form.

⁶² For this articulation of the history of Romanian literature see, Ion Bogdan Lefter, Mircea Cărtărescu, and Eugen Negrici, albeit the latter is more critical. In the English language, this view is formulated by Marcel Cornis-Pope's 'Romanian Novel', in *Encyclopaedia of the Novel*, vol. 2, ed. Paul Schellinger (Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998), pp. 1118-1126; and *Ibid.* Marcel Cornis-Pope, *The Unfinished Battles: Romanian Postmodernism Before and After 1989* (Iași: Polirom, 1996); another interesting use of this narrative is by Cristina Sandru in *Worlds Apart?*. Sandru compares Milan Kundera and Salman Rushdie, and bringing together the totalitarian and postcolonial theories weaves a common narrative that would account for the evolution towards Postmodernism of literature in Eastern Europe and the former colonies of the Western powers.

While this framework was generally accepted, there were various criticisms. Older critics of a modernist inclination such as Nicolae Manolescu, Alex Ștefănescu and Eugen Negrici focus more on the principle of autonomy of the aesthetic and less on the ideal of Postmodernism.⁶³ They celebrated the 1960s and 1970s in terms of the rediscovery of the inter-war Modernism; they played down the achievements of the 1980s and considered the postmodernists' attack on the values of Modernism as destructive, a deviation from a natural development of literary form.⁶⁴ Some critics have questioned the validity of these readings even when endorsing them. The use of the term "Postmodernism" to designate the literary experiments of the 1980s has been dismissed as inappropriate by Alexandru Mușina.⁶⁵ After 1989, Ion Simuț claimed that there was no similarity between Western Postmodernism and the Romanian literature of the same period.⁶⁶ There is one important element in this debate that Romanian critics have tended to overlook: the change in the ideal model of understanding literature from French Modernism to American Postmodernism. This change signals that the so-called "Western literary values" are themselves in a constant process of transformation and subject to contestation. The parallels between Romanian literature and its Western counterparts, both similarities and differences, are perhaps better viewed as local responses to common global historical changes, rather than synchronisation. As Franco Moretti argued, following Frederic Jameson, modern literature – and more generally, modern society – in peripheral countries developed as a compromise between abstract Western forms, the novel being a good example, and local social and cultural realities.⁶⁷ The same can also be said for Socialist Realism's development in Romania after the Second World War. While it was forcefully imposed by the Soviet occupying authority, the outcome must be seen as a compromise between the Soviet abstract form and local realities. Thus, the question as to what communism was and how it transformed societies persists.

The view of communist regimes as deviating from modernity – a view implicit in the synchronisation perspective – has been questioned from various perspectives. Among others, David Hoffmann has claimed that the Soviet-style

⁶³ Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*; Ștefănescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane*; Negrici, *Literature română sub comunism*.

⁶⁴ Negrici, *Literature română sub comunism*, pp. 399-407.

⁶⁵ Alexandru Mușina, 'Postmodernismul, O frumoasă poveste', in Gheorghe Crăciun, ed., *Competiția continuă: generația 80 în texte teoretice* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 1999), pp. 423-41.

⁶⁶ Simuț, *Incursiuni în literatura actuală*, p. 7.

⁶⁷ Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures On World Literature', *New Left Review*, no 1, Jan- Feb 2000, p. 58; Frederic Jameson, 'In the Mirror of Alternate Modernities', in Kojin Karatani, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. xiii.

regimes were engaged in a process of modernisation, which, while different from the Western process, was part of the same wider historical change.⁶⁸ G. M. Tamás goes so far as to see the post-Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe as authoritarian forms of the welfare state – not very different in purpose from other variations such as the American New Deal and the West European social democrat, Christian Democrat or Gaullist.⁶⁹ The theoretical framework proposed in *Mapping Modernities: Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe, 1920-2000*, by Alan Dingsdale will prove particularly illuminating for the analysis of the communist transformation of social relationships. Drawing on the theories of world system analysis and the multiple modernities theory proposed by Peter Taylor⁷⁰, Dingsdale sees development in Eastern Europe since the 1920's as marked by three periods that he refers to as modernisation projects, the Nationalist Project in the inter-war period, followed by the Communist Project in the post-war period, followed by the Neoliberal Project after 1989. Dingsdale argues that each project of modernisation was characterised by a desire to eradicate the past, and at the same time was redolent of a deep attachment to that past as a source of inspiration.⁷¹ Dingsdale's framework has two main advantages: first, it makes it possible to account for the changes as well as continuities in the ongoing modernisation process without regarding it as a homogeneous whole. As such, it eliminates the use of the problematic term "deviation". Second, it makes it possible to relate the local processes to the global ones in a way that accounts for both possible similarities and differences. These advantages are most evident with regard to the question of capitalism and its social structures. As Silviu Brucan has argued, Romania travelled from capitalism to socialism and then back to capitalism.⁷² However, such a view obfuscates the historical differences between the capitalism of the National Project and the Neoliberal Project. For Romania the case can be made that the Nationalist Project started before 1920 – in the middle of the nineteenth century when the first

⁶⁸ Some recent scholarship that makes this point is by David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917 – 1947* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003); David L. Hoffmann, *Cultivating the Masses: Modern State Practices and Soviet Socialism: 1914 – 1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

⁶⁹ G. M. Tamás, 'Counter-Revolution Against a Counter-Revolution: Eastern Europe Today', in *Socialist Register 2008: Global Flashpoints: Reactions to Imperialism and Neoliberalism*, ed. by Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2007), p. 287.

⁷⁰ For a concise presentation of the world system theory see Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004); Peter J. Taylor, *Modernities: A Geohistorical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

⁷¹ Alan Dingsdale, *Mapping Modernities: Geographies of Central and Eastern Europe, 1920-2000*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. xxi.

⁷² Silviu Brucan, *The Wasted Generation: Memoirs of a Romanian Journey from Capitalism to Socialism and Back* (Boulder and Oxford: Westview Press, 1993).

Romanian state was created through the union of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldova.⁷³ More importantly, both the Communist and the Neoliberal Projects can be seen as part of the global dynamics of change after the Second World War. Philip McMichael has formulated a global framework that integrates both Western and Eastern post-war developments. He has argued that the post-war period can be divided into two parts. The first period, being from the end of the war to the 1970s, was characterised by national development through state intervention and the building of the welfare state. From the 1980s onwards national development was replaced by globalisation characterised by the domination of international markets, privatisation and austerity; i.e., neoliberalism. The Communist Projects can be viewed as part of the nation state based development.⁷⁴ Moreover, as David Harvey has argued, the Neoliberal Project was transforming not just the former communist regimes or the Third World, but equally significantly – the West.⁷⁵ This historical understanding undermines the problematic opposition between East and West. The Communist Projects might not have brought Eastern European societies to the Western level of development, but it may prove short-sighted to exclude them from the analysis of modern transformations in social relations and subjectivity. In what follows, the interpretation of the way in which the transformations of class and gender were brought about by the communist regime will be explored; the focus will be on both the differences and similarities with the post-war global changes.

4 Socialist Articulation of Class

Probably the most radical transformation implemented by the communist regime was at the level of social class, which included the abolition of the rural and urban capitalist classes. This was a complete break with the National Project, which had been dominated by the propertied classes.⁷⁶ However, as Daniel Chirot and James Burnham have argued, the process of modernisation implemented by the

⁷³ Keith Hitchins places the beginning of modern Romanian slightly later in 1866, the ascent to the united principality throne of prince Charles of Hohenzollern. See Keith Hitchins, *Rumania: 1866-1947*, p. vii.

⁷⁴ Philip McMichael, *Development and Social Change: A Global Perspective*, 5th edn (Los Angeles and London: Sage, 2012).

⁷⁵ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

⁷⁶ See the assessment of the inter-war period in Stephen Fisher-Galati, *Twentieth Century Romania* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); and Michael Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1985).

communist regime generated social structures not dissimilar to those developing in the West – a professional class of managers and bureaucrats.⁷⁷

Here the employ of the frameworks developed by a critical Marxist engagement with the Soviet style societies will prove useful. These theories, developed by Western theorists and Eastern dissidents, have as their basis the social division of labour into three categories: workers, technical specialists and political cadres.⁷⁸ Among these theories, the one developed by George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi in their book, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, is the most useful in the analysis of class relations in socialist societies.⁷⁹ Their theory delineates not only the class structure of the socialist societies, but also the social interest of each social class and group and the resulting class conflicts between them. Basing their theory of the division of labour between manual and mental, Konrad and Szelenyi considered socialist societies to be rationally redistributive economies, with knowledge functioning as the ordering principle for the redistribution of the social product. In this sense, the possession of knowledge functioned as the principle of social differentiation and stratification. On this basis they saw the socialist societies as divided into intellectuals and workers. The intellectuals; i.e., managers and bureaucrats, are the possessors of knowledge and are endowed with various degrees of redistributive power. In contrast, the workers are the embodiment of manual labour, reduced to a mere tool without any redistributive power. Furthermore, Konrad and Szelenyi distinguish between two forms of knowledge: “knowhow” and “ideology”. This distinction is purely analytical because in practice the two are inseparable: knowhow by definition must imply an inherent ideology. However, this distinction divides intellectuals into two potentially conflicting categories – technical specialists (the holders of knowhow) and political cadre (the holders of ideology). Konrad and Szelenyi conclude that in socialist societies the intelligentsia is the ruling class – not the proletariat. While this structure

⁷⁷ See Daniel Chirot, *Social Change in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977); also James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution* (London: Putman, 1942)

⁷⁸ A detailed review of the different Marxist analysis of the class structure of the Soviet Union and Soviet style societies is in Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2009). For the class analysis in the specific case of Romania see Pavel Cîmpeanu writing as Felipe Garcia Casal, *The Syncretic Society*, trans. by Guy Daniels (White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1980); Silviu Brucan, *Pluralism and Social Conflict: A Social Analysis of the Communist World* (New York and London: Praeger, 1990); and Silviu Brucan, *Social Change in Russia and Eastern Europe: From Party Hacks to Nouveaux Riches* (Westport and London: Praeger, 1998). For a critical revision of the various theories of “the new class” see, Lawrence Peter King and Ivan Szelenyi, *Theories of the New Class* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

⁷⁹ George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, trans. by Andrew Arato and Richard E. Allan (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979).

fostered social mobility, as it opened up the possibility for workers to become intellectuals – either a technical specialist or a member of the political cadres – it also generated self-reproduction and thus the stratification of inequality. Moreover, this created a three-sided social conflict between workers, technical specialists and the political cadre over the appropriation and redistribution of the social product. In such a system, each social class has its own claim for legitimacy in the appropriation of the social product. The workers' claim is based on the idea that the surplus social product belongs to those who produce it. In contrast, the intellectuals' claim is based on the rational management of the social product; i.e., investment in new development rather than consumption. There is also a conflict between the technical specialists and the political cadre. The political cadre legitimised their power over the proletariat by claiming to represent the collective interests of the workers. The technical specialists based their legitimacy on the rationality of the knowledge they possessed and extolled professional rather than social values. This understanding of the social stratification and conflict developing as a consequence of the changes brought about by the communist regime, highlights that the socialist societies were not egalitarian by class societies. In other words, bourgeois class structures were not abolished but redeployed by the new socialist order. There was both change and continuity.

In a critical revisiting of this theory, Ivan Szelenyi has argued that, contrary to the original assessment, intellectuals never became the ruling class in the socialist societies. While the Stalinist bureaucracies occupied a structural position of power they did not have a rationalistic legitimacy; i.e., their legitimacy was articulated not on their own behalf but on that of the workers.⁸⁰ This generated a lack of legitimacy for the social structure, especially when the regime was taking measures against the interests of the workers. In this sense, the new socialist society and its corollary subjectivity, which was split into workers, technical specialists and the political cadre, never stabilised itself, and remained fragmented and conflicting. This framework of social relations and class structures makes possible an understating of the articulation of subjectivities during communism that is not reductive, and helps to deconstruct the simple opposition between individual and party/state. Moreover, Konrad's and Szelenyi's understanding of power relationships as based on a discourse of knowledge is of notable importance because it shows that power in socialist societies was not simply coercive and based on brute force. For this reason, when referring to Konrad and Szelenyi's

⁸⁰ King and Szelenyi, *Theories of the New Class*, p. xxv.

understanding of power relationships the expression “power/knowledge” will be used. This is not to be confused with Michel Foucault’s expression “power/knowledge”, which referred specifically to the power’s role in the production of knowledge.⁸¹

These class differences and conflicts – particularly the ongoing subordination and exploitation of the worker and the conflict between the technical specialist and the political cadre – are of great importance for the understanding of the evolution of shifts in the articulation of subjectivity in literature. While the Socialist Realist literature was dominated by the political values of the political cadre, it very rarely managed to resolve in a credible way the tensions between the worker, the technical specialist and the political cadre. This thesis will look at the way these difficulties were articulated in Mihail Sadoveanu’s novel, *Mitrea Cocor*, a prime example of Romanian Socialist Realist literature. The emergence of the literature of the troubling decade in the late 1960s articulated a change of focus from the political to the professional values, and at the same time presented the emergence of the technical specialist as a tragic character victimised by corrupt bureaucrats. Opening with his first novel, *Absenții*, Augustin Buzura is arguably the most persistent and uncompromising explorer of this scenario. This thesis will analyse Sadoveanu’s and Buzura’s works, comparing and contrasting their themes and narratives, to trace these shifts.

5 Socialist Articulation of Gender

In terms of gender relationships, the communist regime’s project was just as radical: it aimed to establish the equality of men and women. The means of achieving this was through the integration of women in the labour force. This was seen as empowerment of women as workers – a supposedly privileged social category. In contrast, after 1989, one of the prevailing views in Romania was that there was a mass rejection of the egalitarian discourse promoted by the regime, and as a form of resistance there was a retreat into traditional gender relations. This view is presented by Mihaela Mudure in a recent article. Commenting on the present difficulty of articulating a feminist discourse in Romania, Mudure argues that women perceived the communist regime as a form of domination that forced them

⁸¹ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 109-110.

to work because everyone had to be useful. Women were not eager to enter the public space because it was perceived to be one of oppression. Instead the private space of the family became one of personal freedom where individuals could express themselves freely, and where women and men were united in solidarity against the “big patriarch”, or the communist state. Yet Mudure also acknowledges that in the private space there were reproduced traditional hierarchies: “Women were supposed to nurture and care for the family, while men represented it publicly and were the most important provider.”⁸² Mudure’s argument is that there was a difference between the official discourse promoting the equality of the sexes and the patriarchal views informing the private life of individuals. In contrast to this view some have argued that, in fact, the official ideology was deeply patriarchal. For example, Katerina Clark has argued that at the centre of the master plot of the Socialist Realist novel was a paternalist relationship between fathers and sons.⁸³ This male bonding structure is similar to the definition of patriarchy in the feminist tradition. For example, Heidi Hartmann defines patriarchy as “relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women.”⁸⁴ Clark’s view suggests the official gender discourse was strongly patriarchal, rather than egalitarian. The patriarchal articulation of gender relations was not a marginal or accidental phenomenon, but a constitutive element of the official ideology.⁸⁵

Another view presents the gender relationships and the place of women in the socialist societies as developing at the intersection between the drive for emancipation and the reproduction of hierarchical structures of power. On the one hand, the regime did foster the promotion of women whilst on the other hand, the regime itself reproduced the traditional values. As Irina Lizcek argued:

Officially the equality of the sexes was promoted and stimulated. Most of the opportunities created for women were in the working field. However, because this did not take into account that there was also the continuation of so called

⁸² Mudure, ‘A Zeugmata Space’, pp. 23-24.

⁸³ Katerina Clark, ‘Socialist Realism *with* Shores: The Conventions for the Positive Hero’, in Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (ed.), *Socialist Realism without Shores* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 27-50.

⁸⁴ Heidi Hartmann, ‘The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union’, in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, ed. by Lydia Sargent (London: Pluto Press; Boston: South End Press, 1981), p. 14.

⁸⁵ See the argument in Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women and the International Division of Labour* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

“woman’s work” this turned into a double burden of mother and worker. Moreover, women were promoted through quotas policies into all sorts of political positions, state and party. However, because of the centralised system and the fact that the top positions were always occupied by men, this did not actually increase the empowerment and emancipation of women.⁸⁶

This duplicity of the regimes makes the assumption that the communist regime’s discourse of gender equality erased gender differences problematic, because it also reproduced them in the traditional mould, that being the subordination of women to men. This raises questions over the validity of the claim that men and women’s retreat into patriarchal family values was a form of resistance against the regime. It is debatable whether this question can be answered simply within the framework of individual versus party/state. The ideology of the party/state with regard to gender relationships and class was not unitary. The party/state both promoted emancipation and reproduced subordination. For this reason the retreat into family values could in fact be seen as participation within the contradictions internal to the regime. The individual subjects were thus not simply under the regime, but working within the social structures and taking full part in the endemic social conflicts. Moreover, as Lizcek has argued, gender relations intersected with the division of labour and thus class structures, these being worker versus political cadre. This further complicates the horizon within which subjectivities and social conflicts took shape during socialism. The socialist New Woman was subject to articulation on two different fronts, gender and class, each one producing its own differences. As feminist theorists have argued recently, women’s subjectivity and the injustice they suffer take shape at the intersection of gender relations with other social relations such as class, race, sex or religion. As Nancy Fraser has argued:

(...) all these axes of injustice intersect one another in ways that affect everyone’s interest and identities. Not one is a member of only one such collective. And people who are subordinated along one axis of social division may well be dominant along another.⁸⁷

Taking into consideration class and gender structures, as well as conflict between emancipation and the reproduction of social hierarchies of power, reveals

⁸⁶ Irina Lizcek, ‘The Masquerade of Equality: Women and Politics in Romania’, in *Women in Post-Communism, Research on Russia and Eastern Europe* vol. 2, ed. by Barbara Wejnert and Metta Spencer (Greenwich and London: Jai Press inc., 1996), pp. 93-101.

⁸⁷ Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), p. 20.

that both the individual and the party/state were sites of contestation between different articulations; as the contradiction of emancipation and subordination underlining the Communist Project shows, these conflicts were never closed or resolved. Moreover, such a view of the socialist social reality and its corollary subjectivities casts a very different light on the social legacies of the communist regime as well as the transformations that ensued after 1989. Rather than seeing these changes in terms of a transition from a “good communist brain” to a “brain” free of the extreme leftist ideologies, or as a return to a state of “normality” abstractly envisaged in terms of capitalism, the post 1989 transformations are better understood as a complex redeployment of the social structures and conflicts that developed during communism. While the Neoliberal Project imposed a gradual but definite process of economic privatisation, this process reproduced the older social structures and hierarchies – particularly the conflict between the technical specialist and political cadre – albeit in a redeployed form. The reproduction of social structures and hierarchies – i.e., of the social inequalities – gave the impression that despite the major transformations nothing changed. As many analysts have pointed out, the big losers of the Neoliberal Project were the workers, i.e., the majority of the population.⁸⁸ The “winners” seemed to be the former political cadre who turned overnight into private entrepreneurs. As Silviu Brucan has remarked, the post 1989 social transformation meant a change of power from “party hacks to *nouveaux riches*”. Gabriel Liiceanu considered that the determining political conflict of the post 1989 period was that between the old bourgeois parties – resurrected after 1989 – and the communist elites. However, his portrayal of the communist activist as “*lichea*” – a word denoting a contemptible person – entirely resembles the figure of the corrupt bureaucrat familiar from the literature of the troubling decade.⁸⁹ This again shows that the post 1989 social structures were formulated in terms of the conflict between the technical specialist and the political cadre.

⁸⁸ See the analyses by Silviu Brucan, *Social Changes in Russian and Eastern Europe: From Party Hacks to Nouveaux Riches* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 1998); David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity: Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005); Gareth Dale, ed., *First the Transition, Then the Crash: Eastern Europe in the 2000s* (London Pluto Press, 2011); David Kideckel, *Getting by in Postsocialist Romania: Labour, the Body, and Working-class Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

⁸⁹ Gabriel Liiceanu, *Apel către lichele*, 3rd edn (Bucureşti: Editura Humanitas, 2006), pp. 15-19.

6 Chapter Outlines

Given the importance the communist regime gave to literature, it is no surprise that works of fiction came to function as a source of discursive articulation of subjectivity in response to, and engage with, the historical changes and social conflicts generated by and at the same time underlining the Communist Project. In order to capture the changing dynamics of the literary articulation of subjectivity this thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first two chapters discuss the work of Mihail Sadoveanu while the subsequent two discuss that of Augustin Buzura.

In the first chapter, the development of the literary articulation of the new bourgeois subjectivities during what Alan Dingsdale referred to as the National Project will be analysed; i.e., from the second half of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century. In order to understand both the changes and continuities that marked the articulating of the new socialist subjectivities it is important to understand the tradition against which the communists reacted. The focus will be on Mihail Sadoveanu's inter-war contribution to the articulation of the bourgeois self-interested individual through the reading of two of his novels, *Venea o moară pe Siret* (A Mill Came Down the River Siret, 1925) and *Baltagul* (The Hatchet, 1930). The reading of Sadoveanu's novels will be placed in a lineage starting from the first Romanian novel, Nicolae Filimon's *Ciocoi vechi și noi* (Old and New Parvenus, 1862) to the inter-war Modernism of Camil Petrescu's *Patul lui Procrust* (The Procrustean Bed, 1932). The historical changes and social conflicts that underlined the different articulations of the bourgeois self-interested individual – in the forms of the parvenu, the miser and the entrepreneur – will be examined; as well as the interaction and redeployments of gender relationships, specifically of the patriarchal order.

In the second chapter, the way the articulation of class and gender relationships were transformed at the beginning of the Communist Project will be analysed. Through a close reading of Mihail Sadoveanu's novel, *Mitrea Cocor* (1949), the way in which the adaptation of the Socialist Realist model affected both the rearticulating of the old bourgeois order and the formulation of the new socialist subjectivity will be examined. The argument this thesis will make is that although the adoption of the Socialist Realist method meant a complete transformation of the framework of representation, this was more a redeployment of past elements rather than a total break. The focus of the analysis will be on the way in which Sadoveanu makes use of the images of the bourgeois self-interested individual discussed in the

first chapter and integrates them in the new framework of historical change, building a bridge between the modern history of Romanian and the communist present. Particular attention will be given to Sadoveanu's articulation of the communist protagonist, and to the way in which he resolves the differences and potential conflicts arising from the social divisions between workers, technical specialists, and political cadre. With regard to gender relationships, the chapter will explore the way in which Sadoveanu articulates a conflict between capitalism and patriarchy generating a crisis of masculinity in order to present the new socialist order as a return to patriarchal normality.

The third chapter will explore Augustin Buzura's engagement in his early work with the effects of the communist transformation of social relationships, focusing on two issues, generational transition and gender relationships. In the short story 'Plumb' (Lead, 1963), Buzura presents the generational change from the first communist generation to the second, and the effect of industrialisation and education on the socialist social structures. In the novella, 'Capul bunei speranțe' (The Cape of Good Hope, 1963) Buzura focuses on the transformation of gender relationships and the profile of the socialist New Woman. This thesis will argue that both stories represent a double transition: first, a transition within the framework of Socialist Realism, whereby in comparison to the first wave of narratives several new tensions are observed to emerge in terms of class and gender relationships. Second, these tensions – especially those between the technical specialist and the political cadre – anticipate the redeployments articulated in the literature of the troubling decade.

The fourth and last chapter will explore Augustin Buzura's break with Socialist Realism in his novel, *Absenții* (The Absent Ones, 1970) – his first fully developed novel belonging to the literature of the troubling decade. The focus of the analysis will be on the changes at the level of narrative structure, and the redeployment of class and gender relationships. It will be proposed that in Buzura's novel a critique of socialist class and gender structures is articulated. The protagonist finds himself in a world dominated by social atomization and anomie in which the fulfilment of his ideals is obstructed. In contrast to the empowerment of the Socialist Realist protagonist, here disempowerment is in evidence. While the social categories of worker, technical specialist and political cadre are maintained, the relationships between them are transformed. Political ideology, the principle legitimizing the political cadre, is rendered into a corrupting force which displaces technical knowledge, the embodiment of both "truth" and "progress". In contrast, the technical specialist, who occupies the role of the protagonist, while representing the

embodiment of integrity, is unable to achieve his rightful social position. The worker is integrated in the struggle between the technical specialist and the political cadre and is celebrated as a model of integrity when in subordination to the former, and detested when in a position of subordination of the latter. A major transformation is also taking place in the articulation of gender relationships. Buzura abandons the vision of the New Woman he portrayed in 'Capul bunei speranțe'. He redeploys the traditional form of gender relationships to an urban industrialized environment, and employs it as modality of critique of the socialist social order. This thesis will argue that patriarchal gender structures again prove to be reliable forms of articulating a moral critique of political ideology as corrupting force. The chapter will end by extending the analysis in two directions. First, it will explore the impact of the redeployments articulated in the literature of the troubling decade had on authors who continued to write within the framework of Socialist Realism. Second, it will analyse the way Buzura responded to and adapted his narrative frame after 1989, and how his work has been received.

These four chapters will argue for the understanding of the communist period and its representation in literature as both a transforming force as well as being subject to changes and continuities; each period representing a complex redeployment of the previous forms, rather than a complete rupture. In this sense, each new period generates new articulations of subjectivities, through a conflicting process of disarticulation and rearticulation.

CHAPTER 1 | From Parvenu to Entrepreneur: The Changing Faces of the Bourgeois “New Man”

Alan Dingsdale proposed three periods of modernisation for Eastern Europe: the National Project – from the 1920s to the 1940s; the Communist Project – from the 1940s to 1989; and the Neoliberal Project – from 1989 until the present. This chapter will analyse the evolution of the literary articulation of subjectivity during the National Project. In the Romanian case, however, the National Project can be extended back to the middle of the nineteenth century, when the first Romanian nation state came into being. The First World War was an important threshold for this project, but it did not change the overall trajectory; rather, it accelerated it. Socially, the project continued the creation of a bourgeois society. The process of creating a new social order had a corollary in the articulation of a new subjectivity, that of bourgeois “New Man”, or the rational self-interested individual. This was a far from harmonious process of historical and social change. In his analysis of the history of the Romanian bourgeoisie, published in 1925, Ștefan Zeletin remarked that the advent of the new bourgeois man was met with fierce resistance, and that the struggle between the new and old continued:

In no country does the bourgeois revolution end with the new men’s clear victory over the past. This revolution consists in a number of struggles in which the promoters of the new social order step by step crush the resistance of the old men.¹

In the inter-war period, the idea of a “New Man” was also part of the discourse of the Romanian fascist movement, the Iron Guard.² However, this chapter will explore the literary articulation of the bourgeois “New Man”, the rational self-interested individual, and its various embodiments. There are several reasons behind this choice. First, the development of the bourgeois subjectivity was central to the evolution of modern Romanian fiction throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Second, the communist regime’s new subjectivity developed explicitly in relation to the bourgeois subjectivity. The Marxist philosophy of history saw communism as developing out of and succeeding bourgeois society. Third, before writing *Mitrea Cocor*, a classic of Romanian Socialist Realism that will be examined in this thesis, Sadoveanu participated in

¹ Ștefan Zeletin, *Burghezia română* (București: Editura Minerva, 2008), p. 345.

² For the articulation of the Iron Guard “New Man” see Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru legionari* (Sibiu: Editura Totul Pentru Țară, 1936).

giving literary shape to the bourgeois subjectivity. By charting the evolution of the new bourgeois subjects, the ground will be prepared for the analysis of the way the imposition of the Socialist Realist framework transformed the articulation of subjectivity while tracking both change and continuity.

In literature the social confrontation caused by the rise of the bourgeois social order was reflected in the struggle over the meaning and form of the new bourgeois subjectivity. Three main typologies will be explored in this chapter: the parvenu, the miser and the entrepreneur. As Franco Moretti has argued, literature is an engaged response to historical changes and social conflict.³ In this sense, the parvenu, the miser and the entrepreneur are not simple reflections of a historical reality, but cultural responses to the rise of the new bourgeois subjectivity: these responses represent a negative evaluation in the case of the parvenu and miser and a positive evaluation in the case of the entrepreneur. While the literary evolution of the bourgeois “New Man” is full of complexities and ambiguities, the movement from parvenu to entrepreneur does chart in a decisive way the rise to dominance of the new bourgeois subjectivity.

The close relation between the rise of the bourgeois social order and the birth of the modern Romanian novel in the second half of the nineteenth century is a well established topic. Commenting on Nicolae Filimon’s *Ciocoii vechi și noi* (Old and New Parvenus, 1862), generally considered as the first accomplished modern Romanian novel, Nicolae Manolescu recently declared that:

The posthumous glory of *Ciocoii vechi și noi* (...) is explained not by its literary merits, but by Filimon’s chance to have depicted the most characteristic social and moral type, then and later. (...) E. Lovinescu rightly observed the fact that the national novel has emerged from “the land of *Cioco*”, this is because the writer has painted in Păturică, an active, energetic and positive individual; i.e., a “new type”, who was more useful for social knowledge than the defeated intellectuals who preoccupied the novelists around 1900.⁴

Manolescu goes on to catalogue *Ciocoii vechi și noi* as belonging to popular fiction, and that it is “ideological” and “expressive” rather than realist; i.e., it does not present the facts but their interpretation.⁵ In Manolescu’s view, the success, therefore, of the novel is in its ideological depiction of the new type, the *cioco*, which he describes as “an active, energetic and positive individual” – in contrast to

³ Moretti, *The Way of the World*, p. 243.

⁴ Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, p. 348. My translation.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

the “defeated intellectuals” of other novels. Manolescu thus hints at social conflict between the *ciocoi*, the embodiment of the new social type of the bourgeois, and the intellectual, the holder of cultural values. However, Manolescu misses the ambivalence in Filimon’s depiction of the *ciocoi*. “*Ciocoi*” is a Romanian word that is particularly difficult to translate because of its many connotations. The dictionary definition is as follows:

Ciocoi, noun, pejorative term for a parvenu (most often in rural areas) extracted from the ranks of *arendașilor* (land tenants), *vătafilor* (estate managers); through extension: boyar. 2. House servant, a boyar’s employee.

Ciocoi, verb, to become a *ciocoi* (1), to take up the *ciocoi*’s manners, through extension, to become like a boyar. 2. Figurative, (seldom) to be servile and sycophantic.⁶

From these definitions it appears that the term “*ciocoi*” describes the parvenu, an individual driven by the desire for social mobility through accumulation of capital; thus, a bourgeois. However, it can also refer to boyars and thus create an ambiguity as regard the *ciocoi*’s social identity. An important aspect to note, however, is the derogatory aspect of the term “*ciocoi*” as regards the negative evaluation of these characters. This negative encoding is a form of containment of the dislocating social force, the parvenu as usurper. Moreover, the *ciocoi* was not a static figure, but evolved and changed forms. In literature, the *ciocoi* would gradually come to resemble the guise of the entrepreneur, and thus acquire a more positive social valuation. The term “entrepreneur” (there are two terms in Romanian: the original was “întreprinzător” with the more recent interpretation being “antreprenor”) was not used in describing a literary typology. However, it will be referred to in this thesis because it captures in a positive manner the dynamism of bourgeois action and subjectivity. Gradually, after the First World War, the typology of the entrepreneur became ever more dominant – albeit in different embodiments – especially along two dividing lines comprising the rural and the urban, modernity and traditions.

Apart from the parvenu and the entrepreneur, which expressed social dynamism, bourgeois subjectivity took another form, that of the miser. While driven by the same desire for economic accumulation, the miser lacks social dynamism, transforming this drive into a self-sufficient manifestation through an aesthetic withdrawal from the social world into a subjective space. The miser thus expresses

⁶ *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române*, 2nd edn (București: Univers Enciclopedic, 1998), p. 177.

in another way the ambivalence between the containment of the bourgeois subject and the emergence of a new powerful form of subjectivity, that of the autonomous psychological subject. The most famous literary articulation of the miser is that of Barbu Delavrancea in the novella *Hagi Tudose* (1898), later adapted into a play in 1912.

In many of his inter-war period works, Sadoveanu engaged with the historical changes and social conflicts of the time, especially in a rural setting. Sadoveanu participated in the articulation of a form of rural capitalism and its subjectivity – to which this thesis will refer to as the “rural entrepreneur” – in the novels *Venea o moară pe Siret* (A Mill Came Down Siret River, 1925) and *Baltagul* (The Hatchet, 1930). This aspect has been largely overlooked in the analysis of Sadoveanu’s work. In fact, Sadoveanu’s work is seen as belonging to an anti-bourgeois mentality, seemingly entrenched in the Romanian national character.⁷ Generally, Sadoveanu’s inter-war fiction is considered to belong to the ideology of Sămănătorism, a cultural movement that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century and celebrated traditionalism and rural life values.⁸ In this sense, his work was perceived in the inter-war period as advancing an anti-modernist ideology. This perception of Sadoveanu’s work was capitalised on during communism. In the 1950s, it was held that *Mitrea Cocor* illustrated how Sadoveanu found in socialism and Socialist Realism the answer to the issues that he formulated in his pre-communist works.⁹ Such propagandistic gloss was meant to build legitimacy for the new regime while at the same time safely assimilating Sadoveanu into the new political and cultural discourses. The view of Sadoveanu’s work as embodiment of the Romanian anti-capitalism and anti-modernism mentality is so well entrenched that it persists after 1989.¹⁰

The question of the “mentality” of the Romanian people as a stable and unified entity is highly problematic. As Sorin Alexandrescu has argued, the birth of modern Romania in the second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of both modernist and anti-modernist mentalities. In Alexandrescu’s view, while the modernist mentality took political and aesthetic forms, the anti-modernist mentality was concentrated in a distinct antipathy to bourgeois economic self-interest. In contrast, Ștefan Zeletin argued in the 1920s that, in fact, the new modernist

⁷ See the discussion of C. Rădulescu-Motru’s views in Lavinia Betea, *Mentalități și remanențe comuniste* (București: Editura Nemira, 2005), pp. 11-15.

⁸ For a history of the movement, analysis of its ideology and Mihail Sadoveanu’s place see, Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1900-1937*, pp. 152-5..

⁹ Mihai Gafiță, foreword to, Mihail Sadoveanu, *Opere*, vol. 17 (București: ESPLA, 1959), p. 6.

¹⁰ Betea, *Mentalități și remanențe comuniste*, p. 11.

bourgeois attitude manifested itself in the economic sphere, while the reactionary forms were situated in the political and cultural spheres.¹¹ While these positions are contradictory as regards how and where the revolutionary and the reactionary forces were manifested, they make it clear that if there was such a thing as an ideal Romanian mentality, it was heterogeneous and underlined by conflicts. These conflicts and contradictions have been reproduced from the romantics of the nineteenth century to the realists and modernists of the twentieth century's inter-war period.¹² This chapter will argue that Sadoveanu responded to these conflicts and contradictions, underlining the modern social transformation of Romania by articulating a hybrid subjectivity whereby the new bourgeois social relations are combined with the traditional patriarchal social and gender relations. In fact, Sadoveanu, in a dialectical turn, presents the new class of rural entrepreneurs as the upholders rather than the usurpers of the traditional values. This dialectical turn is of great importance because it would be used by Sadoveanu again in the articulation of the communist protagonist as the upholder of traditional patriarchal values.

In order to capture the complexity of the conflicts underlining the evolution of the literary articulations of the bourgeois subjectivity, this chapter will analyse Sadoveanu's representations of the rural entrepreneur while contrasting them with some canonical representations of the parvenu, the miser and the urban entrepreneur. The changing faces of the parvenu will be analysed in the context of their representation in the novels *Ciocoii vechi și noi* by Nicolae Filimon, and *Viața la țară* and *Tănase Scatiu* by Duiliu Zamfirescu. The miser typology will be analysed through its canonical articulation in the novella, *Hagi Tudose*, as well as in its dramatic adaptation. The figure of the entrepreneur will be explored in two novels by Sadoveanu for the rural setting, *Venea o moară pe Siret* and *Baltagul*, and one for the urban setting, Camil Petrescu's *Patul lui Procust*.¹³ This brief history of the struggles over the form and meaning of the bourgeois subjectivity will provide the background for the analysis of the complex redeployment taking place in Romanian fiction within the context of the imposition of the Socialist Realist method after Second World War.

¹¹ Zeletin, *Burghezia română*, p. 350.

¹² Sorin Alexandrescu, *Privind înapoi modernitatea* (București: Editura Univers, 1999), especially the chapter 'Populism și burghezie: România la începutul secolului XX'.

¹³ For a short but informative overview of the canonical novels of the pre-communist Romania see Sorin Pârvu, *The Romanian Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

1 The Parvenu

The title of Nicolae Filimon's novel, *Ciocolii vechi și noi* (*Old and New Parvenus*), suggests a comparison of old and new styles of parvenus. However, the novel presents only the old style, the Phanariot parvenu. The novel is set at the end of the Phanariot epoch in Wallachia. The Phanariot epoch, 1711-1821, refers to a period when Wallachia – although not an integral province of the Ottoman Empire – was administered by rulers directly appointed by the Porte. These imperial administrators were recruited from among the Greek merchant and administrative elite who resided in the Phanar – a neighbourhood of Constantinople – hence their name and that of the period. All this is explicitly presented in the novel, which was published in 1862 – well after the end of the Phanariot rule in 1821 and shortly after the unification of Wallachia and Moldova into one state in 1859. These political changes meant a reorientation of society from the Ottoman imperial structures towards a process of Western influenced modernisation. It was a time when the two social formations overlapped. It could be said that, in fact, the reorientation of the newly emerging Romanian state was a part of the Western powers growing hegemony over the dissipating Ottoman Empire. The novel can be seen to present in the figures of its protagonists a mode of containing and resolving the social tensions and anxieties generated by this geopolitical shift. It is an attempt to accommodate the historical changes and new social forces in a way that would preserve the traditional social order; one based on rank and underlined by moral principles. This is explicitly captured in the discourses employed in the articulation of the protagonist, Dinu Păturică, as parvenu.

Dinu Păturică, a bright but heartless and unscrupulous young man of low social origin, makes his fortune by advancing in the administrative apparatus through intrigue and corruption. In the end, his villainy is rewarded with a gruesome death. Although a colourful, ingenious and energetic character, this thesis proposes that Păturică is not a "positive hero" – as Eugen Lovinescu and Nicolae Manolescu have asserted. By any literary definition he is an out-and-out villain; heartless and unscrupulous, even when faced with death, Dinu Păturică shows no sign of doubt, hesitation or remorse for his actions. His psychological horizon is limited to the thirst for power and material pleasure that he relentlessly pursues. Moreover, it is often forgotten that Dinu has a counterpart in the virtuous Gheorghe. Gheorghe also achieves social advancement, but, in contrast to Dinu, his social advancement comes in the form of reward for his subservience and respect for his social

superiors. Moreover, Gheorghe is a proto-intellectual, as he earns his living with his pen in the service of various boyars. Within the structure of the novel, Gheorghe, rather than Dinu, is the embodiment of positive social values. The contrast between the two characters already puts moral and intellectual values in antagonism with economic self-interest.

However, a paradox emerges: while at the level of the plot, moral values and social structures are preserved, the new social forces push through a redeployment of values at the aesthetic level of individual characterisation. The energy, colourfulness and ingenuity of Dinu, the villain, stand above the dull Gheorghe, the charitable hero. This tension between moral and aesthetic values articulated in the novel is best seen as a response to a society caught up in a process of profound transformation that generated symbolic uncertainty in the articulation of subjectivities. The subsequent critical perception of Dinu Păturică as a “positive hero” is thus, as this thesis postulates, a mistaken reading of the character’s aesthetic force for an ethical stance.

In the novel, one significant element in the preservation of social order and moral values is the role of the ruling prince; a symbol of both social hierarchy and state power. Throughout the novel several individuals ascend to the role of ruling prince. Like Dinu, they are driven mostly by self-interest rather than altruistic principles. Nevertheless, their self-interest guides them in upholding moral principles and social order. This is evident in the way Dinu Păturică receives his punishment. Having obtained the position of official administrator of two counties, Dinu’s inhuman exploitation of the indigenous peasants leads to their marching on the capital to demand justice from the prince. The newly installed prince arrests and imprisons Dinu in a salt mine, where Dinu perishes in gruesome conditions. The prince performs this act of justice not because he is a virtuous character, but because he seeks legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Self-interest compels him to do what is morally right and distribute social justice. In Filimon’s vision, social rank and the fulfilment of the duty that comes with it is more important than the individual’s character. The prince represents patriarchal authority – not as individual character but as function within the social order. It is only from this position that justice can be legitimately delivered. The peasants do not attempt to take justice into their own hands. That would be seen as an act of rebellion, of usurpation of the social order. Instead, they appeal for justice to a higher power. In contrast, Dinu Păturică represents a different set of values. Driven by self-interest he seeks justice individually in the form of upward mobility as he sees himself as a self-made man.

This leads to another contradiction because Dinu both disregards social rank and uses it for his advancement.

There is another interesting paradox at play in the novel. Although Dinu is part of the Ottoman administrative apparatus, his character is defined in terms of Western economic and political discourses: capitalism and communism. Several times in the novel, Dinu's accumulation of wealth is referred to as "capital". Dinu, however, is neither a merchant nor an entrepreneur, but more appropriately a bureaucrat in the Ottoman imperial administration. He behaves in his administrative functions, be it in the employment of private persons or public institutions, as a calculated individual driven by self-interest. Thus, his "corruption" can be seen as the overlapping of two different articulations of subjectivity: the individual in public office and the self-interested economic individual. "Corruption" is thus a conflicting relation emerging out of the opposite ideological demands assumed by the individual: to altruistically do his duty while at the same time selfishly pursuing his own interests. More surprising is that Filimon defines Dinu Păturică as a "communist".¹⁴ For Filimon, "communism" is a form of dissembling that uses "egalitarianism" as a facade for individual accumulation of property, which is a feature of the bourgeois subject. For Filimon, the egalitarian discourse of communism as well as the capitalist discourse of self-interest can have only a negative meaning because in their different ways both come in conflict with and undermine a social order based on social rank, such as that presented in the novel. However, although Filimon presents Dinu Păturică in terms of the Western discourses of communist egalitarianism and capitalist self-interest, the novel is in fact a critique of an Eastern social formation; i.e., the social class supplanting the Ottoman imperial administration. Filimon's critique of both Western ideologies and Ottoman structures has an emergent nationalist basis. While Dinu's ethnic origin is not explicitly stated, he is referred to on many occasions as "Greek", which denotes not so much his ethnicity as his corruption. This is even more strikingly evident in the surprising characterisation of the Jewish money lender's corruption as a Greek vice. This is particularly revealing because it shows that the "Greek" preceded the "Jew" in the Romanian imaginary as the paradoxical embodiment of both socialism and capitalism; in other words, of dislocating modernity.¹⁵ In contrast, the virtuous Gheorghe is presented as "local" (pământean). Regardless, Filimon's criticism of Dinu Păturică's "oriental" corruption in terms of the Western discourses of

¹⁴ Nicolae Filimon, *Ciocolii vechi și noi* (București: Cartex 2000, 2006), p. 8.

¹⁵ Katherine Verdery considers that the "Jew" functioned as a displaced symbol of both socialism and Western cosmopolitanism, Verdery, *What Was Socialism, And What Comes Next?*, p. 99.

egalitarianism and self-interest is not simply confusion. The projection of Western discourses on Eastern formations is best seen as a symptom of the complexity of an emergent modern culture on the cusp of geopolitical shifts. The process of differentiation between the West and the East – the Orientalisation or Balkanisation of the Ottoman Empire – is not as yet clearly defined in the emerging Romanian literary discourse. Western and Eastern discursive formations flowed, overlapped, mixed and conflicted producing various hybrid forms. Dinu is one such hybrid character: he is “Greek” – a corrupt Ottoman administrator – and yet he introduces the Western discourses of egalitarianism and self-interest. Gheorghe, the local agent, upholds an “Eastern” patriarchal social order based on rank. Yet the emerging nationalist discourse that underlines his virtue is influenced by Western Romantic ideologies.¹⁶ As such, both characterisations can be seen as hybrid forms. The larger geopolitical structures and conflicts become mapped onto the local social structures and conflicts. By overlapping Eastern social structures and Western discourses, the novel is articulating a desire for separation from the past/East and the anxiety caused by emerging new social practices under Western influence.¹⁷

From this brief analysis, the clearly emergent theme is that – beneath its structural polarity between protagonist and antagonist, whether these are good or bad characters – Nicolae Filimon’s novel is, in fact, a complex bundle of overlapping discourses generating tensions and paradoxes, all converging in the articulation of the parvenu, Dinu Păturică. As such, it would be reductive to dismiss it for lacking “objectivity” and as being “ideological” and “expressive” as Nicolae Manolescu has suggested.

The rapid changes that the newly formed principality of Romania underwent in the second half of the nineteenth century are evident in the difference between Nicolae Filimon’s novel and those of Duiliu Zamfirescu, especially their respective

¹⁶ Katherine Verdery views Herder’s ethnic view of nation as the influential source in defining the national movements in Eastern Europe. Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, And What Comes Next?*, p. 102. I refer to the opposition between the local and “Greek” as an emergence form of an ethnically based nationalist ideology. In contrast, Thomas J. Keil considers that the local boyars’ support for rebellion was driven not by national ideology, but by their economic and political interest that fuelled a desire for decentralisation and autonomy from the Ottomans. However, I will say that the national ideology found a propitious ground in the interests of the local boyars, and in turn would come to supplement an ideological frame for independence in the second half of the nineteenth century. See Thomas J. Keil, *Romania’s Tortured Road toward Modernity*, East European Monographs, no. DCLXXXVI (Boulder, East European Monographs, 2006), p. 19.

¹⁷ It is relevant here to point to the view expressed by Michael Shafir as to the role of the Greek Phanariote princes in introducing Western liberal ideas in Wallachia and Moldavia and their role in the development of modern Romanian nationalism. Michael Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1985), p.1.

articulation of the parvenu. There are two main changes: these are cultural and socio-economic. The cultural change is reflected in the language and cultural orientation presented in the novels. In Filimon's novel the language has strong Turkish and Greek influences. There are numerous citations of Greek verses, and the Greek language is one of the tools that Dinu Păturică uses in his pursuit of power.¹⁸ In Zamfirescu's novels, the Ottoman influences are completely replaced by Western ones. The educated boyars speak French fluently. Their children have English nannies and later complete their education in the West, most notably Paris, but also Italy. The young generation brings from the West ideas of "modernisation" – both technological and social – especially the vision of a new, more democratic relationship between boyars and peasants. However, the implementation of these ideals – demonstrably for lack of opportunity and determination – remains unfulfilled in the novel.

The central transformation for the articulation of the new type of parvenu in Duiliu Zamfirescu's novel is the emergence of the market economy as autonomous from the social order and moral values. While in *Ciocoii vechi și noi* the economic sphere was ultimately subordinated to moral values and social hierarchy, in Zamfirescu's novels the capitalist market economy affects everyone independently of social rank or moral quality. This has a direct effect on the construction of the conflict in the novels. Tănase Scatiu, the parvenu in Zamfirescu's novels, is not bringing the boyars and the peasants to ruin through direct intrigue or theft as Dinu Păturică does. Although he does engage in various schemes he is not a dissembler of Dinu Păturică's order. Rather, he takes advantage of the misfortune caused by a difficult economic environment. Tănase accumulates his wealth mainly through leveraging free market forces by buying and selling for profit; something he is openly proud of, yet despised for by the old boyars. Although he practices usury and traffic of influence, these are not the mainstay of his wealth. In the case of the boyars, Tănase's plans are mostly unsuccessful, as they find the money to repay their debts or are able to avoid borrowing. The peasants are less fortunate. When they cannot repay money they owe, Tănase attempts to take their land through the courts. This leads the peasants to distrust and fear the state law and administration, and their revolts have dire consequences. It could be said that, in contrast to the

¹⁸ The strong presence of Greek and Turkish words in Filimon's novel appears as a strange anachronism, if compared with some contemporaneous works, such as the short stories of Mihail Kogălniceanu. I owe this observation to Dennis Deletant. It might be that Filimon created a simulacrum language in order to capture the flavour of the historical past, as he depicts events taking place some forty years before that of writing.

personalised relationships between the rulers and the ruled in Filimon's novel, the relationship between state and society has become impersonal.

The changes in economy are redoubled by analogous social changes. Social rank, the basis of social order in Filimon's novel, has been replaced by a bond between the two social classes of boyars and peasants.¹⁹ This bond, however, is characterised by ambivalence. This ambivalence can be seen as emerging out of the overlapping of the discourses of the social bond and the market economy: each articulates a different form of subjectivity. It can be seen thus: the social bond is based on the duty each class has for the other; the market economy articulates a subjectivity of self-interest, and thus the peasants appear as lazy and sly to the self-interested boyar, and the boyars in turn represent the source of misery for the self-interested peasant. This socio-economic ambivalence is complemented by a cultural one.

All these changes and the ensuing tensions converge in the figure of Tănase Scatiu so that they articulate a different form of the parvenu. Culture emerges as a marker of social distinction. While Tănase Scatiu can accumulate great wealth, he cannot hide his low social origins, which transpire in his lack of education, crude manners and poor taste. His crass ostentation appeals the boyars, and he is often ridiculed for it. In contrast to Dinu Păturică, who was an educated and sophisticated individual on a par with his social superiors, Tănase Scatiu is a philistine who cannot compete with the Western educated boyars.

The emergence of the cultural discourse as a mark of social differentiation also affects the articulation of the Romanian national identity. In *Ciocoii vechi și noi*, although a discourse of national ideology was present, its basis was moral rather than cultural. In Filimon's novel, the peasants, local boyars and imperial administrators – in other words, all social strata – partook of the same Ottoman/Balkan culture.²⁰ The term "Greek", that is used to refer to Dinu Păturică, denotes not so much his cultural identity as his moral corruption. Moreover, the representative class embodying national character were the local boyars. In Zamfirescu's novels the question of cultural identity becomes crucial even if

¹⁹ Michael Shafir considers that in fact the social bond was destroyed well before the time of Duiliu Zamfirescu's novel, starting with the mass enslavement of the peasantry in the sixteenth century. This led to a situation of schism between rulers and ruled. Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economy, and Society*, pp. 132-133. As such, the central role of the bond in Zamfirescu's novel is best seen as part of his critique of the new bourgeois social order, a nostalgic longing for a patriarchal order imagined as social harmony.

²⁰ For a succinct but revealing presentation of the diversity and unity of the Balkans culture developed during the Ottoman rule see, Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), especially chapter 7.

ambiguous. The departure from Ottoman structures and the alignment with a Western model meant the complete redeployment of cultural values and the emergence of new hybrid discourses that resulted in the assimilation of local realities to Western ideologies. The local society became divided between those declaring to be civilizing forces in the Western mould, and the forces that purported to uphold local traditions. Both the “traditionalist” and the “modernising” forces were in effect the result of the modern transformation of the cultural, economic and political field under the impact of Western influence. Yet, in Zamfirescu’s novels this new tension is rendered ambiguous. The boyars, especially the younger Western educated generation, idealise the peasant as a mystically innocent being and, as such, view them as the embodiment of an authentic local culture; yet they are dismayed by the peasant’s immorality and irrationality. Moreover, the boyars reject local culture as embodied by Tănase as a form of cultural degradation. In this sense, the articulation of national identity becomes intertwined with the social conflict between the peasant, the boyar and the parvenu.

There is another important effect generated by the emergence of the economy as an autonomous sphere: the separation between social order and the state. As was revealed in *Ciocoii vechi și noi*, the two were united in the figure of the prince. In Zamfirescu’s novels this unity has dissolved. The state is not able to uphold the social bond and protect the boyars and the peasants from economic ruin.²¹ Tănase’s actions are in the grey zone of legality – for example, his claim to recuperate his money from those indebted – and illegality – for example, making deals behind closed doors. This change is reflected in the way conflicts are resolved. In the first novel, *Viața la țară*, the boyars rescue the peasants from the physical torture to which Tănase subjects them. However, this is only a weak intervention based on individual moral principles without any legal backing. The boyars are neither able to prevent Tănase from taking the peasants’ land through the court, nor prosecute Tănase for the physical harm done to the peasants. In the second novel, *Tănase Scatiu*, it is time for the peasants to rescue the boyars. Having married the daughter of a boyar, Tănase attempts to control all the lands by putting the old boyar under house arrest. The boyar calls on the peasants for help. The mass of the peasants turn into a violent mob that attacks and kills Tănase in

²¹ Göran Therborn considers that the bourgeois state splits, divides and changes the functions of government which were unified in the feudal state: “The bourgeois revolution split into two the feudal unity of government, legislation, administration and judicature, each regulated by a specific technology. Government and legislature now had to represent the nation, not the hierarchical orders of the realm.” Therborn, *What Does the Ruling Class Do When It Rules?*, pp. 52-53.

order to liberate the old boyar, but also as an act of revenge for their own grievances. However, the punishment of Tănase at the hands of the peasant mob lacks the legitimacy of Dinu's punishment administered by the prince in *Ciocoii vechi și noi*. Because state law and social order are not identical, the preservation of the social bond between boyars and peasants through the elimination of the threatening force embodied in Tănase falls outside the law. Although the novels present a separation into autonomous spheres of the social (the bond between boyars and peasants), the political (state and law) and the economic (market economy), the social and moral are clearly privileged at all textual levels of the plot.

The privileging of the old social order is also revealed in the representation of love and marriage, and thus implicitly in the articulation of gender relations. In *Viața la țară*, two of the main characters are the couple formed by the boyars Matei Damian and Sașa Comăneșteanu. Their mutual love, however, is subordinated to social duty. When Damian returns home from abroad, he is met by family and friends, with the exception of Sașa, at the train station. She remained at home to look after Matei's ill mother. Moreover, Sașa consents to marriage only after she has escorted her younger brother to Paris where he starts his studies. On her return, Matei fails to meet her at the station because he has to look after the wellbeing of the peasants. Finally, their marriage, although based on love, is socially sanctioned through the mediation of an elder. This means that their love and marriage is not simply a private matter but a social one. Sașa is an interesting female character who anticipates the powerful representations of women in the works of Mihail Sadoveanu and Camil Petrescu. She is both an independent woman and at the same time the upholder of patriarchal gender relations. Sașa's and Matei's marriage unites the private and the public, and the individual and the social into a harmonious whole, just as it did in *Ciocoii vechi și noi*. In contrast, Tănase's marriage with the daughter of an old boyar, while perfectly legitimate, is proves to be disastrous: Tănase is interested in the dowry lands; the father is giving in to financial pressure; the bride is guided by the caprice of youth. Moreover, the disregard for social duty and the prevalence of self-interest has negative outcomes: the young wife dies of grief, Tănase is killed, and the father is left alone to mourn. Thus, the intersection of capitalist self-interest with patriarchal social and gender relationships has a dislocating effect.

All these changes have a direct impact of the aesthetics of the novels. The plot of the novel is structured by the desire to uphold the social and moral order. The social bond is on the brink of being dissolved: on the one hand by the growing power of the market economy which compels everyone to self-interest, and on the

other hand by a process of urbanisation. The peasants might have liberated the old boyar and vented their anger, but they will still have to face the state justice for the murder of Tănase, as well as finding ways to survive in the market economy. The old boyar, now in advanced old age, is left alone to tend for the country's lands, as the younger generations have moved to the city and entered politics and the state administration. All this lends a strong nostalgia to the novels. This nostalgia is generated by the tension between a romanticised past and the realism of the present. While the construction of the plot and the nostalgic mood gives the novels a Romantic sensibility, the separation of life in different autonomous spheres, especially the emergence of the economic field as an autonomous force, increases its realism. While in *Ciocolii vechi și noi*, Dinu Păturică stood out as the most colourful character, here all the main characters shine through the complexity of their characterisation. This complexity is the outcome of the insertion of each character in the multiplicity of discursive spheres as well as the development of the relationships with the others. The attention with which Zamfirescu explores the inner and outer tensions and how they unfold gives all major characters a measure of psychological depth while at the same time grounding them solidly within the networks of social relationships. The emergence of Zamfirescu's novels is not just a process of "synchronisation" with Western aesthetic values, such as Romanticism and the Realist novel, but a synthetic response to a historical context through which a selective assimilation of influences generated a specific cultural sensibility, or structure of feeling as Raymond Williams called it.²²

Zamfirescu's novels provide in the figure of Tănase Scatiu a complete rearticulation of the parvenu. It could be rationalised that if Filimon was representing the old type of parvenu, Zamfirescu completed this representation by presenting the new type. In the very different characters of Dinu Păturică and Tănase Scatiu the "parvenu" is revealed as an abstract cultural construct whose changing form comprises the function to deal with the rise of new social forces. The category of the parvenu would continue to flourish in the Romanian novel in the first half of the twentieth century.²³ However, the rising socio-economic forces would acquire a new socio-cultural category, that of the entrepreneur.

²² Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 128-35.

²³ Other novels that have parvenus among their characters are, Cezar Petrescu, *Întunecare* (Darkening, 1927); Camil Petrescu, *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* (Last Night of Love, First Night of War, 1930); George Călinescu, *Enigma Otiliei* (Otilia's Mystery, 1938); Ion Marin Sadoveanu, *Sfârșit de veac în București* (End of Century in Bucharest, 1944).

2 The Miser

Between the parvenu and the entrepreneur, however, another articulation of the self-interested individual appeared in Romanian literature at the end of the nineteenth century. In the novella *Hagi Tudose*, published in 1887, Barbu Delavrancea presents the classical portrayal of the miser in modern Romanian literature. In 1912, Delavrancea adapted the novella into a play. In many ways both the novella and the play are closer to *Ciocoii vechi și noi* than to *Viața la țară* and *Tănase Scatiu*, with which they overlapped in time. Set in Vitan, a marginal neighbourhood of Bucharest, the novella is a character study that focuses on the psychological structure of the miser, Hagi Tudose. While the story of Hagi Tudose presents a measure of social dynamism, due to the fact that it registers Hagi Tudose's rise from a poor apprentice to a wealthy merchant, this is ultimately of little importance because it brings no change in either social status or lifestyle. Despite his wealth, Tudose lives in dire poverty. He hates spending money for he sees it as sheer waste. His whole libidinal investment is in the physical presence of money, which he counts and contemplates at night. The novella is focused – not on the actions of the character – but on his psychological states that oscillate between the pleasure of contemplating his money and the fear of losing it: Hagi Tudose is completely absorbed in his money fetish. While this alienates him from the surrounding world, it enriches his internal being. He projects all social relationships onto his relationship with wealth. When he becomes the sole owner of a shop he sees it as the fulfilment of marriage and parenthood.²⁴ But his real life is in gold coins in which he sees his children.²⁵ The paradox of the withdrawal from the world is that his inner life becomes a simulacrum of external relationships. The individual becomes autonomous and independent from the external social world, only to replicate that world in his internal life.

In adapting the novella as a theatrical drama, Delavrancea introduced new characters, the most significant being the couple Matache and Gherghina Profirel. They are parvenus in the mould of Tănase Scatiu. Matache Profirel was co-owner of a shop with Hagi Tudose, but he is now a landowner and engages in commercial land transactions. This move from shopkeeper to landowner registers a social dynamic very much in contrast to Hagi Tudose's complete estrangement from society. However, while they are satirised for their ostentatious poor taste and

²⁴ Barbu Delavrancea, *Hagi Tudose: Tipuri și moravuri* (București: Socec and Comp., 1903), p. 20.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

vanity, expressed through their excessive spending and consumption of luxury goods, the Profirels have nothing of the villainy of Tănase. In fact, their charitableness is contrasted to Tudose's stinginess. In many ways Matache and Gherghina Profirel anticipate the emergence of the entrepreneur.

Placed between the diametrically opposing types of the parvenu and the entrepreneur, the miser seems a character out of place, both historically and socially. However, Delavrancea's novella, more so than the play, represents an important literary and socio-cultural development, that being the discovery and articulation of the individuals' inner private space and their psychology. In other words, this is the discovery of individualism: the bourgeois individual as an entity autonomous from their social and historical environment.²⁶ Delavrancea's representation of the miser is a critical response to this process of individualisation of the modern world.

3 The Entrepreneur

The parvenu and the miser are negative cultural representations of the self-interested individual engendered by the capitalist economy, their representations functioning as forms of critique and containment. Mihail Sadoveanu, however, in his post First World War novels turned this around by presenting the rising capitalist rural classes, in the form of the entrepreneur, as the answer to social problems. Critics have recognised that these novels present a world in transition from feudalism to capitalism, but have seen them as a critique of the rising bourgeois society.²⁷ As this thesis will show, Sadoveanu's vision is much more ambiguous.

The crucial historical change that marked the inter-war period in Romania was the creation of Greater Romania through the acquisition of Transylvania and

²⁶ The changing evaluation during communism of Delavrancea's versions of the story articulated in the novella and the drama shows the shift in perspective that took place during the 1960s. In the forward to the 1951 edition of the novella, Valentin Silvestru considers the drama superior because of the more developed social and historical setting. In contrast, in the preface to the 1963 volume of collected theatre, Al. Săndulescu regards the novella to be superior because of the artistry in rendering the psychological features of Hagi Tudose. The shift from the social to the psychological as focus of literary judgement marks not simply a change in the literary field but more generally a shift towards individuality that took place in Romanian literary criticism during the 1960s, especially in terms of integrity ethical and professional. See, Valentin Silvestru, 'Foreword', in Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea, *Hagi-Tudose* (București: Editura Tineretului, 1951), pp. 3-10. And, Al. Săndulescu, 'Preface', in, Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea, *Apus de soare* (București: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1963).

²⁷ Sadoveanu's post First World War novels have been generally regarded as representing a world in transition from feudalism to capitalism, and as a form of critique of the latter. See Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, pp. 579-80.

Bessarabia. However, this national political achievement unfairly casts a shadow on another important event, the land reforms that were implemented after the First World War. These reforms – while they failed to revolutionise the rural economy – did bring to an end to the importance of the boyar class in the Old Kingdom.²⁸ It is in this historical context that Sadoveanu's novels emerge and respond to.

In the novel, *Venea o moară pe Siret* (A Mill Came Down the River Siret, 1925) Sadoveanu revisits the same period as that of Zamfirescu's novels: the end of the nineteenth century. However, the ideological perspective by now had changed considerably. Sadoveanu is no longer concerned with the preservation of the old social order, but with the articulation of the transition to a new one. The parvenu, because of its defined role of containment, was not adequate to the task of presenting the emerging social order as legitimate; it is thus replaced with the entrepreneur. Nevertheless, Sadoveanu was faced with the thorny task of ideological rearticulation. The difficulty derives from the fact that the boyar class had a powerful aura of social and moral superiority, while the new rising bourgeoisie, driven by economic self-interest, was already stigmatised in the figures of the parvenu. This is revealed in the imbalance of the novel's plot. The rise of the new class of entrepreneurs is an underdeveloped subplot in the context of the main story about the fall of the boyar class. However, the fall of the boyars lacks gravity. It has only minimal social resonance, and is concentrated into a melodramatic love story. In contrast, the rise of the new entrepreneurial classes, despite being less developed, is more solidly grounded in social relations.

The novel's main social conflict between different classes is symbolically articulated in the romantic competition for the same woman, the peasant Ana, between three men: the old boyar, Alexandru Filoti, his son, Costi, and the peasant, Vasile Brebu. This conflict ends in the death of Vasile and Ana, the facial disfigurement of Costi and the irreconcilable breakdown in relations between father and son. In this way, the melodramatic love story is symbolic of the dissolution of the bond between the peasants and boyars, and of the dissipation and collapse of the boyar class. The competition among the three men for Ana is presented as a purely erotic drive, beyond any economic or social interests or roles. This is a revealing development because it registers the emergence of the erotic drive as an autonomous force. Boyar and peasant, young and old, all fall under the erotic spell of the beautiful Ana. The erotic motive did appear in Filimon and Zamfirescu's novels, but it was usually coupled with or subordinated to other discourses,

²⁸ For a succinct but incisive examination of the achievements and failures of the land reforms see Hitchins, *Rumania 1866-1947*, pp. 347-59.

including moral (love) and economic (lust for money). The emergence of the erotic as an autonomous force that escapes social control is paralleled by the autonomisation of economic forces. The modern bourgeois individual is no longer an integrated subject but becomes articulated at the intersection of different and autonomous discourses, each competing for control.²⁹

The erotic conflict is redoubled by the economic ruin of the aristocratic class. The boyars, both the old and young generations, are neither able nor interested in overcoming their aristocratic disdain for economic affairs. This leads to their imminent ruin. In the end, Alexandru Filoti, the boyar patriarch, has to sell most of his family estate to Evghenie Ciornei, the entrepreneur. This represents a significant development in the articulation of social relations because Evghenie is an outsider who plays no direct role in the economic ruin of the boyars. He is introduced in the story when the heavily indebted Alexandru Filoti asks his money lender to find a buyer. There is no intrigue underlining the bankruptcy of the boyars. Rather, their economic insolvency is a sign of their moral and social decadence. Besides his disinterest in the administration of his lands, Alexandru Filoti has also abandoned the social duty of looking after the wellbeing of the peasants and other social groups under his jurisdiction. He leaves all these affairs in the hands of the local administrators who, like some small scale Dinu Păturică and Tănase Scatiu, are more interested in their private affairs than in resolving the grievances of the peasants or preserving the wealth of the boyars. The abandonment of their social and economic duties renders the boyars into a superfluous class. Paradoxically, it is their attempt to uphold their social status through careless consumption that leads to their ruin. Their refined manners and sensibility have lost importance and appear superficial and conceited, rather than exemplifying true cultural values.

The moral decadence of the boyar is also illustrated by the change in the relationship with the peasants. While in the previous novels, the boyar was presented as the protector of the peasant from the parvenu, here the boyar is the source of injustice. Alexandru Filoti, consumed by jealousy upon finding out that Vasile Brebu is looking to find Ana, orders him arrested and flogged. He arranges that Vasile Brebu is falsely prosecuted for trespassing, although Vasile works on his estate. Despite being innocent, Vasile ends up in prison for two years. This development has significant importance for the articulation of the position of the peasant in society. Deprived of the status accorded by the social bond with the

²⁹ The impact of the fragmentation and autonomisation of the modern discourses on the articulation of the modern subjectivity has been analysed in Anthony J. Cascardi, *The Subject of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

boyar, the guardian of social justice, and at the same time not yet able to claim his rights as individual citizen, the peasant enters the corrupt justice system defenceless and impotent.

There is a sense of loss in Sadoveanu's presentation of the boyars' social dissipation. However, this has no emotive dramatic power as their drama remains a personal affair, which has little reverberation with wider society. This is because the social bond between boyars and peasants, so prominent in the novels of Zamfirescu, in Sadoveanu is reduced to an empty formality. Taking into consideration this social and cultural dynamic, it is difficult to agree with Nicolae Manolescu's view that in the novel Sadoveanu sympathised with the aristocratic class.³⁰ If there is a character that can be seen to be treated in a sympathetic way, it is that of Androne Brebu, the brother of Vasile Brebu. The two brothers are a new articulation of the peasant as the opposition between nature and culture. Vasile Brebu is the embodiment of the natural element, represented by the erotic drive. He is completely possessed by his instinctual desire for Ana. In contrast, Androne represents a more cultured peasant, educated, with modest wealth but self sufficient nonetheless; he is a calculated and resolutely independent individual. While he avoids being victimised as his brother Vasile was, Androne difficulty in resolving different legal problems indicates the precarious condition of the peasant in a changing world. However, he also represents the impact of the bourgeois social order, that of the transformation of the peasant into an individual economic agent. One can see in Evghenie Ciornei and Androne Brebu the two models that replace the older boyars and peasants; i.e., the big and small new economic agents. However, there are several differences between Androne Brebu and Evghenie Ciornei. First, Androne is not as concerned with the accumulation of wealth as he is with preserving his economic independence from the bigger players. Second, he gives a lot of importance to education. As he has no children he looks after the education of his nephew whose father is rather reluctant to send him to school considering it a waste of time and money. Although a minor element, Androne's interest in education, understood as a means towards individual betterment, stands in contrast to Evghenie's sole economic spirit. Third, there is a difference in social power. While Evghenie Ciornei, driven by self-interest, is virtually an unstoppable force in achieving his goals, Androne is weak and, although conscious of certain injustices, lacks the necessary social clout to pursue their rectification.

³⁰ Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, p. 579.

However, Evghenie Ciornei remains the most important articulation of the new bourgeois subjectivity, that of the entrepreneur. Although uncouth, Evghenie Ciornei does not display the philistine ostentation of Tănase Scatiu. His sobriety is in keeping with his economically calculated nature, which makes him prone to self-restraint. The roles of the parvenu and the philistine are more readily associated with the local administrators, especially Filip Nacovici, the administrator of the boyar's estate. However, his daughter Lavinia benefits from a good education. This generational cultural difference suggests a process of social transition. Moreover, Lavinia's unexpected marriage with Evghenie represents the formation of a new elite and the establishment of a new social order. The two complement each other. While Evghenie brings the economic vitality, Lavinia supplements this with complementary cultural prestige.

Perhaps the most interesting, and yet also the most underdeveloped character is the peasant woman, Ana. Because her psychology and intentions are never explored, her power of seduction has a puzzling ambiguity. It is not clear if she is a self-interested character or some kind of a natural or mystical force. What is clear is that she acts as an erotic stimulus that leads men astray and brings about their ruin. Yet the ambiguity of her motives undermines her categorisation as a negative character. In fact, she can be seen to be a victim of men's lust which she candidly and unambiguously stimulates. Alexandru Filoti, the old boyar, is instantly bewitched by her beauty. He virtually purchases her from her father, and hides her – first in the forest and then in the city. When Ana and the young Filoti try to elope to Paris they accidentally encounter Vasile Brebu. In a drunken outburst of jealousy, Vasile kills Ana and maims young Filoti. The fact that all four characters are driven by pure lust which acts independently of any social, moral or economic factors has an important significance as regards the way the novel manages social antagonism. The embodiments of this new socio-economic subjectivity, Androne Brebu and Evghenie Ciornei are not villains. The moral, social and economic evil is instead displaced and condensed onto the unruly erotic lust, now emerging as an autonomous force. The real polarity and antagonism underlining the novel is between the rational calculated economic spirit and the irrational and unbound erotic drive.

However, what makes Ana's character interesting is the fact that she undergoes a complete transformation. Under the guidance of a German Madame employed by Alexandru Filoti, the peasant Ana is transformed into the refined urban lady Annette. This transformation can be seen as symbolic of a wider social transformation, that of the process of urbanisation. Her change in name, from the

indigenous Ana to the foreign Annette, however, presents this transformation as a process of estrangement. The novel resolves to effect the containment and elimination of this estrangement through the death of Annette. Nevertheless, this containment of the process of transformation is contrasted by the positive ascendancy articulated in the difference between the vulgar administrator, Filip Nacovici, and his educated daughter, Lavinia. Lavinia plays Bach on the piano, but this does not appeal to the father and he longs for local tunes, which he refers to as “true music”. The difference between Ana/Annette and Lavinia is as much cultural as moral. While Ana/Annette registers a superficial transformation, Lavinia’s education and tastes are substantially different from her father’s. Moreover, while Ana/Annette is an unsocialised sexual force, Lavinia represents successful socialisation. Lavinia’s socially sanctioned marriage with Evghenie stands in marked contrast to the purely lustful love induced by Ana/Annette.

It could be said that Sadoveanu’s novel reversed the plot of *Ciocoii vechi și noi*. Here the old order faces death and elimination, while the new upwardly mobile class is legitimised through marriage; at the same time, there is nothing left of the romantic nostalgia of Zamfirescu. This is mostly because the subplot is oriented towards the future rather than the past. However, in contrast to Zamfirescu’s novels, where the inner complexity of the characters was a reflexion of their insertion within the multiplicity of conflicting spheres of the external world, in *Venea o moară pe Siret*, the characters are rather one dimensional, each with his or her specific role in the narrative. While it can be said that the novel successfully manages the process of transition by subsuming the new cultural and economic forces to moral and social order in Lavinia and Evghenie’s marriage, aesthetically the novel reproduces the tension of *Ciocoii vechi și noi*. By default of the fact they have a larger part dedicated in the novel the characters Ana, Alexandru and Costi Filoti stand in marked contrast to the poor development of Lavinia and Evghenie. The rather superficial, melodramatic love story overshadows the social realism. This imbalance in the plot might suggest the difficulty of finding the right narrative form in articulating the complex process of historical change and social antagonism. Nevertheless, the novel marks an important moment in the redeployment of social relationships by reversing class valences. The boyar class is presented as being in a state of decadence, while the new entrepreneurial classes are the embodiment of a new social vitality, both economic and cultural.

Sadoveanu soon found a way in which to address the aesthetic imbalance of *Venea o moară pe Siret*, and produced one of the most powerful representation of the rural entrepreneur, as well as a classic of the Romanian inter-war Realist novel.

In *Baltagul* (The Hatchet) published in 1930, Sadoveanu was no longer concerned with a process of social transition, but with the articulation of a fully established social order. Nevertheless, he could not exclude historical change and social antagonism. Therefore, he needed a complete redeployment of the relationships he articulated. This takes place on three main levels: the geographical location of the novel, gender relationships and the double dichotomy of rural/tradition vs. urban/modernity.

There is a marked contrast between the setting of the novels examined thus far and that of *Baltagul*. While the other novels were set in the plains of Wallachia and Moldova, *Baltagul* is set in the mountains. This change of setting is not simply an ethnographic exploration of a different people but has a powerful ideological role. It allows Sadoveanu to avoid the issue of the dissolving old social order under the drive of new social forces, and at the same time to combine in a harmonious way the mobility of the capitalist economic ethos with the stability of traditional values. The mountain community of shepherds was traditionally one of independent economic agents. The Lipan family – the family at the centre of the novel – is both an economic and social unit. Nechifor and Vitoria Lipan have settled in their present community only after their marriage. They soon acquire prosperity through hard work as well as Nechifor's commercial acumen. This makes the Lipan family as a whole, and especially Nechifor, a pillar of their community of shepherds. The economically underlined upward mobility of this rural capitalist family is no longer a threat to social order but its basis. Social antagonism is reduced to economic foul play, betrayal, murder and robbery, rather than the transgression of social rank or class. This change is not simply a narrative aspect, but a sign of the change of the marker of what is defined as social reality: from the social hierarchy to the market economy. Moreover, this has direct relevance on the construction of the plot and articulation of the conflict in the novel. *Baltagul* has a strong crime story structure, and its protagonist Vitoria Lipan turns out to be a veritable private investigator. When her husband fails to return home from a business trip, Vitoria Lipan discovers and brings to justice the robbers who murdered him.

Vitoria's outstanding performance in the public realm as a private investigator points to the second important redeployment performed in Sadoveanu's novel, that of gender relationships. As with the other novels analysed so far, the world of *Baltagul* is strictly patriarchal. While women's subjectivity is confined to the confined perimeter of the household, men are autonomous mobile agents, both economically and sexually. However, *Baltagul* presents a moment of crisis in this patriarchal order, or, more precisely, a crisis of patriarchal masculinity. Throughout

the novel the dominant male character, Nechifor Lipan, is an absent presence. He appears only through the memories of other characters, especially his wife, Vitoria. Nechifor's disappearance – his failure to return home from a business trip – forces Vitoria out of the household and into the wider public arena. Knowing that it is inappropriate for a woman to venture into the world of men, Vitoria does it reluctantly and with much prior reflection. At first she considers sending her son, Gheorghiță, to search for the father. However, she finds him too immature for the task. Instead, she reasons that as his mother she has all the rights to guide her son, so she decides to take him with her on the journey. Vitoria's reverence for the patriarchal law is powerfully illustrated by the fact that she knows that as a woman she is forbidden to wield the hatchet, the traditional tool/weapon of the shepherds and a phallic symbol of virility. However, she can guide the immature arm of her son who has the right to carry it. This canny solution reveals Vitoria's drive to overcome any obstacles. She goes out into the world, not as an individual woman but as mother, and more importantly as the wife of the well respected Nechifor. Armed with these powerful patriarchal articulations of femininity she is ready to proceed to undertake her task. This solution also reveals the flexibility for redeployment of the patriarchal order in moments of crisis. While Nechifor was alive, Vitoria would not have dreamed of venturing out into the external world of men. Yet, Vitoria's empowerment shows that the phallus and the penis are not identical. Vitoria as mother, wife and a mature and calculated individual is the bearer of the phallus, while Gheorghiță carries only the hatchet; the material symbol; i.e., the penis. Yet her apparent upholding of the patriarchal order is not without ambiguity. Through her power of reason and action Vitoria dominates the novel, towering over all the other male characters. More than the absence of Nechifor, Vitoria's empowerment emphasises the fact that the novel articulates a crisis of masculinity. Vitoria's emergence in the public realm is presented as an emergency response to a crisis of masculinity rather than as a challenge to the patriarchal order.

The combination of modernity and tradition is revealed in the articulation of Vitoria's power and subjectivity through two discourses: erotic drive and reason. The first propels and sustains her in the search for her husband. The second allows her to succeed in her task. Although married to Nechifor for many years, Vitoria still loves him passionately. While waiting for his return, she fondly remembers the moments of love and those of violence that underpin their marriage; for example, the instances when Nechifor was beating her up to quell her jealous outbursts as regards his many affairs. The violent moments are remembered not as signs of abuse or betrayal, but of passionate desire on both sides. Vitoria knows that guided

by a stable love, Nechifor will always return to her. However, Nechifor is well known for his philandering and sexual prowess. This enforces his high social status in the community as well as his virility. In contrast to *Venea o moară pe Siret*, where the erotic drive leads only to ruin, in *Baltagul* the erotic, although irrational, cements both marriage and community. This is because its force is contained and channelled by patriarchal law and rational calculation. While a passionate woman, Vitoria is also a faithful wife. Although a philanderer, Nechifor is a passionate husband and a proud father and head of family. He is also a calculated entrepreneur whose interest in the prosperity of the family business comes first. Equally, Vitoria is a rational and calculated individual. This is proved both in her economic transactions and during her investigation of the whereabouts of her husband. When she needs to sell some of the family's large stock of cheese and furs in order to raise the money necessary for her investigative trip, she gains the respect from a Jewish merchant for her bargaining skills. During her investigation, she calculates every step she takes, basing her movements on her rich knowledge of the mountains, her knowledge of her husband's mountain routes, and the information collected from the people met on the way. When she finds the culprits, she sets a trap for them and skilfully extracts their confession of the crime. As has been often pointed out, the rational investigation of crime and economic rational calculation are interlinked social phenomena. It is thus no surprise that Vitoria is both an astute entrepreneur and cunning private investigator.³¹

While in Vitoria's persona tradition and modernity seem to be reconciled, at the level of the external world they are in a state of potential conflict. As a rational subject, Vitoria challenges two of the traditional institutions of the village: the priest and the witch. Before embarking on her search for Nechifor, Vitoria consults them as is the custom. Although an illiterate woman, she proves to have more sense than either of them. The priest tries to assure her that nothing is wrong and that eventually Nechifor will return. Vitoria dismisses this as nonsense because she knows exactly the route and duration of Nechifor's trip. The same thing happens with the witch. She divines that Nechifor is with another woman. Vitoria dismisses this because she knows that even if Nechifor stopped at another woman's, he would still return home in time. On both occasions, Vitoria counters blind belief and mysticism with rational calculation. Despite being an uneducated and illiterate woman she is not an irrational or mystical being but a modern rational subject.

³¹ Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder* (London: Pluto Press, 1984).

However, Vitoria is also a staunch upholder of traditions. She strongly disproves of her daughter's desire for urban dresses and her foreign tastes. She chastises her daughter for encouraging the romantic advances of the local postmaster's son. Moreover, in order to preserve the chastity of her daughter, she takes her to a convent before embarking on her trip. Yet her most trenchant critique of modernity is her refusal to travel by train. When they plan their journey, Gheorghiță suggests that they should travel by train. Vitoria refuses because in her view the train dulls the senses and estranges the individual from nature.

The most interesting confrontation between tradition and modernity takes place in a small town where Vitoria is invited to talk on the phone with a police inspector. She becomes all flustered and calls the phone the devil's tool. This is the only moment in the novel where we see Vitoria as a superstitious peasant who is out of her depth in the new urban world. This image contrasts strongly with her generally confident and calculated persona. However, it adds rather than detracts from the complexity of her character. It also reinforces the argument against urban modernity, especially the bureaucratic apparatus. When she makes some enquiries, the office clerks appear to be cogs caught in the bureaucratic machine. They are unable to either comprehend Vitoria's demands or help her. This criticism of the state bureaucracy is balanced by the fact that Vitoria seeks approval from a local governor for her planned investigation. This is another sign that she is not a transgressor of authority. Yet the novel clearly presents the efficiency of the entrepreneurial and investigative individual in contrast to the impotence of the state apparatus. One could see in this opposition an argument for *laissez-faire* capitalism and a criticism of statism.

In the novel, Sadoveanu weaves a powerful ideological representation of social reality. However, the ideological nature of his representation does not obstruct the creation of a powerful female character. In Vitoria Lipan, Sadoveanu has created one of the most complex and powerful female characters in inter-war Romanian literature. Through her insertion in a multiplicity of potentially conflicting discourses, Sadoveanu endows her with both psychological depth and a strong social dimension. Each discursive layer gives her persona a different subjective facet: passionate woman, faithful wife, dedicated mother, upholder of tradition and yet a thoroughly rational modern subject; a sensitive and intelligent woman and yet at the same time an illiterate and superstitious peasant. Vitoria Lipan, precisely because of her complexity as a character, functions as a powerful ideological articulation as both entrepreneur and private investigator, a quilting point holding together the rural capitalist social order.

The paradox of the novel is that the ascent of the new economic forces is presented as the preservation of traditional values. Nevertheless, the creation of a strong female character that upholds patriarchal values can be seen as a symbolic response to a process of disintegration of tradition. This is represented by the crisis of patriarchal masculinity and the accommodation of the rising modernity that itself is represented by the advent of the modern rational subject. As we have seen, on the one hand, in the figure of Vitoria, Sadoveanu finds a reconciliation of tradition and modernity while on the other hand this conflict returns in the shape of the tension between rural tradition and urban modernity. Social antagonism is formulated here as cultural conflict rather than it being directly social. One could say that, in fact, the central conflict articulated in *Baltagul* is not the greed driven murder of Nechifor Lipan, but rather the conflict between the rural and urban articulations of life and their respective subjectivities.

Strangely, the tension between tradition and modernity also appears in the critical receptions of the novel. Traditionally, critics have seen *Baltagul* as Sadoveanu retelling the Romanian folkloric ballad *Miorița* (The Lamb). As such they see it as an update of the myth of transhumance and of the peasant as a being fully and harmoniously integrated in nature. In contrast, Nicolae Manolescu rejected the mythical reading and considers *Baltagul* to be a fully realised Realist novel. In the reading undertaken for this chapter, it has been shown that while structurally the novel can be easily seen as Realist, central to it is the articulation of a symbiotic form between modernity (change) and tradition (continuity). As such, neither the mythical nor the realist aspects can be dismissed. Both elements partake in the process of articulation of the new bourgeois social order. The fact that Sadoveanu managed to create a Realist novel adapted to the new historical and social conditions by integrating older elements shows both his creative power of synthesis while at the same time revealing the complexity underlying the new social order, which incorporated older elements and made them its own.

An analysis of the changing faces of the new bourgeois subjectivity must also take into consideration the articulation of the urban entrepreneur. If *Baltagul* and Vitoria Lipan can be seen as the culmination of the articulation of the rural entrepreneurial classes in inter-war fiction, the urban counterpart is to be found in Camil Petrescu's novel *Patul lui Procrust* (The Procrustean Bed, 1933) and its main female character, Mrs. T. The rural urban socio-cultural opposition had been in the

making since the mid-nineteenth century.³² The divide appeared as early as the 1840s in the writings of Mihail Kogălniceanu³³; however, it fully crystallised in the inter-war period. *Patul lui Procust* can be considered as the epitome of the Romanian inter-war modernist novel. Its fragmented structure consisting of the letters and diaries of the various characters, complemented by an extensive commentary of the author/editor in the footnotes, represents the replacement of the concern with plot and centred characters by the concern with individualities and subjective perspectives. While Vitoria Lipan is a complex character with multiple facets, she remains a well centred subject who is able to move with certainty in the world, successfully resolving the mystery of her husband's disappearance while preserving the family business. This is no longer the case in Camil Petrescu's novel. The multiplicity of subjective perspectives constructs the novel as a virtual hall of mirrors. Moreover, they all prove to be based on misrecognition. However, the word "misrecognition" may not be the appropriate term: in the absence of a stable standard of evaluation it is difficult to distinguish the degree of distortion. The role of the author/editor's footnotes is not to provide an omniscient view, but simply to add another subjective perspective to that of the protagonists. The novel articulates a modernist vision of the inter-war urban world; a fragmented and decentred world of individual subjectivities. This world is rich in subjective musings, but also full of uncertainty and indefiniteness. This is reflected by the fact that the deaths of two of the main protagonists, Fred Vasilescu and George D. Ladima, remain unsolvable mysteries despite the fact that all the empirical evidence is available.

As Ileana Orlich has suggested, *Patul lui Procust* is also a novel about a crisis of masculinity.³⁴ However, here the crisis of masculinity is seen as directly related to the modern capitalist system which reduces the relationships between individuals to economic terms. This is exemplified in the characters of Fred's father, a classical figure of the philistine parvenu, and Emilia, a prostitute with thespian aspirations. In this world, the somewhat romantic figures of Fred Vasilescu, a wealthy dandy with an inferiority complex, and George D. Ladima, a brilliant poet

³² This had its origins in the policies of the liberals, representing the middling gentry, who sought the state-bureaucratic modernisation in the urban areas, but maintained underdevelopment in the country side. This led to the development of a professional urban middle class. See the analysis of the social changes in Gale Stokes, 'The Social Origins of East European Politics', in *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Daniel Chirot (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 210-51.

³³ See the story 'Tainele Inimei' (Heart's Secrets, 1850), where the urban and the rural bourgeois classes are presented in opposition, in Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Scrieri Alese*, 2nd edn (București: Editura de stat pentru literatură și artă, 1956), pp. 132-59.

³⁴ Ileana Orlich, *Myth and Modernity in the Twentieth-Century Romanian Novel* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs, 2009), p. 43.

but without luck in love or his career, fail to find their reason for existence and escape into death. Ladima commits suicide by shooting himself. Fred dies more ambiguously when the airplane he is piloting crashes, raising the question of whether it was an accident or suicide. In contrast to these two embodiments of masculine failure, in Mrs T we have a successful adaptation to the modern urban life. Her success depends on the separation of her life into private and public spheres. In public life she is a successful businesswoman running a furniture business, where she transforms old furniture into new items reflecting modernist styles. This encapsulates powerful symbolism as regards moderation and reform, as the old furniture is preserved rather than destroyed, by being refashioned into something new. In contrast, in her private life she has constructed a rurally inspired intimate space of purity where she takes refuge from the bustle of metropolitan life. In her double life, Mrs T finds a balance between modernity and tradition. Both her public and private selves are thus models of moderation in balancing change and continuity. The only thing that Mrs T does not succeed in finding is love and a stable relationship. Although deeply in love with each other, Mrs T and Fred Vasilescu prove to be incompatible individualities. This incompatibility is generated by Fred's inferiority complex and by Mrs T's stubbornly guarded independence. Together with the farcical incompatibility between Emilia (the prostitute) and Ladima (the hopeless romantic) the novel seems to present a crisis of the family as social structure. In Camil Petrescu's novel, the erotic drive – although an essential aspect of individual subjectivity – has neither destructive force as in *Venea o moară pe Siret* nor binding power as in *Baltagul*. In the highly individualising yet alienating life of a metropolis dominated by money the erotic drive splits into readily purchased sexual pleasure (Emilia) and an impossible-to-fulfil longing for love (Mrs T).

Modern women Mrs T and Emilia remain nevertheless within the boundaries of traditional femininity. This is evident if they are contrasted with the young American, Mouthy. While she has only a brief appearance at the beginning of the novel, representing one of Fred's many affairs, her presence is striking in its difference from the local femininities. The daughter of a very rich American oil tycoon, she drinks whisky, is openly flirtatious and boyish. This embodies a very different kind of modern femininity, adventurous and daring, transgressing the traditional gender norms. In contrast, Mrs T and Emilia preserve their traditional, more reserved femininity.

It can be said that in *Patul lui Procust*, Camil Petrescu articulates social antagonism in the same way as Duiliu Zamfirescu did in his novels, only he adapts it to the urban environment. Social antagonism manifests as cultural distinction,

particularly in the articulation of gender. The most prominent is the difference between the vulgar Emilia (the prostitute) and refined Mrs T who is a lady of independent means. While economically both depend on the market economy, culturally they are miles apart. While Mrs T is presented as an authentic sensibility, Emilia is the epitome of the inauthentic as she is false in everything she does – be it as an actress or a lover. The paradox consists in the fact that Mrs T’s authenticity is based on the division of her individuality between her public and private personas, while Emilia’s duplicity is redoubled by the unity of her subjectivity, which remains the same in all situations. In a similar way the stylish dandy, Fred, and the romantic poet, Ladima, because of their search for an authentic love and their disdain for economic affairs they stand in marked contrast to the other male characters in the novel. Camil Petrescu’s novel, however, does not present a period of transition but simply the contradictions and conflicts of a well established order. George D. Ladima, despite his romanticism, is not primarily representing the “passing away of an artistic sensibility” as Ileana Orlich suggests.³⁵ His nostalgia for a golden age of integrity could, in fact, be argued to be a modernist sensibility. In other words, his failure to succeed is a symptom of modern life; a quintessentially contemporary contradiction between moral and aesthetic ideals, on the one hand, and cold economic calculation on the other. This opposition between ideals and interest is presented in the novel in Ladima’s refusal to abandon his integrity for money, which leads to his failed journalistic career, driving him into unemployment and poverty. As one of the characters remarks, in the Romania of the time, one is not born as a “man” (om), but is made into one by upper class social sponsors.³⁶ In Ladima’s story an important contradiction at the heart of the articulation of bourgeois subjectivity is revealed – the contradiction between the demand for individual autonomy and the concomitant subordination of the individual to market forces.

To return to the notion of rural/urban opposition, Mrs T and Victoria Lipan present two contrasting articulations of femininity: Mrs T’s urban sophistication stands in marked contrast to Vitoria Lipan’s rural simplicity. However, despite their differences the two characters have at least two things in common: first, both are successful individual women in a paradoxical world where men dominate, yet masculinity is in crisis; second, together they signify the complete redeployment of social relationships. The old social structure and its sensibilities are no longer to be observed, not even as nostalgia. Past social relations have been reified and reduced to stylistic forms that clothe the new social structures; cultural posturing on

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁶ Camil Petrescu, *Patul lui Procust* (București: Editura Gramar, 2009), p. 130.

the part of both Vitoria Lipan and Mrs T as contrasted with Ladima's romantic sensibility. Culturally, modernity becomes definable as the contestation between two equally new formations: rural traditionalism and urban modernism.

From this analysis of the literary articulation of subjectivity during the national project, it can be concluded that this was a period of intense historical change and social conflict. The rise of the bourgeois social order dislocated the older social structures and imposed a certain uniformity of subjectivity. This process especially affected the older social class structures, which were based on rank or the bond between boyars and peasants. No one escaped the subjectivity imposed by the bourgeois order: boyars and peasants, rural dwellers and urban denizens, men and women alike were all turned into bourgeois self-interested individuals. The seeming continuity of the peasants is a false perception. The collective peasantry of Filimon is very different from the collective peasantry of Zamfirescu. Vasile and Androne Brebu, from *Venea o moară pe Siret*, the individual peasants of Zamfirescu or Vitoria and Nechifor Lipan are all embodiments of different subjectivities. The "peasant" as a social class, rather than being an unchanging entity, was subject to historical change. In fact, it could be said that the peasant was transformed from a social class into a cultural formation by the time of Sadoveanu. The "peasant" is revealed as amorphous ideological construct projecting unity and continuity where, in fact, there was social stratification and historical change.³⁷ The hegemony of the bourgeois social order and subjectivity does not mean that there was a process of social uniformisation. Social stratification and antagonism were no longer primarily presented in terms of class. Instead, they became articulated in cultural terms as tradition versus modernity; in moral terms as the person of integrity versus the corrupt individual; and in aesthetic terms as the authentic versus inauthentic subjects.

Besides social class, there was a complex change in the articulation of gender relationships. The relationship between patriarchy and capitalism is marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, in the form of the parvenu, capitalism appears to undermine patriarchal structures while on the other hand, through the form of the entrepreneur, capitalism appears as the energy revitalising traditional gender relationships. The bourgeois separation of life into autonomous spheres, such as the economic and the political (as we have seen in Zamfirescu's novels), also

³⁷ The complex history of the representation of the peasant in Romanian history is explored recently in Alex Drace-Francis, 'The Traditions of Invention. Representations of the Romanian Peasant from Ancient Stereotype to Modern Symbol', in, *The Tradition of Invention: Romanian Ethnic and Social Stereotypes in Historical Context* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 11-59.

affected the representation of the erotic drive. In Sadoveanu, the autonomous erotic drive is either destructive (*Venea o moară pe Siret*) or the very cement that holds together a stable family and social order (*Baltagul*). As such, patriarchal structure takes on a renewed function for both containing and accommodating the new social forces. Moreover, through the articulation of a crisis of masculinity and the emergence of powerful individualistic women, the novels of Mihail Sadoveanu and Camil Petrescu use the patriarchal structures as a means of critique of the new social order.

This historical and social evolution is paralleled by an evolution of literary forms, from the romance narrative of Filimon to the Realist and Modernist narratives of Sadoveanu and Camil Petrescu respectively. These cultural/literary evolutions developed alongside the transformation of Romania into a bourgeois society based on the Western-inspired model of modernity. This seems to be in agreement with Eugen Lovinescu's theory of the process of "synchronisation" of Romania with the West. However, one has to also bear in mind that these works were primarily responses to local historical changes and social conflicts, which selectively and synthetically assimilated Western influences. There is a tendency in Romanian literary criticism to select Western canonical authors and to transform them into emulating models. It is often decried that Romanian literature does not have enough Balzacs or Prousts.³⁸ Arguably, this is a misleading way of doing comparative studies. For example, it would be strange to hear that English literature does not have enough Prousts or Kafkas, or that French literature does not have enough Joyces or Woolfs. What is interesting in comparative studies is the way different writers in different geo-political contexts respond and treat common themes, particularly as argued by Franco Moretti, how they respond to historical changes and social conflicts. Camil Petrescu cannot be said to be a Romanian Proust; nor Mihail Sadoveanu a Romanian Balzac. Such comparisons arguably only help to obfuscate rather than illuminate the development of Romanian literature, and further presents the danger of subsuming the achievements of Romanian writers by the folly of broad comparisons when discussing them in the context of their Western counterparts. Rather, they should be placed in a complex synchronic framework and defined as both a process of accumulation of articulations and as a conflicting process characterised by antagonism and dislocation. These processes all took part in creating a modern culture: the entrepreneur does not simply supersede the parvenu, but the two cultural articulations enter into a relationship of antagonism,

³⁸ Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism*, p. 401.

competing over the articulation of the self-interested individual. Similarly, the Realism of *Baltagul* and the rural traditional femininity of Vitoria Lipan, on the one hand, and the Modernism of *Patul lui Procust* and urban modern femininity of Mrs T, on the other hand, are to be seen as competing articulating models in response to modernity. It would be misleading to indiscriminately subordinate these local articulations to a universal and abstract frame of literary forms that fetes Modernism while relegating Realism to the nineteenth century. The cultural battle between Modernism and Realism should be seen as a cultural symptom of twentieth century European social antagonism with particular local instances.³⁹

The imposition of the Socialist Realist model after the Second World War is usually seen as a complete break with the inter-war developments. In the following chapter, this position will be challenged by tracing both changes and continuities in the articulation of subjectivity in the first true classic of Romanian Socialist Realism, Mihail Sadoveanu's *Mitrea Cocor*. It will be argued that the Communist Project is best understood as redeployment rather than break, the combination of old and the new social and gender structures within a new ideological horizon.

³⁹ See the discussion by Raymond Williams of the construction of the Western Modernist canon through a process of selection from a heterogeneous literary field. Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), pp. 31-5.

CHAPTER 2 | Mitrea Cocor: The Socialist Subject in Revolutionary Development

In writing his Socialist Realist works, Mihail Sadoveanu had to follow certain principles of abstract dogma, such as “ideological commitment” (*ideinost*), “party-mindedness” (*partiinnost*), and “national/popular spirit” (*narodnost*)¹. These principles were setting the parameters of representation and, because of the unpredictability of their enforcement by the authorities, functioned as rather arbitrary criteria of censorship. However, they do not elucidate the actual forms of the articulations of social relationships. As Katerina Clark has argued, ultimately, the Socialist Realist literary works of the period were produced by artists working creatively within the boundaries of an officially sanctioned, discursive field; this was a creative process not just repetition.² In this chapter, the focus will be on the way Mihail Sadoveanu creatively engaged in *Mitrea Cocor* while reconciling the multiple issues confronting the newly installed communist regime. At the centre of the Communist Project was the transformation of social relationships, processes that were ideologically condensed in the creation of a new subjectivity, the so-called “New Man”. Behind this term hid a multiplicity of social relationships of which class (the creation of a classless society) and gender (gender equality) were pivotal. The discourse of social transformation, which was based on equality promoted by the regime, is today regarded to have eradicated individual differences and generated the so called “faceless masses”.³ In contrast, this chapter will argue that the Communist Project performed a redeployment of social relationships that led to the privileging of certain differences over others. Moreover, rather than creating a homogeneous society the Communist Project of transformation was underlined by the conflict between the drive for social emancipation and the reproduction of hierarchical relationships of power/knowledge, and its subjective corollary, the creation of emancipated individual subjects and their subordination to the party⁴. This contradiction was manifest in both class and gender relationships.

¹ These three categories are identified as central to Socialist Realism in Leonid Heller, ‘A World of Prettiness: Socialist Realism and Its Aesthetic Categories’, in *Socialist Realism without Shores*, ed. by Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 51.

² For an analysis of the creative role of the author within the delimited field of Socialist Realism see, Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3rd edn (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 13.

³ Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity*, p. 33; also Mudure, ‘A Zeugmata Space’, pp. 23-24.

⁴ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 11.

In addition, Sadoveanu had to engage with the political and the ideological need to provide a sense of continuity and legitimacy to the Communist Project by situating it in the existing local social and historical context. As a consequence, Sadoveanu had not only to give form to the revolutionary process of transformation, but to rearticulate the past from the perspective of this new process. In other words, he had to “represent society in its revolutionary development” because the central tenet of Socialist Realism demanded it.⁵ Put in abstract terms, the Communist Project meant the disarticulation of the old and the re-articulation of a new social order. This chapter will argue that in *Mitrea Cocor*, Sadoveanu presented in the most radical form socialist subjects in their revolutionary development.

In order to trace the redeployment of social relationships and underlining conflicts Sadoveanu articulated in *Mitrea Cocor*, this analysis will be divided into three parts: “the old order”, “the war and Soviet education”, and “the new order”. In each part, the articulation of class and gender relationships and the way in which they construct *Mitrea Cocor*, the protagonist of the novel, both as an individual subject and in relationship with the other characters will be examined. When discussing class, the focus will be on the way in which Sadoveanu rearticulates the mediation of social relationships through money and property in his representation of the old order, and the new mediations through the division of labour into manual and intellectual, and of knowledge into technical and political discourses for the new order. When discussing gender, the attention will be on the way Sadoveanu uses the patriarchal frame and towards what purpose.

Sadoveanu’s choice of a rural setting for *Mitrea Cocor*, rather than an urban and industrial one, has to be seen in both a personal and a historical context. Ideologically, Sadoveanu’s interwar literary output was already concerned with the rural sphere, as illustrated by his “traditionalist” perspective analysed in the previous chapter. Moreover, at the end of the Second World War, despite the interwar process of urbanisation and industrialisation, Romania remained largely an agrarian country, and the vast majority of the population were rural dwellers, many engaged in subsistence agriculture; a socially heterogeneous population gathered under the label “peasantry”.⁶ The mobilisation of this population for the construction of socialism was of great strategic importance for the communist regime. Sadoveanu’s stature as an author of traditionalist views potentially brought much ideological

⁵ Zhdanov, ‘Soviet Literature’, p. 21.

⁶ See the analysis of the interwar period rural society in Hitchins, *Rumania 1866 – 1947*, pp. 338-45.

support to the regime, by rearticulating the old order through the discursive lens of the new regime.

This chapter will argue that Sadoveanu's solution to the multiple tensions and conflicts was the articulation of a radical model for a communist leader, similar in structure to the "problematic individual", which Georg Lukács defined as characterised by the tension between the individual's ideals and the external world.⁷ However, Sadoveanu's articulation goes beyond the three possible models defined by Lukács: absolute idealism, romantic disillusion and *Bildungsroman*. While in the first two models the tension is irresolvable, in the third the tension is resolved as the individual achieves a measure of fulfilment through social integration in the external world. In contrast to this, Sadoveanu suggests that a resolution need not subordinate the individual's ideals to the demands of the external world: his communist protagonist is empowered to transform the world according to his or her ideal. This thesis uses the term "problematic individual" because it arguably captures better than the term "positive hero" the tension and dynamism of Sadoveanu's character, and possibly more generally that of the protagonist of Socialist Realism. Sadoveanu's resolution addresses two important issues: the question of social equality and the problem of hierarchies of power/knowledge. The communist leader is both the embodiment of the overcoming of social division, and, as the individual holder of the vision of the communist future, he is separated from and situated in a position of power over the other subjects. This articulation has implications for social order and stratification in both class and gender relationships. As the novel traces the ascending trajectory of the central character from poor peasant to communist leader, some critics have placed Mitrea Cocor in the literary tradition of the parvenu. For example, Marcel Cornis-Pope considered that Sadoveanu's novel is "about an opportunist who turns the Soviet occupation to his advantage".⁸ This interpretation of the communist activist as a parvenu is both capturing the historical changes brought by the communist regime and reflects the power of the parvenu trope as a form of social critique and containment. Moreover, it reflects the redeployment in the representation of the communist protagonist in the literature of the troubling decade, which this thesis will explore in the work of Augustin Buzura.

At the outset, a few observations about the literary form of *Mitrea Cocor* will prove insightful as regards the analysis in this chapter. Sadoveanu was, and still is,

⁷ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 97.

⁸ Cornis-Pope, 'Romanian Novel', p. 1122.

the focus of debate regarding his position as a writer.⁹ As this thesis has mentioned, this debate is central to the categorisation of *Baltagul* as either a modern mythical rendition of a folkloric ballad or a fully-fledged Realist novel. In Sadoveanu, however, this opposition between serious Realist novelist and romance novelist can be argued to be mistaken. In fact, he effortlessly blended the familiar narrative elements of the populist novelist with the sharp, penetrating, and sometimes even estranging sensibility of the Realist novelist: this same blend is encountered in *Mitrea Cocor*. The novel is structured round a Realist plot that drives the action towards a complete resolution but with its textual style intensely fractured by the swing between the perspective of how things are and how they should/will be in the future. The communist future, as an object of desire, dislocates and degrades the existing social order. This is the effect of the central tenet of Socialist Realism, which posits that social reality should be represented in its revolutionary development towards communism. The fracturing and dislocation of the text is generated, on the one hand, by the constant switch of character focalisation, and, on the other hand, through the juxtaposition of different discourses. These constant changes produce tensions and ambivalences in the representation of characters and their objects of desire, and mark them as points of intense struggle between different power relationships and knowledge discourses. In this chapter, attention will be paid to the ways these tensions and ambivalences participate in the construction of class and gender subjectivities.

1 The Old Order

There are two main issues at stake in Sadoveanu's redeployment of the articulation of the interwar rural world; i.e., the old order in *Mitrea Cocor*. First, there is the need to present a sense of historical and social dynamism while at the same time presenting the capitalist order as an exhausted force, an obstacle to further progress that concomitantly represents a force of degeneration. Second, there is the need to articulate a historical and social subject with revolutionary potential. Together these issues would provide the sense of continuity and the legitimacy for radical change that the new communist regime required. These redeployments will be explored starting with the way they affect the articulation of class structures and

⁹ For an analysis and a new perspective on Sadoveanu's writing see Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, pp. 583-85.

then move on to gender relationships. On each issue, the general structure will be explored and then an analysis of the way in which Mitrea Cocor, the protagonist, is inserted into and related to these structures will be undertaken.

In *Mitrea Cocor*, Sadoveanu presents three social classes: the large landowners, the merchant middle classes, and the peasants. The first two are presented in terms of their undivided desire for the accumulation of wealth. In contrast, the peasants are divided beings, subjected as they are to their desire for wealth while at the same time also subjected to personal and emotional impoverishment; i.e., the impossibility of fulfilling their desires. This tension marks them as a social force for historical transformation. There is however an ambiguity underlining the tension characteristic to the peasants: it can lead to either the way of the parvenu or along the path to revolution. This is illustrated by the different paths Mitrea Cocor and his brother, Ghiță Lungu, take; the former as a revolutionary subject, and the latter as parvenu.

The characters representing the large landowners, the old boyar Mavromati, and the new entrepreneur (*ciocoi*) Cristea, find their counterpart in Alexandru Filoti and Evghenie Ciornei from *Venea o moară pe Siret*. Like Filoti, Mavromati is presented as weak and unable to properly run his estate. His impotence is suggested by the fact that when he observes the peasants in activities other than work, the only thing he is able to do is to shoot his gun in the air. Moreover, he has been abandoned by his children who left for Paris where they squandered his fortune. The distance between father and children, which echoes the rupture presented in *Venea o moară pe Siret*, suggests the advanced social decay of the old boyar class; a force completely exhausted socially, economically and culturally.

The same perspective is also registered in the representation of the entrepreneur. In *Venea o moară pe Siret*, Evghenie Ciornei is the embodiment of an inexhaustible economic force, and together with Lavinia, his cultured wife, represents a revitalised bourgeois landed class. In contrast, Cristea, the *ciocoi* in *Mitrea Cocor*, loses his social and economic vitality. Once he acquires Mavromati's estate, Cristea seems to have reached not only the limit of upward social mobility but also the entrepreneurial drive for economic growth.

While Cristea is a less dynamic character than Ciornei, he is not as powerless as Mavromati. Cristea inspects the estate by driving in a horse cart and shooting at the idle peasants with salt granules. However, his real power resides in the fact that he is rich while the peasants are poor. His greed and cruelty are presented as personal characteristics rather than as engendered by the economic system. The fact that he is a "negative character" is emphasised by his physical

appearance. This form of characterisation was previously used to great effect by Sadoveanu in *Baltagul*. Nechifor's murderer has a harelip, the external physical mark of his internal villainous nature. Cristea is big and tall and has a huge growth on his nose which results in the peasants giving him the nickname Cristea Three Noses (Trei Nasuri). The excessiveness of his physical appearance is symbolic of his greed and cruelty. The combination of greed and lack of social dynamism make Cristea more akin to a miser than to a parvenu or an entrepreneur.

Sadoveanu's use of degrees of differentiation in the articulation of the personalities of the landed class characters facilitates both the creation of a sense of social dynamism in the transfer of power from the old boyar and the new capitalist land owner and the exhaustion of that dynamism as well as the transformation of the capitalist into an obstacle to further progress. Moreover, the contrast between the weakness of Mavromati and the power of Cristea suggests a historical process of intensification of the disciplining and exploitation of the peasants in the passage from the boyar to the entrepreneur/miser.

Sadoveanu embodies the same combination of dynamism and exhaustion in the articulation of the rural middle classes in Ghiță Lungu, Mitrea Cocor's older brother. He starts a business partnership, but he soon abandons his associate and opens a mill in the village. Despite his desire to accumulate wealth, the mill is the end of his entrepreneurial career. Instead, he turns to petty crime, stealing from his customers at the mill. In addition, he plots to deprive of their inheritance his brother, Mitrea, as well as Nastasia, the young sister of his wife. The drive for the accumulation of wealth is presented therefore as breaking family ties, the traditional social unit. From a rising entrepreneur he turned into a parvenu, and ultimately into a miser.

An important aspect of Ghiță's personality is his lack of social ambition. This differentiates him from both Dinu Păturică and Tănase Scatiu. These two classical embodiments of the parvenu were in conflict with their social superiors, the boyars, as well as exploiters of the peasants. In contrast, Ghiță openly acknowledges his sincere subservience to Cristea, the big landowner:

Bogatul știe mai multe decât săracul; de aia e bogat, că e deștept. Ciocoiul știe mai multe decât mine.¹⁰

Rich men know more than the poor ones; that's why he is rich, because he is clever. The parvenu knows more than I do.¹¹

¹⁰ Mihail Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, in *Opere*, vol. 17, (București: ESPLA, 1959), p. 291.

Through this formulation, Ghiță voluntarily subordinates himself to Cristea and willingly accepts the bourgeois hierarchy of power/knowledge. Wealth is a sign of knowledge; of the knowledge of how to make money. Ghiță sees Cristea as the source of authority and never challenges him economically, intellectually or morally. The two never enter in competition, but instead form a tacit brotherhood. At one point, Mitrea points out the similarity between the appearances of the two. While Cristea is big and tall, Ghiță is short and fat. Cristea's excess is expressed in the growth on his nose. Similarly, Ghiță's nose is red from the abuse of alcohol, another symbol of excess.

In contrast to his reverence for the rich, Ghiță has a deep dislike towards those less wealthy than himself. When towards the end of the novel there is news that the communist regime would implement a land reform that would dismantle the large estates and distribute the land to poor peasants he declares:

Ei socot c-o să li se dea pământ. Așa se tot zvonește de când a venit guvern nou. O să se ia de la ăi bogați, să se dea la săracime. Va să zică, eu muncii și mă căznii o viață pentru puțină agonisită ce am și să vină nepricepuții, leneșii și proștii, s-o roadă ca la praznic.¹²

They think they will receive land. That is the rumour since the new government came to power. They will take from the rich and give to the poor. That's right, I worked and endured hardship for a lifetime to gather the little I have and now the feckless, the lazy and the stupid will feast on it and squander it.¹³

Ghiță's view is informed by an ideology that, on the one hand, appears to value work and thrift while, on the other hand, detests the poor as a feckless and greedy underclass. These attitudes are structured by a particular power/knowledge order that privileges the accumulation of material wealth as the central tenet around which all other aspects of life are organised. This order provides both a structure of values and a sense of social stability, as it orders individuals according to their personal qualities. It could be said that within this order, Cristea and Ghiță are individuals of moral integrity and honesty because both know their place, while at the same time they get what they deserve as regards their ability to make money. In contrast, the poor are the transgressors because they demand what they do not deserve.

¹¹ Mihail Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. P. M. (London: Fore Publications, 1953), p. 111. I use this English translation with some silent modifications to bring it closer to the original.

¹² Ibid, p. 334.

¹³ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P. M., p. 148.

Lacking the audacity and knowledge to make money, they attempt to acquire wealth and prosperity through the transgression of the private property laws, the state intervention in the dismantling of the large estates and the redistribution of land.

However, Sadoveanu does not present the actual structural workings of a capitalist economic system. It is the individual's personal qualities and defects that shape social relationships, rather than social relationships shaping the personality. This strategy of representation has the ideological role of facilitating the distinction between positive and negative characters caught in an epic struggle between good and evil. However, the personification of economic power relationships makes the critique of the system ambiguous. Both Cristea and Ghiță are presented as accumulating their wealth fraudulently. Paradoxically, Sadoveanu presents the defenders of private property law as transgressors against it. For this reason, it is never clear if what is being criticised is the personal defects of individuals or the economic system. One could see in the presentation of Cristea and Ghiță – not a critique of capitalism – but a moral critique of corruption and cruelty, which could just as well be articulated from a capitalist perspective.

In order to dispel this ambiguity, Sadoveanu directly identifies capitalism with corruption. This view is further enforced by Mitrea Cocor's description of capitalism as the "system of the wolf and the lamb" ("sistemul lupilor cu oile")¹⁴. This remark comes as a clarification and stabilisation of any ambiguities that might emerge from the representation of class conflicts in the novel. Moreover, this zoomorphic allegory of social relationships will play an important role at the end of the novel when the bourgeoisie are dispossessed by the socialists.

The presentation of the class structure is completed with the articulation of peasants. Sadoveanu presents the peasants as split between the desire for accumulation of wealth and impoverishment. Some of the individual representations of peasants, Ghiță, his mother, Agapia, and his grandparents are presented as driven by greed and economic interest. Others, like Laie Săracul (Laie the Poor), and Mitrea Cocor are presented as being driven into destitution. The reason behind this discrepancy is presented as springing from individual personal qualities: Laie and Mitrea are impoverished because they are honest; Ghiță and Cristea are rich because they are corrupt. The whole articulation of bourgeois social reality, from landowners to peasants, is framed by this moral structure. Its dominance mediates the representation of other structuring principles, be they economic (accumulation of wealth), erotic (sexual drive, love) or cultural (manners and aesthetic sensibility).

¹⁴ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 221.

Sadoveanu retains the dominant moral dimension present in his interwar period, even if he changes the ideological framework. This presents another element of continuity in his work.

In contrast to the representation of these individuals, the representation of the peasants as a social group is complex and full of ambivalences. The opening paragraphs present the peasants in their relationship with both the natural and social environment. These relationships are both clear and ambiguous. The peasants are clearly presented as a creative force. They found their village, choosing an ironic name for it, Fallen Bank (Malul Surpat), to underscore their relationship with the hostile forces of nature; they name their surroundings, calling the vast plain The Bustards, after the large birds inhabiting it. They also show themselves to be creative through their labour. This is indicated by the word “ogoare” – meaning cultivated field – and is the name that is used to describe the fields around the village. Both of these representations are close to nature and are locked in a tense relationship with it as they struggle with its turbulence, which is represented by the flooding torrents of the river. In this way, Sadoveanu presents the peasants as full of knowledge, symbolic and practical. However, this kind of knowledge is very different from that possessed by Cristea or Ghiță: the knowledge of how to make money. In fact the two are presented as being in opposition: the peasants are the creators and the landowners and millers are exploiters of that creativity.

Social relationships are presented just as clearly as being unjust. While the boyars/parvenus (*boier/cioco*) get rich, the peasants live in poverty. This is exemplified by the fact that they are not allowed to populate the field called The Bustards. The former landowner prohibited the peasants from settling there. The creative nature of the peasants is presented as being obstructed by private property. However, the description of these fields, The Bustards, is conflicting. On the one hand, it is said that this is the place where the boyar's best wheat ripens, meaning that they are fertile and cultivated. On the other hand, the word “pustiu”, meaning wilderness, suggests a barren and deserted plain. The fact that the peasants entertain the wish of building villages there makes it a contested territory between the landowner and the peasants. The discrepancy in its description as a fertile land full of richness, and as barren desert is the symbolic encoding of the social tension between the peasants and the boyars.

The peasant's wish to settle and build villages in the landowner's fields articulates an object of desire, the desire to construct a new life, to transform the world – both its hostile nature (the river Lisa) and unjust social relationships. This

presents the peasants as a potentially dynamic social force, the potential of which is obstructed by the laws of private property. In the articulation of the peasants as collective subjects underlined by an unfulfilled desire, Sadoveanu constructs a potentially revolutionary subject. However, the peasants lack the political vision of transformation. The collective peasantry remains locked in a contemplative position with regards to “what ought to be”. In this way, Sadoveanu provides the space into which to insert the communist party and the communist protagonist as leader. These elements thus function as the quilting point that bridges the present and future, and thus suture the linearity of historical change in accordance with the Marxist vision.

The articulation of the capitalist system in terms of corruption facilitates the construction of opposing subjectivities and destinies. This is reflected in the difference between Mitrea Cocor and his brother, Ghiță. Ghiță, as we have seen, is driven by the desire for wealth and uses corrupt means to achieve it. His path from peasant to miller registers a measure of upward mobility. In contrast, Mitrea, a person of integrity, experiences downward mobility, from peasant to being destitute. First, he is robbed of his inheritance by his brother. Second, entering apprenticeship on Cristea’s estate, he experiences hardship and misery. On his departure for the army he is informed by Cristea that he owes money for the food and clothing he received. In the army his advancement is blocked because of his lack of education. In a typical Marxist formulation of the division of society into two opposing classes under capitalism, Mitrea undergoes a process of proletarianisation, being stripped of all property apart from his labour power. However, he is unable to sell his labour on the market because there is no market. As we have seen, he is always in a position of coerced servitude. However, Mitrea’s destitution and proletarianisation is of an ambiguous nature: it is both a negative process and the sign of his virtue. While the social order obstructs Mitrea’s advancement and reduces him to a pauper, his adamant refusal to participate in schemes to get rich renders him into a virtuous character. Thus, poverty is rendered as a sign of moral integrity.

This chapter has thus far explored Sadoveanu’s complex redeployment of the old class structure, including the transition from the old boyar class to the new rural entrepreneurs, the exhaustion of capitalism as a driving force of historical change, and the emergence of the proletarianised peasants as a potential revolutionary class. However, as has been shown in the analysis of Sadoveanu’s interwar novels, he made use of patriarchal gender relationships in order to present a sense of continuity. In *Venea o moară pe Siret*, the dissolute boyar class presents a patriarchal order in crisis. The old and young Filoti have abandoned their

patriarchal manly duties as heads of family and community. They are superseded in this role by the new revitalised patriarchal family embodied in Evghenie and Lavinia's marriage. In *Baltagul*, there is another crisis of patriarchal relationships. This time the solution comes in the figure of Vitoria Lipan, who is the embodiment of both the new capitalist order and of the patriarchal traditions. Sadoveanu's attitude to the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy seems to have been ambiguous. Capitalism, or, more appropriately, modernity, appears as a threat to the patriarchal order; yet, at the same time, he articulates capitalism as the force that reinvigorates it.

Building on these precedents, in *Mitrea Cocor* the old order is presented as patriarchal while at the same time the patriarchy is represented as being undermined by a crisis of masculinity. All the male characters representing the old order in varying ways: the peasants, the rural middleclass and the large landowners are presented as weak male figures, either dominated by their wives or lacking sexual potency. This is evident in the description of Ghiță and Cristea's relationships with their wives. Ghiță is always overruled by his argumentative wife, Stanca. She acknowledges that a wife has to listen to her husband, but only when she agrees with him; this attitude is not a contestation of the patriarchal order. Stanca remains restricted to the household and confined to a woman's traditional duties: cooking and raising the children. Therefore, she acts as a guardian of the existing social order, as well as the accumulation and preservation of private wealth. Her role is to prevent Ghiță from showing signs of weakness and giving in to Mitrea's apparently unreasonable demand to be sent to school, or have a share of their inheritance. At the same time, from the point of view of a patriarchal order, Ghiță's inability to be the master in respect of his wife signals his lack of manly authority.

In the case of Cristea the same duality is presented, this time in sexual terms. Cristea is married to his third wife, the young Didina. While Cristea is never challenged by his wife, his patriarchal role is undermined by the fact that Didina is presented as sexually available to other men, explicitly Mitrea. This suggests that Cristea might be suffering from impotency. Due to the existence of a structure based on the privilege of the father as head of the household and paternal lineage, male sexual potency has a central role in patriarchy. Cristea's impotence is not a criticism of patriarchy as such, but of Cristea's failure to fulfil his marital duty to provide social heirs. Both cases highlight the fact that what is at stake is not a criticism of patriarchy, but the failure of men to fulfil their roles as patriarchs. Sadoveanu articulates a connection between the exhaustion of capitalism as a force for progress and the weakness of his representative male capitalists, Ghiță and

Cristea. By doing so, he prepares the groundwork for articulating the overthrow of capitalism and the instauration of socialism as the revitalisation of patriarchal male figures.

The most complex redeployment of gender relationships and their intersection with class is in the presentation of Mitrea's family. A close examination of Mitrea's family is necessary for two reasons: first, the relationship between Mitrea's parents, Agapia and Iordan, will be reversed in Mitrea's relationship with his wife Nastasia; second, in this scene Sadoveanu articulates clearly the dual ideological interpellation through which Mitrea emerges as a problematic individual. In this process of socialisation, disciplinary practices are divided between the repressive (corporal punishment) and the emancipatory (education). The scene examined here can be found at the beginning of the novel, immediately following the presentation of the peasants as a social class characterised by unfulfilled desire. The central element revolves around Mitrea's response to the joke about white bread and Judgement Day:

leșeau oamenii vara la câmp trecînd prăpastia Lisei pe un pod
șubred. Cînd ajungeau la Puțul Boilor, simțeau adiînd dinspre
Dropii mireasmă de grîu copt. "Mi-e poftă de pîine albă" ...
zicea careva.

Ceilalți rîdeau. A răspuns odată unul:

"Așteaptă pînă la ziua de apoi, cînd vom brăzda noi bărăganul."
Vorba aceasta, încă ne înțeleasă pentru el, a auzit-o atunci
Mitrea Cocor, fiind în vîrstă numai de unsprezece ani. A rîs și
dînsul.

"De ce rîzi, mă?" L-a întrebat maică-sa, care își făcuse cuibar
de paie lîngă el în căruță.

"Rîd și eu, așa."

"Cînd nu pricepe omul să nu se strîmbe."

"Ba pricep."

Tatăl mîna în față cei doi murgî. A întors fruntea și a rînjit:

"Mitrea ăsta are minte de firoscos; trebuie dat la învățătură."

"Ba mai bine îi dau eu una peste bot, ca să nu se amestece în
vorba ălor mari,"

I-a dat cu dosul palmei peste gură. Mitrea și-a înghițit lacrimile
și a tăcut.

"Nu mai spui nimic?"

Mitrea și-a plecat fruntea îndărătnic. A întors într-o lature un
ochi negru și fioros.

Femeia l-a lovit iar.

"De ce-l loviși, Agapie?" s-a răsucit din nou omul.

Uite-așa, căci se uită la mine ca hoțul.

"Agapie, lasă băiatul în pace."

"Nu-l las; tu, Iordane, să nu te-amesteci, căci eu îi sunt stăpînă.

Numai o dată să-l prind că se mai uită ca acum si-i spînzur

pielea în cui. Așa te uitai și tu cândva, dar te-am domolit. O să-l domolesc și pe Mitrea ăsta.”¹⁵

In the summer, people went to the fields crossing the Lisa River by a small unsteady bridge. When reaching the Cattle-Well, they would smell the breeze the perfume of the ripe corn rising from the fields called The Bustards.

“How I’d like to eat white bread,” somebody would say.

The others would laugh. Once, one of them answered, “Well, wait till the Day of Judgement. Then it’ll be our turn to work the whole field.”

Mitrea was hardly eleven years old when he heard this remark, which he couldn’t follow. He joined in the laughter.

“Why are you laughing?” asked his mother, who was bundled up near him on the straw in the bottom of the cart.

“Oh, I was just laughing.”

“When you do not understand, there’s no need to make faces.”

“But of course I understand.”

In front, his father was driving the two bay horses. He had turned round and chuckled.

“Ho, Ho, there’s no flies on our Mitrea! We’ll have to send him to school.”

“I’d sooner send him a good box on the ears. That’d teach him to stick his nose into grown-up talk.”

And she struck him on the face with the back of her hand. Mitrea swallowed back his tears in silence.

“Haven’t you anything else to say?”

He bent his head obstinately with a side glance of fury.

The woman struck him a second time.

“Why did you hit him again?” the man asked.

“Just because... He was looking at me like a criminal.”

“Why, Agapia, leave the boy alone.”

“No, I won’t leave him alone! And as for you, Iordan, you’d better mind your own business, because I’m the mistress here. If I find him looking at me like that once more, I’ll flay him. You used to have the same kind of look once upon a time, but I cured you of it. Well, I’m going to cure our Mitrea of it too.”¹⁶

The conflict between the parents is formulated as a dispute over gender relationships. The mother’s aggressively dominant position – she claims the role of master – is usurping the father’s traditionally patriarchal leading role. The mother’s violently repressive force, applied to father and son, casts in a negative light the undermining of traditional gender relationships. The mother’s empowerment is not a drive for emancipation: her repressive action connects the undermining of the father’s patriarchal leading role with the oppression of the peasants by the capitalist classes, represented by Cristea and Ghiță: a paradoxical case where the social order is undermined in order to be reproduced is thus represented. This movement

¹⁵ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 170.

¹⁶ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., pp. 1-2.

is akin to that in *Baltagul*, where Vitoria Lipan takes on a dominant role in order to preserve the patriarchal order. However, in *Baltagul* this was presented as an emergency response to a moment of crisis of masculinity, that of the absence of the husband/father.

Mitrea's process of socialisation is presented as his insertion within this paradox of gender and class relationships. The result is that Mitrea is articulated as what Georg Lukács has referred to as a "problematic individual".¹⁷ For Lukács, the protagonist of the novel is characterised by the tension between the individual's ideals and the external world order. The source of the tension that animates Mitrea is in his conflicting socialisation. Mitrea's spontaneous laughter prompted by the joke is best seen in terms of what Louis Althusser has called ideological interpellation.¹⁸ For Althusser, ideology has the role of turning concrete individuals into subjects through an act of interpellation or hailing. Although the joke was not specifically addressed to him, Mitrea's laughter, his instant response and participation in the ritual of the joke, suggests that Mitrea responds to it as to an interpellation. He recognises himself as an individual belonging to the group. Despite being a child, Mitrea is already revealed as subject to the complex articulation of the peasants with all the implied conflicts and desires that result from this. Because it is made through a joke that triggers laughter, Mitrea's interpellation into a subject combines pleasure and education; it is a form of enjoyment. Moreover, the presentation of Mitrea's spontaneous connection with the social collective before the presentation of his familial relationships has the ideological role of enforcing his public and social self rather than his private one. This has the effect of reinforcing the dichotomies of private/public, and social/individual rather than to undermine them.

From the general social level of socialisation the text moves to the level of family. Here, Mitrea is caught in a clash between different articulations competing to master him, represented by the mother and the father. Despite the opposition between the mother and the father's forms of interpellation, both are the embodiments of forms of socialisation; i.e., the individual's insertion into social structures.

The father represents a nurturing form of socialisation. Iordan joins in the social laughter, and pays a compliment to the child as regards his intelligence. He introduces another object of desire: education as fulfilment of the child's talents. The

¹⁷ Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 97.

¹⁸ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 2008).

father's intervention triggers the violent response of the mother, who attempts to put a stop to the stimulation of prohibited knowledge. However, the mother's intervention has the paradoxical effect of fixating him more firmly on the very objects of desire she tries to repress with her intervention: white bread, laughter, knowledge, and school. This is evident in Mitrea's silent obstinacy and furious side glance, both being signs of him jealously clinging to his objects of desire. Mitrea inherited these traits from his father, which would become personal trademarks – outward expressions of his rebelliousness.

Mitrea's resistance to enforced submission brings about another physical punishment. Insubordination, even if silent and merely symbolic, cannot be tolerated, for it is a sign of criminality; i.e., transgression of the social order. Calling him a "hoț" – i.e., a thief – the mother already hints at a particular form of transgression – the unlawful appropriation of things. The child claims possession of knowledge to which he is not entitled. It also reveals that the mother's repressive attitude is not merely a personal quirk, but has a wider social meaning, that of disciplining individuals with the intention of negating any potential for professional and social mobility. White bread and education are not for the peasants, only for the landlords; thus, a conflict between different articulations of social orders is presented. These are represented by, on the one hand, the mother, who aims to preserve individuals within a static and hierarchical social structure, while on the other hand, the father promotes the transformation of both the individual's conditions and subjectivity.

Mitrea's contrarian attitude is aimed not only at the mother, but also at the narrator. The narrator clearly stated that Mitrea did not understand the meaning of the joke. Yet Mitrea makes the opposite claim, and by doing so he claims for himself the position of subject who knows, who enjoys and is part of the adult world. This is a transgression of the adult/child hierarchy enforced by the mother, as well as the narrator. The important thing to notice is that this is not a contest about the type of knowledge in particular, but about who is supposed to be in possession of it. The rebellious personality of Mitrea takes on a narrative dimension; as is the case with the challenge of the narrator's perspective by the collective voice of the peasantry, Mitrea's contestation articulates a subjective desire – an "ought to be" – that decentres the narrative perspectives and introduces tension. In this way, Sadoveanu again presents in Mitrea an individual interpellated by the conflicting ideologies of the social order. The tension between Mitrea's ideals and the oppressive social order makes him a "problematic individual" and creates the potential for social change.

The subsequent disciplinary measures that Mitrea experiences at the hands of Ghiță and Cristea have the effect of turning him into a docile subject while at the same time reinforcing his contrarian personality. The central episode typifying this is when Cristea, at the suggestion of Ghiță, teaches Mitrea a lesson for his rebelliousness. Cristea makes a false complaint to the gendarme, accusing Mitrea of stealing his gun. As we have seen, Cristea had inherited the gun, a phallic symbol of patriarchal authority, from the old Mavromati. Mitrea is arrested and mercilessly beaten by the gendarmes. After this application of corporal punishment, Cristea attempts to pacify and entice Mitrea with money. The two measures, physical chastising and the promise of money are interrelated disciplinary practices: first, the subject is disarticulated through the application of physical violence; second, he is rearticulated by being seduced with the prospect of money. However, what might be seen as a “stick and carrot” strategy fails. Mitrea preserves his dual structure, external obedience and internal rebellion. He humbly accepts the money, however once out of sight he throws it on the ground, spits on it and crushes it under his boot. By refusing the money, Mitrea proves his moral integrity, his resistance to being turned into a subject of the tyranny of economic gain. This further enforces his dual nature as both problematic individual and virtuous character.

By the time he enters the army, Mitrea has completely internalised the fear of punishment:

Venise cu o spaimă la regiment, așteptînd să găsească aici chinuri cumplite. Era mulțumit că nu i se întîmplase nimic din toate cele nedesluite cîte își închipuise. Intrase sub mîna plotonierului Major Cataramă, hotărît să îndeplinească toate ca într-o robie din care nu putea ieși decît supunându-se cu desăvîrșire. Spaima de bătaie pîndea ca o fiară înlăuntrul său. Se temea de răzvrătirea-i proprie ca de un arc întins al unei curse. Așa că plotonierul major Cataramă găsise în el un fecior mlădios și deștept.¹⁹

He arrived at the army barracks full of fear, expecting to meet terrible ordeals there. He was relieved that none of his imagined fears came true. When entering into the hands of adjutant Cataramă, Mitrea made up his mind to obey all demands as if entering into slavery, the only escape from which was total submission. The fear of being beaten lay inside him like a preying beast, and at the same time, he feared his own indomitable spirit of revolt as if he were a trap ready to snap. Thus, adjutant Cataramă found him a docile yet bright servant.²⁰

¹⁹ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 216.

²⁰ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., p. 41.

In this image, Sadoveanu presents Mitrea being turned into a coiled creature; a docile subject, enslaved and forsaken, trapped in fear of his own self. He has thus been successfully integrated into the social order; however, the apparent success of the disciplinary practices is undermined by the persistence of a counter articulation. Mitrea's hatred for the social order and his hopes for a better life are never abandoned. In his dreams he sees religious inspired visions of salvation and an escape into another world. He imagines himself in the dark, waiting before a huge gate beyond which he intuitively feels a world of heavenly light. Sadoveanu's use of the Christian imaginary of salvation, of heaven and hell, of light and darkness are in keeping with the idea that the religious discourse is the only one available in articulating the peasants' grievances and desires. The dominant discourse is able to provide the language by which a form of opposition and the desire of something better can be articulated by the oppressed.

Besides the external practice of physical punishment, Mitrea's disciplining also takes an internal form: this is evident in the articulation of his erotic drive. The erotic had acquired a growing importance in pre-communist, modern Romanian fiction. However, this importance revealed an ambivalent nature and status. On the one hand, in novels such as Sadoveanu's *Venea O Moară Pe Siret*, and Liviu Rebreanu's *Ion*, the erotic was an irrational force, spontaneous and natural, which, if unrestrained, could lead to ruin. On the other hand, it was, as presented in *Baltagul*, a cementing force, sustaining the social order. In articulating the erotic discourse for the new socialist order, Sadoveanu had to deal with these two articulations of the erotic. The solution is a distribution of the values of the erotic along class and gender lines. First, there is class distribution, which sees Mitrea, the poor peasant, as virile subject, in opposition to Cristea, the impotent landowner. This overlaps with the representation of the poor peasants as full of creativity, and thus vitality, in opposition to the exhausted force of the capitalist classes. However, the erotic discourse could become a diverting element from the public oriented aims of the protagonist; i.e., class struggle and social emancipation. For this reason, Mitrea had to be articulated as being in complete control of his erotic drive, rather than being driven by it. This double articulation of Mitrea, as both virile and in control of his sexual drive, is presented in two different episodes: the encounter with Didina, Cristea's young wife, and his relationship with Nastasia, his future wife.

On their first meeting, Didina is stirred by young Mitrea's good looks. Mitrea is embarrassed by the gaze of Didina, and tries to clothe his nakedness, which his rags fail to conceal. Mitrea's embarrassment is a sign that the aroused sexual desire

is reciprocal. He responds to Didina's gaze as to a sexual interpellation, just as she was stirred by his looks. The fact that he understands her desire is revealed in his answer to her inquiry as to what he is hiding: "Mi-ascund sculele. Atîta am."²¹ ("I hide my tools. That is all I have."). However, he soon regains control of his erotic drive:

S-a dus. Bălaie, cu pălărie mare de pai, înpodobită cu panglică albastră.

Se spune una și alta între oamenii conacului despre doamna Didina.

"O fii", își zicea Mitrea, cu tulburare fierbinte. Pe urmă i-a trecut; nu s-a mai gîndit la întîmplarea asta.²²

She went off, her face very fair under the big straw hat with the blue ribbons. Among the servants of the manor various things were said about lady Didina. "It's possible" said Mitrea to himself, with a burning torment. It soon passed, and he did not think about this event anymore.²³

It is important to emphasise here that Mitrea is presented as both in possession of a powerful sexual drive, expressed by the words "tulburare fierbinte" (burning torment) while at the same time being able to control it. Unlike the pre-communist representations, in which the peasant appeared ruled by sexual drives, Mitrea controls them.

Sexual drive is associated also with economic self interest. Having heard that Didina has taken an interest in his brother, Ghiță suggests to Mitrea that he should take advantage of this and improve his material situation. The use of sex for economic benefit was one of the means employed by Dinu Păturică. However, Mitrea adamantly refuses to do so with the words, "Ba, mă nene, oricît de amară ar fi mămăliga ce mi se dă, nu vreau s-o arunc în noroi."²⁴ ("No, uncle. However bitter is the polenta that I receive, I can't drag it in the mud.")²⁵ This again emphasises Mitrea's moral integrity and his disdain for money and sex as forms of power and self-gratification.

Given the importance of the erotic element as symbolic of social vitality, Sadoveanu had to also find a way to articulate it in a positive form. He does so by gendering the erotic discourse. This is evident in Mitrea's encounter with Nastasia, his future wife. Mitrea does not seem to be conscious of his own desire for Nastasia,

²¹ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 189.

²² Ibid., pp. 189-90.

²³ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., pp. 18-19.

²⁴ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, pp. 194-45.

²⁵ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., p. 23.

or even, for that matter, of her love for him. In contrast, Nastasia is presented as passionately and consciously in love with Mitrea. Her love for Mitrea is so strong in fact that he becomes the principle by which her life is regulated. This is illustrated in the episode of their meeting, before Mitrea is ready to leave for his military service. Nastasia asks Mitrea if he loves Veta, a wealthy girl from the village. When he says that he does not love anyone, Nastasia declares that she will wait for his return, even if he makes no promises. It is clear that Nastasia's love for Mitrea overrides all other aspects of her life, and is connected with the hope of marriage. The power of love, seen as a feminine attribute, to cement stable relationships was already portrayed by Sadoveanu in *Baltagul*, where the undivided love for her husband is the basis of Vitoria's faith and power.

By contrasting the differences between Didina and Nastasia, the effects of gender and class intersection can be seen. The bourgeois, sophisticated femininity, as embodied by Didina, is love reduced to sex – a bodily pleasure which can be exchanged for material means. In contrast, the peasant femininity, as embodied by Nastasia, is love attached to a particular individual and is non-exchangeable. There is a strong moral framing of these two forms: Didina is seen as unfaithful while Nastasia as faithful. However, the two relationships can be seen in a different way. The unfaithful Didina remains, as woman, subordinated to her husband: she married Cristea for his money; yet she has a certain sexual independence from him. In contrast, Nastasia is completely subordinated by her love to Mitrea. Sadoveanu presents the reproduction of traditional gender relationships, the wife's subordination through love to her husband, as the answer to the crisis of masculinity caused by capitalism.

This chapter has thus far discussed how Sadoveanu has prepared Mitrea as a potentially revolutionary subject. However, his potential grows and matures only in contact with and under the guidance of the communist ideology. Mitrea's political education starts with his encounter with communists in the army. Communism is presented as the answer to Mitrea's desires, especially the desire for education. Old Florea, an army colleague, takes the dual role of educator and friend. The connection between education and communism has multiple roles. First, it resolves the question of knowledge: as has been shown, Sadoveanu presents capitalism and knowledge as being in opposition, and for this reason capitalism is rendered as an obstacle for social progress and development. At the same time, this posits technical and creative knowledge as free elements, both of which can be articulated together with radical politics. This is achieved by presenting communists as interested in the education of Mitrea Cocor. This is practically illustrated by the fact

that Costea teaches Mitrea to read and write. The following dialogue between Mitrea and Costea presents the transformative effect of communism:

“Da, da. Ție îți trebuie învățătură. Ți s-ar deschide mai bine priceperea.”

“Poate mi s-ar deschide poarta...”

Fierarul l-a privit nedumerit. Nu-i cunoștea visul.

“... așa că m-am gândit, mă Mitreo, să-ți cumpăr carte și tăbliță. Este la bateria a cincea unul de-ai noștri cărturar. Să te ia în primire.”

“S-ar putea?” A tresărit Cocor.

“S-ar putea, însă tu să nu spui la nimeni nimic. Stă într-o zi cu tine un ceas, într-altă zi alt ceas, mai vorbește cu tine una și alta...”

Cocor oftă.

“Se află pe lume, prietene Mitreo, oameni care luptă pentru dreptatea sărmanilor și lumina celor neștiutori...” a urmat fierarul cu glas moale de poveste.

Mitrea îl asculta simțind în sine plăcere; însă tot se îndărătnicea:

“Greu s-ar putea crede una ca asta.”

Fierarul a zîmbit cu milă:

“Auziși tu, Mitreo, prietene, de revoluția rușilor?”

Mitrea dădu din cap mirat. Da, auzise.

“Auziși, dar n-ai știut ce-a fost. Acolo s-au sculat asuprașii, au răsturnat împărăția, au măturat stăpînirea capitaliștilor și au întemeiat stăpînirea clasei muncitoare. O să afli tu toate de la profesor.”²⁶

“Education, that’s what you need. It would open your mind.”

“Perhaps my gate would open...”

The blacksmith looked at him without understanding. He did not know Mitrea’s dream.

“... therefore, I thought, dear Mitrea, to buy you a book and a slate. In the fifth battery there’s one of our learned people (cărturar). He would look after you.”

“Is it possible?”

“It is possible, but you must not say anything to anyone. He will spend an hour one day, an hour another day, and talk to you about this and that...”

Cocor sighed.

“There are people in this world fighting for justice, for the poor, and for the enlightenment of the deprived...” continued the blacksmith with a storyteller’s soft voice.

Mitrea felt pleasure inside while listening, yet he still objected:

“It is hard to believe such things.”

The blacksmith smiled and continued:

“Have you ever heard of the Russian revolution?”

Mitrea nodded with surprise. Yes, he’d heard.

“You heard but you did not know what happened. There, the oppressed rose and overthrew the empire; they swept away the

²⁶ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, pp. 221-22.

capitalists' power and installed the working class power. You will find all about it from the professor.²⁷

Education is articulated in this dialogue as knowledge, emancipation and pleasure all at the same time. Moreover, it is detached from economic gain and connected with political ideology. Besides humbleness towards Florea, Mitrea also displays enthusiasm, even if in a guarded manner. To acquire knowledge through education is to broaden an individual's horizons and to promote understanding. For Mitrea, education is the possibility for his dream of emancipation to become reality. Mitrea's internal desire, his dream of salvation, which has not found any other external form of gratification, is captured by Florea's words and redeployed in the form of social revolution after the Russian model. The religious discourse of salvation is transformed into the secular discourse of emancipation through revolution. The impact on Mitrea is expressed by the words, "Mitrea îl asculta simțind în sine plăcere" (Mitrea felt pleasure inside himself while listening). What is stressed here is Mitrea's personal enjoyment in the contact with the communist ideology of emancipation. The fact that he shares his most hidden wishes for the first time with another person, and finding out that these wishes might be fulfilled in this world, have a powerful emotional effect on Mitrea. Here the power of ideological interpellation as articulation of enjoyment can be seen.

Mitrea's hopes are jeopardised by the sudden arrest of the nameless teacher mentioned by Costea. Thus, it is ultimately Costea who teaches Mitrea to read and write, as well as continuing his political education. The arrest of the nameless teacher becomes an opportunity to present the position of the party, in a similar way to that of Mitrea, as a problematic entity; i.e., in opposition to the present order:

"Unul ca ăsta," a șoptit el, "e hăituit și prigonit. Nu te uita așa la mine. Vino mai aproape și stai colea. Poate fi cazul să ne cheme și pe noi, să ne cerceteze, să dăm vreo mărturisire."

"Doar nu e făcător de rele?"

"Ba e, după socotința stăpînirii de azi. E făcător de rele, căci e din partid."

Florea tăcu; ochii lui Mitrea urmau să-l întrebe.

"Partidul muncitorimii," urmă Florea, "care partid vrea să facă dreptate celor nedreptățiți. Iar te uiți așa la mine?"

"Mă uit, ca un neștiutor și prost."²⁸

²⁷ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., p. 46.

²⁸ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 228.

“Someone like him,” Florea whispered, “is always persecuted and hunted. Don’t look at me like that! Come, sit closer. It’s possible that he will be questioned, and asked to give evidence...”

“But, he is not a criminal?”

“He is, in the view of those in power today. He is a criminal because he is a party member.”

Florea fell silent; Mitrea’s eyes were full of questions.

“The workers’ party,” continued Florea, “which is the party that wants to bring justice to the oppressed. Stop looking at me like that.”

“I’m looking at you as an ignorant fool who does not understand.”²⁹

Just as Mitrea was a criminal for Agapia, Ghiță and Cristea, the communists and the communist party are criminals for the established social order. The conflict between the ideals of the communists, their struggle for justice for the oppressed as well as their criminalisation creates confusion and incomprehension in Mitrea. On the one hand, it reveals the conflict to be irreconcilable; on the other hand, it opens up Mitrea to the possibilities of education and provides a catalyst for his transformation into a communist leader; i.e., by acquiring full understanding.

However, the problematic relationship between the party and the social order – besides being an irreconcilable conflict – also shows a distinction between an internal space and an external world. The party was presented as a brotherhood; a place of intimacy and comfort. As such, it appears as a closed and secretive private space, structured by its own rules; moreover, it is structured by a patriarchal hierarchy. The private/public distinction would by the end of the novel prove instrumental to the Communist Party’s ascent to power and in securing a privileged role as a leading social force for the party.

In conclusion, Sadoveanu rearticulates the interwar period, what is referred to in this thesis as “the old order”, as a multiplicity of conflicts; this is marked by both historical dynamism and stagnation. Capitalism is represented not only as exploitation, but more importantly as an obstacle to progress. In order to achieve this, Sadoveanu articulates the self-interested individual as miser, and the drive for profit as greed. Moreover, Sadoveanu articulates capitalism and patriarchy in a conflicting way. While the capitalist system is presented as being patriarchal – Cristea and Ghiță are patriarchs and master over the peasants – patriarchy is presented as being undermined by a crisis of masculinity. The patriarchal order is undermined by aggressive women who cannot be either controlled (Agapia, Stanca) or sexually satisfied (Didina), and by weak men (Iordan, Ghiță, Cristea). In this way,

²⁹ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P. M., p. 52.

Sadoveanu creates an equivalence of power relationships that fuses class and gender relationships: capitalist over peasant, wife over husband. This equivalence prepares the ground for its reversal in the new socialist social order. In opposition to the vision of a stagnant and exploitative capitalism, Sadoveanu articulates two subjectivities with revolutionary potential: the peasantry as a social class and the individual in the form of Mitrea Cocor. The peasants are presented as full of creative and technical knowledge: they name and work the land. Moreover, they are animated by a desire for a better life that would fulfil their creativity. However, they lack the political vision that would allow them to fulfil these desires. Sadoveanu balances this by inserting an individual subject with more developed revolutionary potential, Mitrea Cocor. All social conflicts articulated in the novel converge in the figure of Mitrea, and prepare the ground for his future transformation into a communist leader. In this way, Sadoveanu does not simply illustrate the Marxist vision of history, but presents the advent of communism as an answer to the local social problems, by connecting them to the already established traditions of literary representation. Mitrea's final metamorphosis and ascent to leadership and enlightenment is, however, presented as a demanding process of both disarticulation and rearticulation. While the process of disarticulation is presented in the war episode, the process of rearticulating is accomplished through the education he receives as a prisoner in the Soviet Union. The complexities of these processes will be explored in the next section.

2 War and a Soviet Education

The episodes of the Second World War and of Mitrea's education in the Soviet Union play the pivotal role in the novel; they present the transformation of Mitrea into a new subject. Within the structures of the old order, Mitrea's rebelliousness remained an internal force, manifest only in ironic laughter or hidden outbursts of anger. This is because fear rendered him a docile subject. The education he receives from Florea has the effect of gratifying him internally, but does not change Mitrea's relationship with his external reality: he remained a subordinated subject, unable to fulfil his ideals. The war changes things radically. The annihilation of the Romanian and German forces in the encounter with the Red Army has a powerful symbolic meaning. It is not simply a military confrontation, but represents the complete disarticulation of the old order and the extraction of Mitrea

from it. The result is that Mitrea is rendered into an element ready for a new articulation. Mitrea's rearticulation happens during his stint as a prisoner of war in the Soviet Union. It is carried out on three different discursive levels: as worker, technical specialist, and as political cadre. Mitrea's disarticulation and rearticulation form one process, and they will be considered together, starting with the war episode.

The war episode, staged as the confrontation between capitalism and communism, presents social conflict intertwined with historical change. The contrasting representation of, on the one hand, the German and Romanian armies, and, on the other hand, the Soviet forces, is of great symbolic importance for the construction of the conflict. The armies are symbols of the social articulations they stand for and defend. Moreover, the external conflict between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, presented as the conflict between capitalism and communism, realigns the Romanian internal social relations between the upper and lower classes, between officers and soldier.

The ideological overlapping of the national social structures and the external geopolitical conflicts was not something new in Romanian literature. As the previous chapter showed, it was strongly present in *Ciocoii vechi și noi*, as well as in *Viața la țară* and *Tănase Scatiu*. Even in *Venea o moară pe Siret*, *Baltagul* and *Patul lui Procust* certain strong geopolitical alignments can be found, especially cultural ones, with regard to the West. The persistence of this theme reveals "Romania" as continuing to be a socially, politically and culturally contested space. The war episode in *Mitrea Cocor* can thus be seen as a symbolic process of transition from one form of geopolitical hegemony to another.

The representation of the three armies registers their respective ideological status, as the representatives of the old and the new. The German army appears as powerful and highly disciplined. Yet the Russian counterattack effectively turns the ranks of the German army into the collective equivalent of children crying for their mother. The reduction to a state of helpless infantilism is a form of disarticulation. The discrepancy between the inhuman instrumentality and the immaturity of the German army is meant as symbolic of capitalism, which is presented as leading to historical obsolescence and social degeneracy.

The Romanian army lacks the inhuman efficiency of the German army. It is presented as a "train of peasants" (*trenul ăsta de țărani*)³⁰, which the Soviet forces would simply blow away. From a patriarchal perspective, the peasants, as a

³⁰ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 249.

subordinated social class, can also be seen as akin to children, and thus as symbolically infantile. Yet Sadoveanu presents the patriarchal order in crisis. On the one hand, the Romanian army officers are presented as a group interested more in decadent pleasures, such as drink, gambling and women than in fighting the war. On the other hand, the Romanian foot soldiers are a group of poorly instructed and dismally equipped peasants with little respect for their superiors. The tension between the officers and soldiers is articulated through Mitrea's jokes and sarcasm towards the debauchery and incompetence of the officers. The army as a group is presented as disoriented and inept. This is illustrated symbolically by the fact that the train in which Mitrea's regiment travels moves slowly, apparently in circles, and does not arrive anywhere.

In contrast, the Red Army is presented as an unstoppable force of apocalyptic proportions. Its "millions and millions" of "perfectly trained" soldiers are backed up by extensive military equipment: airplanes, tanks, motorized artillery, and katioushas.³¹

The symbolic role of war as ideological disarticulation is captured in the episode depicting the Soviet aerial attack on the panic stricken Romanian and German armies. There is an emphasis on the violent dismemberment of bodies and the destruction of things into independent parts, which renders them grotesque and absurd. The repeated images of dismemberment present the war as a symbolic space of total carnage where escape is not an option. The disarticulation of the order represented by the Romanian and German armies is complete and completed. Communism, in the guise of the Red Army, is presented as marching towards certain and total victory.

The arrival of the stretcher bearers after the attack unexpectedly transforms the image of the Soviet army and humanises it. While the German army is represented as simultaneously inhumanly efficient and immature, the Red Army is represented simultaneously as an unstoppable killing machine yet humane in its compassion after victory. Just as the contrasts of the German army worked towards the articulation of a social order on the brink of symbolic dissipation, the contrasts in the representation of the Soviet Army worked towards the articulation of an order full of vitality. Moreover, the care shown by the Russian soldiers behind the front line indicates that the process of disarticulation is immediately followed by one of rearticulation.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 250-51.

Of all the characters introduced by the narrative, only Mitrea and Florea survive. Being communists, their subjectivity was not entirely dependent on the old order. It possessed an independent internal articulation. In other words, their “souls” were not of the world that perished, and thus they survived. The disintegration of the order containing them simply detached them as individual elements ready to be rearticulated and integrated into a new order.

Having been rendered into a detached element, Mitrea, as a prisoner of war, enters the path of rearticulation through education. This takes place under the supervision of two instructors: the Soviet soldiers Vasili Pistruga and Mitea Karaganov. The process of re-articulation is presented by Mitrea himself as one of enlightenment through education:

Îmi deșertai desagii de prostie și dobîndii un dram de înțelepciune.³²

I've emptied my two bags of stupidity and gained a grain of wisdom.³³

There are three elements to Mitrea's education/rearticulation: worker, technical specialist, and political cadre or political man. While Pistruga teaches Mitrea the Russian language, Karaganov instructs him in agronomy and the life on a collective farm. The prison camp is just outside such a model collective farm.

Besides theoretical instruction, Mitrea's education also includes manual labour: he participates in the repairing of a dam that blocks the local river. This is a clear attempt at overcoming the division between intellectual and manual labour by presenting Mitrea as learning through practice:

Cît ținuse vremea bună, pînă toamna tîrziu, prizonierii dăduseră ajutor la repararea unui dig de pămînt cu parcanе de stejar ce oprea apele unui rîuleț. Rîulețul era acum lac; se strecura domol și suna la opustul bine întocmit cu lanțuri și zăvoare. Valea suia coline unduioase plantate cu pomi roditori. În capul văii, în fund, un sat cu case de bîrne și acoperișuri de șovar. Ferestele mari, împodobite cu obloane verzi. Mitrea le privea de departe și-i plăceau.³⁴

The weather was warm, the days fine, and until late into the autumn the prisoners helped in rebuilding a dyke which blocked the course of a little river. The river had already become a lake, which flowed away quietly, its wavelets splashing against the

³² Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 267.

³³ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., p. 88.

³⁴ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 269.

dam that was secured by chains and bolts. Here and there in the valley were gently undulating hills planted with fruit-trees. At the end of the valley was a village, of houses built with logs and with thatched roofs. They had large windows adorned with shutters painted green. Mitrea was contemplating them from afar and liked them very much.³⁵

This image of rural life, especially the houses with the shutters painted green, becomes one of the ideal images that Mitrea will internalise as his personal ideals. Besides this firsthand experience, a central role in the education of Mitrea is played by the stories Karaganov tells him about the Soviet economy and the transformations in Central Asia. He is told how, under the guidance of the Bolsheviks, the Kazak people built garden cities out of the desert.

There are several elements that are eliminated in order to create this idyllic picture of the Soviet social reality: first, the system of forced labour camps, or the gulags; and second, the war effort and the resulting heavy industry are entirely omitted. The absence of the gulag is not a surprise as this was an issue that was ideologically foreclosed, and hence impossible to represent. The more conspicuous omitted element is the complete absence of the war effort. In the war episode, the Red Army was presented as a gigantic force in both numbers and technology. This would require mobilisation on a grand scale, and hence extensive heavy industry. Yet, Mitrea sees nothing of this. The world of rural bliss that he witnesses behind the front line is completely removed from the reality of the war and industrial modernisation, which was presented in the Soviet Socialist Realist literature of the time, albeit in a positive light.³⁶ This makes its absence even more conspicuous.

Another important element that was eliminated from this image of the Soviet social reality is the circulation of goods and labour. In Sadoveanu's vision of the Soviet Union everything is in its place and effortlessly reaches its destination without failure. Yet this circulation of goods is not based on exchange – be it either in barter or money form. The goods are produced as a by-product of the pleasure of labour and then enter distribution. Consumption in the form of gratification as end in itself is absent. All consumption is directed to further production. There are things that have an end in themselves, for example, butter and cheese, tables and chairs, electric light, and the like. They are consumed as though in a process of contemplation and as such remain untouched, never exiting the process of circulation. The garden cities of central Asia are poster pictures advertising plenitude. Effort and obstacles,

³⁵ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., p. 90.

³⁶ See for example Vasiliu Azhaev, *Far from Moscow* (1949), an industrial novel presenting the social dislocations caused by the war and massive efforts to construct an oil pipe in the Far East.

let alone alienation and exploitation, have been eliminated. The socialist world is presented as a wholly organic process; there is no loss and no waste; in other words, neither lack nor excess. The principle guiding this world can be surmised to be a form of rationality. This rationality is distributed organically in society, each individual having his or her place and role that he or she completely fulfils.

By the act of both seeing village life outside his prison camp, and his imagining of the realities presented by Karaganov, Mitrea is engaged in contemplation. Through his contemplating gaze, Mitrea is both idealising the world while at the same time, through the internalisation of the image, re-structuring his desires; in other words, he learns how and what to desire. The process of transformation of the Soviet Union into an image/icon parallels the Bolshevik transformation and rearticulation of the world and history.³⁷ In this sense, the fantasy of a fully constituted reality, whereby the individual finds self-fulfilment, is not merely a propagandistic falsification of the Soviet reality, but rather a constitutive ideology necessary in sustaining the hegemonic project of constructing socialism. As such, this fantasy is central to the articulation of power/knowledge structures and plays a central role in the articulation of Mitrea as communist leader.

Taken together, these elements present the Soviet Union as a completely depoliticised world: all points of potential contestation and conflict have been eliminated. And yet, besides his articulation as worker and technical specialist (he learns agronomy), the most important aspect of Mitrea's education is political:

"Mă rog, Dimitri Matveevici," întoarse cuvînt Pistruga, "pe cît înțeleg, dumneata dorești să faci din acest țăran de la Dunăre un bărbat politic."

"Doresc, într-adevăr."

"Dar pe dînsul l-ai întrebat dacă vrea?"

Cătră veselia ucraineanului se răsuci Cocor, cu zîmbetu-l ascuțit:

"Vasili Ivanovici," zise el cu ton potrivit clipei și împrejurării, "eu am mai înțeles și alt lucru de cînd sînt aci. Stăpînii noștri de pînă acuma ne-au ținut într-o anume îngrădire în ce privește politica. Ne-au îndemnat să ne ocupăm de viața viitoare și de bunurile sufletești pe altă lume, în vecii vecilor amin. Stăpînii și-au făcut însă politica lor pe lumea asta." (...) "Așa că acum numaidecît să ne facem și noi, sărmanii, politica noastră pe lumea asta și în această viață. Știu că nu place stăpînilor, căci e primejdioasă pentru ei. N-am ce le face. Cînd va sosi timpul, o să mă întorc cu primejdia asta la Malul Surpat."

³⁷ According to Boris Groys, Stalinism was above all an aesthetic project of beautification of the world, which found its fulfilment in the Socialist Realist art rather than in the economic or social realms. See Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

“O să te bage la închisoare și o să plîngă Tasia.”

“Se poate. Dar dacă-i biruința de partea noastră, nu mă mai bagă.”³⁸

“But Dimitri Matveevich,” Pistruga replied at once, “if I get it right, you would like to make a politician out of this Danubian peasant.”

“That’s right.”

“Have you asked him if he wants to?”

Mitrea turned towards the Ukrainian’s humour with a sharp smile:

“Vassili Ivanovitch,” he said with an adequate tone for the situation, “since I’ve been here, I’ve managed to understand something else as well. Until recently, as far as politics were concerned, our masters kept us as in a cage far away from it. They advised us to keep our minds occupied with the life to come, and the future of our souls in the next world – and so on forever, Amen. And yet, the masters made their own politics in this world.” (...) “So it is urgent that we, the poor, work out our politics in this world and this life. I know that the masters do not like it, because it is a dangerous threat to them. But I can’t help that. When the time comes, I’ll return to the Fallen Bank with this danger.”

“They’ll put you in prison and your Nastasia will cry.”

“That’s possible. But if the victory is ours then I shan’t get put in prison.”³⁹

The preceding passage is important because it certifies that Mitrea is a reliable agent for communism. Not only did he acquire technical knowledge and prove his worker credentials through manual labour, but more importantly, he shows that he understands that without a political framework the former two are worthless. A hierarchy of power/knowledge relationships is established between these three subjectivities: worker, technical specialist and political cadre. The political discourse is external to the depoliticised world and at the same time the condition for its realisation. What assures the privilege of Mitrea as a communist protagonist is not his technical knowledge or worker’s credentials, but his political vision.

If the importance of a political discourse – the articulation of Mitrea as political subject – is unsurprising, the actual effect of it is. The political consciousness of Mitrea makes him into an usurper/revolutionary. His political task is to overthrow a political regime and replace it by another: from the perspective of the downtrodden (sărmanii, robii) it is a legitimate task because it is in their interest to do so. Conversely, for the rulers (stăpîni) it is a danger; moreover, Mitrea is fully conscious that he is a threat to the social order. The two orders are presented as

³⁸ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, pp. 271-72.

³⁹ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. P.M., p. 92.

incompatible. As usurper of social order Mitrea is set in the lineage of characters such as Dinu Păturică and Tănase Scatiu. However, his power to do so is not based on the money economy but on political discourse and rule. Moreover, Mitrea is not a self-interested individual: his political discourse bases the legitimacy of overthrowing the social order on the collective interest of the downtrodden. Nevertheless, through his knowledge, multiple subjectivities and especially his internalised political vision, he remains highly individualised and separated from the masses. Again, this ensures his privileged position as a future leader.

The strategy of uniting the three potentially conflicting subjectivities of the worker, the technical specialist and the political cadre in a single individual has a double role – a role that exposes the tension between emancipation and subordination underlying the communist discourse. On the one hand, this model of subjectivity is a representation of the way in which class divisions can be overcome, by eliminating the underlining division of labour between manual and mental. If all individuals have been equally articulated as workers, technical specialist and political cadre, social hierarchy and inequality is made redundant. On the other hand, this type of radical socialist subjectivity remains the privilege of the communist leader. The reproduction of social hierarchies through the preservation of the division of labour between the “mental” (the leader’s vision), and the “manual” (the working masses who follow the leader) will be reinforced at the end of the novel when the new socialist social order is presented. In this articulation of Mitrea, the paradox underlining the socialist order is revealed: the tension between the drive for emancipation and the reproduction of hierarchies of power as knowledge.

The reproduction of the division of labour between the manual and the mental, on which the socialist society was based, is also evident in the novel’s representation of maimed bodies. The commander of the prisoners’ camp is missing a leg (he has a wooden leg), and his porter is missing a hand which is replaced by a hook. How they lost their limbs is not revealed to the reader. The concepts of dismemberment and castration, as central to Socialist Realism, were highlighted by Lilia Kaganovsky in her argument about the “unmaking” of the Soviet man.⁴⁰ However, this image of unmaking and of sacrifice, of proving one’s worth for the cause of the revolution, has to be placed in overall context with the entire text, especially the image of pristine harmony and plenitude. The full gratification articulated in the image of the rural idyll is supplemented by the embodied “reality” of the limbs missing due to their owner’s sacrifice; the signs of deferral of

⁴⁰ Kaganovsky, *The Unmaking of the Soviet Man*.

gratification for an ideal. In *Mitrea Cocor*, the tension between the ideal (ideological plenitude) and the corporeal (material lack) never reaches the radical dimension it does in Soviet Socialist Realism. For example, in *How the Steel Was Tempered*, the example analysed by Lilia Kaganovsky, the body is fully consumed (the hero ends up blind and paralysed), while the ideal driven spirit burns ever more bright. In contrast, Mitrea is wounded while fighting the German armies, but his body is not completely consumed.

However, the question of the presence of the maimed body in Socialist Realism arguably has a more important socially symbolic dimension. The tension between the ideal and the body is, in effect, another manifestation of the tension between the ideal (spirit/mind) and the corporeal world (matter/body) that informs the articulation of the communist protagonist as a problematic individual. Moreover, the strict hierarchy of consciousness over body; of intellect over manual labour; can be seen as a symbolic transfiguration of the social hierarchy and tension building within the social body between the Stalinist bureaucratic apparatus and the toiling masses/workers, reduced to a tool. The body of the communist is an instrument (the worker) fully subordinated to the spirit/intellect (the political cadre/technical specialist). The communist protagonist's internal structure replicates the external social tension. The image of the maimed body of the communist protagonist draws its symbolic power from its function as metaphor that stands in for the material lack that has been eliminated from the idyllic representation of Soviet society.

Part of Mitrea's enlightenment in the Soviet Union is also one of erotic desire. His Soviet education and the witnessing of the Soviet social reality bring about the consciousness of his love for Nastasia. In an imaginary letter addressed to Nastasia – as a prisoner of war he is not allowed to send letters – Mitrea declares:

“Întîi și întîi, Nastasie, să cunoști că, de cînd sînt aci, aflai că îmi ești dragă.” Păi, ea știe de pe cînd era el acolo și le cînta cucul primăvara, într-un salcîm înflorit.⁴¹

“First of all, dear Nastasia, I must tell you that since I am here I found out that I love you.” But she already knows this since the day when together they stood under an acacia in flower and the cuckoo called.⁴²

⁴¹ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 268.

⁴² Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., pp. 88-89.

The first line conveying Mitrea's thoughts is using direct speech. In the second, the narrator conveys the thoughts of Nastasia using free indirect speech. Both of them have two different discursive registers: the first is a communicative act addressed outwardly; the second is infused with a romantic sensibility of longing. Here a gendered discrepancy of knowledge can be seen: Mitrea was in love with Nastasia but did not know it, whereas by contrast Nastasia had full knowledge that he was in love with her. Her knowledge was made possible by her living in the romantic discourse of love and longing; however, this discourse was alien to Mitrea. A subject of public social duty he ultimately comes to realise his love only as a side effect of the fulfilling of that discourse. His love and longing for Nastasia is expressed – not by a direct articulation of his longing for her – but rather by the desire to instruct her in the new world he discovers in the Soviet Union. This short passage is crucial in the gendering of discourses: public duty as male, intimacy and erotic discourse as female. It is also a moment when Mitrea is shown not as a subject who knows, but as one who is unaware. By placing Mitrea in a position of not knowing, this episode has a potentially dislocating effect on his authority. Yet here we see the effect of the gendering of discourses as a hierarchical power/knowledge structure and its role in the assimilation, and, at the same time, the disempowerment of the erotic discourse. Mitrea's unawareness of his love is transformed into a sign of his masculine mastery over the feminine and the erotic. His excitement is channelled and articulated by the discourse of social and public duty. Yet erotic desire is surfacing in him in moments of solitary self-intimacy:

“Zilele se adaogă zilelor,” ofta când se afla singur Mitrea Cocor, “și săptămînile se adaogă săptămînilor. Aș dori o veste și nu știu de la cine.”

Pistruga și Karaganov plecaseră de la Tabără.

În ceasurile de odihnă, Cocor ședea uneori tăcut și se strîngea în sine; zvonul odăii în care își avea culcușul se stîngea treptat, și în ochiul pe jumătate închis apărea imaginea celei de care îi era dor. “Cînd o văd așa zîmbindu-mi pe copila asta, își spunea el, ar trebui să mi se îmblînzească inima. Dar nu mi se îmblînzește. Ci mi se străpunge de ghimpele urii. Nu mă pot alina și n-o să fiu fericit cu dînsa decît după ce-o să plătesc aceloră care m-au ars cu dușmănia și desnădejdea.”⁴³

“The days are following each other,” Mitrea Cocor was saying to himself when he was alone, “and the weeks pile up. I should love to get some news, but I don't know who from.”

Pistruga and Karaganov had left.

⁴³ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, pp. 272-73.

Sometimes in his leisure hours, Mitrea sat in silence, wrapped up in himself; the noises gradually died down in the room where he had his bed, and the image of the girl he longed for appeared before his half-closed eyes. "When I see her smiling at me like this" he said to himself, "my heart ought to soften. But it doesn't. Oh, no! On the contrary, it is pierced by the thorn of hate. I shall never rest and be happy with her, till I will pay back those who burnt me with the fires of hate and despair."⁴⁴

As soon as the erotic desire makes its appearance, represented by the half-dreamt smile of Nastasia, this erotic energy is promptly channelled into social duty; love is replaced by hate; the longing for social retribution takes priority over the longing for a woman. In keeping with the gendering of roles, this transformation of the erotic into the social is a sign of Mitrea's manliness, of his mastery over the erotic. In contrast, Nastasia is a subject subordinated to the erotic discourse. The discourse of social duty forces a deferral of erotic gratification: „Nu mă pot alina și n-o să fiu fericit cu dînsa decît după ..." (I shall never rest and be happy with her, till...). The important aspect, however, is not so much the repression and displacement of erotic love as the signalling of its presence as fully articulated discourse inside Mitrea. This contributes to his articulation as a dislocated subject; a subject out of place, longing to return home to a loved one.

Mitrea's double longing, for Nastasia and for revenge, as well as his political mission of bringing communism back home, has an important emotional effect. During his youth, Mitrea is presented as having lived in a state of terror, generated by his fear both of external punishment and of his inner rebellion, however, during his education in the Soviet Union, the tension between the inner and the external is redeployed into restlessness. When they meet again, Mitrea tells his friend, Florea, all he has witnessed in the Soviet Union, and of his desire to bring the same order back home. However, Florea observes that Mitrea is not happy, that he is consumed by restlessness, and advises him to have patience.⁴⁵ In this episode, and throughout his education in the Soviet Union, Mitrea is a revolutionary subject constructed around the tension between stimulation and deferral. On the one hand, we see the way in which Mitrea's education, received in the Soviet Union, stimulates his desire to return home and commence the realisation of his ideal, in turn generating restlessness. On the other hand, this "restlessness" is reined in by Costea's injunction ordering him to have patience. The tension is channelled by enrolling Mitrea in the army and sending him to fight the Nazis. Somewhat tellingly,

⁴⁴ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., p. 94.

⁴⁵ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 282.

the example of patience given is that of Stalin, who, the text maintains, had patience until the battle of Stalingrad. The appeal to the ultimate master signifier, or father figure in Katerina Clark's reading⁴⁶, Stalin, makes the injunction to apply patience more than a suggestion or a lesson; it is an order, a command. This is emphasised by the use of the word "poruncă" (a Slavism, meaning command, or order). Thus, the deferral of gratification is a law which cannot be disregarded at any cost. The deferral however, is revalorised as gratification by sending Mitrea to war, by transforming the deferral of gratification into the struggle for gratification and thus gratification itself.

What Mitrea's Soviet education ultimately amounts to is revealing: having been rendered into a free element through violent disarticulation in the war, Mitrea acquires a new subjectivity, which develops on multiple levels. First, there is the unification of the worker, technical specialist and the political cadre. These are organised hierarchically, in an order that privileges above all the political subjective. Second, he internalises the image of Soviet rural life as an ideal. Moreover, Mitrea discovers his love for Nastasia, which makes him into a subject of the erotic discourse. In a sense, he is a full subject for the first time in his life. However, these various articulations render Mitrea as an internal space, full of knowledge and desires, but which is essentially out of place. Mitrea's sense of dislocation as regards his relationship with the immediate Soviet reality is best captured in the phrase, "looking from afar". This contemplating gaze reveals Mitrea as a subject rent with desire and the landscape of the industrious, rural idyll, the houses adorned with the green shutters, as an object of that desire. Gratification – him becoming one of the people living in this village – however, is impossible. He defers immediate self-gratification by channelling all his desire into this mission of transformation, of bringing communism from this far away land to his home, which is now a far-away land also. Thus, Mitrea, the political revolutionary/usurper, is a subject out of place, possessed by an ideal which articulates his desire. Socialist socialisation is thus both full disciplinary integration into hierarchies of power and radical dislocation. Mitrea Cocor, the ideal communist leader, structured around the tension between the objectively real and the subjectively ideal, is presented as driven by the restless desire to realise his own subjective ideal. This image of radical dislocation and tension between the self and world, stands in marked contrast to the complete integration manifest in the surrounding world as typified by the idealised image of the Soviet Union. Mitrea Cocor, a stranger in paradise, is a paradigmatic

⁴⁶ Clark, 'Socialist Realism with Shores'.

problematic individual. The following section will analyse the way in which Mitrea begins the implementation of his ideal, its outcome and limits.

3 The New Order

Sadoveanu presents the new socialist social order as dynamic, and in a process of historical transformation. This dynamism takes two forms: the transition from the old to the new social order is seen as a process of historical change driven by the social conflict between the bourgeois classes and the popular masses led by the communist leader. By contrast, in the newly established socialist order the process of continual transformation is driven by the tension between the ideal vision of the future and the existing reality. The communist leader functions as a quilting point, suturing the present to the future, thus ensuring the direction of historical change. However, the new socialist social order is presented as both historical progress and the revitalisation of traditional patriarchal structures.

Sadoveanu presented Mitrea at the end of his Soviet education as animated by the desire to return home. This desire consisted of two elements ordered into a hierarchical relationship; these being the desire to bring communism to his home village and the desire for Nastasia. This again shows the reproduction of the division between public and private spheres, and the reinforcement of public duty taking primacy over private life. Mitrea's return home is deferred, as he first had to fulfil his social duty. He participates in the defeat of Nazi Germany alongside the Red Army, and then, after the war, in the organization of the new regime in Bucharest. This process is not presented directly: the narrative switches back to the village and focuses on two parallel conflicts over land: Nastasia's conflict with Ghiță and the peasants' conflict with Cristea. Yet throughout this section of the narrative the figure of Mitrea Cocor is an overwhelmingly desired presence in both the private and the public spheres.

In his private life, Mitrea's desire to return home is strengthened by his marriage to Nastasia, and the subsequent birth of a son. Mitrea's absence from the birth of his son – he is away fighting the German armies – has two effects on him. On the one hand, it reproduces the privilege of social duty over private affairs, and on the other hand, it articulates a desire and its mode of fulfilment: Mitrea's return home to his family. In the public sphere, the peasants' desire for justice is enforced by their continued exploitation at the hands of Ghiță and Cristea. Moreover, when

the new government passes a land reform, which legislates the dissolving of large estates and distributes small allotments to peasants, Cristea and Ghiță conspire to delay its application. They hope for the overthrow of the communist government by the much coveted arrival of the Anglo-American forces. All these elements create the ideological space in which Mitrea's return can function as the fulfilment of the peasants' desire for justice and the punishment of Ghiță and Cristea.

Mitrea's return to the village is presented as fulfilment through the unification of private and public desires and needs. On the one hand, there is Mitrea's double desire to bring home communism and to reunite with his family, and, on the other hand, there are the needs of those at home, the villagers and Nastasia. In this sense, Mitrea's return home can be seen as full gratification, and a neat closure of the narrative arc.

However, Mitrea's return is also the articulation of a new order, and therefore of new desires. This is a dual process of both disarticulation of the old and the rearticulation of the emerging elements into a new order. There are three main elements that undergo this process: Nastasia, as the significant embodiment of femininity and private life; Ghiță and Cristea, as the dominant subjectivities of the older regime; and the peasants themselves. The outcome is the articulation of a new hierarchy of power/knowledge relationships, and at the same time the articulation of a new desire for the continuing transformation of social reality through industrialisation and modernisation. As such, rather than eliminating the tension between the existing social reality and Mitrea's political ideals, this tension is reinforced and made into the very structure of the new social order.

This chapter-section will analyse the process of disarticulation of the old class and gender structures and their rearticulation by way of a reading of Sadoveanu's redeployment of the hierarchies of power/knowledge relationships.

Sadoveanu designates the issue of gender as the basis of the redeployment of social order. In preparing his arrival, Mitrea organises for Nastasia not to be present at the distribution of land, and ensures that they will be reunited only after everything is concluded:

Să nu știe nimeni; să nu afle Nastasia – să fie departe de sat. El avea întâi și întâi de îndeplinit o judecată și o rînduială le Dropii, și numai după aceea își va îmbrățișa copilul și soția. Nu vine pentru durerea de dragoste ce are. Vine pentru un interes al obștei pe care poate mulți nu-l vor înțelege. Dar așa e hotărîrea lui. Așa s-a înțeles cu tovarășii cu care a trăit în străinătate și cu care va să săvîrșească o faptă bună, după ce se vor fi întors cu toții acasă... Cîte unul, cîte doi, s-au adunat,

s-au întrunit în timpul verii și au ținut sfaturi la Cerneț. Si-au păstrat taină, s-au pregătit și au așteptat cuvîntul.⁴⁷

Nobody should know; Nastasia is not to find out – she is to be far away from the village. First of all, he had to implement a sentence and make order at The Bustards, and only then would he embrace his child and wife. He is not coming for the love ache he has. He is coming out of an interest in the community, which many probably would not understand. But this is his decision. That's the decision he and his comrades took when they were living together abroad. They all desired to do a good deed back home. During the summer they gathered in small groups at Cerneț's, where they discussed their plans. Keeping it secret, they got ready and waited for the word.⁴⁸

The exclusion of Nastasia from the public space has a complex role. It is not simply the exclusion of individuals who are female: many women, including the widows and the elderly, will be present at the public event where the land is divided. Rather, it performs the role of containing the erotic and the private/individual discourses. While it reinforces the serial equivalence of woman/femininity/private life in opposition to man/masculinity/public life, it also functions as symbol of a return to "normality". As we have seen, in the relationship of Mitrea's parents, the mother was the dominant, repressive figure, while the father was a rather weak presence. This articulation of family thus presents a crisis of masculinity within a patriarchal frame of gender relationships. The reversal articulated in the relationship between Mitrea and Nastasia is both part of the redeployment of relationships and the reinforcement of a patriarchal frame for gender relationships.

The domination of the public sphere by men is emphasised by the fact that the interest of the community is prepared in exclusivity by a group of men: Mitrea and his comrades. However, the decision is taken in private, and in a secretive way. The public space, where the events will take place, is not a space of debate and decision, but simply of action; i.e. the implementation of a decision already taken in private. The reason given for this segregation between a private space of decision and a public space of action is that not everyone would understand the sense of the actions. This signals an anxiety that not everyone would have the same knowledge/opinion. The segregation between private decision and public action is thus a method of control that works through the exclusion of certain articulations from the decision making process. Moreover, what appears as the independent actions of a group of individuals is subtly subordinated through the insertion of the

⁴⁷ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, pp. 358-59.

⁴⁸ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., p. 171.

phrase, “waiting for the word”. This means that, in fact, Mitrea and his comrades are awaiting orders. The source of this order is, of course, the communist party leadership, which, as we have seen in Mitrea’s encounter with communism, is another closed/private space dominated by homosocial relationships.⁴⁹ One could say that, in fact, the public space is completely reduced to one of simple implementation of privately taken decisions.

The dichotomy of public/private spaces is reproduced and reinforced by this segregation, rather than being dissolved as is claimed by the idea that the private realm disappeared under communism due to surveillance and coercion. While the privacy of many individuals was violated, certain secluded private spheres (the segregated space of certain individuals and group interests) were privileged as spaces of decision, reassigning the open public sphere that was hence relegated to the function of simple implementation. Moreover, keeping many issues out of the public sphere through censorship created an alternative private discursive realm, which grew more and more in significance.⁵⁰ The understanding of socialism in terms of the division between a private space of decision making and a public space of decision implementation is a more adequate way of understanding the structuring of power/knowledge relationships than the opposition between “propaganda” and “reality”. This functioning segregation between the private space of decision and the public space of action was also a reinforcement of the old hierarchical dualities of mind over body, and the intellectual over manual labour, as embodied by the thinking leadership and the labouring masses being reduced to a tool.

It is only after the dividing of the land is completed that Mitrea is reunited with his wife Nastasia and his son, Tase. The scene is rendered thus:

Cînd poposi la Fîntîna Oilor, veni asupra lui, ca din arc, Nastasia. Ținînd cu dreapta pruncul la sîn, îl cuprinse de după gît cu stînga și mărturisi lumii, cu vorbe deșănțate și alintări plîNSE, dragostea pentru Mitrea al ei. Mitrea al ei era cu fruntea încrețită și tîmplele ninse. Mitrea al ei se stăpînea în fața satului și ea își opri pornirile pătimășe. Îi întinse pruncul și se liniști.⁵¹

When Mitrea stopped at the Sheep’s Well, Nastasia sprang upon him like a shot from a bow. While holding the baby in her right arm she threw the left around Mitrea’s neck and with indecent words of endearment she declared to the world her love for her own Mitrea. Her own Mitrea had grey temples and

⁴⁹ For an analysis of homosociality, the non sexual bond between same gender groups, in literature see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and the Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University press, 1985).

⁵⁰ See Mudure, ‘A Zeugmata Space’, pp. 23-24.

⁵¹ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 364.

his brow was furrowed. Her own Mitrea was controlling himself in front of the people, and she restrained her passionate instincts. She handed him the baby and became quiet.⁵²

What is made apparent in this scene is Socialist Realism's concern with instilling a sense of public decorum. This is achieved through a strict separation between the public and private persona of the individual. Nastasia's "indecent words of endearment" and her passionate feelings are marked as possessively individualist through the repetition of the phrase "her own" when referring to Mitrea. This is both an expression of her deep devotion to him and of her individualistic nature. Yet, "her own" is not simply an articulation of Nastasia but also of Mitrea. It provides and makes apparent that aspect of Mitrea that he cannot articulate himself: his repressed private and erotic self.

Nastasia falling silent is both a disarticulation and rearticulation of female subjectivity. The passionate, feisty and outspoken Nastasia is transformed into a sober and tranquil new subject. Her quick response to Mitrea's restrained attitude can be seen as a form of risen consciousness, an education of her feelings.⁵³ However, this transformation cannot be reduced only to her individual articulation, but has to be seen in connection to the way it articulates the relationship with her significant other; i.e., Mitrea. By falling silent, Nastasia gives in to Mitrea's authority, to his knowledge and power. Mitrea's restraint in the public space is a measure of his self control and a sign of rational masculine authority. In contrast to his father who was dominated by the mother, Mitrea is in control of his wife. Without a word, he establishes his unconditional authority simply through his attitude. However, the disciplining factor is presented as internal to Nastasia: her complete devotion to and love for her husband. There is no conflict between the two. Nastasia is presented as fulfilled in her subordination.

Moreover, the fact that she entrusts the child to Mitrea, signals his status as the uncontested master in the family. This is the reversal of the relationship in Mitrea's family where the mother was the garrulous master who dominated both father and son. The new order is established as intrinsically patriarchal. Of course, the patriarchal order of things was never really contested in *Mitrea Cocor*. Mitrea's domineering mother, Ghiță's vociferous wife, as well as Cristea's lusting wife are not so much a contestation of an order as symptoms of a crisis of patriarchal masculinity in the forms of Mitrea's weak father, the petty Ghiță, the impotent Cristea.

⁵² Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., p. 177.

⁵³ I own this insight to my colleague Anna Toropova.

While the private and public spaces are rigidly delineated and gendered, this articulation is not simply one of containment, but also the reproduction of a certain modality of social order rather than its dissolution. “Woman” and “femininity” become legitimate spaces for the articulation of the erotic and private individual discourses. The containment is produced through the subordination of woman to man. This containment is not completely negative and neither amount to a foreclosure of the erotic discourse nor its outright elimination from the legitimate socialist discourse as happened with the money economy and other material objects of desire, which were deemed as essentially “bourgeois”. Once gendered, the erotic drive becomes a force of stability for the socialist order by presenting “woman” as being passionately attached and subordinated to the male authority figure. Moreover, it provides women a voice for potentially critiquing the social order in terms of a failure of men to do their patriarchal duty. This form of critique will later emerge as an important element in the literature of the troubling decade.

The fact that Nastasia’s silence is not followed by Mitrea’s words indicates that the new public space of Socialist Realism is regulated by a sober sense of decorum. This is in keeping with the relegation of debate and decision within a privately secluded space (the party leadership) and the reduction of the public sphere as one of mechanical implementation. It also prepares the scene for Mitrea’s inner projection of the icons he brought home from the land of the Soviets. This point will be further developed when analysing Mitrea’s internal visions.

It must be emphasised that it is not by chance that Sadoveanu gives such importance to the articulation of gender roles. The patriarchal distribution of gender roles – because of the apparent basis of this distribution on a given order of things, be it religious (creation) or natural (biological evolution) – carries a commonsensical solidity, quite apart from any other social relationships. Deviation from the traditional gender roles is easily articulated as corruption of the given natural/divine order of things. In contrast, its reproduction can function as a powerfully cementing articulation of political legitimacy as well as a sense of stability and continuity in a time of social upheaval. Sadoveanu had already made use of this strategy in the *Baltagul*, where he skilfully managed to present the development of new capitalist economic and social relationships as contributing to the preservation of traditions. In *Mitrea Cocor* he uses it as the basis for the presentation of the Communist Project of social transformation as a return to a sense of given order, after a crisis of masculinity which has been corrupted by the capitalist system.

The second disarticulation and rearticulation presented is that of the bourgeois classes represented by Ghiță and Cristea. In contrast to the peaceful

transformation of Nastasia, this is presented as the clash between two opposing forces. On the one hand, representing the new order is the mass of peasants lead by Mitrea and a group of his communist comrades; while on the other hand, Ghiță and Cristea represent the old order. This is in a way the reproduction on a reduced scale of the clash between the German and Romanian armies and the Red Army. It has the same socially symbolic meaning of disarticulation and rearticulation.

When Mitrea arrives in the village he heads together with the mass of peasants to the fields. On the way they pick up Ghiță, who is now the deputy mayor of the village, as he has to ratify the redistribution of land. The aim is to both enforce the new law and fulfil the desire of the masses:

Obștea de săraci și văduve și rude ale orfanilor războiului aveau a lua în stăpânire lărgimea acelei cîmpii. Urma să fie scriși toți în condici, fiecare după nevoia lui; apoi aveau să tragă brazde, însemnînd răzoare. Vechiul cîmp al opreliștii intra astfel în stăpînirea acelor care îl lucrează de ani și zeci de ani, robind pentru folosul proprietarului.⁵⁴

The community of the poor and widows and the relatives of the war orphans were to take into ownership the whole extent of the fields. They were all to be written in the registers, everyone after his need, and then they would draw marks and set the boundaries. The formerly barred old field was thus entering into the ownership of those who for years on end worked on it for the landowner's profit.⁵⁵

The importance of this passage is evident in the way in which it articulates the peasants taking possession of the land. On the one hand, we have a collective subject denoted by the word "obștea" (community), which is described as the subject of the redistribution. On the other hand, the taking possession of the land is described as the division of the land into individual plots. Everyone will receive according to their individual need. The legitimacy of this redistribution is based on the principle that the land belongs to those who work it. Moreover, it is presented as the lifting of an obstruction caused by the single landowner. The important thing is that there is an overlapping in the articulation of ownership. The ownership is presented as collectively legitimate, but the redistribution is individual. It could be said that, in fact, this is simply a propagandistic manipulation. It presents the communist regime as the final fulfilment of the peasant's desire for land, while it already undermines the idea of private property. However, symbolically, this is

⁵⁴ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, pp. 360-61.

⁵⁵ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., pp. 173-74.

arguably a necessary step in the process of articulation of the new order. The dismantling and parcelling out of the large estates is the symbolic disarticulation of the power of the landowners represented by boyar Cristea. This redistribution of land also frees the peasants as individual elements to be rearticulated as collective farmers. Cristea's response, anger and resistance, denotes his subjectivity as being fully articulated through the old discourse of private property and social hierarchy:

"Poporul a venit să ia în stăpînire pămîntul său după lege."
"Pămîntul meu, al vostru?" Îşi umflă boierul glasul cătră toată adunarea. "Văzuşi? Auzişi? Mama lor de păcătoşi!" adaoase el cătră Danţiş.
Cocor vorbi iar, mai apăsător:
"Partidul a făcut dreptate. Pămîntul e al celor care îl muncesc."
"Eu n-am muncit?"
"Nu."
Cu răget de fiară, Cristea ridică arma trăgînd cucoaşele.
"Îţi arăt eu ție lege! Te bag în pămînt."⁵⁶

"The people have come to take possession of the land as is the legal ruling."
"My land, yours?" the boyar raised his voice towards the gathering. "Did you see? Did you hear? To hell with these criminals!" he added, turning towards Danţiş.
Cocor spoke again, with more determination:
"The party made justice. The land belongs to those who work it."
"Didn't I work?"
"No."
Roaring like a beast, Cristea raised the gun.
"I'll show you the law. I'll bury you in the ground!"⁵⁷

This passage clearly illustrates the confrontation between two opposing articulations of ownership and labour. For Cristea ownership is granted by purchase; he is the legal owner of the land because he paid money for it. For Mitrea, land ownership is by virtue of it being physically worked. This relationship of land ownership is not an economic one, but an ethical one: everyone will receive according to their needs. The mechanism determining the needs is not presented; however, it is clear that it is not based on the idea of market profitability, but rather on some idea of the virtuous peasant life. Moreover, this determination – as it was brought about by the party – is realised through a political act of state intervention. The change of discourses from the economic to the ethical also transforms the meaning of work. Labour is restricted in this sense to the actual manual toiling of the

⁵⁶ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 362.

⁵⁷ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., pp. 174-75.

land. The economic activity of accumulating wealth on the basis of private property is no longer regarded as a form of labour or knowledge. This view is presented by Mitrea in the allegorical form of: "the system of the wolf and the lamb." The wolf's activity is parasitism rather than labour.

Deprived of ideological power, Cristea is reduced to the use of violent force in the defence of his authority and reaches for the gun, the phallic symbol of his authority. However, he is easily disarmed and subdued. The gendarme Danțiș, the representative of law enforcement, is now on the side of Mitrea, the embodiment of the new ideological authority. It is important to notice that while his comrades and some peasants are presented as armed with machineguns, Mitrea is not. He does not appropriate what the novel has presented as the phallic symbol of authority, the gun inherited by Cristea from boyar Mavromati. His symbol of authority is his voice and the words that he utters. It is as if Sadoveanu attempts to separate the ideological and the repressive functions of the state apparatuses. However, Mitrea does not need the gun to exercise actual power over physical bodies. He fully exercises his authority to complete the disarticulation of the landowners by passing from the legal form to the physical means:

"Nu venii să-ți cer socoteală nici pentru foame, nici pentru bățai, nici pentru batjocuri. Îți ceri singur pedeapsa, tu cel care te lauzi c-ai muncit aici. Treci în rînd cu noi la brăzdat!"

Se auzi un țipăt de mirare din mulțime:

"Cum de îndrăznește prîslea una ca asta?"

Mitrea se întoarse și văzu pe nea Ghiță umflat: îi mai trebuiau țepi ca să fie arici.

"Tu la boi și ciocoiul la cormană," îl fulgeră el. "Luați-i."⁵⁸

"I did not come here demanding retribution either for the hunger or for the beatings and humiliation I got from you. It is you who is asking to be punished; you, who claim to have worked here. Get in line and plough the land with us!"

From the crowd was heard a scream of wonder:

"How does he dare such a thing?"

Mitrea turns and saw Ghiță, he was so puffed up that he only needed some spines to turn into a hedgehog.

"You take the place of the ox and the *ciocoi* would drive."

Mitrea struck him with words. "Take them."⁵⁹

The abolition of the privilege articulated through the discourse of the money economy turns Cristea into an element to be rearticulated through that of manual labour. He is reduced to a simple working hand and reintegrated into the mass of

⁵⁸ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 363.

⁵⁹ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., pp. 175-76.

peasants, who have been articulated as subjects through the discourse of manual labour. Mitrea's words, "Get in line and plough the land with us", have the force of a rearticulating interpellation, which seals the fate of Cristea. However, this interpellation has no immediate hold on Cristea, or Ghiță. They see it as an outrage, a crime. Because they are not responding to the ideological interpellation, brute force is necessary in their disarticulation; i.e., the use of violent state apparatus.

Cristea's reintroduction into the mass of labourers is described as a punishment. It is important to analyse this presentation of manual labour as a disciplinary measure because it reveals the duplicitous status of manual labour during communism. On the one hand, manual labour held a privileged status because it articulated the officially privileged subjectivity, the worker. However, because of the reproduction of the division between intellectual and manual labour and the hierarchy of the intellectual over manual, manual labour has the propensity to function as a form of punishment, implicitly that of subordination.⁶⁰

The scene of manual labour as a form of disarticulation and degradation is captured in the scene of the "plugul jalnic", meaning "sorry plough". Mitrea commands the putting together of a "sorry plough", Ghiță instead of the ox, Cristea taking the handles, as a form of physical punishment.⁶¹ This scene of physical violence is presented as impersonal. It is work which reduces Ghiță and Cristea to two exhausted and bloodied bodies, which are propped up at the side of the field. The violence of the scene derives from the way in which the ploughing of the land is reducing Ghiță and Cristea to disempowered subjects. The degradation is emphasised by the comparison of Ghiță with a writhing worm, their reduction to cattle: simple tools. They are deprived of any will; the will at work in them is that of Mitrea, who commanded the formation of the "sorry plough", and of Gregory Alior, who acts as supervisor and whose cutting words make Cristea get up and move. The violence exercised by Mitrea and Alior is discursive in nature. They do not touch either Cristea or Ghiță, but move them simply through the power of words. Yet the violence is a spectacle infused with physical, vengeful enjoyment, a form of carnivalesque procession, as it is attested by Ana Zevzeaca's words, which again allude to Mitrea's view of capitalism as "the system of the wolf and the lamb". The power relationships have been reversed: now it is the lamb that bites. This inversion, however, in contrast to Bakhtin's carnival reversal, is not simply a temporary symbolic game, but an irreversible historical event stained with blood.

⁶⁰ Konrad and Szelenyi, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*.

⁶¹ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, pp. 363-64.

The carnivalesque process reproduces and reinforces the hierarchies of power rather than undermines them.⁶²

The presentation of manual work as a degrading and coercive form of punishment does not sit well within an ideology centred on its celebration. In order to rectify this problem, the image of the “sorry plough” is immediately followed by one in which manual labour is presented as a strenuous but fulfilling activity:

Plugul jalnic mai porni o dată. Purceseră după el și celelalte. Își avea brazda lui și Mitrea; la întoarcere era cu cămașa desfăcută la grumaz și fruntea goală. Îl mîngîia vîntul răcoros de toamnă.⁶³

The sorry plough (of Ghiță and Cristea) proceeded once more. The others followed it. Mitrea had his lot, too; when driving back the plough his shirt was open at the neck and his forehead was naked. The fresh autumn breeze was caressing him.⁶⁴

Sadoveanu makes an appeal to images of an idyllic symbiosis between man and nature in the act of work. The image of the fresh autumn breeze softly caressing Mitrea suffuses the paragraph with a subtle erotic intimacy between man, work and nature. This integration at once overcomes any concerns of material lack and the degrading alienation induced by the division of labour at work in the image of the “sorry plough”. Work is no longer punishment but gratification of the senses, a synthesis of body and mind into pleasure. The peasants and Mitrea’s desires seem to reach fulfilment in this moment of blissful labour.

However, this is a short lived gratification. Mitrea is still possessed by the internalised vision of communism. This produces a complete rearticulation of social reality as unfulfilled desire engendered by the gap between the ideal and the existing reality. The outcome is the degradation of the existing reality and implicitly of the peasants’ desires, knowledge and way of life:

Cîștigurile științei în toate sectoarele vieții au rămas străine acestor oameni copleșiți de trecut.
Lumea nouă se folosește de tractoare, de aeroplan, de electricitate; pămînturile pustii rodesc sub puterea irigației, prilelurile se prefac prin iscusința inginerilor; plantele folositoare înlocuiesc spinăriile, mlaștinile seacă, păduri apar unde erau nisipuri.
Oamenii de la Malul se ofilesc în umbra trecutului.

⁶² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).

⁶³ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 364.

⁶⁴ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. P.M., p. 177.

Asupra acestora trebuia îndeplinită revoluția. Alcătuirea veche să fie în întregime răsturnată. Statul socialist nu va întârzia să puie la îndemîna foștilor robi toate puterile științei, așa încît unde au fost cîndva noroie și cocioabe, să apară șosele și case luminate electric; unde bîntuia seceta, să vie pe canaluri bucuria apei; unde se trudea silnic omul, mașinile să-i ușureze munca.

Desfacera de trecut, ieșirea într-un veac nou al lumii.⁶⁵

The conquests of science in all spheres of life were still unknown to these people who were bent under the burden of the past.

The new world makes use of tractors, aeroplanes and electricity; the deserts are turned into fertile plains by the power of irrigation, the landscapes are everywhere transformed by the knowledge of engineers, useful plants replace weeds, marshes are drained, where there was sand forests appear.

The people of Fallen Bank wither in the shadow of the past.

Over them the revolution must be accomplished. The old order must be completely overturned. The socialist state will not delay in putting all the power of science at the disposal of the former slaves, so that where once stood mud and hovels, there may be fine roads and houses with electric light, where there was drought the canals will bring the joy of water, where men toiled under pressure, machines will ease his work.

It is the breaking away from the past, the entering into a new age of the world.⁶⁶

This is a panegyric of the power of science to transform the world and to bring ease to people's lives. The discourse of technology and science is elevated to a preeminent position, rendering the traditional knowledge and desires of the peasants obsolete. As has been shown, the knowledge and desires of the peasants were mostly articulated in religious imaginary. The discourses of science and technology come to dislocate and replace religion as the privileged form of articulating subjectivity. Moreover, these discourses are harnessed to the idea of revolution and together become the articulation of power/knowledge relations legitimising the construction of socialism. The taking of political power was just the beginning of the process of transformation, both social and material.

The ending of *Mitrea Cocor* articulates both the new hierarchies of power/knowledge relations and the desire for emancipation from these hierarchies:

Toate acestea clipeau în Cocor, ca lumini fugarnice și învîlmășite, pe cînd își ținea în brațe copilul primit de la soața lui. Vîntîșorul subțire al pustiei gîdila năsucul micuțului, îl făcu

⁶⁵ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, pp. 364-65.

⁶⁶ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., p. 177-78.

să strănute și să deschidă ochii. Acum zîmbea soarelui de octombrie.

“Viitorul e al tău...” suspină Cocor și zîmbi și el nenumăratelor icoane pe care le adunase din rătăcirile prin țara nouă a socialismului.

Nastasia credea că-i zîmbește ei și fu fericită chiar în acea clipă.

“Pentru fapta mea de mînie,” zise Mitrea, “o să dau seamă înaintea celor care mă vor chema să mă judece.”

“Ce facem noi?” Întrebă Laie Săracu, apropiindu-se.

Mitrea îl bătu pe spate prietenește, fără a-i răspunde. Mălurenii lui mai aveau de străbătut drumul spinos al înțelegerii.⁶⁷

All these things sparkled inside Cocor like fleeting and bewildered lights while he held his child who he'd received from his wife. The desert's silky soft breeze tickled the tiny nose of the baby and made him sneeze and open his eyes. Now he was smiling at the October sun.

“The future belongs to you,” Mitrea said softly, smiling at the innumerable icons he had brought back in his mind from his wandering in the land of Socialism.

Nastasia thought that he smiled for her, and at that very moment she felt very happy.

“For my act of anger” added Mitrea, “I'll give an account to those who would come to judge me.”

“What are we going to do now?” Laie Săracu asked, coming up.

Mitrea gave him a friendly pat on the back, but did not reply. His fellow-countrymen still had to tread the thorny path to full understanding.⁶⁸

The patriarchal structure that privileges Mitrea as father and husband is extended beyond the boundary of his family to the new social structure. At the top of the new hierarchy of power/knowledge relationships sits Mitrea, the only subject who possesses the vision of the future; i.e., the icons he brought back home with him from the land of the Soviets. As this chapter has shown, these icons contain the new dominant discourses of technical knowledge and political rhetoric that have replaced the money economy as structuring discourse. Through the question, “What are we going to do now?” the peasants are emptied of knowledge and aspirations. This relegates them to the subordinate position of children in respectful compliance to the paternal figure of Mitrea. Nastasia is on an even lower level due to her lack of understanding of what is happening: she wrongly interprets Mitrea's smile as being addressed to her. Her lack of knowledge is compensated, however, by her complete personal devotion/subordination to Mitrea. At the bottom of this structure, the two disarticulated bodies of Ghiță and boyar Cristea – who are now out of sight as they

⁶⁷ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, p. 365.

⁶⁸ Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor*, trans. by P.M., p. 178.

have been emptied of meaning – can also be added. There is another subject position: that of Tase, Mitrea's boy. Mitrea grants him the future, yet this is a displacement for it shows that Mitrea can relate to the present only in terms of his ideals. The boy is emptied of his present meaning and placed into a trajectory that is not yet his own. As if to ensure his dedication as follower of the father's ideal, the boy smiles to the rising October sun, an allusion to the October Revolution.

In a sense all subjects are projected into a structure that only Mitrea has knowledge of; i.e., his internalised ideal. As he commences to externalise this ideal; i.e., commence the construction of socialism, the other subjects will still have to accommodate their aspirations to the new social order – a social order that is effectively Mitrea's vision as a privileged individual subject. Now a new process of socialisation has to begin – that relating to the villagers. The word "thorny", which is used to describe the villagers' "path to full understanding", has strong religious connotations as it can be seen as an allusion to the Passion of Christ, his suffering culminating in his crucifixion and resurrection.

The concluding passage above reveals the tension between the need for order and the need for transformation and emancipation that underlies Socialist Realist articulations of social reality. On the one hand, the success of the process of socialisation would mean the dissolution of the hierarchical order just established (as all subjects reach full understanding, there is no longer a privileged subject position); on the other hand, the success of the socialisation process depends on the stability and reproduction of the present hierarchical power structure. Without the stability of this power structure the outcome is uncertain. It is important here to point out that in order to preserve the positivity of the hero, and thus of the power structure that privileges his subjective position and ideals, the novel has to renounce what Lukács has called irony; the position from which things, subjects, and deeds are simultaneously revealed as valuable and valueless, meaningful and meaningless, essential and inessential.⁶⁹ This means that the representation of the world has to be narrowed the soul of the protagonist; i.e., Mitrea's ideal. Irony is replaced by optimism/enthusiasm. Rather than all things being revealed as both valuable and valueless, meaningful and meaningless, essential and inessential they are distributed into valuable and valueless, meaningful and meaningless, essential and inessential. This binary structure that privileges certain discourses and their constituted objects over others is essential in the reproduction of the hierarchies of

⁶⁹ Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 75.

power. Thus, optimism, as a formal quality, is the embodiment of a social structure.⁷⁰

This is most evident in the disarticulation of the peasants' desire for land, which has just been satisfied. The question of the ownership is clearly rendered meaningless. While the peasants have received land they are not the ones who decide what they have to do with it. The question, "What are we going to do now?" that Laie Săracu asks Mitrea, empties the peasants of knowledge and subordinates them to the communist leader. With this question, the ownership of the land becomes insignificant in the articulation of power relationships, and is replaced by a different articulation. There are three dominant articulations of subjectivity: manual labour, engendering the worker and the working class; technical knowledge, engendering the technical specialist; and ideological knowledge, engendering the political cadre. In the figure of Mitrea Cocor we have a synthesis of these three discourses. The new socialist social order is presented as the elimination of the peasant's rebelliousness and the complete disciplining of the masses. The paradox is that the socialist process of transformation created the proletariat, and divided society into a new hierarchical stratification, rather than abolished a class-based society.

4 *Mitrea Cocor's Place in Romanian Socialist Realism*

This chapter has argued that the privileged place *Mitrea Cocor* held in the Socialist Realist canon was because of the way Mihail Sadoveanu creatively engaged with the tasks facing the new communist regime: the taking of political power, the recruitment and organisation of the party, and acting as the local catalyst of the process of social transformation after the Soviet model – and not merely because the novel embodied an abstract ideological dogma. Sadoveanu articulated the regime change as both transformation and continuity, and it presented social conflict as the drive behind historical change. In this sense, his novel is a successful illustration of the central tenet of Socialist Realism, the representation of the world in its revolutionary development. Its success was based on the way it pertained to resolve the social tensions internal to the communist project, especially in terms of social class and gender.

⁷⁰ The rejection of irony and its replacement by pathos in Socialist Realism was also noticed by Andrei Siniavskii, see Tertz, *On Socialist Realism*, pp. 74-75.

The process of change is most powerfully manifest at the level of class. The old capitalist order, based on money and private property, is presented as exhausted. The new model subjectivity is that of Mitrea Cocor, the communist leader unifying three different subjectivities, the worker, the technical specialist and political cadre. The force behind the new process of transformation is generated by the tension between the ideal of the future communist society (imagined as a modern industrial and technological world), and the existing conditions.

While the old class divisions are abolished, new hierarchies appear which affect both the external and internal articulation of subjectivity. Internally, Mitrea is dominated by his political role. Similarly, the external relationship privileges the political leader over the masses, which are deprived of knowledge and reduced to mere tools; i.e., they are proletarianised.

Continuity is articulated at the level of the patriarchal structure. This affects both gender and the wider social relationships. Sadoveanu presents the new socialist social order as the revival of patriarchy. The old bourgeois world was presented as being underscored by a crisis of patriarchal masculinity. In contrast, Mitrea Cocor is in control of his virile sexual drive while at the same time re-establishing the dominance of the masculine/public subjectivity over the feminine/private. Moreover, as a communist leader, his patriarchal role is also extended to his relationships with the masses. Deprived of knowledge, the peasants are reduced to childlike workers subordinated to the communist leader. This addresses the need for the mass mobilisation of the population in the process of transformation; i.e., the communist project. Sadoveanu's employment of the patriarchal structures, however, cannot be seen simply as a reproduction of past social structures. Rather, as the author had previously done in *Baltagul*, in *Mitrea Cocor*, Sadoveanu uses the patriarchal structures in order to give legitimacy to the new social order and connect it with the past.

These complex redeployments are united at the narrative level by the figure of the communist protagonist, around whom the novel is structured. Through the close reading of *Mitrea Cocor* this chapter has revealed the textual richness as well as the various articulations of characters and relationships, the multiplicity of overlapping structures of feelings generating ambivalences, as well as the unifying/transformative drive of the narrative. The fulcrum of the novel's narrative drive has been shown to be the tension generated between the drive for unification through containment and the exclusion of differences in the articulation of subjectivities, and the counter-drive for multiplying articulations of subjectivity. The multiplication of different articulations of subjectivity is present in the evolution of

Mitrea from angry rebel to disciplined cadre. His transformation is paralleled by the changes of his mode and structure of feeling; from dispossession to terror and anger, to restlessness and finally to visionary optimism. The drive for containment through education cannot totalise the meaning of Mitrea: he must be seen as being construed through both the diversity of his structures (and of the relationships in which he is inserted) and his unifying/transformative drive. Paradoxically, the drive for unification/transformation produces differences and reveals the text in its multiplicity of forms: this does not mean that the text does not have ideological limits. On the contrary, being part of the Socialist Realist horizon means that it is both limited in its specificity and the novel itself participates in the enlargement of the horizon that contains it.

As in the case of the redeployments at the level of class and gender, the narrative form of the novel cannot be regarded as a return to nineteenth-century forms. Sadoveanu's novel is a work fully embedded in the historical process of the time. His prose skilfully captures the dynamics of the historical changes and social conflicts underlining the communist project, albeit within a given ideological framework. This is done both at the macro and micro levels of the narrative. At the macro level, it organises the events in the typical frame of Socialist Realism by emphasising the forward movement toward the future communist society. At the micro level, it presents the tensions between characters, and the articulation of their subjectivity, through the skilful switching between all three forms of discourse, direct, indirect and free indirect. Sadoveanu creates a synthesis between the interwar literary developments and the new ideological imperatives. Moreover, Sadoveanu's novel, through its articulation of a multiplicity of class and gender subjectivities renders untenable the idea that Socialist Realism, and implicitly the official discourse of the communist regime, imposed social uniformity. On the contrary, it reveals the structural inequality on which the new social order was based, as well as its complex redeployment of social differences. As such, *Mitrea Cocor* is by any definition a genuine post war novel and not a regression to nineteenth-century Realism.

Given that Socialist Realism was imported from the Soviet Union, it is helpful to compare the Romanian and Soviet forms it took. Katerina Clark's understanding of the Soviet Socialist Realist novel will be employed to achieve this comparison; specifically, the dialectic of spontaneity and consciousness, and the paternalistic structure between hero and mentor. Clark places at the centre of the Soviet novel the dialectic of spontaneity and consciousness, a dialectic that she sees as informing the philosophical thinking of Marxism-Leninism:

In this dialectical model, “consciousness” is taken to mean actions or political activities that are controlled, disciplined, and guided by politically aware bodies. “Spontaneity,” on the other hand, means actions that are not guided by complete political awareness and are sporadic, uncoordinated, even anarchic (...).⁷¹

This structure of spontaneity and consciousness does inform the portrayal of Mitrea, but with an important difference: Mitrea is marked by his conscious rebellion against social injustice as a special character right from the beginning. There is an element of spontaneity to it, in that his actions are individual and lack organisation. However, he is clearly conscious of the injustices, and, with the use of a religious language, he is able to evolve a clear mental picture of this social injustice and the vision of a better world to come. Moreover, in terms of consciousness, he stands above the average peasant, and this marks him from the beginning as future leader.

Another feature of the Soviet Novel identified by Clark is the structuring relationship between hero and mentor.⁷² The positive hero advances in consciousness through the encounter with a father figure or mentor, who has a more advanced consciousness. Clark finds that in the Soviet novel this hierarchy is static: the hero very seldom, if ever, surpasses the mentor in consciousness. Moreover, this paternalist structure is extended to other relationships: the hero can function as mentor to other less conscious characters, and the mentor can in turn be subordinated to a more conscious character. The structuring relationship between the hero and mentor generates a pyramidal structure of social relationships, which is a mirror image of the socialist social relationships presented by A. Zhdanov in his speech at the Writers congress in 1934. The pinnacle of consciousness is Stalin, followed by the party members and then by the toiling masses. Moreover, this shows the personalisation of social relationships in Socialist Realism, and the rejection of anonymous social structures.

The hero mentor structure is also present in *Mitrea Cocor*. Mitrea has a number of mentors: Old Florea and the two instructors in the Soviet Union being the most important. The “teacher” which Mitrea briefly meets while in the Romanian army, is also an important figure. As “teacher”, this character appears as a pinnacle of consciousness, and his death is strategic: it opens the path to leadership for Mitrea. Yet Mitrea is not simply subordinated to his mentors. In his portrayal of the relationships between Mitrea and his mentors, Sadoveanu manages an uneasy

⁷¹ Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 15.

⁷² Clark, ‘Socialist Realism With Shores: The Conventions for the Positive Hero’, pp. 27-50.

balance between subordination and superiority. Throughout the story the reader is made aware that Mitrea has an independent mind and that, while always respectful to his elders, he is one step ahead of them in consciousness. At the end of the novel, as communist leader, Mitrea emerges as the uncontested full consciousness. In this way, Sadoveanu places Mitrea on a socially ascending path that overturns social hierarchies while at the same time reproducing them.

Of particular note in Sadoveanu's novel is that he employs the same paternalistic structure in the relationships between the bourgeois characters. Ghiță Lungu is placed in a subordinate position to Cristea; Ghiță is fully aware of Cristea's superior knowledge, which he associates with his wealth. The instauration of the socialist order does not replace a social hierarchy with social equality, but with another social hierarchy: structurally, nothing changes. The only difference is that at the end of the novel we are presented with a vision of a future communist world when everyone reaches the same full consciousness. In this duality between "what is" and "what ought to be" the novel presents the structural conflict between the drive for emancipation and the reproduction of social hierarchies that characterised socialist social order. In both cases of spontaneity/consciousness and hero mentor structures, it is clear that Sadoveanu employed the Soviet structures, and adapted to the Romanian historical condition. In fact, this is clearly presented in the novel in the form of Mitrea's Soviet education. However, Sadoveanu also puts Mitrea on an independent ascending path that sees him reaching full consciousness, and in this way makes him an equal with his mentors.

Another connected issue is the problem of the individuality of the protagonist of the Socialist Realist novel. Clark considers that in the Stalinist novel the emphasis is on the typicality of the character, and not on creating a memorable character as an individual.⁷³ At play is a process of depersonalisation of the characters. To a large extent this can be seen as applicable to Sadoveanu's protagonist. However, Sadoveanu also manages to make his communist protagonist a memorable character, if not exactly a rounded individual. This is achieved through the quirkiness of the situations in which Mitrea finds himself: the exploration of his internal fears and desires, his sense of humour, and his physical description. Moreover, Mitrea is presented as an independent mind and this gives him a degree of autonomy, even when he is interacting with and is subordinated to his mentors. As such, Sadoveanu balances the ideological demand for typicality –

⁷³ Ibid., p. 42.

Mitreă's characteristics are the imputed characteristic of his social class – and the aesthetic imperative for the creation of a memorable character.

It is important to emphasise that, although privileged at the time as role model, *Mitreă Cocor* did not exhaust the horizon of Socialist Realism. Rather, in the figure of Mitreă Cocor, it presented a radical articulation of subjectivity. In this regard, two further novels are worth noting: Marin Preda's novel *Moromeții* (1955), and Petru Dumitriu's *Drum fără pulbere* (Dustless Path, 1949). In *Moromeții*, Preda presented a completely different view of the interwar rural world from that in *Mitreă Cocor*. *Moromeții* can be seen as a redeployment of Sadoveanu's vision of the old order in *Mitreă Cocor*. While Sadoveanu personalised the capitalist drive for profit accumulation by making them synonymous with the greed of their characters; Preda presents the structural working of capitalism. The peasants are not ruined directly by the greed and corruption of the large landowner or the miller. Even if the theme of corruption is present (the local miller uses the same device as Ghiță to steal from his customers), but through a combination of market forces. One year there is a drought and, because the harvest is poor, the peasants do not realise sufficient money from their corn crop and get into debt. The next year, although the harvest is plentiful, because the price of corn drops dramatically, the peasants still do not manage to earn sufficient money. Moreover, state taxation puts a strain on the peasant families, who need to sell their land in order to survive. There are also pluralities of ethical and cultural issues involved, especially the migration to the towns of the young generations of peasants who are attracted by the prospect of the easy accumulation of wealth through commerce, which adds to the economic conflict. Moreover, Preda's novel presents in a detailed way the contradictions of bourgeois ideology – the ideal of the autonomous individual versus the reality of the individual's subordination to market forces – and of the disenchanting and alienating process of reification that transforms the world into sellable commodities. The rewriting of the theme of the stolen gun both connects and differentiates Preda's novel and *Mitreă Cocor*; Mitreă was falsely accused of stealing Cristea's gun. In contrast, in *Moromeții*, Țugurlan, a landless peasant nurturing communist ideas, resists arrest and then disarms and steals the gun of the local policeman after he unmasks the local miller as a thief. Predictably, he ends up in jail for this act of rebellion. Marin Preda turns this episode into a tragic predicament, whereby the oppressed can only express their sense of social justice through the violent transgression of the law because they are deprived of both intellectual and material means. It can be said that in this scene, Preda puts an ironic spin on the idea of

“free choice”: the poor are condemned to either “freely” choose between suffering chronic impoverishment or resort to hopeless crime.

The differences are equally as important at the level of the overall narrative structure. While Sadoveanu creates in Mitrea an essentially epic character that internalises an ideal and is empowered to overthrow social order and establish a new one, Marin Preda’s character, Ilie Moromete is essentially tragic; the victim of the unremitting process of historical change. The difference between the two articulations is one of perspective. Out of the necessity of articulating a social confrontation between opposing forces, in Sadoveanu’s novel the economic discourse is personalised; i.e., the greed and avarice of Agapia, Ghiță and Cristea. In contrast, in Marin Preda the conflict is not directly personal but the confrontation of the individual with history: the forces of the market economy, industrialisation and urbanisation. The towering persona of the novel’s protagonist, Ilie Moromete, is the paradoxical embodiment of both the traditional peasant and the bourgeois autonomous individual: two ideal models of a precarious nature. Historical changes, represented by war and modernisation (urbanisation and industrialisation), undermine and render them outdated.

Here it must be observed that while Sadoveanu’s articulation might appear as reductively ideological and Marin Preda’s closer to historical reality in its complexity, both are, in fact, ideological. The tragic destiny of the peasant assaulted by the forces of modernity, capitalism, industry, urbanism, war and, in the second volume (1967), socialism, is just as much of an ideological projection as Sadoveanu’s epic triumphalism. In fact, Marin Preda’s vision was made possible by the ideological climate of Socialist Realism, which imposed a transformative vision of history. Moreover, Preda’s critical analysis of the effects of the process of commodification of life is clearly a response to the Marxist theory of capitalism.⁷⁴ Preda’s novel is significant not only because it demonstrates the possibility of developing different perspectives within the Socialist Realist horizon but also because it points to the complexities of the process of cultural redeployment. By the late 1960s, *Moromeții* would come to replace *Mitrea Cocor* as the canonical model of literary representation of rural life. Its articulation of human destiny as tragic, together with the critical view of the process of collectivisation of agriculture

⁷⁴ Marx’s concept of reification and commodity fetishism as presented in *Capital*, was central to the development of Western Marxist cultural theories, especially as developed by Georg Lukács. See Georg Lukács, ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’, in *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 83-222.

presented in the second volume, were both important contributions to the emergence of the literature of the troubling decade – a term coined by Marin Preda.

If Preda presented a very different view of the old order, in *Drum fără pulbere*, Petru Dumitriu presented a different vision of the new socialist order. The novel is the epic story of the initial project to construct the Danube-Black Sea canal. Today, this initial attempt to construct the canal is remembered as the site of horrendous labour camps, where many political prisoners died – including peasants and the bourgeois political and cultural elite.⁷⁵ Petru Dumitriu makes only indirect references to the existence of the labour camps. However, this construction project was also an ideological undertaking that mobilised huge numbers of people with the aim of turning them into workers. He presents the construction of the canal as symbol for the construction of socialism. Dumitriu achieves this through the skilful creation of a huge cast of colourful characters from all walks of life who populate a dynamic, fast-paced narrative. At the centre of the plot is the class conflict between the old bourgeoisie, who oppose the construction of socialism, and the new communist proletariat. However, the plot is complicated by the figure of the young engineer of bourgeois origins, Pangrati. He is torn between his love for a scion of an old aristocratic family, the beautiful but decadent Dona, and his enthusiasm for the intellectual challenge posed by the construction of the canal. Dona refuses Pangrati's love for the brutal sexuality of Mateica, the villain of the story. Mateica shoots Pangrati fearing that he will unmask his plans to sabotage the construction of the canal. In turn, Mateica is unmasked by Matei, the communist protagonist in the novel. Matei manages in the end to convince the wounded Pangrati that the construction of the canal is not just a technical problem, but also a political one. However, the two discourses, technical and political, are not evenly distributed between the two characters: Matei remains a political cadre, while Pangrati, despite his newly found political consciousness, remains a technical specialist. Yet because the construction project of the canal is, above all, a theoretical engineering challenge, Pangrati, the technical specialist, is elevated into a privileged position in relation to both the political cadre and the workers.

The tension between the political and the technical discourses; between the cadre and the specialist was observed at the time by Silviu Brucan in his review of

⁷⁵ For a discussion of this topic see Doina Jela, 'Canalul morții', in *Comunism și represiune în România: Istoria tematică a unui fratricid național*, ed. by Ruxandra Cesereanu (Iași: Polirom, 2006), pp. 126-34.; and Denis Deletant, *Communist Terror in Romania: Gheorghiu-Dej and the Police State: 1948-1965* (London: Hurst & Company, 1999).

the novel.⁷⁶ Brucan stipulated that Dumitriu presented with great skill the epic transformation of society as well as the harsh realities under the leadership of the communist regime. However, he found it objectionable that this novel is driven by the figure of the intellectual and not by the communist protagonist. For Brucan, the fault does not lie with the observation that the communist protagonist is not sufficiently referenced or given a central role, but in the way he is portrayed. Brucan considered that Matei is outshone in terms of drama and dynamism by Pangrati. Moreover, Brucan, rather than searching for the reason for this situation in the social context of the novel, saw it as the fault of the writer.

It could be argued that the reason behind Dumitriu's failure to make the party cadre the protagonist of the novel is due to the underlying tension between the technical and political discourses; an aspect that Brucan will only analyse theoretically in his 1980s works.⁷⁷ In contrast to *Mitrea Cocor*, in *Drum fără pulbere*, the communist protagonist is no longer constituted through the convergence of the three discourses of the worker, the technical specialist and the party cadre, but is reduced to the last. The other two dimensions are dispersed across other characters, the mass of workers, and several of the engineers, primarily Pangrati. While he does demonstrate moments of brilliance, the nature of Matei's position excludes any conflict or dynamism. As both worker and political cadre, he finds himself subordinated. As a simple worker he lacks the technical knowledge of the intellectual to resolve the problems of construction. As party cadre he simply receives and executes orders. Being completely subordinated to the party hierarchy makes it difficult for Matei to affirm himself as the central protagonist. In contrast, the double drama of the intellectual, that of both solving the technical problems of the construction and walking the road to political consciousness, is as central to the novel as it is to that of many of the other characters, mostly the peasants or those from the lower classes who come to find a new life on the construction project. Their drama is synonym with the drama of the construction of the canal. For this reason, the bourgeois intellectual and the numerous workers are the characters who appear colourful and interesting, redolent of their immediate everyday work and life problems, and thus dominate the novel. Dumitriu skilfully assembles a huge cast that includes petty criminals and homeless labourers, industrial workers and

⁷⁶ Silviu Brucan, 'Pentru o oglindire justă și curajoasă a adevărului vieții. Cu prilejul ediției a II-a a romanului *Drum fără pulbere* de Petru Dumitriu', *Scînteia*, nr. 2598, 4th March, 1953, quoted in, Ana Selejan, *Literatura în totalitarism, 1952-1953: Bătălii pe frontul literar*, 2nd edn (București: Cartea Românească, 2008), pp. 212-15.

⁷⁷ Silviu Brucan, *Pluralism and Social Conflict: A Social Analysis of the Communist World* (New York & London: Praeger, 1990).

peasants of both genders. He presents people from various regions of the country with their local dialects, as well as different ethnic groups, including Gypsies, Hungarians and Tatars, all converging in this huge social melting pot and becoming transformed into politically conscious workers.

In contrast to *Moromeții*, *Drum fără pulbere* did not have an enduring influence because of historical changes. The novel explicitly associated the success of the construction of the canal with the success of constructing socialism. When the construction of the canal was eventually abandoned in 1956, the novel inadvertently turned from a tool of propaganda into a reminder of the party's failure. Moreover, Petru Dumitriu moved to the West in 1960, and his whole oeuvre became blacklisted until 1989. And yet, in his unintentional articulation of the underlying tensions between the political cadre and the technical specialist, Dumitriu anticipated one of the themes of the literature of the troubling decade.

While Socialist Realism was the background against which the literature of the troubling decade defined itself, the differentiation was achieved through a consistent redeployment of many of its elements, such as the different modes and structures of feeling articulated in *Mitrea Cocor*, the conflict between the political cadre and the technical specialist present in Dumitriu, as well as Preda's tragic vision of life. The advent of the literature of the troubling decade, transformed the whole literary canon, disarticulating the Socialist Realist one and articulating a new one. In this process, some works such as *Moromeții* which were previously seen as part of Socialist Realism were reinterpreted for the new ideological parameters. In what follows, I will trace the complex redeployments that took place in the transition from Socialist Realism to the literature of the troubling decade, as it unfolded in Augustin Buzura's work.

CHAPTER 3 | The Cape of Good Hope: The Socialist Realist Origins of Augustin Buzura's Literary Vision

Although Augustin Buzura is today mainly recognised as a novelist, his first volumes, *Capul bunei speranțe* (The Cape of Good Hope, 1963), and *De ce zboară vulturul?* (Why Does the Eagle Fly?, 1966) were collections of short stories. Today his short stories are considered as unremarkable stylistic exercises.¹ However, this thesis will argue that while the second volume can indeed be seen as an exercise in style that flourished in Buzura's first novel *Absenții*, *Capul bunei speranțe* does, however, form a distinct body of work. The main difference is that in these stories Buzura formulates his defining themes within the ideological horizon of Socialist Realism. As the title suggests, enacted in these stories is a form of optimism characteristic to Socialist Realism. In Buzura's novels, optimism will be replaced by a bleak vision of social anomie and atomisation. Yet the vision articulated in these stories – that of the possibility of social unity and harmony, and of an empowered subject – will continue to be present in Buzura's future work in the form of the unfulfilled desire in the lives of his protagonists. It is for this reason among others that, in the context of this thesis, an analysis of these stories will prove revealing. Another reason is that the movement from the vision of the possibility of social solidarity and harmony to that of atomisation and anomie reveals the way in which the impact of the Communist Project was reconfigured during the 1960s. Moreover, the stories selected for reading herein highlight the importance of the emergence of a new generation and its impact on the redeployment of social power relations, specifically those of class and gender. Two stories have been selected for close reading: 'Plumb' (Lead) and the titular, 'Capul bunei speranțe'. Between them, these two stories encompass the themes that Buzura will develop in his subsequent novels. In 'Plumb' the relationship between the old generation of communist activists and the new generation of educated professionals is explored in the context of the change of orientation from the communist future to the rediscovery of the recent past erased by the construction of the new socialist reality. In contrast, in 'Capul bunei speranțe', the generational clash between parents and children focuses on the way in which the new socialist ethic of equality and individual affirmation impacts on and disrupts traditional gender relations. The articulation of a woman on the quest for emancipation in the public sphere rather than in the private

¹ Mircea Iorgulescu, 'Introducere' in Augustin Buzura, *Absenții* (București and Chișinău: Litera Internațional, 2008), pp. 7-8.

domain makes this story unique in among Buzura's works, which later became dominated by a clear realignment of gender relations along traditional lines.

It can be said that Buzura's stories take up the challenge set by Sadoveanu at the end of *Mitrea Cocor*, that of articulating "the thorny path towards full understanding". In *Mitrea Cocor*, the relation between the first generation of communists and their children is envisaged as a continuity: Mitrea grants the future to Tase, his baby boy. This smooth transition is underlined by the conflict between the reproduction of the social hierarchies of power, and the revolutionary transformation of social relationships. On the one hand, the inheritance passed from father to son reproduces the patriarchal order. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a step towards the prefigured communist future when all individuals have reached the same full understanding, and thus equality.

By way of contrast, Augustin Buzura's stories render problematic the intergenerational relationship, and articulate a redeployment that posits both rupture and reconciliation. While in 'Plumb' the two generations are reconciled, in 'Capul bunei speranțe' there is both a rupture and a struggle for integration of the individual in wider society. In both stories the new generation has a dislocating effect on the old generation. This articulation of generational dislocation, rather than being a smooth transition, anticipates the coming change of political gears, as it were, in the party leadership with the rise to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu after the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej in 1965. Moreover, it also anticipates the more general difficulty of the transfer of power within the communist regime.

1 A New Generation

In 'Plumb' the encounter between the two generations is illustrated by the evolution of the relationship between the two main protagonists. Ion Pinteia is a recently graduated metallurgy engineer, and Gyuri Barta is the party activist in charge of the lead smelting plant where Pinteia reports to take up his first job. The relationship between the two main characters as they enter the professional plane is dominated by the activist, but their relationship gradually moves onto the plane of personal memory and becomes dominated by the young engineer. An analysis of this transition reveals the complex way in which Buzura presents a vision of change in the articulation of socialist social relationships and subjectivities. The story begins with Pinteia being met by Barta at the train station, from where they make their way

to the smelting plant. As they approach the furnace hall the engineer falls behind the activist, which signals the difference between the two; a difference that consists of their orientation in relation to the world outside work:

„Ai obosit, tovarășe inginer? De fapt ai dreptate: abia ai sosit în oraș și eu – repede să te conduc la locul de muncă, să-ți prezint secția.”

Timbrul glasului său aducea a părere de rău, a muștrare, încât Pintea, rușinat, dădu din cap, într-un fel copilăresc, stîngaci.

„Nu, nu, nu! ... Vai de mine, dar v-aș fi spus!

”De fapt asta-i o boală a mea, reluă secretarul, ca și cum nu l-ar fi auzit. Și e veche. Îmi place să le arăt eu noilor-veniți fabrica, locul de muncă, imediat ce sosesc. Mai ales topitoria. A crescut și s-a schimbat sub ochii mei. Mă mîndresc cu ea, ca și cum aș fi făcut-o numai eu. Îți dai seama, de treizeci de ani de cînd sunt aici, am vazut fiecare piatră care s-a mișcat, fiecare cărămidă ce s-a pus! De aceea țin...”

„Nu, nu-s obosit, reluă Pintea firul gîndurilor, însă parcă-s beat, dar de emoție...”

„De emoție?! Se miră secretarul. Ei bravo! Dar...”

„Știți, e altceva. De acum nu mai rămîn în urmă, schimbă el vorba, grăbind.”²

“Are you tired, comrade engineer? In fact you are right: you have just arrived in town and I rush you straight to your workplace, to show you the department.”

The tone of voice sounded regretful, as if in scolding, such that Pintea felt embarrassed, and shook his head in a childish and coy way.

“No, no, no! ... silly me, but I would have told you...”

“In fact, this is an illness of mine,” continued the secretary as if he did not hear Pintea. “And it is old. I like to show the factory, the workplace to the newcomers immediately when they arrive. Especially the smelting hall. It has grown and changed under my eyes. I am as proud of it as if I built it by myself. You must understand that having been here for thirty years, I have seen every single stone that was moved, and every brick that was laid. For this reason I hold ...”

“No, I am not tired,” Pintea continued his thought, “but I feel as though drunk with emotion...”

“With emotion?!” The activist was surprised. “Well, Well!, but...”

“You know, it is something else. From now on I will no longer fall behind.” Pintea changed the subject in a rush.

The dialogue is clearly dominated by the activist and his orientation towards work. His entire life is, in fact, dedicated to work: he has the outward oriented personality of a man of action. The factory is his achievement and his pride. His authority and leadership spring from his energy and enthusiasm, from his undeterred focus on the

² Augustin Buzura, ‘Plumb’, in *Capul bune speranțe* (București: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1963), pp. 27-28.

life of the factory. The factory is a symbol of the new socialist reality, the growth of which he has overseen like a father. By comparison, Pintea appears as a confused, immature and frail child. His only ability is to make a formal engagement not to fall behind. This difference between the two can be seen as that between maturity and youth. The experienced communist leads through example on the work forefront while the young newcomer follows in his footsteps. Pintea's frailty might simply be inexperience and could be parlayed into pliability – the ability to learn and be moulded. In fact, the metal industry was an important element of the Communist Project, both in economic terms of industrialisation and as social symbolism: it is the place where things are transformed and given shape. The intensity of the creative power symbolised by the heat that melts the ore and transforms it into metal, can be seen as a metaphor for the intensity of the revolutionary process of social transformation. The factory was not simply a place of forging new things, but also a place of education in order to forge the new socialist subject. The authority of the communist is not directly professional but has a political dimension. A potential tension is foreshadowed between the young man who, being a university graduate, has more professional authority, and the activist who will be revealed to be merely a skilled worker. The lack of professional knowledge of the political authority becomes a point of tension and criticism in the later works of Buzura. As we have seen in *Mitrea Cocor*, the communist project sought to suture together the political and the professional into one individual subject, yet in this story they are embodied in two different individuals.

The imminent change in the relationship between the young engineer and the communist leader is hinted at in the words, "it is something else" – words that Pintea uses to rectify his mistake in saying the he is drunk with emotions. These words suggest that behind Pintea's behaviour there is something that has no place within the plane of work, framing the relationship between him and Barta. As the two enter the smelting hall the relations between them suffer a profound alteration, as if melting under the heat. With a short, enigmatic question, "Care-i... Maxim?" ("Which one is... Maxim?")³, Pintea reveals the other factor beyond the plane of work that influences his behaviour. This question produces a change in the activist and opens him up to the past and to private memories, thus changing the plane on which the two characters interact. From the answers of the activist it is made apparent that Maxim was the name of an old furnace at the time when the factory was private property. After communist nationalisation the furnace was demolished and replaced

³ Ibid., p. 29.

by a new one, like so many other relics of the past, including an incarceration unit used for punishing absenteeism, which has now been replaced by a canteen. Taken by surprise by Pinte's question the activist is shaken. At first he seems to oppose this reorientation of attention towards the past and personal memory:

„De ce mi-ai putut aduce aminte de asta? relua secretarul. Nu înțelegi, omule, că s-a șters orice urmă de atunci? Am cautat să le șterg, să nu se mai vadă, să nu se mai repete! Altceva nu ți-a putut trece prin cap?” Vocea lui nu aducea a mustrare. Avea un accent cu totul deosebit. Cuvintele parcă erau rafale puternice de vânt care îl zguduiau pe Pinte.⁴

“How could you remind me of such things?” continued the activist. “Don’t you understand, man, that all traces of that time have been erased? I have tried to erase them, so that they are no longer visible, so that they could not happen again! Couldn’t you think of anything else?” His voice did not sound like he was reproaching. It had a completely unusual tone. The words seemed like strong gusts of wind and they shook Pinte.

The activist's words reveal that beneath his optimism and enthusiasm for the present there is a dark past that he has tried to erase. Paradoxically, the young man, the new generation, reminds him of exactly what he has tried to erase: the past. The intensity of the activist's words, although not a reprimand, reveals the intensity of the internal dislocation that Pinte's question produced in the activist. This internal dislocation brings to the surface the long buried story of one of the activist's friends who died in the factory after a life of hardship and injustice under the old regime. However, there is not only the tragic death of his friend that consumes the activist, but also an unfulfilled promise. Before dying the activist's friend asked a favour of him:

„Am un copil, mi-a zis el atunci, și-i tare deștept. Eu n-am făcut prea multe în viața mea... N-am putut face... Până nu prea demult, n-am știut cu cine s-o iau la drum... Odată ... te-oi ruga să-i arăți tu ... să nu caute...”

„Ști de ce-mi pare rău? N-am mai dat de urma copilului, căci nu tare peste mult am fost băgat la închisoare. L-am căutat totuși în sat după ce am ieșit, dar rudele mi-au spus că au plecat undeva. Apoi au venit vremurile în care trebuia să ne ținem tare, în care am pus mina pe putere, și m-am pierdut în astea. Îmi pare foarte rău că nu i-am regasit urmele...”⁵

⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

“I have a child, he told me then, and he is very bright. I did not do much in my life... I couldn't... until a short while ago I did not know with whom to walk on the road... Sometime... I would ask you to show him the path... so that he would not have to search...”

“You know what I regret? That I did not find the child, because not long after, I was jailed. Nevertheless, I looked for him when I was freed, but some relatives told me that they left the village. Then the time came when we had to be strong, when we took power, and I lost myself in these things. I deeply regret that I did not trace him...”

It is revealed that the young engineer is the son of the activist's friend. Pintea has come to the factory in order to find the truth about his father who died when Pintea was still a child. A multiplicity of changes is articulated in this revelation. First, the tension between the two generations is displaced from the present and the plane dominated by the activist, to the past and the personal. Moreover, in this new setting it is the activist who is remiss, in that he has not kept his promise to look after and guide his friend's son. The two are reconciled through an exchange, each recounting the way they experienced the tragic event that befell Pintea's father.

In this recounting there is a further dislocation of the activist: while he is the teller of the story of the events that led to the death of the father, and the death itself, this is not in any meaningful way his story, but the story of the father. This is evident in the way in which the narrative voice switches perspectives when the actual death is related from that of the activist to that of the father. At the same time, when Pintea recounts his memory of the circumstances in which he and his mother received the message of the father's death, he maintains his perspective.

The two stories, that of the father as recounted by the activist and that of Pintea, are recycled narrative forms. The story of the father reprises the scenario of the workers' hardship under the old capitalist regime in a manner common to Socialist Realism. However, there is a slight reorientation from the dedication to the communist cause to the personal. Pintea's father suffers from massive lead intoxication. One day at work, when he is alone in the smelting hall, he suffers a stroke that paralyses his left side. Fearing becoming a heavy burden on his already impoverished family, and also out of pride, he decides to end his life: the thought of being disabled is unbearable to him. Moreover, there is a chance that his death might appear as a work-based accident and his family might get some insurance money. There is no big political ideal behind his act, just the prosaic and practical thinking of an ordinary man trapped in an extraordinary situation that he cannot otherwise reconcile. Overcoming pain, weakness, and fear, in an almost

superhuman effort, he gathers the last of his last energy and willingly throws himself to his death in the furnace called Maxim. The whole scene, although recounted by the activist who was not present, is presented from the father's subjective perspective. We are presented with the father's internal struggle to overcome physical impairment through sheer will power. He repeats the following words like a mantra:

Nu se poate... Nu se poate, nu se poate... Trebuie.. Trebuie...⁶

This cannot be, this cannot be, this cannot be... I must... I must
...

These words express both his refusal to accept his destiny as a defeated individual and the struggle to overcome weakness and fear while gathering the strength to act. These exact words will appear again and again in Buzura's future novels, and they signify the same individual refusal to accept a humiliating condition and the struggle to preserve individual moral integrity: it can be said that these words express in a condensed form the essence of Buzura's protagonists. Yet in these words there is more than an echo of the strength of character of a communist protagonist, such as Pavel Korchagin in the novel *How the Steel Was Tempered*, a classic of Soviet Socialist Realism. The difference is that here the strength of character is not based on the communist ideology of dedicating one's life to the struggle against humanity's enemies, but has an individual character that evinces a sense of individual pride. This change signals Buzura's future break from Socialist Realism and the articulation of an individualist protagonist.

Although the story articulates a subjectivity that dislocates the centrality of the communist protagonist, by shifting the focal point to the father and to the private, the story remains firmly within the ideological horizon of Socialist Realism by being located in the old bourgeois society, where workers are condemned to a life of hardship and misery.

Pintea's story recycles an episode made famous by Marin Preda in the novel *Moromeții* (1955), which became a central piece of the post war Romanian literary canon. It presents the confrontation between an impoverished rural family and the tax collector. However, while in Preda's novel the situation is defused by the payment of the tax, and is framed by a sense of bitter humour, Buzura paints, as it were, the confrontation in violent and shocking colours. The mother does not have the money to pay, and when she aggressively resists the few household goods she

⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

possesses being taken away, she is mercilessly beaten by a group of men led by the taxman. The young Pintea is himself caught in this physical clash. The beating only stops when someone brings the news of the father's death. The crushing effects of physical violence on the individual, combined with the news of tragic death and the overall bleak social vision, are a recurrent theme in Buzura's future works. Here, however, these elements are again situated in the old capitalist regime, and thus easily accommodated ideologically as regards Socialist Realism. In fact, this kind of strong representation of violent acts was made acceptable to the Romanian Socialist Realist canon through the novel *Descult* (Barefoot, 1948) by Zaharia Stancu. This is a work that represents in a brutally vivid manner the social unrest in rural Romania during the 1907 peasants' revolts.

The exchange of personal memories establishes the reconciliation between the old activist and the young engineer. This reconciliation is presented in a somewhat melodramatic and heavily symbolic manner:

Inginerul tăcu. Ridică fruntea și întâlnește privirea secretarului. Acesta prinse să se ridice încet, cu băgare de seamă, ca și cum ar fi fost sus, la o mare înălțime, pe o sîrmă de se mișcă. Se ridică și el. Prin ochii umezi, își vedeau fețele diformate, mult mai mari, tremurătoare, ca și cum s-ar privi printr-o perdea deasă de vaporii. Mai întâi oarecum surprinși, dar stingheriți, încercau gesturi inutile, schițau pași, apoi perdeaua de vaporii ce parcă-i despărțea începu să dispară, conturul feței, ochilor le deveni clar, sigur, poate ceva mai accentuat. Rămaseră multă vreme așa, înbrățișându-se sufocant, bărbătește, cu privirile. Și liniștea, se adînci așa de mult, deveni așa de nepătruns, încît li se părea că sînt singuri sub imensul clopot al cerului, care creștea, se întindea fantastic de repede, împingînd ceața de pe Valea-Neagră, toropind-o către pereții munților.⁷

The engineer fell silent. Looking up, he met the activist's gaze, who stood up slowly and with great care as if he was high up on a tightrope. Through their moist eyes they saw their deformed faces, greatly enlarged, trembling, as if they were looking through a dense curtain of mist. At first, somehow surprised and embarrassed, they were trying senseless gestures, tentative steps, and then the curtain of mist that separated them begun to disappear, the line of their faces and eyes became clear, certain, slightly more accentuated. They remained in this suffocating and manly embracing gaze for a long time. And the silence between them reached a great profundity, became so impenetrable, that it seemed that they were alone under the immense bell of the Heavens that grew and was extending at a fantastic speed pushing the fog off the Black-Valley, crushing it against the mountains' walls.

⁷ Ibid., p. 43.

The reconciliation between the two is intensely personal and associated symbolically to nature rather than to any work ethic or the industrial environment. The private character of the relationship is emphasised by the fact that they appear alone within an expanding but enclosed space, the bell-shaped sky. The silent communion between the two is made through their eyes. This communion dispels the “curtain of mist”; i.e., the misunderstanding that separated them. This misunderstanding was of course due to the work-oriented mentality of the activist. The fact that they enter into a new relationship, framed by private intimacy rather than public convention, and that this is something new is symbolised by the way in which “somehow surprised and embarrassed, they were trying senseless gestures, tentative steps”. However, although the new relationship is presented as being between two equal individuals, the plane on which it is realised is that brought about by the engineer, the reorientation towards the past and the private. This is symbolised by the fact that it is the activist who stands up “slowly and with great care as if he was high up on a tightrope”. His slowness and care symbolises his entering a new, unfamiliar territory.

One interesting feature of the story is the way in which Buzura correlates symbolically the changes in the relationship between the characters and the changes of environment. The road to the factory is dominated by the activist, who leads the way; the heat of the smelting hall marks the change of the plane on which the two relate; the new relation is forged in the rather cooler air of the outside yard, and the reconciliation takes on atmospheric symbolism. However, there is a tiny element that sticks out in a strange way: when the two of them come out, the activist describes the corner of the factory yard where they sit to talk as being dirty. Moreover, they are near a water stream that is also described as dirty. The presence of this “dirt” can be seen to symbolise a sense of something unacknowledged that is lacking. In Freud’s psychoanalytic theory the perception of “lack” is the ground on which reality is distinguished from fantasy.⁸ As such, the presence of the “dirt” element can be seen as an attempt to underpin the rather heavily ideological structure of the story with some sort of realism. The stream of water and the yard of the factory would be expected to be dirty; therefore, it is

⁸ Sigmund Freud, ‘Formulations on the Two Principles of Psychic Functioning’, in Sigmund Freud, *The Unconscious*, trans. by Graham Frankland (London: Penguin Books, 2005), pp. 1-10. A discussion of the significance of Freud’s theory of the relationship between the reality principle and the pleasure principle, and its contribution to the understanding of the concept of “reality” is Mark Cousins, ‘Introduction’, in Sigmund Freud, *The Unconscious*, pp. vii-xx.

realistic to portray them as such. However, it could be argued that the dirtiness of the present reality that the two characters inhabit is a symbolic condensation and displacement of the potential professional tension between the two protagonists; i.e., a way of containing it. Moreover, this symbolic condensation together with the displacing of the “dirt” of social antagonism to the past allows for the reconciliation between the two characters to be achieved. It is therefore reasonable to summarise the intricate rearticulation performed by Buzura in ‘Plumb’ as an astute and tactful, yet at the same time hopeful, attempt to make room for a different subjectivity within the ideological horizon of Socialist Realism. It is an attempt that both dislocates and preserves the position of the communist protagonist by effecting a reorientation towards the past: the communist is not only the eraser of the past, but also its preserver. At the same time, the forcefulness of the reorientation and redeployment of power relations generated by the emergence of the new generation is made somewhat gentle through the provision of an important role for the old political cadre/worker in the new structure. At the same time, it is naively optimistic to think that the old communist elite would simply accept the transfer of power and the redeployment of social relationships. This tension between the old and new generation, cohabiting as they are in the new socialist Romania, will irrupt in the narratives of the future novels of Buzura.

2 ‘The Cape of Good Hope’

In contrast to the story, ‘Plumb’, where historical change and social conflict were framed in terms of a broken family and the reconciliation between generations, in the novella, ‘Capul bunei speranțe’, they are framed in terms of generational conflict and gender relations. The story focuses on Maria Condrea, or Mimi, as she is called at home, a young woman searching for her role and place in the world. Her predicament consists of the conflict between dual articulations of femininity that are represented by the two names, “Mimi” and “Maria”. In this story, which is set in the new socialist society, Buzura tackles an important issue identified by Andrei Zhdanov in his speech that sets out the tenets of Socialist Realism: the issue is the problem posed by “the fact that peoples’ consciousness lags behind economic life”.⁹ “Mimi” represents the persistence of the bourgeois articulation of woman as subordinated to man, relegated to the private sphere of the household, as well as

⁹ Zhdanov, ‘Soviet Literature’, p. 23.

the embodiment of erotic drive. “Maria” represents the articulation of the new socialist woman on a more equal basis as regards gender equality; an empowered individual participating in the public sphere through her integration in the labour force. As with ‘Plumb’, this story has a positive outcome as Maria finds a way to become an independent woman; however, traditional gender structures are not completely overcome. The contrast between man as a being of reason and woman as a being of the heart persists, albeit to a lesser extent. Moreover, new tensions arise in the form of the difficulty in forming intimate relationships in the absence of an erotic discourse.

The predicament of Buzura’s female protagonist is presented in a similar way to that of Mitrea Cocor: she is the subject of two conflicting ideological interpellations, each articulating a different form of femininity. On the one hand, there is “Mimi”, her bourgeois femininity stimulated and enforced by both her mother and by Mimi’s first boyfriend, Alexandrescu. On the other hand, there is “Maria”, the new emancipated femininity, stimulated by her private readings as well as her father and her school and work colleagues, and, later on, by her second boyfriend, Bucșan. In contrast to Mitrea, who was presented as being firmly situated as a potential revolutionary subject while rejecting bourgeois subjectivity, Buzura presents his female protagonist as undergoing a journey of self-discovery that takes her through different life stages that merge her two separate but converging and diverging identities. Nevertheless, by comparison to the other female characters explored in this thesis, Maria is the most radical articulation of a woman’s quest for equality and emancipation. This chapter will first analyse the articulation of “Mimi” and then proceed to that of “Maria”, ending with the analysis of the story’s difficulties in articulating an erotic relationship based on gender equality.

In contrast to the hardship and deprivation Pinteia and Mitrea Cocor endured in their childhood, Mimi had a typically bourgeois upbringing. The family lives in a comfortable house, and Mimi has her own well-furnished room, which even contains a piano. Her family has a conventional structure: the father, a successful and renowned medical doctor, is the breadwinner and a public figure, while the mother is a housewife embodying the private sphere. Growing up under the guidance of the mother, Mimi seems destined to be replicated in her mother’s image and becomes a housewife. The mother seeks to mould Mimi into an idealised image of femininity in the context of a traditional bourgeois housewife. This is evident in the guidance she gives her daughter: for example, her mother stops her from practising athletics while at school under the pretext that it will deform Mimi’s body. The fact that the mother thinks of an athletic female body in terms of “deformity” shows her unambiguous

understanding of what she perceives as “normal” gender differences; i.e., to have a strong active body is not considered by her to be feminine. This reflects a prevalent articulation of femininity during the period; that of femininity engendering a soft and passive body in opposition to a strong and competitive masculine body. In the clash between the two competing articulations of the female body, a dislocation takes place: Mimi’s aspirations are dislocated by the mothers’ view, just as the mother’s ideals are dislocated by Mimi’s aspirations. This traditional view of femininity is also applied to the shaping of the mind. After finishing school, Mimi wants to attend university, however Mimi’s mother asks her to take a break from her studies in order to think about marriage. In this respect, Mimi follows the advice of her mother; however she soon starts to feel bored. Ultimately, housework and reading do not satisfy her desire for self-affirmation.

A new episode is opened up in Mimi’s life by her first erotic experience, which is mediated by her mother and friends. Under the guidance of her mother and friends she falls in love with a young man, Costel Alexandrescu, who represents not only an articulation of masculinity, but also a view of ordering gender relations into well defined roles. He is a dentist and has good social skills; he knows how to dance and sing and, more importantly, he knows how to speak to women. During her affair with Alexandrescu, Mimi experiences her first kiss. This erotic experience represents for Mimi her coming of age and the shedding of the last remnants of childhood. Moreover, her relationship with Alexandrescu brings about a transformation in Mimi: she starts to dress with care and attires herself more prettily. In this transformation of her attitude and appearance, the active response of an individual to the demands of her environment can be observed. Regardless, she is rather ambivalent about her relationship with Alexandrescu:

Orele cînd îl aștepta deveniră nesfîrșite, de ne suportat, ca apoi, cînd apărea pe ușă, mereu elegant, călcat, în fiecare zi cu altă cravat, răspîndind în cameră un miros feminine de parfum bulgăresc Jorjet, să se mire cum de a putut fi așa.¹⁰

Her longing to meet him made the hours waiting seem endless. And yet, when he was appearing at the door, always elegant, with his clothes well pressed, with a different tie every day, and spreading in the room the feminine scent of the Bulgarian perfume Jorjet, she was wondering how could she long for him.

¹⁰ Augustin Buzura, ‘Capul bunei speranțe’, in *Capul bunei speranțe* (București: Editura Pentru Literatură, 1963), pp. 140-41.

From Mimi's rejection of Alexandrescu self-regard as vain and effeminate, it appears that her views of gender relations are informed by a traditional perspective. Yet her rejection is not simply the rejection of that of inappropriate behaviour; i.e., a man having certain traits traditionally associated with those of women. Mimi herself has more "masculine" aspirations. This conflict is made apparent in Mimi's conversations with Alexandrescu:

Discuțiile lor: Eu... eu... eu... eu...
Planuri de viitor: eu... eu... eu... eu...
Noi? Niciodată. Iar ea?... Ea? Cea care trebuie să le asculte pe toate. Ea, ca om? Unde se găsea în planurile lui? Să-l aștepte acasă, mereu veselă, fericită, elegantă, să-l conducă. Așa trebuia să arate soția stomatologului Alexandrescu.
Odată îi spusese că ar vrea să facă ceva. Dacă nu ceva deosebit, totuși folositor, să se bucure. Când a auzit-o, a izbucnit în râs.
„Da există o facultate foarte indicată în cazul vostru... pentru tine în special și pentru femei în general: electrocrația! Are cursuri la zi, la seară, și, excepțional, la fără frecvență. Dădu apoi din mână: exaltări adolescente.”¹¹

Their discussions: I... I... I... I...
Their plans for the future: I... I... I... I...
We? Never. And She?... She? The one who had to listen to everything. She, as a human being? Where was she in his plans? To wait for him at home, always happy, well-disposed, elegant, to lead him. This is how the wife of stomatologist Alexandrescu should be.
Once she told him that she would like to do something, if not unusual, at least useful that would make her happy. When he heard her he burst out laughing:
“Yes, there is a university well suited for women in general and for you especially, the electro-kitchen! There are day and evening classes and in special cases even without attendance.”
He then waved his hand dismissively: adolescent exaltation.

This dialogue is not simply the illustration of a confrontation between two individuals. Rather, it illustrates the clash between two different models of articulating individual subjectivity. Moreover, in order to understand the nature of the conflict between Mimi and Alexandrescu this first has to be seen as Mimi's internal conflict. Mimi sees the tension as being between her as a human being and her as Alexandrescu's wife. Alexandrescu's view presents an order of gender relations where each individual has an assigned place and role in their relations. It could be argued that Mimi is in a way unfair when she affirms that she does not have a place in his plans. She has, in fact, a very well-defined place and role: the wife who listens

¹¹ Ibid., p. 141-42.

to her husband, who takes care of the home, who is always happy and well disposed, while always being ready to comfort him and to accompany him. However, although Mimi has been groomed by her mother to adopt the role of “wife”, she nonetheless rejects her role – ostensibly because it places her in a subordinate position to that of her husband. While this stance is arguably valid, being a wife is not in the text merely redolent of connotations of disempowerment: to achieve a level of ambiguity the text references the expression “să-l conducă”, which has been translated in this thesis as “to lead him”. In Romanian, the verb “a conduce” expresses “to lead” or “to guide” as the main meaning; it thus signifies a dominant role. However, it also expresses the meaning of “to accompany”, or to provide companionship, which has a less dominant connotation. In the context being discussed, it would have been arguably more appropriate to use “to accompany”, yet this would have dispelled the ambiguity of the term, and would have erased the contrast between its denotation of dominance and the rest of the sentence, which has a clear subordinating meaning.

A more appropriate interpretation of this passage is to see Mimi’s rejection of Alexandrescu’s view in terms of a denial of autonomous individuality. This is clearly suggested by the fact that Mimi sees the conflict in terms of the opposition between her-as-a-human-being and her-as-a-wife. To become “wife” appears to Mimi as the social imposition of a role over the individual. However, “human being” is not in this context a definite term, and has no actual content; moreover, “wife” cannot be taken simply to mean “non-human being”. Through this deductive process, whereby each articulation negates the other in terms of arriving at a fixed definition, a new situation emerges: the clash between terminologies signifies that the struggle is between two different forms of articulating the term “human being”; i.e., individual subjectivity. The “I” invoked by Mimi stands in fact for a different social articulation of being, one that sees doing “something, if not unusual, at least useful that would make her happy” in terms other than that of being a wife. To see becoming “wife” as the imposition of a social role on the individual, would posit the individual as an autonomous entity outside the domain of social relationships. Yet as this thesis will show, Mimi’s aspirations are themselves social articulations of individual subjectivity.

After their confrontation, Mimi stops seeing Alexandrescu. At her request, her father finds her a job as secretary at the local metallurgical factory. At first, Mimi is dually enchanted and empowered by attaining employment. However, she soon grows dissatisfied with her secretarial position; the routine of copying documents

and being under the control of the boss represents a form of disenchantment for her.

From this brief analysis of her evolution and development Mimi's dissatisfaction and lack of fulfilment in the traditional role assigned to women is evident. However, this is not caused by the fact that this role subordinates her to other people: her mother, her boyfriend and her boss. As Laclau and Mouffe argued, the subordination of an individual does not by itself produce resistance, but it emerges only in the presence of a social articulation opposed to the subordinating subjected. In the story, this other social articulation of subjectivity appears under the name "Maria". An important part in the articulation of "Maria" is played by the father, who Maria highly esteems and regards almost as a role model. As a successful doctor, who spends his time dedicated to finding a cure for cancer, he represents an active individuality fighting for a just cause. Moreover, Maria receives an active education at school that develops both body and mind, and is further stimulated by the U.T.M. slogans that encourage students to find a new life through work:

În școală i se vorbește mereu de muncă. Considerase sfaturile repetate ale colegelor, ale organizației U.T.M. ca un soi de ceasornic care bătea încontinuu și plictisitor și a cărei ascultare era o corvoadă. „Trebuie să trăiești altfel... altfel... Să muncești!...” Sigur ! Foarte simplu! Dar cum?¹²

In school she has been repeatedly told about work. However, she considered the repeated advice from her colleagues and of the U.T.M organisation (Uniunea Tineretului Muncitor, The Working Youth's Union) as a kind of endless and monotonous clockwork, churning out slogans, listening to which was a tedious job. "You must live differently... differently... to work!..." Indeed! Very simple! But how?

This passage reveals that Maria's upbringing and education into a different social form – that of being a dutiful housewife – precludes her from knowing how to "live differently", and hence to her the slogans are empty and monotonous.

In Maria's relationship with her father another form of gender relations is articulated. When the father informs Maria that he has found a job for her, they shake hands in a manly fashion: this is a sign of partnership between two individuals on equal terms. In contrast to Maria's relationship with Alexandrescu, where both roles seem somewhat effeminate, here both individuals are articulated in masculine terms. This double dislocation raises the question of what attitudes and behaviours are socially defined as either "masculine" or "feminine". Moreover, the

¹² Ibid., p.143.

question of self-affirmation of the gendered individual subject becomes framed by the tension between different articulations of both “man” and “woman”, rather than as a conflict between “men” and “women” *per se*.

Another stimulus for Maria takes the form of her witnessing the busy workers who come to the office where she works:

Muncitorii intrau înăuntru, mulți veseli, rîzînd, discutînd. La ușă întrerupeau totul, spuneau sau cereau scurt ce aveau, apoi plecau reluîndu-și discuțiile lăsate la ușă. De fiecare dată cînd îi vedea se mira. Cum putea să le înțeleagă pe toate, să trăiască și ea bucuria lor, dacă în fiecare zi se simțea departe?¹³

The workers were entering the office, many happy, laughing, talking. At the door, they were interrupting their discussions, laconically they were asking or saying what they needed, and then they were on their way, taking up their talk again. Every time she saw them she was wondering. How could she understand them, how could she live their happiness, if every day she felt estranged?

The contrast revealed in this passage is between her un-fulfilment and the apparent fulfilment of her co-workers; between her subordination to the boss, and their apparent autonomy. Maria's question relates to how she could become happy and engaged in the world and live as they do. This passage reveals the conflict between subordination and emancipation underlying socialist societies, and shows the significance of the official discourse in stimulating in individuals the desire for social emancipation and self-affirmation.

Maria's aspirations for self-affirmation through work, exploration, and discovery were already embryonically present in her reading of adventure stories featuring such characters as Tarzan, Old Shatterhand, Winnetou, Matta Hari, etc. These aspirations developed in Maria while she read and daydreamed in her room, the symbol of her interiority. Symbolically, she names the old armchair in which she reads and daydreams, “Capul Bunei Speranțe”. Thus, her own room and the name of the chair are symbols of an internal space full of potential. In this way, the new socialist femininity – based on gender equality, a strong work ethic, and public presence – is presented as in a positive light and as source of hope. The presence of this kind of a progressive articulation of femininity is of great cultural and political significance because of its uncommon occurrence in Romanian literature, even that of the communist period. The growing tension inside Mimi is encapsulated in the image of her reading in her armchair after her break with Alexandrescu:

¹³ Ibid., p. 145.

Zilele iar enorm de lungi. Arcurile Capului Bunei Spenranțe se obișnuiseră să stea încordate. (...) întrebările se conturau tot mai clar, mai precis. Ce va fi de acum înainte? Ce va face după asta?¹⁴

The days were enormously long again. The springs of 'The Cape of Good Hope' got used to being tensed. (...) the questions became clearer, more precise. What would be from now on? What is she going to do afterwards?

The image of the armchair's tense springs captures Mimi's growing inner tension; that is, she is ready to spring into action and become Maria. However, the questions that spring into her mind, despite the fact that they become clear, signify her uncertainty about what she should do. Her decision as to how to live differently is catalysed by a chance encounter with a young worker, Andrei Bucșan. Bucșan is the opposite of Alexandrescu: he is a construction worker with a shock brigade; a Stakhanovite worker and a symbol of virility. His strength is not merely physical but comprises as well that of character. His strength of character is reflected in his disregard for physical pain: for example, he disregards the pain he suffers when he hurts his arm in a work-related accident. Moreover, it is not comfort that he seeks but adventure. If Alexandrescu's vanity was that of "effeminate" comfort, Bucșan is possessed by the virile twin vanities of action and danger. It is this characteristic that casts Bucșan and Maria's father in the same mould as regards the articulation of masculinity, and in contrast to Alexandrescu. However, Bucșan is shy with women and does not know how to talk about love. His lack of charm is not simply a personal defect, but the symptom of the difficulty of articulating an erotic discourse within the ideological horizon of Socialist Realism, as was evident in the absence of the erotic discourse in the articulation of Mitrea Cocor. This absence will prove to be an important obstacle to establishing a stable relationship between Bucșan and Maria.

On the day of the encounter Maria had just resigned from her job as a secretary. Bucșan asks her if she is working, which both embarrasses and infuriates her. She does not want to be taken as workshy or worse "as one of those girls", meaning idle and promiscuous:

"Complicată și munca asta! Unii pot trăi fără ea, se hotărî el să-
i plătească ironia de mai-nainte, pe cînd la alții e însăși viața
lor."

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 142.

“Asta nu înseamnă să privești de sus pe alții!” Zise ea încet, simțind că nu-si poate reține plînsul.¹⁵

“Work is such a complicated thing! While some can do without it,” he said, deciding to pay back her irony, “for others it is their life.”

“This does not mean to look down on others!” she said quietly, unable to hold back her tears..

Having had her pride hurt by Bucșan’s words, she decided to prove that she is more than just an idle and promiscuous girl. The next day, she takes a job as trainee welder at the factory. This decision brings her mother to the brink of despair. The mother blames Bucșan for twisting her daughter’s mind. However, the father sides with Maria, remarking that:

„Faci ceea ce crezi că-i bine și-ți place. Munca cinstită nu-l înjosește pe om și nici dragostea; dimpotrivă...”¹⁶

“You do what you believe is good and what you like. Neither honest work nor love degrades human beings, on the contrary...”

The father’s remark is not only giving Maria free reign as an individual, it also provides an articulation of values that becomes a stimulation and model for Maria’s self-affirmation and development. This is an important aspect because it shows that ideological inculcation of values in an individual (the father’s remark is an abstract ideology providing a social articulation of what is expected of an individual as a “human being”) is simultaneous with the articulation of her autonomy.

On the basis of their common attitude towards work, Maria and Bucșan’s affair, which started as conflicting relations, develops into friendship and chaste love. They grow fond of each other to the point that they become inseparable. They talk about their experiences and aspirations, always having their personal development in sight; they read books together and discuss them. However, although their work ethic is what binds them, they talk very little of their actual occupations. In fact, we are not told anything of Maria’s progress as a welder. They are simply described as being happy together in a private realm while their relationship remains chaste. It is in the relationship with Bucșan that Mimi for the first time in her life asserts herself as Maria:

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 147.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 135.

“Zi-mi tu. Mă cheamă, după cum știi, Maria Condrea. Acasă îmi zic Mimi, dar tu nu-mi spune așa. Îmi amintește de ce a fost...”
“Bine, dar oameni, când încep să se tutuiască, trebuie mai întâi să se sărute... așa-i obiceiul... nu-i vina mea!”
“Dar noi nu sîntem conservatori, este?”¹⁷

“Call me you (singular). As you know my name is Maria Condrea. At home they call me Mimi, but do not call me so. It reminds me of what is past...”
“Okay, but people, when they start calling themselves by the first name, they first must kiss... this is the custom... it is not my fault!”
“But we are not conservatives, are we?”

Maria's refusal to kiss is caused by the fact that, like the name “Mimi”, kissing reminds her of her former self, especially her relationship with Alexandrescu. Bucșan's invocation of tradition is not sufficient excuse to persuade Maria because of her desire to become a new person. This is made clear by her reference to them not being conservative in their morals. Given that this story was published in the early sixties, the decade which saw the sexual revolution in the West, an inversion can be detected here in that abstinence – and not erotic exploration – is seen as progressive. In the context of the story, where Maria's past experience with a man was purely erotic, and moreover carried out under the guidance of the mother and friends, abstinence is a symbol not so much of repression but of self-affirmation. Sexuality is part of the articulation of individual subjectivity and gender relations that Maria now struggles to liberate herself from. This is because of the ideological polarisation between bourgeois/erotic versus proletarian/abstinence that structured the Socialist Realist imaginary. While this inversion is explicable in the context of the story, the lack of an erotic discourse would prove problematic. The erotic desire that develops between Maria and Bucșan remains an internal, unexpressed articulation that demands expression.

Maria and Bucșan's relationship, based on a mutual yet undeclared and unconsumed love, soon arrives at a critical moment. Having finished his construction job at the factory, Bucșan is ready to leave together with his team for the challenge of a new project in a different town. The news is devastating for Maria. Her new life, whereby her inner aspirations and the outer articulation are fused for the first time, is threatened with collapse. This time the dislocation is not caused by an opposing form of articulation, as in the case of the mother and of Alexandrescu, but rather by the same aspirations in a different individual. For Bucșan, the solution is for them to leave together on a quest for self-affirmation. However, for Maria this

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 154.

decision is more problematic: she fears that if she leaves with Bucșan the potential for him to grow tired of her might be realised and he might ultimately abandon her. In the end, she reconciles this conundrum by following him; not together with him but independent of him, and on her own. In order to make him leave on his own, she writes him a letter, saying that she does not love him, and refuses to see him. The discrepancy between their evolving thoughts emphasises the differences in the traditional gender roles. The thought that Maria might abandon him does not cross Bucșan's mind. Maria's doubts emphasises the weaker status of woman, for whom self-realisation as an autonomous individual proves more difficult. To be together with Bucșan as equal partners, Maria needs to gain self-reliance, to guard her self-determinacy, to overcome her status as a dependent being.

The first step is to gain freedom from her mother. The mother tries to assert herself by ordering Maria to stay home and marry Alexandrescu; in other words, to do as she is told. The mother blames Bucșan for the changes in her daughter:

Dacă ar fi fost Bucșan acolo, căci pe el îl considera vinovat de toate schimbările ei, l-ar fi scos în stradă, ar fi strigat către toți în gura mare că i-a nenorocit fata, că i-a distrus familia, liniștea.¹⁸

She (the mother) blamed Bucșan for all the changes in her (Maria). If he would have been there, the mother would have thrown him out in the street, and would have cried out loud that he has destroyed her daughter, her family, her peace.

For the mother Bucșan is an intruder, who is guilty of not only seducing the daughter physically, but has, even more perversely, inculcated her with ideas and values contrary to those the mother struggled to instil in Maria. Bucșan, the idealist proletarian, the archetype of the communist "New Man", stands as the ultimate threat to the traditional order of life, especially where this concerns gender relations. The transformation of Mimi into Maria, her seduction into a new articulation of individuality, indeed destroyed and dislocated the mother's articulation of life: as such, her accusation is not entirely that farfetched. What the mother does not perceive is that the new articulation of Maria's identity has been long in the making. The mother herself fostered in Maria the desire for a different life by thwarting her aspirations; Bucșan acted only as the external catalyst that triggered Mimi's transformation into Maria.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 135.

The narrative is constructed in such a way that the confrontation between Maria and her mother forms the opening of the narrative. In this scene, Maria takes refuge from the mother's rage in her room. From this temporary refuge, she recollects her life, all the events and incidents that shaped her and led to her departure for a new beginning. The protagonist's withdrawal from the tumult and pressures of external life, while recollecting the past as a mode of gathering strength for a new beginning is a narrative strategy that Buzura will employ again and again in future novels.

When she is at the train station Maria fears an encounter with Bucșan, however this time she has a plan that gives her strength and bolsters her self-determination. She imagines a dialog with Bucșan in which she answers his question as to where she is heading:

„Spre capul bunei speranțe! Da, nu te mira. Mi-am făcut un plan fantastic pentru toată viața. Înțelegi? De fapt încă nu e chiar gata, dar pînă acolo îl voi pune la punct. E un plan colosal. O! și nu ți-am spus cum îl cheamă! Marele plan al fericirii: Capul Bunei Speranțe! Ce zici! Cam bombastic, dar merită. Dacă vrei, poți să-mi ajuți să-l dezbatem, să-l facem chiar împreună. Zău, nu e gata chiar în amănunt. Deodată i se păru că ceilalți se uită la ea, și i se făcu rușine. „Oi fi gîndit cu voce tare! Să rîdă, treaba lor. Parcă ei nu și-au făcut?”
Își luă bucuroasă valiza și se înghesui printre oameni. Trenul era foarte aproape, încît i se păru că-l poate atinge cu mîna.¹⁹

“The Cape of Good Hope! Yes, do not be surprised. I have a fantastic plan for my whole life. Can you understand? It is not complete, but before I arrive, I will define it. It is a colossal plan! Oh! I did not tell you what it is called! The great plan of happiness: The Cape Of Good Hope! What do you think? A bit bombastic, but it is worthy. If you want, you can help me discuss it, we can even make it together. Really, it is not ready yet.”

Suddenly she had the sensation that the people around are watching her and she felt embarrassed. “Probably I have spoken out loud! Let them laugh, it is their problem. Haven't they made their own plans?”

She picked up her luggage and pushed through the crowd. The train was very near; she felt that she could touch it with her hand.

Maria's strength comes from the fact that although she follows Bucșan she does it on her own terms: she does not feel dependent on him. At the same time, her desire to be with him is expressed in the fact that she imagines that they will work out their

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 175-176.

future together as equal partners. Yet the future remains open, even as Maria breaks from her past existence and envisages a new life. Maria's "pushing through the crowd", her momentary embarrassment and self-consciousness, and her eventual assertion of her individuality on an equal basis with others, is articulating a revealing form of integration of the individual in the wider social world: by her actions, she both enters the social world and asserts her individuality. Her aspirations are both about to be fulfilled, and remain open. This is captured in the image of her about to touch the train, the symbol of movement, of force, of direction. At the same time, the train is also the symbol of journeying, and thus a portal and a passage into an unknown and unknowable future, and thus leaves the resolution of the story open. This resolution is rendered as a contrast between the imaginary fulfilment of desires and the radical contingency of unfolding time.

The novella, 'Capul bunei speranțe', is clearly developing within the ideological horizon of Socialist Realism as it explores themes central to the relation between the demands made on the individual by the construction of socialism, even if the terms employed are not necessarily self-evident. In the frame of class struggle that was central to Socialist Realism, the two forms of articulating individual subjectivity and gender relations can be seen as opposing the bourgeois Mimi and the proletarian Maria. The articulation of the mother, Alexandrescu and Mimi – characterised by individual vanity, comfort, and subordination – are defined as bourgeois values. Maria and Bucșan, and also the father, are the embodiment of proletarian values, these being the dedication and enthusiasm for work, the desire for adventure, challenge and discovery, the courageous confrontation with difficulty and danger and the unknown. Above, all they are driven by an ideal: the desire for change in the context of a better world. In this regard, their openness towards the future is essential for articulating their individual subjectivity. At the same time, Buzura develops the theme of individual subjectivity by emphasising the difficulty of forging intimate relations between individuals, solely in terms of their work ethic. The difficulty of the development of the relations between Maria and Bucșan is that neither of them has the "vocabulary" of intimate love at their disposal. Apart from the moment when Bucșan asks for a kiss and Maria refuses it, none of them are able to formulate their intimate erotic desires in explicit terms. This is partly caused by the close association of the erotic with the bourgeois as was made apparent in Maria's relation with Alexandrescu. The discourse of the work ethic dislocates the discourse of Eros. This dislocation renders the erotic attraction between Maria and Bucșan as a repressed desire. Yet the work ethic itself remains rather an abstract form, as the story does not explore Maria's progress as a welder. Nor do we see Bucșan the

Stakhanovite worker actually acting. Moreover, the fact that Maria's job as a secretary is presented as alienating to her individual aspirations affords a glimpse into the problems of work relations in the type of industrial bureaucratic setting that developed under socialism. In a similar manner to 'Plumb', here Buzura transposes the tensions and confrontations to the plane of personal relations, the relations between Maria and Bucșan. The displacement of conflict from the world of workplace relations to that of personal relations reduces social conflict to an individual problem and forecloses the conflicting social reality. The importance of both stories is revealed by how effectively the writers, through the very process of creation, produced articulations that broadened the ideological horizon of Socialist Realism. They formulated new tensions and problems of representation to be resolved. Moreover, these stories highlight the reproduction of the tensions between the individual's socially determined aspirations and social reality within that ideological horizon even as they struggle to find ideologically correct resolutions. Moreover, both stories are a revealing illustration of the transition from rendering social conflict in terms of the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat to a new rendering in terms within the socialist order. The conflict between the old communist and the new young engineer; the conflict between Maria and Bucșan are in themselves articulations of social conflict, even as they are portrayed as private privations. In both cases, social divisions are reproduced: in 'Plumb' the social division of labour between manual and intellectual is reproduced, whereas in 'Capul bunei speranțe' the traditional gender division is rearticulated.

These stories were published in 1963, which was a year of important changes within the cultural field in Romania.²⁰ Buzura's second volume of short stories, *De ce zboară vulturul?* (1966), already displays a departure from the standard Socialist Realist ideological horizon. However, it is in Buzura's first novel, *Absenții* that the break would be completed and a new, fully developed rearticulation formulated. Concurrent with this new rearticulation, the themes of individual struggle for self-affirmation that Buzura articulated within the ideological horizons of Socialist Realism would continue to be repeatedly articulated in all of his subsequent novels. How and in what sense Buzura's articulation would develop in response to the historical changes and social conflicts forms the focus and scope of the following chapter.

²⁰ Denis Deletant considers 1963 as the year when Socialist Realism was abandoned as the sole ideology of the party in Romania. Deletant, 'Cheating the Censor: Romanian Writers under Communism', p. 132.

CHAPTER 4 | Neither Defeated nor Winner: Social Anomie and Atomisation in Augustin Buzura's Novel *Absenții*

The publication of the novel *Absenții* (The Absent Ones) in 1970 marked Augustin Buzura's break with the Socialist Realist ideological horizon, and established him as a prominent author of the literature of the troubling decade. Buzura's powerful literary vision, and more generally the literature of the troubling decade phenomenon, must be placed in the context of the historical changes and social antagonism taking shape in the 1960s. This decade was a period of ideological liberalisation, which saw the abandonment of Socialist Realism as the sole aesthetic ideology of the party, and the rediscovery of past political and cultural figures who, like Titu Maiorescu and Eugen Lovinescu, were promoters of the principle of the aesthetic autonomy.¹ At the political level, there was a gradual move away from Moscow, an emphasis on national ideology, and a reappraisal of attitudes towards the West, both economically and culturally. Most importantly, there was Nicolae Ceaușescu's criticism of the so called "errors" and "transgression of legality" that took place during the first decade of communist rule under the leadership of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej. All these changes created the necessity and possibility for writers to formulate articulations that were different both formally and thematically from the Socialist Realist ones: the outcome of this was the literature of the troubling decade. This term comprises a formally eclectic number of works and authors that are united by revisiting the first decade of communist rule with a critical eye. Sometimes the critical view extends to the contemporary, as is the case with Augustin Buzura. However, as Dennis Deletant has observed, these changes happened under the gaze of the party, which continued to maintain undiminished control over the cultural field.²

From the point of view of social antagonism these changes reflected a complex redeployment of the dynamics of social relationships, especially between the technical specialist and the political cadre. There was a growth in the importance of professional values and their separation from political ideology. This manifested itself in the emphasis on the autonomy of the aesthetic in the literary field. The emergence of a new generation of technical specialists formed in the socialist education system (as illustrated in Buzura's story 'Plumb') intensified the antagonism with the old political cadres. At the same time there was a significant

¹ Deletant, 'Cheating the Censor', p. 132.

² Ibid., p. 133.

decline of the symbolic role of the worker. The worker becomes fully subordinated to the clash between the technical specialist and the political cadre. However, the technical specialist's emphasis on professional values in their confrontation with the political cadre can also be seen as a form of compromise. As Alex Goldiș has observed with regard to literary criticism, the principle of the autonomy of the aesthetic was perceived by the party leadership as less dangerous than a political stance.³

Buzura's response to these historical changes and social conflicts was the articulation of a bleak vision of the socialist society and the place of the individual in this society, particularly that of the technical specialist. The optimism and the empowerment of the individual to act and transform the world, which is characteristic of Socialist Realism, are replaced by social anomie, atomisation, and the disempowerment of the individual. Buzura juxtaposes the social antagonism between the technical specialist and the political cadre with the individual's impossibility of self-affirmation and gives it a moral frame. The technical specialist becomes the embodiment of professional and moral values. The political cadre and political ideology are rearticulated as agents of corruption. This vision of social classes intersects with gender relations. Buzura articulates a crisis of masculinity in which men are corrupted by politics and fail to play their patriarchal roles. Moreover, there is a return to traditional gender roles: man being of the mind while woman is of the heart. In this way, Buzura makes use of the patriarchal frame as critique of the political regime and views it as a force of corruption.

Within this context, Buzura articulates the social and psychological predicament of the individual in terms of traumatic dislocation and agonising endurance, these being two facets of the same phenomenon. In the essay, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', Freud presented trauma as the involuntary compulsion of the individual subject to repeat particular events or scenarios.⁴ This is brought about by two things: first, there is the initial shock; i.e., the intensity of a libidinal charge (psychic energy) generated by an original stimulus that dislocates the subject. Second, there is the subsequent failure to symbolically integrate this stimulus and thus defuse its libidinal charge. The failure of symbolic integration keeps the libidinal charge and the memory of the stimulus in a state of suspension in the psyche of the subject. The subject experiences this floating libidinal charge as an unstable and

³ Alex Goldiș, *Critica în tranșee: De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului* (București: Cartea Românească, 2011), p. 280.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, Translated by John Reddick (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 43-102.

destabilising form and this leads to the compulsion to repeat it in the search for its elimination/symbolic integration. However, the repetition reproduces the event as shock and fuels the dislocating effect rather than eliminating it. As such, the trauma is both the sense of dislocation and repetition, comprising the agonising endurance. This lends a circular form to the experience of trauma.

With Buzura the protagonists are caught between the desire for self-affirmation and the impossibility of achieving it. At the same time, they are unable to renounce their moral and professional ideals. They are compelled to repeat their attempts at self-affirmation and this turns into a Sisyphean circular task. As such, their traumatic dislocation (the impossibility of self-affirmation) is both the obstacle and condition for their agonising endurance (the compulsion to repeat).

This articulation of the individual's predicament can be seen as a form of compromise. While the dislocating forces are seemingly prevalent, and render the individual's disempowerment apparently absolute, the ultimate choice rests with the individual, their preservation of or abdication from moral principles. In Buzura's post-1989 novel *Recviem pentru nebuni și bestii* (Requiem for Fools and Beasts, 1999), Matei Popa, the protagonist, describes his situation as "neither defeated nor winner" (nici învins nici învingător).⁵ This phrase could be considered as encapsulating the plight of Buzura's protagonists from Mihai Bogdan in *Absenții* onward. To a degree, this presents the preservation of individual integrity, in that the individual subject is not defeated. At the same time, it represents a state of uneasy stability or compromise between the confronting sides, in that the protagonists are not winners. This situation is not static but circular, patterned on the movement of crisis, the individual's retreat into him or herself and re-emergence into the world, as had already been formulated in 'Capul bunei speranțe'.

The articulation of traumatic dislocation and agonising endurance is fully realised in *Absenții*. This chapter will therefore focus on their articulation in this novel by dividing the analysis into six parts. The ways in which traumatic dislocation and agonising endurance shape narrative form and individual consciousness will be discussed first. In the following two parts, the articulation of social conflict and gender relationships will be analysed. The last three parts will analyse the way in which Buzura developed his vision in several novels before and after 1989, and will consider the place and impact his work had in the Romanian literary context and beyond. In order to assess the more general impact of the literature of the troubling decade redeployments had on writers who continued to work within the Socialist

⁵ Augustin Buzura, *Recviem pentru nebuni și bestii* (București and Chișinău: Litera Internațional, 2003), p. 22.

Realist horizon at the time, the novel *Clipa* (The Moment, 1976) by Dinu Săraru, in which the revitalisation of the communist protagonist is attempted, will be discussed.

1 Individual Consciousness and Narrative Form

Buzura's fiction has been defined by Romanian critics as "analytical prose" because it explores the states of consciousness of the various protagonists. However, this psychological interest in individual subjectivity is far from the contemplative self-sufficiency articulated in Proust, where the withdrawal from the external world and into the world of dream/memory is marked by the resurfacing and unfolding of memories in the mind, a process triggered, for example, by the taste of a Madeleine cake dipped in tea. Equally, it is not the dialogical interaction between subjective positions, each casting a different light, as in Bakhtin's reading of Dostoyevsky, nor is it a phenomenological stroll through different fluid consciousnesses as in Virginia Woolf's modernist *Mrs Dalloway*. To a certain degree, Buzura's novel is a rewriting of Camil Petrescu's novel, *Patul lui Procust*, as both novels take place in one room and in a bed, with both protagonists pondering in discomfort over traumatic memories. However, in contrast to Camil Petrescu who introduces the perspectives of more than one character and thus generates ambivalence, Buzura seeks to enforce a vision of moral certainty by restricting his narrative to the perspective of the protagonist. As has been shown in the case of Mimi/Maria in 'Capul bunei speranțe', Buzura's protagonists are forced to revisit their past due to a moment of crisis. However, in his novels Buzura is no longer interested in the process of the transformation of subjectivity, but in the struggle for the preservation of the individual's moral and professional integrity. Buzura's interest is split between, on the one hand, the examination of the movements of individual consciousness in a moment of crisis, and on the other hand, a desire for purposeful action as a means for self-affirmation. For this reason, Buzura's novels read like huge prologues to future action that is anticipated but never consumed. The difference between his early short stories and the later novels is that, in the former, action is possible in a purposeful sense while in the latter it becomes problematic if not meaningless.

Traumatic dislocation and agonising endurance, social anomie and atomisation are not just the objects of representation, but shape the narrative form as well. The overlapping of the articulation of subjective consciousness and

narrative structure is clearly presented in *Absenții*. The text is full of metaphorical images of fragmentation, dislocation, spatial and temporal disorientation. These will each be examined in turn, starting with a close reading of the opening paragraph which sets the structural pattern of the novel.

The individualist perspective, in the sense of both the preservation and affirmation of the individual self and the sense of atomising isolation, is emphasised in *Absenții* not only by the focus of the narrative on one consciousness, that of the protagonist, but also by the setting. The novel takes place one Saturday evening, in the confines of Bogdan's room. After a dull and conflicting day at work Bogdan seeks tranquillity from the turmoil of the external world by withdrawing into his rented room. Alone, but able to escape neither from his inner torment nor the aggressiveness of the external world, Bogdan takes refuge in a contemplative position, an estranged witness to his own predicament:

Deși mă străduiesc cu încăpățănare să-mi reprim memoria, să nu mai știu nimic, dar absolut nimic, rețin totul cu o claritate nefirească. Uit adesea un singur amănunt: anii, fiindcă seamănă prea mult.

Dar, iată acestea au fost cuvintele:

„Păcat că n-am o bombă atomică sau măcar o dinamită să vă prăpădesc urgent, fără milă, cretini nenorociți, sectă de găinari cu maniere! Ce ați făcut, Doamne, ce ati putut face din mine?! Toata ziua umblu cu stomacul întors pe dos de greutate, de dimineața și până seara scuipe neîntrerupt... Unde o fi oare bomba aia atomică de care am atîta nevoie?...”

Dure, iritante, rostite rar, fără prea multă furie, cuvintele, scoase dintr-un arsenal ce mă lasă indiferent, spărseseră brutal liniștea falsă, atît de greu improvizată cu ajutorul unui somnifer luat hoțeste, în drum spre casă, dar deschizând involuntar ochii – uitasem brusc de cuvinte – am rămas surprins de distanța dintre mine și obiectele din jur și mai ales de răceala violentă ce se degaja din ele. Camera mă umilea prin dimensiunile ei, încât păream un modest preparat supus unui microscop imens, iar conștiința dimensiunii mele microscopice îmi impunea un singur mod de reacție: să stau nemișcat, să văd ce mi se mai poate întîmpla.⁶

Although I stubbornly persevere in repressing my memory, so that I know nothing, absolutely nothing, I remember everything with an unusual clarity. I forget only one detail: the years, because they all seem the same.

Yet, look, these were the words:

“What a pity I do not have an A-bomb, or at least some dynamite to urgently destroy you without mercy, you disgraceful idiots, you sect of pretentious shitsheads! How could you do this, Oh God, how could you do this to me! All day long I

⁶ Augustin Buzura, *Absenții* (Chișinău and București: Litera Internațional, 2008), p. 33.

go about with my stomach upturned by nausea, from dawn till dusk I continuously spit... Where could I get that A-bomb, which I so desperately need?..."

Harsh, irritating, each one uttered with patience and without too much fury, these words, picked out from an arsenal to which I was indifferent, had brutally broken the false tranquillity, difficultly improvised with the help of a sleeping pill craftily swallowed on the way home. Yet, when involuntarily, I opened my eyes – I suddenly forgot the words I just heard – I was surprised by the distance between me and the objects around me and especially by the violent coldness they were emanating. The room was humiliating me through its dimensions, to the extent that I seemed to be a modest sample examined through an immense microscope, and the consciousness of my micro dimension imposed on me only one way of reacting: to stay still and wait to see what else could happen to me.

This passage presents a constant and abrupt switching of the attention focus from one plane to another, and this movement denotes a vision of intense temporal and spatial fragmentation and dislocation of the individual consciousness. The individual subject feels a powerful sense of estrangement from the world; a feeling caused by the perceived violence of the surrounding world. At the same time, he is possessed by an intense sense of self-consciousness. This self-consciousness both paralyses and renders him immobile while at the same time heightening his sense of self. This traumatised consciousness is the focal lens and emotional filter through which the story is narrated. The sense of fragmentation and disempowerment, of inner and external conflict, structures the whole novel. Alone in his room, Bogdan is a lucid yet passive witness to his internal moral deliberation about his work conditions, the disjointed fragments of memory, and the events taking place around him, both in the street outside his window and in the room next to his. All these elements are colliding and dislocating one another, creating a fragmented, nonlinear narrative, a form that is mirrored in many metaphorical images, such as a broken window and a disassembled clock. The social, individual and narrative fragmentations all articulate a sense of traumatic dislocation; i.e., the compulsive repetition of the same pattern over and over again. Bogdan's withdrawal into an estranged, passive and distraught contemplative state articulates a sense of agonising endurance. Thus, traumatic dislocation and agonising endurance are brought together in the compulsion to repeat, as well as the impossibility to forget.

The temporality of the novel is split between the linear objective time measured by Bogdan's watch and his subjectively unfolding time, which expands with each memory that emerges from the past and which intersects with the

intrusions from the external world: the shouts of a neighbour and the happenings in the street outside the window. Each memory and event dislocates the previous rather than build a narrative unity. The thirteen chapters are not building on each other, but repeat the same pattern of dislocation and juxtaposition. In this way, the form of the novel is the very form of Bogdan's consciousness: there is no difference between the two. This further emphasises the sense of anxiety and claustrophobic imprisonment that dominates Bogdan's consciousness: there is no escape.

The sense of individual traumatic dislocation and agonising endurance is presented as the outcome of a general social state of anomie and atomisation:

Prins într-o clară mișcare browniană pluteam aiurea, în căutarea unui singur moment de împăcare, dar de fiecare dată o moleculă îmi devia direcția, săltam și mă adânceam neîntrerupt, enervat, încât în afară de năuceala continuă nu simțeam nimic, n-aveam timp, pereți și molecule într-o aiureală eternă, obositoare și sentimentul nelipsit că mă aflu în același timp, în doua locuri: *aici*, angrenat stupid în eterna mișcare, mereu și mereu printre molecule, și numai ciocnindu-mă de ele și de pereți, și acolo, unde poate că aș vrea să fiu, unde ar trebui de fapt să fiu, și căruia astăzi mă văd obligat să-i spun, cu tristețe, viitor.⁷

Clearly caught in a Brownian motion, I was drifting aimlessly, I was searching for a single moment of reconciliation, but each time some molecule or other changed my direction, I was endlessly going up and down, I was exasperated because I had no time and I felt nothing but permanent confusion, walls and molecules in an eternal and exhausting confusion, and the permanent sensation of being in two different places at the same time: *here*, stupidly caught in the eternal movement, always among molecules, always crushing into molecules and walls, and *there* where I would like to be, where in fact I should be, a *there* which sadly today I find myself constrained to call the future.

The sense of traumatic dislocation is doubled: on the one hand, there is the use of the term Brownian motion, which in chemistry describes the chaotic movement of molecules when suspended in a fluid state, liquid or gas. This metaphor presents a state of intense anomie and atomisation as social order has broken down. This leads to the paradoxical situation where subjects are both individualised and deprived of individuality. It generates a sense of disempowerment while at the same time enforcing a need for individual affirmation. There is neither order nor freedom in such a state. On the other hand, there is the clash between this state of reality

⁷ Buzura, *Absenții*, p. 324-25.

and the aspirations of the individual. This is represented through the spatial framing of temporality. The present becomes “here” and the future “there”, both of which, paradoxically, the subject inhabits at the same time. Yet Bogdan is fully present in neither of these places. In fact, he is absent from both. It is this absence of a full subjectivity that is presented in the title, *Absenții*. The question that preoccupies the protagonist is how to get from “here” to “there”, and thus achieve fulfilment and full subjectivity. This can be seen as a desire for social mobility, reaching the position in life and society that the protagonist considers that he justly deserves for his merits. The fact that Bogdan insists on the “future” signifies his preservation of his ideals. Yet the fact that he frames time in spatial terms serves to fragment temporality and makes the future uncertain. The arrival of the future and the possibility of self-affirmation are no longer inevitable. Unlike Maria in ‘Capul bunei speranțe’ – who was just about to touch the train with her hand – the symbol of transformation, journey, direction and self-affirmation – Bogdan’s fulfilment is projected onto an uncertain future. This is not so much a problem of the flow of time, but rather of the impossibility of changing social order. Unless he breaks out of his self-recognised Brownian motion, Bogdan cannot reach his “place” in the “future”. It is exactly this break out that is rendered problematic and impossible:

Măcar dacă ai putea să-i cunoști, să le desfaci cumva blindajul, îmi reproșez.(...) Poate că știu și eu despre ei exact ce știu și ei despre mine, adică nimic. Blindajele ni se ciocnesc mereu, adesea chiar scapără, deși noi, probabil, ar trebui să ne întindem mâinile. Dar nici asta nu am cum s-o aflăm, deoarece nici o clipă măcar nu îndrăznim să ne părăsim armurile, so încercăm să redevenim normali.⁸

I reproach myself: only if you could know the others, if you could open their armour. (...) probably what I know about them is just as much as what they know about me, which is almost nothing. Our armour is always colliding and sparking, when we should probably shake hands. But even this I cannot know, because we do not dare let down our guard even for a moment, we do not dare to become normal again.

What is immediately striking about this passage is that it articulates a critique of individualism and a desire for solidarity. “Armour” and “colliding” represent a metaphorical representation of social relations in terms of individualism and conflict. In contrast, there is the articulation of social relations through “shaking hands” in solidarity. “Armour”, the defensive enclosure of the individual in opposition to the

⁸ Ibid., p. 371.

external world, is both a means of preserving one's individuality from an aggressive environment and the obstacle to forging new relations in terms of solidarity. The problem of knowledge stated by Bogdan is the lack of imagining a different way of life and acting according to it. Despite his desire for a different articulation of social relations, Bogdan remains trapped in the individualist articulation of subjectivity.

The withdrawal into a contemplative stance does not satisfy Bogdan's desire for self-affirmation. This is clearly formulated at the end of the novel when Bogdan decides to leave his room and return to work:

A nu ceda ar putea fi, în cele din urmă, un joc. Un joc umoristico-fantastic, antrenant. E groaznic de greu, dar mă voi distra învingând... Și ca să fie și mai tâmpit, îmi voi atârna și provizia de principii... Blindat, înainte sau înapoi, ca o locomotivă pe linia de manevră. Am să fiu formidabil.(...) „Și acum, cu umor, primul pas spre institut... (...) Chiar dacă voi rămâne singur, nu se poate... trebuie să-mi anesteziez durerea, spaima, pentru că singur te prezinți la toate judecățile și singur trebuie să te învingi pentru a învinge... jocul de-a viața și de-a victoria și de-a normalul într-o lume în agonie. Dar ... Timpul trebuie umplut cu ceva... A aștepta... Da... Cam asta ar fi... Numai că nu se poate oricum. Trebuie... Trebuie... Trebuie...”⁹

Ultimately, not giving up could be a game. A stimulating, humoristic-fantastic game. It is horribly hard, but I will have fun winning... and to make it even more stupid, I will carry the provision of principles... Steel-clad, I will move forward and backward like a tank engine on the railway line. I will be formidable. (...) And now, with humour take the first step towards the institute... (...) even if I will remain alone, it is not possible... I must anaesthetise my pain and fear, because you present yourself alone to all the judgements, and alone must vanquish yourself in order to vanquish... playing the life game, the victory game the normality game in an agonising world. But... The time must be filled with something... To wait... Yes... this is all there is... Yet, not anyhow. It must be... It must be... It must be...

Despite the rather bombastic bravura implied by the line “I will be formidable”, Bogdan's plan for the future remains unclear. He seems to have resigned himself to his position of withdrawn detachment, of contemplation, and of waiting, while at the same time not being satisfied to just wait. He affirms that he must continue his struggle for integrity and self-affirmation however hard and futile it might be – regardless whether he is the only one left struggling. He sees his struggle in a highly individualistic way, perceiving success in life as his own victory in a game, and thus

⁹ Ibid., p. 375.

reproduces the state of things from which he sought to escape, fragmentation and dislocation, social atomisation and anomie. "Steel-clad" and "tank-engine" signify not only his imagined self-empowerment but also his individualism, an isolated form of defining his relations with the world. The individualist attitude is also enforced by his vision of responsibility in this line, "you present yourself alone to all the judgements". His return to the institute means the return to the same game of individual confrontation from which he wished to escape.

Bogdan's situation stands in contrast to that of Mitrea Cocor who finds a way out and the empowerment to change the world in the communist movement and ideology. Bogdan remains trapped and disempowered, a subject coiled in fear prone to violent outbursts as Mitrea was before his encounter with communism. His only resources are his own sense of frustrated individuality, and his "provision of principles".

From this analysis of the articulation of individual consciousness and narrative form the narrative form of *Absenții* can be deduced. The novel is structured around the movement of Bogdan's consciousness, his responses to the world around him, which unfold as crisis, and then withdrawal and return to the same condition. It is the same structure as in the story 'Capul Bunei Speranțe'. The difference is that Maria emerged with a plan for a different life; Bogdan does not have such a vision, and he is not able to overcome his individualist struggle. As such he can only return to the game of "colliding armours" he tried to escape from.

One important aspect of Buzura's novel emerges if regarded in terms formulated by the American literary critic Fredric Jameson¹⁰, these being the distinction between the novel of plot (unity of action) and the "psychological" novel (unity of point of view): Buzura's novels fit neither entirely. Buzura's novels are essentially characterised by a frustrated desire for action. As such, they border between a disunity of action (the plots are fragmented and non-linear) and the disunity of an isolated consciousness (equally fragmented). Referring to Georg Lukács' typology proposed in *The Theory of the Novel*, Bogdan is the protagonist of a novel of absolute idealism who desires epic action, but is trapped in a novel of romantic disillusionment. As has been remarked, Buzura's novels, although focused on individual consciousnesses, are not "psychological" in the sense of Proust or Virginia Woolf, which explore the phenomenological unfolding of subjectivities through the intricate interaction between memory and the individual sensual perception of the world. Rather, Buzura's protagonists can be seen as frustrated

¹⁰ Frederic Jameson, 'Metacommentary', in *The Ideologies of Theory*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 3-16.

action heroes. They all desire to act, to find self-affirmation through action, yet they are unable to do so and are reduced to being tormented consciences – a state of mind that serve as displaced gratification and paralyses them. Because of their desire for action, their contemplative stance is framed by a critical moral frame rather than by an aesthetic sensibility. However, Buzura's novels formulate a powerful aesthetic articulation of the sense of traumatic dislocation and agonising endurance through the random accumulation of vivid images, and the style of a fragmented and conflicting narrative. Moreover, the endless repetition of the same pattern of frustrated individuality, crisis, withdrawal and return, articulates an obsessive and frustrating narrative rhythm. This can be seen as the sublimation of a desire for unity behind the formal fragmentation; the expression of a repressed utopian desire for social solidarity and harmony that cannot find representation in the content of the novels.

Buzura's novels are usually referred to as a form of realistic representation of the bleak social reality of socialism.¹¹ However, his style is ostensibly expressionist rather than realist. While the narrator assumes a seemingly detached contemplative position in respect to the world, in fact, he colours the whole representation through the filter of his personal experience. This is emphasised by intense symbolism in its use of metaphors. Again, it is the sense of the individual subject, traumatised and yet enduring, that is powerfully emphasised by the stylistics of the novel. However, things are complicated by the unity of the narrator's consciousness and the state of the world: both are dominated by anomie and atomisation. The bleakness of the metaphors and images that suffuse the novel is a reflection of the narrator's state of mind and of the state of the world. In this sense, the narrative is a form of literary realism. This is because Buzura's moral framework imposes a unity between subjective perception and the perceived world. The difference between the characters is not in their subjective perception of the world, but in their moral attitude towards it. Like in the case of Socialist Realism, this "moralising realism" excludes what Georg Lukács has called irony: the representation of things and values as both essential and contingent, both meaningful and meaningless. The morally outstanding position of the protagonist is not placed in doubt.

Buzura's vision of a world dominated by social anomie and atomisation situates his work in a well established tradition of understanding the modern world, in both the social sciences and literature. The concept of "anomie" was used by Emil

¹¹ Ion Simuț, *Augustin Buzura* (Braşov: Aula, 2001), p. 12; and Eugen Simion, *Scriitori Români de Azi*, 2nd ed. (Bucureşti: Editura Cartea Românească, 1978), pp. 489-90

Durkheim to describe the condition of the industrial world and the modern mind.¹² As a property of society, anomie described “the absence of regulations and rules so that the parts of the social order are insufficiently co-ordinated”¹³. As a state of mind, anomie describes the “sense of isolation and meaninglessness of life and work”.¹⁴ The two are connected, the anomie as state of mind reflecting social anomies. Durkheim’s definitions refer to the capitalist industrial society dominated by an intensified stimulation of self-interest and the lack of social and economic regulation characteristic of laissez-faire regimes. This might not seem to be appropriate for the communist regime which appeared to promote social over individual interest, and suffered from overregulation rather than a lack of it. Yet Buzura’s work presents a world in which there is an overlapping of both rigid incarceration and anomie. For this reason, it is important to place his work in the context of the Western tradition of literature of anomie in order to highlight both similarities and differences.

The themes of existential crisis and of the desire for self-affirmation through action that characterises Buzura’s protagonists have drawn comparison with existentialist literature, particularly Sartre.¹⁵ In this sense, Buzura’s work belongs to a well established tradition in European literature, that of social anomie and atomisation, which developed from the Romantics to the existentialists. As William Barrett has observed, in this tradition is registered a “protest of the individual against the universal laws of classicism, or as the protest of feeling against reason, or again as the protest on behalf of nature against the encroachments of an industrial society – what is clear is that it is, in every case, a drive towards the fullness and naturalness of being that the modern world threatens to let sink into oblivion.”¹⁶ There are both similarities and differences between Buzura’s protagonists and those of Western Existentialism. In a sense, both present cases of rebellion against social order. However, the moral structure of the rebellion is very different. The protagonists of Existentialism rebel against established social values; values which they perceive as empty and meaningless.¹⁷ In contrast, Buzura’s protagonist is a

¹² See the analysis of Emil Durkheim concept of anomie in David Lee and Howard Newby, *The Problem of Sociology* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), pp. 221-28.

¹³ Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁵ Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism*, pp. 266-68. For an analysis of existential crisis in Buzura see, Eugen Simion, *Scriitori români de azi, IV* (Bucureşti: Editura Cartea Românească, 1989), pp. 227. For an examination of the problematics of Existentialism and its roots in Western modern philosophy and literature see William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1967), pp. 106-129.

¹⁶ William Barrett, *Irrational Man*, pp. 37-57.

¹⁷ The Existentialist protagonist's rejection of the established social values is clearly articulated by Albert Camus; Albert Camus, ‘Afterword’, *The Outsider* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 118-19.

defender of established values against a corrupting political regime.¹⁸ Whereas one puts moral and social values into question, the other attempts to preserve them against destructive forces. It is worth noting that this moral structure was already established in Romanian literature with Nicolae Filimon's novel, *Ciocolii vechi și noi*, where Gheorghe was the defender of values in opposition to Dinu Păturică, the corrupt parvenu. In the 1960s, Marin Preda, a contemporary of Buzura, explicitly rejected Jean-Paul Sartre's celebration of the rebellion of the former convict and homosexual writer, Jean Genet. Preda referred to that form of rebel as a manifestation of the primordial aggressive spirit (*spiritul primar agresiv*).¹⁹ After 1989, Eugen Negrici considers that Buzura's protagonists do not reach the radicalism of Sartre, which presumably is a positive thing given that for Negrici Sartre's unabated opposition to the bourgeois social order was funded by the KGB.²⁰ However, Negrici overlooks the difference between Buzura's and Sartre's forms of rebellion. This difference is crucial because it highlights the importance of the historical context in moulding and adapting a modern formal structure – in this case the protagonist of the Existentialist novel – to various local situations. By placing Buzura's work in the company of Western writers it is not necessary to make them into a standard for evaluating his work. On the contrary, a specific literary development must be placed in the context of the local historical changes and social conflict in order to understand its significance. For this purpose, in the next section the attention turns to Buzura's articulation of class structures and conflicts.

2 Social Conflict and Historical Change

The vision of traumatic dislocation and agonising endurance that Buzura articulates is not only an aesthetic or subjective phenomena but has its roots in social relations. The world within which Bogdan is inserted is clearly socially divided into two parts that are hierarchically related. On the one hand, there is the psychiatric institute where he works as researcher, while on the other hand there is the world outside the institute. While both are structured by the same state of fragmentation, social anomie and atomisation, the institute is the locus of his power struggle and of the possibility for self-affirmation, whereas the external world is the

¹⁸ For an analysis of the relationship between revolt and value in Buzura, see Eugen Simion, *Scriitori români de azi* (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 1974) pp. 332.

¹⁹ Marin Preda, 'Spiritul primar agresiv și spiritual revoluționar', *Imposibila Întoarcere* (București: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2010), pp. 44-49.

²⁰ Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism*, p. 268.

locus of destitution. The distinction between the institute and the external world is the symbol of social stratification. The institute is the enclosed space of power, articulated through the discourses of technical knowledge and political ideology. The external world, dominated by physical and psychological aggressiveness and violence, is the world of the destitute and disempowered. This division of the novel's world between intellect and physicality has a strong social significance. This is because of its similarity to the view of the social division of the socialist world between intelligentsia and the workers as proposed by Konrad and Szelenyi in their book, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power*, which was discussed in the introduction. There is another structural duality informing the novel: the opposition between the man of integrity and the dissembling and corrupt individual. The two structures overlap and generate different subjectivities. The man of integrity is the technical specialist. The political activist comes in various forms that combine the corrupting political power with either the physical world or with intellect. Bogdan's fragile subjectivity straddles these two worlds and social conditions. The analysis will begin with the social relationships in the institute.

The institute functions as a centre of power in Bogdan's life. It is both the locus of his disempowerment and of the possibility of self-affirmation. The relationship between Bogdan and his friend and colleague, Nicolae, the forging of a friendship and its breakdown, is symbolic of wider social relations. Bogdan and Nicolae are the representatives of the first generation of professionals and intellectuals that arose under the communist regime. They were educated during a time when universities had been highly politicised by the communist regime. The politicisation of education meant that students considered of bourgeois origins were excluded and students from poor backgrounds were promoted, regardless of academic skills. Moreover, political values took precedent over professional values. This proved to be the downfall for many academics that refused to engage in the new political rhetoric. Bogdan and Nicolae, despite their dislike for political rhetoric, survived because they were talented students and above all had "healthy social origins"; i.e., both came from poor families of peasants and miners. It was their dislike for the political rhetoric and their idealist upholding of professional values that brought them together and forged their friendship. Here it has to be remarked that, although at one point Bogdan describes himself as being a "socialist romantic", there is no evidence that he is interested in socialist ideas or ideals. Nor is his view of social reality framed from a socialist position of optimism and self-affirmation through collective political action.

Bogdan and Nicolae's friendship, the symbol of an open, genial relationship in the midst of social atomisation and anomie, is endangered by the power intrigues and conflicts dominating the institute where they work. The institute is dominated by the figure of its director, professor Poenaru. Poenaru is for Bogdan the symbol of all bosses: the embodiment of corrupt political authority. Behind his mask of geniality, Poenaru is a tyrant, a dissembler and a thief. It can be said that in his careerism, Poenaru, is an avatar of Dinu Păturică, the Romanian archetypal bourgeois parvenu. In a bureaucratic system where the power of money has been replaced by the power of political decision and, to a lesser degree, by professional capital, upwards social mobility takes the form of career advancement. The self-interested individual manipulates this system for his own advancement. Poenaru built his reputation through opportunism, intrigue and the abuse of power. Through political opportunism, Poenaru ousted the former director of the institute and his mentor, professor Onaca. At the time of the instauration of communism and the politicisation of all professional spheres, he criticised Onaca for being a "bourgeois scientist" whose psychiatric theories were no longer relevant to the new social reality. Onaca is presented as a naive scientist who, isolated in his scientific world, does not understand the political turn of events around him. For this reason, he is an easy victim to Poenaru's machinations. Poenaru's immense vanity is manifested in his insatiable hunger for celebrity status that he gains through the accumulation of merits and awards. He turns this into professional and political capital to secure his status and enlarge his power base. This strategy is not simply one of vanity, but also a dire necessity due to the fact that any position of power is precarious, tied as it is to political fortunes.

Poenaru built his scientific reputation by stealing the work of young talented researchers like Bogdan and Nicolae. An astute manipulator, Poenaru uses the method of both stick and carrot in persuading the young researchers to accept a state of virtual enslavement. Poenaru threatens to ruin their career in case they were to make a complaint; yet he also stimulates and supports their research interests and acts as their protector in the power intrigues dominating the institute. Bogdan and Nicolae mockingly call themselves "negrii lui Poenaru", "Poenaru's blacks" – i.e., slaves – in order to express the abusive relationship in which they find themselves trapped. While Nicolae seems acquiescent to the situation, Bogdan nurtures the dream of secretly developing and publishing his own research project. He hopes that by making a name for himself he will gain autonomy from Poenaru's abusive authority. However, things are complicated by the intrigues in the institute – there is another contender for power, Dr Bălan. Frustrated by Poenaru's abusive

authority that also obstructs his own advancement, Bălan plans to undermine his position, oust him and take his place. He attempts to get Bogdan and Nicolae on his side by threatening to fire them as soon as he becomes director if they do not switch sides and support him. It is this new threat that triggers the breakdown of Bogdan and Nicolae's friendship. Dissatisfied with the lack of professional and material advance, Nicolae decides to cast aside his professional idealism and moral integrity, and get involved in the intrigues. He hopes that by openly supporting Poenaru he will reap some rewards for himself. Nicolae plans to both inform Poenaru of Bălan's scheming, and to flatter his vanity by promising to help him gain new international awards, honorific doctorates and even the Nobel Prize. Bogdan sees in Nicolae's siding with Poenaru, including him being implicated in the intrigues for personal material gain, as the abdication from moral integrity. Moreover, he feels that he can trust Nicolae no more, and fears that Nicolae will inform Poenaru of his own secret research plans.

The network of these relations is structured by the conflict between the man of moral and professional integrity and the dissembler. On the one hand, there is the relationship between Onaca and Poenaru. This relationship is symbolic of the betrayal and marginalisation of individuals and their values by impostors and political opportunists during the communist process of the transformation of society. It symbolises the dislocation of values and order and the instauration of imposture and arbitrariness. The relation between Bogdan and Nicolae is a duplication of their mentors'. Bogdan is the individual who struggles to preserve his integrity while Nicolae is the one who under the pressure of the system abandons it.

However, things are more ambiguous. In their student years, Poenaru was a role model for Bogdan and Nicolae. His scientific reputation and his charismatic personality, although they were to be proven a sham, were two ideals to which Bogdan aspired, especially when compared with the opportunism of nullities. This suggests the fact that the ideals promoted officially, although unrepresentative of reality, had an influence in the articulation of individual subjectivities. Opportunism and professional nullity is embodied in the character of Studentov. He was a university colleague of Bogdan and Nicolae's. Studentov is described as having little education and scientific talent or interest, but is a dedicated political activist. His political activity consists of making bombastic speeches in praise of the new socialist order, and the criticism of students for their lack of political engagement. He often threatens Bogdan and Nicolae for their disregard and lack of enthusiasm for political action, but apart from being made into bad role models for other students, they escape unharmed. It is their antipathy towards Studentov that catalyses

Bogdan and Nicolae's friendship. The nickname "Studentov", a mocking Slavic inflection of the word student, is a derogatory allusion to the dislocation of professional values by the Soviet style "dogmatism" that was imposed in the first decade of communism in Romania in the 1950s.²¹ In contrast to Studentov, Poenaru, having noticed Bogdan and Nicolae's academic talents, offers them the research position at the institute. Moreover, Poenaru invokes the aggressiveness of individuals like Studentov as an excuse for his ousting of Onaca. Onaca would have been demoted and marginalised anyway, if not by him, then by someone else; arguably someone worse. Moreover, he excuses his stealing the work of his researchers for his own glory by claiming that by enhancing his personal reputation he gains some protection from the "authorities", and is thus able to protect professional values. Yet, in the eyes of Bogdan, Poenaru is the "authority" as he has strong connections in the local party organisation. The contrast between Studentov and Poenaru can be seen to also illustrate the switch of political orientation of the party leadership from Moscow to the West. Poenaru is eager to gain Western and international recognition, and aspires to the Nobel Prize. He participates in conferences in the West and Japan, and seeks to obtain contracts for his institute to collaborate with Swiss and West German firms. Yet this cultural and scientific reorientation does not change the primacy of political power in the organisation of social relationships.

Another interesting contrast is between Studentov and his two fellow students, Bogdan and Nicolae. Studentov can, like Mitrea Cocor, be seen a transfiguration of the hero of the Socialist Realist protagonist who rises from humble origins to power through political means. In contrast to Studentov, Bogdan and Nicolae's social advancement from poor peasant families to university educated researchers is based mainly on their professional excellence, even if their humble origins were probably an important element in their acceptance in the university in the first place. This contrast presents two opposing sets of values and means of social advancement, highlighting the tension between the technical specialist and the political cadre, which was already surfacing in the novel *Drum fără pulbere* by Petru Dumitriu, and was also articulated in Buzura's early short story 'Plumb'.

An evolution of the relationship between political and professional values from *Mitrea Cocor* to 'Plumb' and *Absenții* can be observed. In *Mitrea Cocor*, professional values were subsumed to political ones, as education was seen as a way of facilitating political action. In 'Plumb' we saw the gentle attempt to

²¹ The implementation of Soviet dogmatism in the sciences was already criticised by Alexandru Ivăsiuc in the novel *Vestibul* published in 1967.

subordinate political power to technical knowledge. In *Absenții* the relationship between political activism and professional expertise is irreconcilably conflicting. Political activity is seen only as a dislocation of professional values. This separation of spheres of activity, of politics and professional values, is a major step in the rearticulation of social relations and individual subjectivity that was seen in the 1960s. The frustration of self-affirmation encountered by both Bogdan and Nicolae is represented as caused by either political activism (Studentov) or political opportunism (Poenaru, Bălan, and, in the future, possibly even Nicolae himself). The separation is not simply the affirmation of a correct division of spheres of activity and their specific values. The articulation of politics as a negative force, a distortion and dislocation of professional values, facilitates the advocacy of a withdrawal from politics into professionalism. It can be seen as a form of resistance in that it promotes a form of criticism of political authority. Conversely, it can also be seen as an excuse for not engaging in a political confrontation of authority. This ambivalence of the rearticulating of the relation between politics and professionalism will become even more relevant in the discussion of Bogdan's disempowerment.

The question of values is also reflected in Bogdan's ambivalent relationship with both Poenaru and Onaca. They are for Bogdan two failed role models or father figures. Despite his rejection of Poenaru's immorality and abusive authority from which he desires to escape, Bogdan is fascinated by the image of individual dynamism he projects. Moreover, Bogdan's aspirations are modelled on those of Poenaru. Like Poenaru, Bogdan hopes that by establishing a name for himself he will gain autonomy from abusive authority. Yet because he cannot accept the means through which Poenaru achieves his success, Bogdan is caught in an irreconcilable conundrum.

Bogdan entertains the same ambiguous relationship with the figure of Onaca. While he is a model of integrity, Onaca's resignation to his dislocated fate, and withdrawal from the world through inaction (he tends to his garden and reads detective novels), is a sign of abdication and does not satisfy Bogdan's desire for self-affirmation. Onaca and Poenaru represent the two options that Bogdan faces, those of integrity and marginalisation or immorality and affirmation. Bogdan recognises that these cannot be the only options. However, he does not have the vision of how to change his current situation and remains disempowered.

Bogdan's disempowerment is represented in a multiplicity of ways. In terms of social relationships, Bogdan's disempowerment is most powerfully illustrated by his subordination to Poenaru's authority. Bogdan is held in thrall by Poenaru. He feels

in a permanent state of anxiety and his subordination renders him inexistent. He formulates his dependency on Poenaru not only in direct relations, such as the need of protection, food, his moral debt, but even the possibility of emancipation from the subordinate position he is dependent on to Poenaru.²² The access to the laboratory, on which Bogdan pins his hope of making a discovery that would grant him immunity, is mediated by Poenaru. There is a tension between Bogdan's sense of non-existence, and the emphatic repetition of the pronoun "I", which stands for exactly that: his existence. The "I" does exist, it functions and it manifests itself as a force that is forged in the very process of its repression in the relationship between Bogdan and Poenaru. Bogdan feels the force of his "I" pushing for self-affirmation inside him. But he is also bent on suppressing it himself: he must be correct. "I must be correct" means that he has to accept his position as subordinate to Poenaru's authority.²³

Bogdan's predicament is similar to that of Maria in the 'Capul Bunei Speranțe'. However, while Maria has a vision of a different life, that is self-affirmation through work and the forging of a new form of gender relation based on equality, Bogdan lacks such a vision. Or, more appropriately, Bogdan finds himself in a social environment that does not allow the fulfilment of these aspirations. He is not able to find self-affirmation through work as Maria seems to. Nor is Bogdan able to forge a new relationship with those around him as equal partners. His view remains individualist. His open relationship with Nicolae, his colleague and friend, was possible only as long as it was based on shared professional idealism, and their abstaining from the power politics dominating the institute. In fact, it was in a way made possible by a benevolent authority, like Poenaru, who allowed and protected for his own interests their non-involvement. The moment Nicolae abandons his idealism and integrity and gets involved in the intrigues, this open relationship is dissolved and is supplanted by suspicion. The relationship is altered by Nicolae's changed attitude – even if he did not intend to turn against Bogdan. His changed attitude transforms the whole network of relations in which he is engaged by the fact that it triggers a change in the attitudes of others towards him. This suggests the pervasive process of social atomisation imposed by the power structure of the system. It is relevant to remark that Vaclav Havel has criticised the position of the preservation of professional integrity as insufficient as a form of resistance against the system, and advocated for political participation.²⁴

²² Augustin Buzura, *Absenții*, pp. 36-37.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

²⁴ Vaclav Havel, 'The Power of the Powerless', pp. 61-63.

One important aspect of the whole network of social relations as presented by Buzura is their intense personalisation. Power is exercised as part of direct relations between individuals: there is no real rule of law on which individual action can be based. The personalisation of power, its direct investment in an individual through a hierarchical order, eliminates the idea of formal equality in the face of law. At the same time, the personalisation of social relationships combined with the discourse of professional values generates a cult of personality in terms of “authentic talent”, which can be easily perverted and manipulated, as Poenaru does. The absence of a sense of equality of individuals before law and the prevalence of the cult of personality makes possible the rise to power of impostors like Poenaru, a distant avatar of the personality cult of communist leaders like Nicolae Ceaușescu. Moreover, this social structuring can be seen to be homologous with the patriarchal structure where the father figures dominate over all other members of the family. Poenaru and Mitrea Cocor are quintessential patriarchal father figures.

The interesting thing is that Bogdan does not see his subordination to Poenaru as a transgression of equality in the face of law, but a dislocation of the hierarchical order of values by an impostor. There is no invocation of any law in the novel. Instead, the question of individual value, of personal integrity is prevalent. This form of articulating social relations and, implicitly, individual subjectivity, as direct inter-individual power relations, produces an intense individualisation of value and over-valuation of individuality. The outcome is that social anomie is seen as the obstruction of individual freedom, and social atomisation is caused by individual dishonesty. Bogdan’s enslavement and his subsequent disempowerment are not presented as a transgression of a social right, but rather the result of an abusive and dishonest manifestation of personal power. Ultimately, Bogdan’s vision is not underlined by a criticism of a hierarchical social structure, but only by a moral critique of a false hierarchy. The solution is an individualist one, and, rather than seeking to change the system, this is a form of accommodation to it because it replicates the model of Poenaru. The same structure of double fear as in *Mitrea Cocor* is articulated in the co-dependent relationship between Bogdan and Poenaru: the fear of the external threat and the fear of one’s own rebellious outbursts. It presents the subject in a permanent state of terror, both external and internal.

Without the vision of a different way of articulating social relations, change remains an unrealisable ideal, and Bogdan remains trapped in the Brownian motion that enforces individualism while at the same time making it impossible. Yet the institute has a strong gravitational pull on Bogdan. This is because it is the place

where the possibility of change and of self-affirmation is articulated. In contrast, the external world is one of destitution and degradation.

The fact that the external world is a place of destitution, a dead-end inhabited by the marginalised and the powerless, is emblematically illustrated by the fact that both Poenaru and Bălan threaten to exclude Bogdan from the institute. For example, Poenaru declares:

Ai o singură şansă: îți vine mintea la cap, lucrăm în colaborare, sau mergi la țară, unde se știe, este mare nevoie de cadre, de oameni care să aibă grijă de sănătatea poporului, a celor ce muncesc pentru edificarea noii societăți.²⁵

You have only one choice: you come back to your senses and we work together, or you go to the countryside, where it is well known, there is a great need for cadres to look after the health of the people, of those who are working for the creation of the new society.

The threat of ending up in the countryside where the possibility of scientific affirmation is nil and the social environment is even more oppressive being dominated by material misery and hardship, is worse than the fate of Onaca who was only marginalised. Moreover, the reference to “the people”, the constructors of the new society, is rendered sarcastic by being placed in a threat. Gone is the desire expressed by Bucșan in ‘Capul bunei speranțe’, to be there where it is harder. Bogdan has a different view and priority in life. The sarcasm towards the new society and its constructors is symbolic of the gap between the intellectuals and the proletarianised masses that developed in Romania during communism. This fractured social stratification, which is also apparent in Bogdan’s condemnation of the idleness of the workers in the institute, is also expressed in the difference between the institute as the locus of power and that of the external world as a place of destitution.

It is not only the threat of being sent to the countryside that makes the institute attractive to Bogdan. The place outside the institute is not safe even in the town where he lives. One day, returning home from work, he finds the door open and an unknown person inside his room. The stranger knows Bogdan’s name and says that he was looking for him. When Bogdan threatens to call the police the stranger attacks him and a fight ensues. Bogdan suspects that the stranger might be one of his patients. However, the stranger does not confirm this, nor does he explain his visit. When he leaves, he locks the door, which means that he has a key.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

Bogdan does not call the police, nor does he speculate about the meaning of the visit. The fact that Bogdan pursues this incident no further, combined with the overall unusual behaviour of the stranger suggests that he might be a Securitatea agent: the Romanian secret police during the communist period. Many of these agents were recruited from the bottom strata of society. Their privileged status, like that of many members of the party and state nomenclature, was seen as undeserved, especially by the younger and better educated professionals like Bogdan. Yet this tension took the form of professional values rather than a direct political contestation. The exchange between Bogdan and the stranger expresses an important form of articulating social division: the intellectual and the uneducated brute, or the thug. Bogdan describes the stranger as follow:

Făcea parte, (...), din categoria dobitoacelor puternice, de povară, care, prin stângăcia și, aș spune, imbecilitatea gafelor lor, te intrigă, îți stârnesc mai degrabă uimirea și satisfacția decât indignarea.²⁶

He belonged to the category of strong beasts used for hard work, which through their clumsiness and, I would say, the imbecility of their blunders, provoke wonder and satisfaction rather than indignation.

The interesting thing about the fact that Bogdan refers to the stranger as a “strong beast used for hard work” is that it places him in the peasant/working class category, the uneducated, but in a derogatory way. The problem is articulated in terms of a displacement. Throughout the novel, Buzura does not refer to the working class in a derogatory manner; on the contrary, Bogdan comes from a poor family of peasants and miners. The problem is that the stranger takes a position of authority over Bogdan in an abusive and aggressive manner. He is transgressing social order and triggers Bogdan’s sarcasm and his derogatory attitude. It is significant that after the incident, his room loses its former sense of privacy and Bogdan starts to spend the nights at the institute. This again enforces the meaning of the world outside the institute as a place of degradation and destitution.

It is important to draw a comparison between Poenaru and the stranger as embodiments of abusive power over the individual. Although they seem to have unlimited power, they restrict it to threats. Like Poenaru, the treatment of the stranger does not materialise into real action. Each rules in a different manner over their territory, yet both are equally abusive. The novel does not articulate a

²⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

connection between the two levels of abusive power. The possibility of such a connection remains guess work. This might be considered, like the silence about the real identity of the stranger, to be something impossible to acknowledge during the communist regime. But this thesis argues that it is more in keeping with the image of social atomisation and fragmentation articulated by Buzura. Moreover, Buzura's novels are not focused on the general systems of power, but rather on the effects of abusive power on the individual. They are not dystopian visions of a totalitarian system where power is omnipotent, but rather present the moral vision of a fallen world dominated by human corruption and social degradation.

The sense of degradation and destitution outside the institute is enforced by the presence of several characters whose fate seems much worse than that of Onaca or Bogdan. Mr Jules, Bogdan's private French teacher, a highly intelligent person and an erudite man, is driven to madness by the burning of books and other perceived crimes against culture committed by the (communist) brutes. He retreats in a fantasy world populated by historical figures, imagining himself to be an ancient king, and plans to build an empire. Although he no longer gives Bogdan lessons, Mr Jules keeps asking for the fees, which seems to be his sole means of survival. Mr Jules is a ghostly apparition; the persistence of the past, its values and ideals out of place in a degraded present, but he also represents the fragmentation of the social reality into atomised individualities that are incongruent with each other.²⁷

Another figure of traumatic dislocation is professor Matei, Bogdan's quarrelsome neighbour. Matei, a former professor of history, is now an alcoholic. He lives with his family in one room, which is separated from that of Bogdan only through an old rotten door. Matei's activities seem confined to arguing with his wife and daughter about money for drink, playing the violin and trying to strike up a conversation with Bogdan. Annoyed that Bogdan ignores his calls for a dialogue, Matei keeps on shouting and banging his fists on the door that separates their rooms. Bogdan sees in Matei's degradation his own possible future. As an alter ego representing Bogdan's failure, Matei's gesture to strike up a conversation resembles the futility of Bogdan's own attempts to engage the people. Hiding behind the fragile door in a state of paralysing terror, Bogdan is unable to respond to Matei's calls. From Matei's incongruous rant it emerges that his present state of destitution has been brought about by persecution and abuse. As such it can be seen as a return of the repressed, the disturbing voice of the destitute and declassed. Matei and Mr

²⁷ Here can be remarked that the structure of Buzura's novel fits Lucien Goldman's idea: "The novel is the story of a degraded search, a search for authentic values in a world itself degraded", Goldmann, *Towards a Sociology of the Novel*, p. 1.

Jules' aggressive eruption into the scene is the dislocating effect of the return of the repressed knowledge about the victims of communism, which return to hunt the consciousness of those less unfortunate. Bogdan is ultimately one of the individuals who, because of the right social background, has managed to escape the fate of those like Mr. Jules and Matei, and to a degree even benefited from the new system.

The interesting corollary between Mr. Jules and Matei is that they appear as external forces that impinge on Bogdan's consciousness, causing as much of a traumatic dislocation as the figures of Poenaru or the stranger: figures of authority. Their aggressiveness, although of a different nature, is equally disempowering. Bogdan seems to be caught between these two opposing forces, and is unable to find a way to reconcile his actions to account for both the oppressors and the victims.

From this analysis it is possible to conclude the significant ways in which Buzura articulated in *Absenții* a major redeployment of social relationships and conflicts as well as historical change. The transformation of the relationship between technical knowledge and political power is central. In Socialist Realism the subordination of professional knowledge to political power was presented as a positive revolutionary achievement, either within the figure of a communist leader as in *Mitrea Cocor*, or in the subordination of the technical specialist to the political cadre as in *Drum fără pulbere*. In his short story, 'Plumb', Buzura articulated an attempted transition of power from the political cadre to the technical specialist. However, this proved a short lived hope. In *Absenții*, the hierarchy is firmly re-established but the political dominance is presented as a form of abuse and corruption. While the relationships remain the same, they are negatively valorised. This rearticulation consists of two interrelated changes: first, it affirms the superiority and autonomy of professional values to politics; second, it presents politics as a negative corrupting force.

The revalorisation of social relationships changes the articulation of the Communist Project's meaning. In Socialist Realism the Communist Project was one of development and progress, whereas in *Absenții* it appears as one of degradation and corruption. This is not clearly articulated anywhere, but it transpires from the evolution, or rather the involution, of the characters: Onaca, Poenaru, Bălan, and Nicolae. Onaca, the original scientist of value, has been ousted by Poenaru the impostor. Bălan, who is looking to oust Poenaru, promises to be even worse. In his abdication from professional and moral integrity, Nicolae further augments the corrupting force of politics and implicitly that of communism. The cause is the

political intrusion into and dominance over the professional field. Buzura also presents a line of development and social improvement in Bogdan's progress from the son of an impoverished family of miners and peasants to a promising young researcher. However, this is presented as happening despite, rather than because of, the Communist Project. All in all, the Communist Project is articulated as the advent of abusive political power, social degradation, and economic exploitation. The drive for social emancipation, central to Socialist Realism, is completely lost: it is replaced by the problem of individual preservation of integrity. Thus, we see a movement from social emancipation through action to individual moral preservation through resistance to corruption. This signifies a major ideological change; in fact, this represents the abandonment of the socialist vision of social emancipation.

There is present in the novel, however, also a line of continuity with the values and hierarchies articulated in Socialist Realism. As we have seen, before his encounter with communism, Mitrea was articulated in terms of resistance to corruption (represented in the novel by money and the path of the parvenu) and the preservation of moral integrity. Moreover, this resistance was seen in terms of higher principles over material interests. At the same time, there was a contradiction articulated between criticism of the poverty and misery engendered by the social and economic system, on the one hand, and the refusal to pursue the available avenues to achieve prosperity, on the other. The same contradiction is formulated in *Absenții*. However, while Mitrea finds the answer in political action, Bogdan sees politics as the cause of the problem, and finds the grounds for resistance in an individualist ethic.

There are two main consequences of these complex redeployments: the positive revalorisation of the interwar past as a golden age and the rediscovery of individualism as the basis of an ethical framework. Together, these two aspects contribute to a positive revalorisation of the bourgeois values of private life and private property. The presentation of the communist period as one of corruption and degradation generates a nostalgia for the interwar period. Bogdan's nostalgia is not based on his own childhood experience, which was marked by poverty and brutality, but for the bourgeois world of Onaca, the symbol of an innocent time when professional merit affirmed itself as unencumbered. The presentation of the violation of an individual's intimate space (the presence of the stranger in Bogdan's room, and also the aggressive proximity of the neighbours) valorises private life. Bogdan's exploitation by Poenaru is criticised in terms of private property rather than collective effort. All this, together with Bogdan's adamant individualism, proposes a celebration of bourgeois subjectivity. At the same time, there is a criticism of

individualist competition driven by material interests, which is the central tenet of ideologies of the market economy. Individualist competition for material gain, however, is seen as part of the corrupting effect of the dominance of politics rather than of a market economy. The latter concept is not in fact presented, and money is shown to have an insignificant role to play when its power has been replaced by politics.

In these complex redeployments, we see the bourgeois world of the interwar period transformed by the communist experience into a golden age of innocence and value, devoid of conflicts and contradictions. However, Buzura's rearticulation is underlined by ambivalence. On the one hand, the break from Socialist Realism and the negative valorisation of the Communist Project as a process of degradation can be seen to be opening the ideological path to the post 1989 criminalisation of the communist regime. On the other hand, the redeployment remains firmly situated within the socialist problem defined by the conflict between technical knowledge and political power, and evades the larger question of social inequality represented by the subordination of the workers.

Buzura's redeployment adds up to a complex series of equivalences that privilege high principles over material interest, individualism over collectivism, professional knowledge over political power, private life and property over collective life and property. However, all these values are presented as being violated by the social order that imposes corruption and falsity. Overturning this corrupt social structure and the reestablishment of order remains Bogdan's personal wish and is without any possibility of realisation.

3 Gender Relations

Gender relationships, like social relationships, are articulated as dominated by anomie and atomisation. Bogdan's relations with women are all fractured. The sense of a crisis of traditional gender relationships is pervasive: family structures are disintegrating as men and women cannot form stable relationships. Bogdan's romantic relationships with women replicate the pattern of his relationship with his friend, Nicolae. They end up being broken either by the personality of the woman, or by a violent external event. His first love and fiancée, Elena, betrays him. Magda, his second fiancée dies in a horrific car accident. Yet there is a particularity that distinguishes Bogdan's relations with women from those with men. In the case of

men, relations are structured as professional and intellectual competition, whereas with women the relations are those of the heart. In this sense, there is a reproduction of traditional patriarchal articulations of gender subjectivities. Nevertheless, both class and gender relationships are framed within moral terms. Within this moral framework women appear as agents of aggression or the victims of it. Bogdan's fiancées: Elena and Magda are the two examples in the novel.

Buzura, and his protagonists, view the distinction between love and sex as underlined by the districting between the body and the mind. As such, sexuality is presented as biological need; an animal instinct that needs to be satisfied and is associated with low moral value and aggression. This view of sexuality is illustrated by Elena who is symbolic of what Bogdan considers female sexual aggressiveness. One day, he surprises her having sex with a circus's animal tamer. Elena's reaction is contradictory: at first, she accuses Bogdan of spying on her, and shows no sense of guilt or remorse. Although they continue to see each other, after a few days she announces that she is getting married, with a man who she says is "too good for her". Yet she insists on continuing to see Bogdan after her marriage. Promiscuity is a common thing among the sexually aggressive women in the novel. It is also a sign of the social atomisation, where every individual is driven by an individual search for satisfaction, in this case carnal. However, they are also driven by a sense of corruption: the domination of the body over mind and of material interest over high principles.

While Elena is the embodiment of female sexual aggressiveness, Magda, Bogdan's previous fiancée, is the embodiment of women as an injured individual; a fragile being, life proves to be a traumatic experience for her. This is typified by her student years and working as a physician in an isolated village, all experiences that traumatise her and drive her to the brink of a nervous breakdown. The separation of a couple because of the job placement of one of the partners was already presented in 'Capul Bunei Speranțe'. However, here the separation is not the outcome of the individual's will, but the outcome of the arbitrary process of the distribution of jobs. Like everything else in Bogdan's life, his relationship with Magda is structured by confusion, contradiction and disempowerment:

Magda era exasperant de slabă, n-ar fi putut trăi... Sub aparenta ei indiferență presimțeam mereu un joc periculos, obositor, pe sârmă, la care nu ar fi putut rezista prea mult. Întreaga ei studenție fusese un adevărat coșmar: tensiunile mărunte, incidentele firești, inerente, la ea luau proporții încât aveam mereu sentimentul că substratul reacțiilor ei este altul ascuns, imposibil de mărturisit; după absolvirea institutului, a

stat un an la țară; scrisorile ei de un optimism greu de crezut, mă îndepărtaseră; ba chiar îmi spuneam: Bine c-am scăpat de atâta sensibilitate, bine că încep să mă îndepărtez de ea; când am reîntâlnit-o însă a izbucnit în lacrimi: „Fă ceva, nu mai pot singură, nu mai știu să mă descurc, am impresia că toți oamenii una zic și alta fac... Nu înțeleg nimic, așa că fă ce știi cu mine!” Poate că aș fi salvat-o și gestul meu ar fi fost unica mea realizare autentică, dacă aș fi avut convingerea că trăim într-o lume normală.²⁸

Magda was exasperatingly weak; she could not have lived... Underneath her apparent indifference, I always sensed an exhausting and dangerous game like walking on a tight rope, which she could not have resisted for much longer. Her student years have been a true nightmare: the little tensions, the normal and unavoidable incidents, took for her exaggerated proportions. This made me think that the underlying motive of her reactions was different, hidden, and impossible to confess. After graduating, she spent one year in the countryside; the incredible optimism of her letters estranged me. I even started to think: Lucky me that I have escaped from so much sensibility, that I am no longer attached to her. However, when I met her again she broke down in tears: “Do something, I can’t take it being alone, I no longer know how to cope with things, I have the impression that everyone does something else than what they are saying... I cannot understand anything; do what you think best with me!” Perhaps I would have saved her, and that would have been my sole authentic achievement, if only I would have had the conviction that we are living in a normal world.

Magda’s exasperating weakness and hyper sensibility, which make Bogdan happy to be rid of her, are the mirror image of his own traumatised personality. Underneath the mask of detachment he wears hides a being terrified by a confusing and aggressive world. Bogdan is consumed by the regret that he could have saved Magda, if only he could have believed the world was normal. However, the circumstances of Magda’s death are completely independent of his will. She died in a “stupid” car accident, which, in Bogdan’s opinion, could have been avoided. The car they were travelling in for a work errand was in a poor state of repair. Everyone, including the authorities, knew about it but all those concerned had to follow orders regardless. The rough mountain terrain and the condition of the car proved a fatal combination. The driver lost control and the car crashed in the rocky terrain. The driver, Magda and another passenger all died. Bogdan, who was only accompanying Magda, was the only survivor. The horrifyingly dislocating experience of the accident, and Bogdan helplessly witnessing Magda’s death, not only

²⁸ Buzura, *Absenții*, p. 152-53.

traumatised Bogdan, but again encapsulated for Bogdan his dark vision of reality. The sense of anomie and atomisation of gender relationships is framed by a traditional outlook. Bogdan's self blame for the failure of his romantic relationships suggests a view sustained by a sense of a crisis of masculinity. Bogdan fails in his traditionally prescribed role as man: he is neither able to discipline unruly women like Elena nor protect weak ones like Magda.

While Elena and Magda are the embodiments of two opposed articulations of femininity – aggressive sexuality and traumatised sensibility – there are several characters that bring the two elements together. Gina, one of Bogdan's work colleagues, and Mirela, the daughter of Bogdan's neighbour, while they appear to Bogdan as sexually aggressive, are revealed to be traumatised sensibilities. Bogdan's relationships with both of them is tangential; yet in the contrast between his intense, if fleeting, emotional investment in these characters both his conflicting and contradictory personality and the wider social relevance of gender relations are denoted.

After the traumatic loss of Magda, Bogdan decides not to get caught in a sentimental affair. His sexual needs are met by engaging in occasional sexual encounters. The impersonality of these relations is reflected by the fact that he refers to his partners as love number one, two, three, four, and so forth. Yet his unfulfilled erotic desire is manifested in the seemingly superficial flirting games with his female colleagues, among them Gina. The following passage is typical of these games:

Apoi ușa se deschise și, veselă, cu pași leneși, zâmbindu-mi fără urmă de reținere, intră Gina, care, pentru mine, era simbolul feminității agresive. O clipă mă gândisem să-i strig: „Fugi dracului, mă scoți din fire când te văd și nu mai răspund de faptele mele!”. M-am oprit însă la timp știind că nu numai ea, ci și celelalte aveau o imagine falsă despre mine: afemeiat, brutal, plăcut totuși. Prin urmare, nu mai rămânea decât să mă conformez impresiei mele. „și nu ne duce pre noi în ispită, ci ne mântuie de cel rău...” Începui să strig fugind spre ea decis să o plachez ca la rugbi și nu pentru că era frumoasă, ci de dragul gafei în sine. Dar privirea ei contrariată îmi stopase elanul. „Ce te mai poartă hormonii, domnule academician!” râse ea, uimită sau enervată că m-am oprit, și scoțându-mi limba părăsi laboratorul, la fel de leneșă, așteptând probabil s-o ajung din urmă. N-am încercat, spre marele meu regret, poate și pentru că, în clipa aceea, mi se părise prea accesibilă.²⁹

²⁹ Ibid., p. 77.

Then the door opened and, happy, with lazy steps, smiling without any restraint, entered Gina, who for me was the symbol of aggressive femininity. For a moment, I thought of shouting: "Get the hell out, when I see you I lose my senses and I am no longer responsible for what I do!". However, I stopped just in time, knowing that like all the others she had a false impression of me: a coarse womaniser, but rather pleasant. In the end, the only thing to do was to conform to my image. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil..." I started to shout running towards her intending to tackle her rugby style, not because she was beautiful but just for the sake of the gaffe. But her upset look curbed my enthusiasm. "The hormones are leading you, Mr academician!" Surprised or disappointed that I stopped, she laughed, and, sticking her tongue out, she left the laboratory, just as lazily, hoping probably that I would follow her. I did not, to my own regret, perhaps because in that moment she seemed too accessible.

The reason why Gina is a symbol of aggressive femininity is never revealed. It might be simply because she sexually stimulates Bogdan and he projects his own frustrations back onto her. Yet, from this whole charade, it is clear that Bogdan plays a game of self-deception: he is attracted to Gina, yet he cannot acknowledge it. He says that the impression his women colleagues have of him is false, but he seems very eager to play up to it. The difference between what he intends to say, and the actual words that he utters, is not one of substance but of nuance: he wants to make a sexual pass but abstains. Yet he cannot resist his desire for Gina and makes it appear a game. Despite his reticence to show his attraction to Gina, Bogdan is repulsed and, above all, his pride is hurt when he surprises Gina and Bălan in a moment of apparent intimacy. Later, when Gina confirms his impression, she is surprised to learn of Bogdan's interests in her, but disappointed that he could declare it only when Bălan entered the picture. Bogdan manages, however, to offend her by making it appear that she is a pawn in the rivalry between him and Bălan. Reduced to tears, Gina reveals Bălan to be a mirror image of Bogdan, a man consumed by rivalry, but who is also capable of selfless gestures: for example, in the absence of a suitable blood donor, Bălan donates his own blood for a blood transfusion. Caught between Bălan and Bogdan and their rivalry, Gina sees her own person and feelings disregarded and reduced to an irrelevance. This is the only scene in the novel when we get a perspective that is external to Bogdan and his rivalries with the other male characters. It reveals Bogdan as being part of the degraded social structure rather than a non-conformist, as he likes to see himself. Gina's perspective is also significant because it reveals the way in which a patriarchal structure of gender relationships comes to function as a criticism of the

socialist social order. Gina's criticism of the men's disregard for women is not a critique of patriarchy, but of the degeneration of patriarchal order. She does not challenge the order as Maria did in 'Capul Bunei Speranțe' because it obstructs her affirmation of the professional or political spheres. Her issue is that men, corrupted by political intrigue and power plays, forget about their traditional duty towards women.

The relation between Gina, Bălan and Bogdan is interesting because it illustrates the way in which the conflict between individuals obfuscates and obstructs the possibility of forging open and genuine relations. Moreover, it shows that behind their armour of defence and attack, there is the desire for such relations. Yet one also sees a clear demarcation between women's and men's roles. The public rivalries in the novel are between men driven by the desire for professional self-affirmation: in the network of power/knowledge formed by Poenaru, Onaca, Bălan, Nicolae and Bogdan women play no role. This is an interesting redeployment of gender relations in comparison with 'Capul Bunei Speranțe', where Maria's problems of self-affirmation are both professional and sentimental. *Absenții* could be seen as a return to a patriarchal distribution of gender roles. However, this return is not simply a reversal. Women are not relegated to the home, but are themselves professionals: Magda is a doctor, Gina works in the microscopy laboratory, and Mirela is a student. It is only the elder women who are housewives.

At the same time, women are presented as being free to find self-fulfilment in the erotic, be it sex or love, rather than professional or political activity: Elena is essentially a promiscuous nymphomaniac; Amalia, another of Bogdan's love interests, has a cosmic vision of sexuality as the dissolution of the self into the great universe of physical sensations. Bogdan resists these forms of sexual dissolution just as he resists the path of political corruption.

The notion that sexuality is something more for Bogdan than a physical act is revealed by his relationship with Mirela. Alone in his room, Bogdan overhears an argument the neighbours are having. Returning home, Mirela wants to have a shower, but her father has locked himself in the bathroom playing the violin and refuses to come out. Mirela affirms that she will ask Bogdan to use his bathroom: this never materialises, however Bogdan starts to fantasise about her doing so. His fantasising is an oscillation between crude sexuality and a miracle:

După cum arată, nu m-aș mira să-și ridice fustele în cap cum făcuse pe vremuri dresoarea: „Puișor, tare mă tem că n-ai picat niciodată în ispită. Îți spune tanti ce și cum numai nu te

emotional.” Oricum sunt sigur, n-o aştept numai pe Mirela, ci ceva deosebit, o minune.³⁰

Judging by the way she looked, I would not be surprised if she would lift her skirts over her head as the circus trainer did a long time ago: “ Kid, I fear that you did not fall into temptation as yet. Aunty will instruct you the ins and outs, but just do not get emotional”. Anyhow, I am sure I am not waiting for Mirela only, but for something special, a miracle.

The miracle Bogdan awaits is to break out of his condition of isolation, of estrangement, to find an open and harmonious relationship with another human being. Mirela, however, arrives neither as carnal being nor miracle.

Bogdan’s most interesting sexual encounter is arguably with his cleaning lady. While she remains anonymous Bogdan’s relationship with her is quite elaborate. She is a widow with five children, and on top of that, she has to look after her husband’s father who is now senile and cannot care for himself. After her husband’s death in a work accident she did not have a sex life. Despite the hardship and misery she suffers, Bogdan sees her as a still young and attractive woman. She seems spiteful towards other women’s apparent sexual fulfilment, especially the women for whom she does laundry. Bogdan employs her as a cleaner more out of a charitable inclination. He even looks after her children when she is cleaning his room. During one of her cleaning visits, she has an outburst born of frustrated sexuality:

„Doamne, dacă n-ar fi nopțile astea, dacă aş putea dormi...Sunt frântă de oboseală, îmi ard mâinile şi, totuşi, îmi aduc aminte de soţ, de un bărbat... Dar numai fâşneţa dumitale are dreptul? Cu ce-s mai bune? Numai ele? De ce?”³¹

“God, if only the night did not exist, if only I could sleep... I am exhausted, my hands are burning, and yet I remember my husband, a man...Only your lass has the right?... How are they better? Only them? Why?”

The way she articulates her frustration marks both a similarity and a difference to Bogdan. Like Bogdan, she would like to be rid of her torment but cannot find rest, not even in sleep. In contrast to Bogdan, however, her frustration is material in nature; carnal rather than intellectual. Yet she articulates her frustration in terms of equal rights to sexual fulfilment: this makes her discourse unique in the novel. No other characters, not even Bogdan, formulate their frustration in terms of equal

³⁰ Ibid., p. 267.

³¹ Ibid., p. 147.

rights, but always in terms of hierarchies of merit, be it professional or moral. At the same time, the discourse of equality is restricted to her sexual fulfilment, and does not address her poverty and inferior social status or her destitution. Moreover, her low social status, like that of the stranger, is expressed in her aggressiveness and envy; her jealous craving for individual satisfaction. Bogdan's charitable attitude to her, and, for that matter, to other destitute persons, such as Mr Jules, only reinforces the sense of social stratification. On the one hand, this can be seen as a critique of the inequalities and injustice of social relations, while on the other hand, the charitable solution only affirms in Bogdan's case the individual's humanitarian quality without addressing or imagining the social dimension to it. This is especially notable for a novel published under a communist regime: it shows that the official discourse of social justice had lost its credentials, and had been replaced by one of individual moral responsibility. Considering that the cleaner's discourse of equal rights is associated with resentment and envy, it can be reasonably surmised that the novel rejects the any form of egalitarian discourse.

Bogdan's response to the woman's demand is ambiguous. They have sex, yet they remain detached, she with her satisfaction he with his questions. As with the case of the stranger, the woman does not seem able to rise above the brutal nature of animal instincts. Bogdan views the body, be it naked physical force or sexual drive as characterising the lower social classes. Bogdan's encounters with the physical body and with the lower classes are experienced as traumatic dislocations. In this sense, we see that gender and class are intersecting to produce a clear yet multiple structure of the chaotic universe in which Bogdan is eternally falling. His unremitting questioning, his reverting to an intellectualised attitude towards the world is presented as the sign of his struggle for moral integrity, of agonising endurance.

Buzura's redeployment of gender relationships marks changes in regard to both the patriarchal structure dominant in Socialist Realism and his own egalitarian articulation in 'Capul bunei speranțe'. In *Mitrea Cocor* the patriarchal order is re-established at the end and thus it ensures a harmonious and unequal relationship between women and men, Mitrea and his wife Nastasia. In 'Capul bunei speranțe', Maria's drive for self affirmation and her individual pride create an obstacle to her relationship with Bucșan. However, the ending promises the possibility of forging a relationship based not on subordination but on equality. In *Absenții*, the patriarchal order is both re-established and presented as being corrupted by the intrusion of politics, which makes men forget their duty to women. There is however, a development registered in the status of women. Most of them are not active solely in

the household, but have professional lives and employment. Nevertheless, they do not participate in the network of power/knowledge that is the preserve of men. In many ways, women's externality to the corrupt power games men play makes them potential sources for articulating a hopeful vision of reconciliation through love, but this remains only a distant wish. At the same time, this exclusion of women from the power games played by men reflects the reproduction within the workplace of gendered hierarchical structures that subordinates women to men. This is an important vision that reinforces a patriarchal view of women as beings of feeling, be they instinctual (sexual) or spiritual (love).

One of the central aspects of Buzura's articulation of gender relationships is the impossibility of a fulfilling relationship typified by the intimacy between two individuals; this is either because of an aggressive instinct or the intrusion of the social order. Thus, sexual relationships are reduced to a cold consummation of bodily functions. However, Bogdan does long for a relationship, one in which sex is elevated by love and a communion of minds and spirits. As with his social and professional self-affirmation, such a relationship is impossible in the world corrupted by politics in which he finds himself.

Bogdan's masculinity, a mix of sexual virility and traumatised sensibility that makes him socially impotent, is developed at the intersection of the worker/intellectual. His virility is revealed by his mechanically satisfied sexual drive, and by his physical agility proven in the combat with the stranger. However, these are traits that do not dominate him, but are subordinated to his intellectual, moral and professional preoccupations. His violent outburst towards Poenaru and his confrontation with the other men are responses to provocations; phenomena stimulated by the corrupt environment. Here again a trait that is similar to the protagonist of Socialist Realism, specifically *Mitrea Cocor*, is observed. Bogdan's attitude towards physical combat is marked by ambivalence. He sees it as both a trait of the lower classes and as a sign of virility. The positive valuation of physical prowess is a trait of the action hero of this epic, which is manifested as active agent in the world of objects.

4 Further Developments

The redeployment of the articulation of subjectivities brought about by the literature of the troubling decade – as illustrated by the analysis of Augustin

Buzura's novel *Absenții* – had relevance for both the remaining period of the communist regime and after 1989. In this section will be explored the way Buzura developed his vision before 1989. This will help put in a larger historical perspective his vision of the socialist social reality.

After *Absenții*, Buzura published five more novels before the end of the communist regime in 1989. As the critic, Eugen Simion, remarked, with each novel, Buzura expands his exploration of the social classes of the socialist reality.³² Eugen was justified in pointing out that the new classes are not like the old ones, and he enumerates the new classes as peasants, workers and intellectuals. However, he omitted to name the *Nomenklatura*, which, because of its privileges, was unnameable before 1989. After 1989, Negrici has remarked that Buzura's novels are in large part a critical exploration of the *Nomenklatura*. Negrici refers to the communist *Nomenklatura* as the "red bourgeoisie", for its immorality and its appetite for mammon and luxury.³³ In the figure of Poenaru, as well as in the desires for material prosperity intrinsic to Bălan and Nicolae, it is easy to recognise the articulation of this appetite. A review of Buzura's subsequent novels will contribute to a better understanding of his redeployment in the articulation of socialist subjectivities.

The first two novels after *Absenții*, *Fețele tăcerii* (The Faces of Silence, 1974) and *Orgolii* (Forms of Pride, 1977)³⁴ are revisiting the 1950s, the decade of the initial process of constructing socialism, and as such are clear illustrations of the literature of the troubling decade. *Fețele tăcerii* deals with the process of collectivisation and the resistance against the communist regime by small armed groups in the mountains. *Orgolii* deals with the political prisoners who received amnesty in 1964 and their reintegration into society. The interesting thing about these novels is that although they look back and articulate the past as a traumatic dislocation, the perspective is from the present and therefore after the fact.

Fețele tăcerii is narrated from three perspectives; these being those of a young journalist, the victims of the collectivisation process, and the communist activist in charge of the repressive campaign. Radu, the communist activist is probably the most interesting character in that he completely rearticulates the image of the first generation of communists like Mitrea Cocor. Behind his dedication to the cause he is represented as an aggressive and malicious individual who sees any form of action, however brutal and deceptive, as legitimate. He is full of spite

³² Eugen Simion, *Scriitori români de azi IV* (București: Cartea Românească, 1989), p. 227.

³³ Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism*, p. 270.

³⁴ I am indebted to Professor Dennis Deletant for the English translation of this title.

towards the new generation of activists and professionals for their lack of recognition for his work in bringing about the new world that they enjoy. He sees them as the cause of his marginalisation: equally marginalised are Radu's victims, the Măgureanu family. The Măgureni are a synthesis of the victims of communism: the father is the embodiment of the hard-working peasant with strong moral principles while the son is the embodiment of the young intellectual. Their marginalisation is presented as being caused by Radu, the agent of the new social order, who destroys their way of life. An interesting point to note is that to the journalist, Dan Toma, the perspective from which the other two perspectives are framed, has a similar relationship with Radu and his victims, as Bogdan had with Poenaru and his victim Onaca. He rejects the apparently irreconcilable conflict between Radu and the Măgureni, and does not want to be implicated in it. Yet Dan Toma remains emotionally implicated in their struggle. He feels repulsion for Radu, and a deep affinity and sympathy for Carol Măgureanu, the figure of the persecuted intellectual. The irreconcilable fragmentation of perspectives is a sign of social atomisation and intergenerational conflicts. Gone is the image of reconciliation and solidarity between generations articulated in 'Plumb'. While the older generations have the ability to articulate their positions clearly and forcefully, the new generation's perspectives are vague; consumed by impotence and arbitrariness. A marginal episode describing the social interaction between Dan Toma and a school friend, who is now a barrister, is reminiscent of the absurdity and ennui characteristic of Michelangelo Antonioni's protagonists in *L'Avventura* and *L'Eclisse*. The dusk of an age of violent ideological confrontation and the emergence of an age of seemingly depoliticised bureaucratic routine, where terror is replaced by deep anxiety as dominant form of social control, can be seen articulated in this novel. Like in *Absenții*, the cause of the social degradation is the intrusion of politics into daily life. Politics is the corrupting force and the source of resentment that animates Radu, the worker/political activist.

The novel, *Orgolii*, is particularly interesting for the way in which it presents social fragmentation and conflict. The novel is narrated from two perspectives, revealing the story from the point of view of two of the characters. The main protagonist is the medical doctor and professor, Ion Cristian. He suffered political persecution and imprisonment after the war, but is now reinstated in his position as professor of oncology at the local university. He is a renowned specialist and is both esteemed and envied by his colleagues, who are portrayed as a group of opportunistic and scheming bureaucrats. Like Bogdan, Cristian refuses to get involved in the intrigues in the medical institution where he works. Unlike Bogdan,

however, he is already famous for his expertise, and this procures him a measure of personal immunity and potential political clout. His reluctance to intervene in the intrigues is seen by his son, a medical student, as a form of moral betrayal; of refusal to confront the corruption. Together with the accusations of arrogance by his former friend, Redman, the man who participated in Cristian's denunciation, arrest and torture, this creates a rupture of the relation between the father and the son. This intrigue forms the main narrative drive of the novel. The second perspective is constructed from several fragments from a diary of a porter who works at Cristian's hospital. These fragments are inserted throughout the main narrative. Most critics have seen this character as an informer, and therefore as presenting the degradation of the human character by the communist ideological indoctrination.³⁵ Indeed, this nameless character seems to address a higher authority to whom he reports his surveillance on Ion Cristian. His discourse is a simultaneously funny and sad, uncouth articulation of the communist rhetoric of class struggle, and has as its main target what he sees as the non-proletarian arrogance of Ion Cristian; his attitude of superior disdain towards the other workers. The informer's discourse is marked by a vitriolic, anti-intellectualist rhetoric, similar to those of Studențov and the stranger in *Absenții*. The informer has an antagonist and counteragent in Cristian's devoted laboratory assistant. The laboratory assistant is in fact a sort of personal assistant of Cristian's, running errands for him, informing him as to what is happening in the hospital, and more importantly protecting him from the informer. From the informer's discourse we come to know the divertive pranks that the laboratory assistant plays on him. The two can be seen to form the comic couple of the *eiron* (the mischievously clever laboratory assistant) and the *alazon* (the sincere but foolish informer). The informer and the laboratory assistant can be seen as representing two opposed relationships between intellectuals and workers, one subversive the other devoted. In the relationship between Cristian and the laboratory assistant the relationship as of that between a nobleman and his devoted servant is embodied. This relationship of subordination and dependency is structured by moral (devotion) and professional values. (The laboratory assistant respects, even adulates Cristian both for his professional merits and for his past suffering). In this relationship, a clear alternative to the corrupt and degrading power relationships dominating the novel – and more generally in Buzura's overall work – is revealed.

³⁵ Ștefănescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane*, p. 548.

The interesting point to note is that while the informer's perspective is focused on the figure of Ion Cristian, he does not appear in those narrative sections presented from Cristian's perspective. The separation between the two perspectives is significant because it symbolises the rupture between the intellectuals, in the sense of technical specialists, and the masses. While the intellectuals remain ignorant of the masses, isolated in their individual endeavour to preserve moral and professional integrity, the degraded masses of the workers develop a hatred for what they see as the arrogance and indifference of the intellectuals (their isolation in a self-enclosed sphere), and articulated their frustration in the only form of discourse available – that provided by the official discourse of class struggle. This is not simply ideological indoctrination, but rather and more potently an antagonistic articulation of social relations on which the political cadres are able to capitalise. The language of the informer can be seen as a degraded expression of the desire for social solidarity and recognition by the intellectuals. There is a double wall separating the man of integrity from those who have lost theirs: the intellectual is indifferent to the masses, however they in turn hate him for his aloofness. Buzura's novel presents this relationship in a clear, hierarchical way. Cristian's discourse has a distinctive tragic dimension that elevates it morally. In contrast, the informer's discourse is distinctively comic and thus morally inferior.

Social fragmentation is also the focus of Buzura's subsequent novels, *Vocile nopții*, (The Night's Voices, 1980), *Refugii* (Refugees, 1984) and *Drumul cenușii* (The Cinders' Way, 1988). The focus of these novels is on the present rather than the past. They explore the new socialist society: the interconnection between rural, industrial and bureaucratic social strata. Arguably the most interesting in the context of this thesis is *Refugii*. This novel is unique among Buzura's novels because the protagonist is woman, Ioana Olaru. She represents a complete redeployment of the representation of women from that of Maria in 'Capul Bunei Speranțe'. Like Maria, Ioana is also in search of self-fulfilment. However, her plight is not of a professional but of a sentimental nature. A university graduate in English and French, Ioana works as translator in a large industrial complex. Professionally, she is integrated in the bureaucratised industry. Her job is similar to Maria's position as a secretary, in so far as she is subordinated to an abusive boss. However, her frustration is not expressed in professional terms, but as degradation of love. The relation with her fiancé is broken when he is sent to work as a teacher in a village. There he succumbs to the corruption and debauchery of the local authorities and ends up marrying the daughter of the local priest, who appears as materially/sexually driven. Ioana's boss asks her to play the role of "escort" to the visiting officials, and she

ends up as the mistress of one of them, Anton. Although she seems to have some affection for Anton, Ioana is frustrated by his lies. Anton is in an unhappy marriage with a career-driven woman, but for professional reasons – i.e., it would not look good for a man of his ministerial rank to be divorced – he does not keep his promise to divorce her and marry Ioana. Growing disillusioned, Ioana has an affair with an artist, the rather bohemian painter, Sabin. Suspecting her “betrayal”, Anton runs her over with his car. The novel is narrated after the accident as Ioana tries to piece together her past. Besides all these failed affairs, she also had an intensely affectionate but platonic relationship with David Helgomar, the boyfriend of her landlady, Victoria Oprea who is a medical doctor. Helgomar is a mining engineer who suffers sustained persecution because he protests against the inhuman conditions in which the miners work. He blames the corrupt authorities for not looking after the safety and welfare of the miners. In turn, they blame the conditions on the shortage of resources. He is beaten up several times, and the windows of his house are smashed. The perpetrator has the same transparent anonymity as the stranger in *Absenții*; they seem to be agents of the secret police, but are not named as such. Helgomar, like Bogdan, remains a lone individual in his struggle for social justice. He adamantly refuses to get anyone involved in the struggle on the pretext that he does not want to put them in harm’s way. At the same time he has the same individualistic rhetoric as Bogdan. Resistance is strictly individual, the preserve – or, more accurately – the vanity of special characters. At one point he disappears, and, a short time after his disappearance, his girlfriend, Victoria Oprea, a tough but resigned character, takes another boyfriend, a local bureaucrat. At the end of her recovery from amnesia, Ioana decides to look after Helgomar, as he is the only one she regards to be a person of moral integrity. Victoria’s accusation that Ioana wanted to steal Helgomar from her leads to the breakup of the friendship between the two women. What is notable is that the relation between Ioana and Helgomar is very similar to that between Maria and Bucșan: both are chaste, platonic loves, the declaration and consummation of desire being endlessly postponed. Like Maria, Ioana follows the man she loves into the unknown. However, here the unknown is not the construction of socialism, but an individual struggle for integrity in a degraded social world. Similar is the representation of sex as a degraded and degrading affair. Ioana’s lover, Anton Crișan, a bureaucrat of some importance, is a rather refined character in comparison to the mass of coarse individuals that surround her. However, their sexual relationship is one of degradation in the absence of emotional and intellectual affinity; a substitute for genuine love. In contrast, Ioana and Helgomar form a genuine couple, the symbol of an ideal

relationship that remains impossible to fulfil under the pressures of the degraded and degrading social reality. The impossibility of forming stable and genuine, loving relations is paralleled by the impossibility of forming stable and genuine social relations: the overall picture is of the social traumatic dislocation of individuals.

In *Refugii* we see clearly the way in which a patriarchal gendering of the public and private spheres – this being in the form of “man” (Helgomar), who is fully oriented towards public duty, and “woman” (Ioana) who is restricted to the private domain (problems of the heart) – is reproduced and turned into a discursive platform for wider social critique. The abuse that Ioana suffers from men is the symptom of the crisis of masculinity; men fail to perform their loving and protecting roles due to the fact men are seen to have been weakened and corrupted by a degraded society. Women’s emancipation has lost its positive symbolism. On the contrary, a career-driven woman who aspires to public affirmation, like Anton’s wife, is presented as negative and the cause of marital problems. Ioana does not seek fulfilment in public self-affirmation, but in dedicating herself to the man she admires and loves in a pure way – a man like Helgomar who is for her a symbol of integrity. This patriarchal vision of gender relationships functioned as a critique of the patriarchal communist state. Arguably, the power of this discourse and its hold over the articulation of gender relationships made the post-communist encounter with the Western feminist discourse problematic for Romanian women, as Mihaela Mudure has affirmed.³⁶

It can be concluded that throughout the communist period Augustin Buzura articulated in his work a complete redeployment of narrative structures, social class and gender relationships. This redeployment was not simply a representation of reality; a kind of naive realism. On the contrary, as testified by his declared meliorism – the belief that art could play a role in the struggle for a better society – his work was performative in that it transformed the discursive articulation of the socialist social reality.

5 Other Developments in the Literature of the Troubling Decade

The changes articulated by Augustin Buzura in his work raise the question of his place within the literature of the troubling decade. This thesis will place his work

³⁶ Mudure ‘A Zeugmata Space’, p. 23-24.

in the literary context through an analysis of Dinu Săraru's novel, *Clipa* (The Moment, 1976).

In its bleak vision, Buzura's redeployment can be seen as characteristic of the literature of the troubling decade as manifested in the work of other authors such as Marin Preda, Alexandru Ivăsiuc, D. R. Popescu and Nicolae Breban.³⁷ However, the field was much more heterogeneous than such a claim suggests. Buzura's vision was quite radical in the articulation of the conflict between the technical specialist and the political activist. Many writers, especially in the 1960s and the early 1970s, presented a more ambiguous view. For example, in the novels *Moromeții*, vol. 2, (1967), and *Marele singuratic* (The Great Hermit, 1972), Marin Preda combines a criticism of the process of collectivisation with the positive articulation of an idealist political activist. In *Francesca* (1965), Nicolae Breban has a positive political activist who, however, is more implicated in personal dilemmas than in a leading political role. Moreover, Breban creates a quasi naturalist image of the worker of rural origins dominated by basic instincts – a reminiscence of Rebreanu's representation of the peasant in his novel, *Ion* (1921), a classic of Romanian literature. Ivăsiuc, in the novel, *Vestibul* (Hallway, 1967), and D. R. Popescu, in *Vânătoarea regală* (The Royal Hunt, 1973), present tragic visions of the idealist technical specialist – doctors and teachers – who fall victims to corrupt mob rule. Particularly vivid is D. R. Popescu's allegory of a countryside teacher who is persecuted, chased and killed by a mob of villagers maddened by rabies, which ultimately proves to have been mass hysteria rather than a true epidemic.

From this short list it is clear that the transformation of the articulation of socialist subjectivities took a critical turn with the literature of the troubling decade. However, there were writers who continued to write in a more committed way and who followed the image of the political activist as articulated by Mihail Sadoveanu in *Mitrea Cocor* more closely. Nevertheless, under the conditions of the changes that took place in the 1960s, particularly Ceaușescu's condemnation of the errors and illegalities committed under the leadership of his predecessor, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, the committed writers also had to update the image of the political activist. Following the example of Ceaușescu's own critical stance, a critical position with regard to socialist reality could be also taken from the point of view of the political activist, and hence that of the regime. This form of criticism, however, could take unexpected directions. The regime's reorientation towards national ideology as a

³⁷ A brief but insightful analysis of some of these writers is given in Michael Impey's 'Historical Figures in the Romanian Historical Novel', *Southeastern Europe*, vol. 7, 1980, pp. 99-113.

form of political legitimisation brought about the resurrection of tradition and made possible the criticism – sometimes more open and sometimes more veiled – of the aesthetic “dogmatism” of Socialist Realism, without actually being critical of the political regime.³⁸

One of the unexpected turns taken by writers committed to the “Socialist Revolution”, meaning the construction of socialism, is illustrated by the novel, *Clipa* (The Moment, 1976) by Dinu Săraru. Săraru attempts to revitalise the original articulation of the communist leader created by Sadoveanu in *Mitrea Cocor*. As this thesis has shown, from Studențov (*Absenții*) and Radu (*Fețele tăcerii*) to the informer (*Orgolii*), in Buzura’s novels the figure of the working class political activist was presented as a negative character, marginalised and derided. In *Clipa*, Săraru grafts onto a Socialist Realist structure certain elements of the literature of the troubling decade – elements such as the critical revisiting of the recent past and meditative characters prone to introspection. The effect of this grafting is remarkable in its aesthetic and ideological implications, and their analysis helps capturing the complexity of the redeployment of socialist subjectivities articulated in the literature of the troubling decade.

Despite Dinu Săraru’s open affirmation for revolutionary transformation and class struggle, his novel lacks the epic dynamism characteristic of Socialist Realism. On the one hand, this is caused by the meditative stance of the characters, which, in a manner similar to those of Buzura, dwell on the past while endlessly pondering the meaning of their actions. Similarly, we never see the agents in action but only through the meditative prism of memory. On the other hand, the sluggishness of the narrative is an effect of Săraru’s prose, which develops slowly through uncharacteristically long and meandering phrases, full of repetition and crowded by peculiar, because ostentatious, similes. Together, these two aspects impress a sense of a stalled dynamism on the narrative: given the positive valuation of the peasant’s obstinate attachment to the land/earth (pământ), Săraru’s supposedly revitalised revolutionary spirit appears as a revolution that got bogged down in the sticky earth of traditional social relationships.

Another significant change brought by Săraru is the absence of the industrial workers. This is conspicuous because the action of the novel is based in an industrial town and is concerned with the conflicts of factory leadership and production. The plot revolves around the conflict between various types of the *Nomenklatura*, these being technical specialists, state administrators and political

³⁸ For the complexities of the redeployment of the discursive positions during Ceaușescu’s time see, Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism*, pp. 137-66.

cadres. The only working people presented in the novel are peasants in the countryside: slow and circumspect individuals attached to the land, traditions and to their life marked by hardship. Strangely for a novel that purports to present a renewed revolutionary spirit, these peasants are portrayed as the holders of a genuine traditional wisdom. The protagonist of the novel, the communist leader, Dumitru Dumitru, whose beginnings were those of a poor peasant himself, visits the peasants in order to reconnect to their wisdom, unspoiled by the urban embourgeoisement of the new life. This revalorisation of the peasants and their ways of life marks a complete reversal of the view presented in *Mitrea Cocor*, which advocated the complete modernisation and urbanisation of village life, and the erasure of the backward poverty of the peasants.

In the figure of Dumitru Dumitru, Săraru manages to create a powerful, if conflicting, communist leader. The powerfulness derives not from the qualities of the character, but from the fact that he is situated in the position of a decision maker. Reading the novel, it is apparent that he holds all the strings of power. This is problematic because he is only a regional party leader. However, in the novel there is no representation of the party organisation hierarchically above him, the locus, as it were, of decision-making. Because of this absence, Dumitru Dumitru functions as a real agent of decision-making. In this sense he is very far from both Mitrea Cocor and Matei, the communist protagonist in Petru Dumitriu's *Drum fără pulbere*. While Mitrea's power was based on his unification of the three discourses of the worker, technical specialist and political cadre in one person, Dumitru Dumitru has only the circumspect wisdom of the peasant to guide him. Yet he is in an uncontested position of authority.

Despite his power and his privileging of the peasant wisdom, Dumitru Dumitru is an unusual communist leader. He is preoccupied with his appearance and is described as athletic but sober in his demeanour and with exquisite sartorial tastes. His suits are always perfectly tailored and matched with pristine shirts and stylish ties. Moreover, he dislikes the proletarian's unrefined attire. He spends his time visiting the countryside, musing in his sumptuous office or conducting meetings. Considering that he is supposed to be the embodiment of the proletarian consciousness, this creates an unintentional irony.

The element that distinguishes Dumitru Dumitru and gives him an aura of righteousness and political legitimacy is his past victimisation. Persecution was a well-established element in the career of any communist leader, but as was the case with Mitrea Cocor, this happened at the hands of the old bourgeois regime. In contrast, Dumitru Dumitru has been wrongly accused of sabotage and imprisoned

by communist cadres during the time of the collectivisation. He took the side of peasants who were arrested without evidence of wrongdoing and freed them. For this reason, he was denounced as a class enemy and imprisoned in a labour camp. The representation of life in the camp focuses on the consciousness of Dumitru Dumitru who meditates on his guilt and refuses to abdicate from his ideological view when some fellow inmates of bourgeois origin probe him on this issue. The material existence and conditions of work in the camp are not described, and this creates a sense of a clinical, pristine space, like the environs of a hospital. The camp is presented as a place of pure meditation on the value of liberty. Liberty is regarded as being the heart and soul of the great revolutionary action taking place beyond the barbed wire fence – the fence itself giving the only sense of oppression in this scenario. This pristine representation of the labour camp stands in marked contrast to the representation of the so-called “errors” committed during the first decade of socialism as characterised in the literature of the troubling decade, where the brutality and misery that contributed to the degradation of the prisoners was emphasised. This brutality was presented as the outburst of what Marin Preda called “spiritul primar agresiv”, the primal aggressive spirit.³⁹ Buzura represented “spiritual primar agresiv” in the novels, *Fețele tăcerii* and *Orgolii*. The most prominent representation of the brutality of socialist labour camp life was by Marin Preda in *Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni* (The Most Beloved Among Humans, 1980).⁴⁰

Despite this representation of the “errors” committed during the process of collectivisation, Săraru does not present it as a conflict but as a misunderstanding. While he dedicates long passages to the description of peasant revolts, these are revealed to be misrepresentations made by poorly instructed political cadres who do not understand the ways of the peasants. The peasants are presented as being dedicated heart and soul to collectivisation and revolution. Dumitru Dumitru’s guilt lies, not in having done something wrong, but in not having done enough; i.e., not having protected the peasants from the zeal of misguided cadres while pushing harder for collectivisation. The reckless zeal of the misguided cadres is countered by an appeal to the peasants’ circumspect wisdom, to which Dumitru Dumitru returns again and again. The opposition between reckless zeal and circumspect wisdom is the central conflict and contradiction that the novel attempts to resolve.

³⁹ Marin Preda, *Imposibila întoarcere* (București: Cartea Românească, 1971), specifically the article titled ‘Spiritul primar agresiv și spiritul revoluționar’.

⁴⁰ The reference is to works published during communism in Romania. The central Romanian author whose work is systematically dedicated to the representation of the horrors of the Romanian Gulag is Paul Goma, but his work was published in Romanian only after 1989.

The dangers of misguided zeal are presented in the figures of Tudor Cernat and Arvinte Panait. Tudor Cernat represents the passion for the profession and ideas of the technical specialist. This is seen as both good and bad; good because it generates the energy necessary for the construction of socialism, and bad because zealousness under such circumstances is prone to recklessness. Cernat is the director of the towns' industrial plant. His subalterns perceive his passion and drive as dangerous (because it puts people's lives at risk) and tyrannical (due to his exaggerated demands on the workers). Having been reported to the minister, he is under investigation. Arvinte Panait, the bureaucrat in charge of the investigation, is the other example of reckless zeal. His zeal is manifested in the mechanical application of rules, and his obsession with being up to date with the latest instructions from the minister. This is comically rendered through his obsession, bordering on a nervous tick, with being kept informed by telephone and his resulting panic when he does not receive a call. The mediation of the "conflict" between Tudor Cernat and Arvinte Panait is the duty of Dumitru Dumitru. While sympathising with Cernat's passion and dedication, he sees it as dangerous if not tempered by the obedience to rules. While he dislikes Arvinte's bureaucratic neurosis, he appreciates the necessity of an unreserved following of the rules. As such, he sees both the technical specialist and the bureaucrat as necessary for the construction of socialism. The decision as to whether Cernat should be demoted is never taken due to the fact that, just before the end of the novel, Dumitru Dumitru receives the news of the tragic death of a dear friend. On the one hand, this has the role of humanising the communist leader by showing that he has a personal life. On the other hand, yet again it enforces the pervasive sense of deferral and melancholia, the avoiding of confronting problems and conflicts. The last minute switch in the narrative to a personal event masks the fact that Dumitru Dumitru has no answer apart from postponement, the circumspect wisdom of the peasants. The emphasis on prudent deferral rather than decision and action betrays the fact that Săraru has abandoned the idea of revolutionary transformation in favour of the reproduction of rigid hierarchical social structures of power/knowledge.

In the context of this thesis, arguably the most extraordinary aspect of the novel is its articulation of gender relationships. All the main female characters in the novel are portrayed as negative influences on men. Tudor Cernat's wife is a bored and frustrated housewife obsessed by her social status. She always admonishes Cernat for putting his family at material risk through his recklessness; i.e., being demoted from directorship. She does not understand his passion for his profession and feels abandoned by him in favour of the factory. She spends her time

complaining and shopping for luxury items, mostly antiques, in order that their high social status is maintained in a conspicuous fashion. She is a clear example of what the book critically refers to as the *embourgeoisement* of the new professional classes.

Another example of this kind of weak woman, prone to anxiety and reckless action, is Dumitru Dumitru's wife. A fragile being, she could never cope with his long and frequent absences, and things get worse when he is sent to prison. She abandons him, and this leads to her and their young daughter's death. While Dumitru Dumitru feels some guilt for not being there for his family, he is even bitterer that they deserted him, and he solely blames the wife's weakness and distrust of him for the death of the daughter.

In contrast to these traditional, housebound, if destructive, femininities, Ruxandra Mărcineanu is a new woman. She is single, a talented professional full of passion for the construction of the new modern world. However, she bears a stigma: she is the daughter of the former bourgeois lawyer of the town, who is now dead. Her father was a staunch enemy of Dumitru Dumitru in the past. Moreover, her zeal is marked by the same potential recklessness as is common to Cernat. Although from an old family, she is an emancipated woman, both professionally and sexually. A brilliant architect, she is in charge of the redevelopment of the old centre of the town in a modernist style. She designs the new party headquarters in the shape of an aeroplane taking off. She and Cernat are irresistibly attracted to each other and have a passionate affair. This is not just a meeting of carnal desires, but also the dialogue of kindred spirits. Again the association of the technical specialist with a bourgeois mentality, sexualised and formalist in its thinking, is shown. Her representation is highly sexualised: with long red hair, always dressed seductively, she exudes powerful sexual energy. Inherent in this sexuality is the danger that comes from her power to seduce men and lead them to reckless acts. She seduces Cernat away from his family but, more importantly, by stimulating his professional passion she increases his recklessness.

This potentially dangerous relationship between Cernat and Ruxandra is resolved by the "natural" exclusion of Ruxandra: she dies in a flood under the ruins of the modernist building she designed. The novel ends with Dumitru Dumitru laying the symbolic first brick at the foundation of the reconstruction site – an ending that has complex ideological implications. It suggests that Ruxandra's buildings were too extravagant (again a sign of her reckless zeal) and thus not strong enough. Only the foundations laid by the communist leader are solid enough, because paradoxically they are based on the circumspect wisdom of the peasant. Moreover, it shifts the

blame of destruction (and thus recklessness) away from the communist leader, who is placed in the position of a healer by way of reconstructing that which was damaged.

The only positive female figure in the novel is Dumitru Dumitru's sister. A humble person, she silently tends to all her brother's needs, looking after the house, cooking and washing, without making any demands on him and stoically waiting for his arrival from work duties. Her complete subordination is symbolically rendered in a table scene: arriving home late, Dumitru finds his sister still up and ready to serve him dinner. After she sets the table and serves the food, she withdraws into a corner of the room and sits quietly on a little chair, watching as her brother eats his food. Dumitru finds in his sister's meek character the much cherished wisdom of the peasant. This dry patriarchal structure, highly hierarchical and devoid as it is of erotic passion, is seemingly the only form of gender relationship compatible with the socialist ethic. This is even more conservative than the structure originally proposed by Sadoveanu, and has completely abandoned the ideal based on equal partners formulated by Buzura in 'Capul bunei speranțe'. The subordination of women to men advocated by Săraru enforces the view of gender relationships that, from a feminist perspective, can appear as misogyny due to the representation of women as a hateful danger to men and society. As with the case of social class and conflict, Săraru is no longer interested in social transformation, but only with the reproduction of rigid hierarchies of power. Moreover, the pervasive dissolution of marriages suggests a crisis of gender relationships. The way in which this is formulated – as an effect of the embourgeoisement of the new professional classes and the solution in the retreat to the old traditions of peasants - suggests a more general state of social crisis. Paraphrasing a much used formula common at the height of Socialist Realist criticism, it can be said that Săraru represents the socialist society in its last stage of decomposition. From Săraru's vision it transpires that the communist regime's response to the pressing social conflicts of socialism was a retreat into rigid patriarchal forms of power. Strangely, by portraying the dynamism, professionalism and eroticism of the new professional classes as embourgeoisement, it already prepared in terms of freedom the positive ideological revalorisation of bourgeois social relationships.

In the opposition between Buzura and Săraru we see two ideological directions competing over the articulation of the initial dislocating effects of the communist project. Both attempt to articulate a view of preservation, Buzura's view relating to professional and moral values while Săraru's view takes the form of morally vague and circumspect peasant wisdom. This ideological completion for the

articulations of social values and relationships is, in fact, presented by Săraru in the opposition between reckless zeal and circumspect wisdom. Whereas with Buzura it is present as the conflict between on the one hand, the integrity of professional and moral values, and on the other hand corruption and brutality. Buzura does not propose a way out but finds a compromise in the individualist formula of “neither a winner nor defeated”. Săraru constructs the communist leader as a quilting point holding together through his symbolic power of mediation the social conflicts, initially between the technical specialist and the bureaucrat, and then between the embourgeoisement of the modernising professional classes and the peasants’ retreat into traditional values. As a result, the contradictions of the Ceaușescu regime, which can be typified by the continuous reckless transformation of society and a retreat into conservative social and political structures, is thus condensed in the figure of Dumitru Dumitru. Săraru’s valorisation of the peasant is in keeping with the nationalist revival during Ceaușescu’s rule – a revival that defined the national essence in the shape of an idealised peasant.⁴¹ In order to understand the changes in the articulation of the communist leader as a quilting point holding together conflicting social structures it is useful to compare Mitrea Cocor with Dumitru Dumitru. Mitrea held a double role: on the one hand, there was the suturing of the three discourses of the worker, technical specialist and political cadre into one identity. On the other hand, there was the role of suturing the present to the future and thus assuring the privileged position of the communist as leader. With Dumitru Dumitru, it could be argued that he is suturing the circumspection of the peasants with the zeal of the new professional classes while also suturing the past to the present. The future seems to be unclear, and a less important issue for him. In contrast to Mitrea Cocor, Dumitru Dumitru is more prone to look to the past rather than the future to find answers to the problems of the present.

Despite their major differences, there remains a commonality between Buzura and Săraru, in that both are articulating a retreat to patriarchal gender relationships, rather than proposing the construction and adoption of a new view. Both positions signal the abandonment of an ideology of social progress and the retreat into either nostalgia for a lost “normality” or a direct celebration of traditional values in the present. The advent of the literature of the troubling decade was not simply a critique of the so-called “errors” and “transgression of legality” perpetrated during the first decade of socialist construction, but the sign of a fully articulated

⁴¹ For an analysis of the role of the intellectuals in promoting the idealised image of the peasant during Ceaușescu’s rule see Brindusa Palade, ‘The Romanian Utopia: The Role of the Intelligentsia in the Communist Implementation of a New Human Paradigm’, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, vol. 3, no. 2-3, 2000, pp. 107-15.

reassertion of conservative values. This in turn would have important implications in the redeployment of the ideological field – politically, socially and culturally – after the fall of the communist regime. After 1989, the changes in the socio-political conditions in which the literature of the troubling decade was received opened it to criticism and reinterpretation. The last section of this chapter will focus on these issues.

6 Reception and Changes After 1989

One important question that emerged after 1989 in Romanian literary criticism is that of the changing reception of the works produced during communism. The change in the reception of literary works is a common thing in the evolution of societies. Each generation of readers and historical epoch brings its own reading of past works: such readings discover and value aspects that previously went unnoticed or were not appreciated while overlooking or discounting others. These reinterpretations, both individual and collective, demonstrate that the meaning of a work is not a static given, but that it emerges out of an interaction with the individual and collective readers.⁴² It is thus no surprise that many critics have argued that the change in the literary and socio-political context after 1989 has rendered obsolete most of the works of the literature of the troubling decade. These assertions are based on the distinction between the reception of these works by the reading public during and after communism.

First, it was argued that during communism the so called “political novels” – a term that mostly includes the works of the literature of the troubling decade – were read as sources of historical information.⁴³ The reason behind this mode of reception was found in censorship. The branches of history and sociology, which are meant to provide information about the past and present social reality, were heavily censored during communism. In contrast, the novel, being a subjective and fictional genre, had more liberty in addressing difficult issues – an idea amply illustrated by the myriad themes dealt with in the literature of the troubling decade. Second, the fiction was a platform for the veiled articulation of criticism of the

⁴² For an introduction to reception theory see Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory* (London: Methuen, 1984). For a brief but insightful exposition of sociology of literary response see David Coward, ‘The Sociology of Literary Response’, in *The Sociology of Literature: Theoretical Approaches*, eds. Jane Routh and Janet Wolff, Sociological Review Monograph 25, 1977, pp. 8-17.

⁴³ Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, p.1098.

socialist reality in the form of Aesopic language, and especially the phenomenon of “the lizard”.⁴⁴ A pact between writers and readers emerged whereby the writer suggested or hinted at certain aspects of socialist reality in a critical manner without openly declaring it, and the public engaged in reading between the lines. The pleasure of reading was in finding and decoding these “lizards”. These kinds of reading practices are no longer applicable after 1989. The interested reader can find the information in the empirical sciences of history and sociology, and in a much more accurate and trustworthy form. Similarly, younger readers who did not live under communism are no longer able to practice the reading between the lines and to decode the lizards, as this was a specific language code of the time.⁴⁵ Therefore, the conclusion is that the literature of the troubling decade is no longer of any value.

Another point of dismissal is presented in the claim that these works are ideologically tainted.⁴⁶ In other words, the articulations of subjectivity in these works are no longer relevant to a contemporary readership. The argument follows that the communist protagonist, the technical specialist and the worker are subjectivities that belong to a past world – subjectivities, moreover, that have been rearticulated under the labels of “extreme left ideological toxins”.⁴⁷ The working class has lost political and symbolic relevance in the post-communist world and with it the individual worker as well.⁴⁸ These changes are formulated in particular in the case of Augustin Buzura: as Eugen Negrici has remarked, during communism Buzura was perceived as a courageous writer; after 1989 this is no longer the case.⁴⁹ In other words, Buzura’s work, like that of the literature of the troubling decade, was able to reveal only partially the “truth” about the communist regime.

These kinds of approaches appear very narrow in scope, and are arguably misguided, targeting reading strategies rather than engaging with the works themselves. It is entirely possible that works of literature remain culturally, critically and artistically valuable despite the changes in their reception. This thesis has argued that the literature of the communist period holds an important place in the understanding of the communist past as well as its legacies in the present. As these works combine the literary discourses and responses to social reality they cannot be reduced to simple sources of information outside their field, be it historical facts or political criticism. They are resources of discursive articulation of both literature and

⁴⁴ Lungu, *Incursiuni în sociologia artelor*, pp. 62-63; Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism*, p. 401; Ioniță, ‘Hunting Lizards in Romania’, p. 704.

⁴⁵ Lungu, *Incursiuni în sociologia artelor*, p. 67.

⁴⁶ Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism*, pp. 11-15.

⁴⁷ Cesereanu, ‘Dezintoxicarea creierelor’, p. 216.

⁴⁸ Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity*, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁹ Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism*, p. 266.

subjectivity. What the above mentioned criticisms imply is the inability of critics to go beyond the reading frames developed during communism. Moreover, the articulations of subjectivities as formulated during communism are relevant for the understanding of both the changes and continuities that took place after 1989.

One illuminating case is that of Buzura's work after 1989, in which he deals specifically with the impact that the transition from the Communist Project to the Neoliberal Project had on the articulation of class and gender relationships. Alan Dingsdale argued that the transition from one modernisation project to the next takes the form of an erasure of past structures and the creation of new ones. In the case of Romania, the process of replacement of the communist past was imagined as a return to a past form of perceived "normality". This view was best exemplified by Ruxandra Cesereanu's expression of this process as one of "brain detoxification" – a process that would eliminate the extreme leftist ideologies with which the communist regime purportedly inculcated individuals.⁵⁰ At the same time, she argued that this process should equate to a return to the "brain" that the communists tried to eliminate. These former "brains" were envisaged, with regards to class and gender, as being determinately bourgeois and traditional in form. With respect to class, analysis at both ends of the political spectrum, left and right, agreed on the direction the transformations should take: the restoration of capitalism. As such, the post-communist political conflict was waged – not over the articulation of the social order – but over who should be leading it. On the right of the political spectrum, Gabriel Liiceanu considered that the post-communist conflict was articulated as a confrontation between the bourgeois past – he called for the restoration of the constitutional monarchy – and the communist past – the communist elites – but he did not present a vision of new social forms.⁵¹ In other words, for Liiceanu the present and the future are subsumed to the reproduction of past social forms. Despite the fact that he frames his conflict as one between the bourgeois and the communist past, even in Liiceanu's argument there transpires the conflict between the technical specialist and the political cadre. His articulation of the political activist as "*lichea*" – a derogatory term denoting a morally corrupt and despicable person – suggests a redeployment of the social conflict between the political cadre and the technical specialist as this conflict was articulated in the literature of the troubling decade, and, in particular, Buzura's novels.⁵² Similarly, Silviu Brucan – situated on the left of the political spectrum – considered the essence of the transition period to

⁵⁰ Cesereanu, 'Dezintoxicarea creierelor', p. 216.

⁵¹ Gabriel Liiceanu, *Apel către lichele*, 3rd edn (București: Editura Humanitas), pp. 116-19.

⁵² Gabriel Liiceanu, 'Meditație despre activist', in *Apel către lichele*, 3rd edn (București: Editura Humanitas, 2006), pp. 15-19.

be the transformation of “party hacks” into the “new rich”, in other words, from socialism to capitalism.⁵³ The corollary of this transformation was the symbolic demise of the workers, who – though hit by unemployment – did not disappear.⁵⁴ As history attests, it was ultimately the former communist elites that presided over the process of social transformation in the transition from communism to capitalism. The partial recycling of the communist political elite gave a measure of truth to the popular theory circulating during this period that “nothing has changed”. However, this continuity was superficial and tended to mask the fact that, as G. M. Tamás has observed, the transformations were “gigantic” with only a fraction of the communist elite becoming capitalists; the real winners being the multinational corporations.⁵⁵ For Tamás, the central conflict of the post-communist period was that between the national and comprador bourgeoisies, both emerging in the process of the structural realignment that typified the Neoliberal Project.

In terms of gender relationships, things took a more convoluted form. As discussed, Mihaela Mudure expressed the view that men and women retreated into traditional family values as a form of resistance against the communist regime.⁵⁶ Together with the perception of the egalitarian discourse promoted by the communist regime as a form of erasure of differences, this retreat made the emergence of a feminist discourse of emancipation after 1989 difficult. In Mudure's view it seems that, somewhat ironically, the communist regime did not manage to replace the “traditional brain” with the “extreme left ideological toxins” of the egalitarian feminist discourse. Yet as this thesis has argued, the traditionalist gender relationships were not eliminated by the communist regime; on the contrary they were central to the official discourse as expressed in the Socialist Realist literature, which was to continue in the literature of the troubling decade. Nevertheless, Mudure's view shows the continuity of the patriarchal discourse as a form of critique of social relationships, post 1989.

In his first post 1989 novel, *Recviem pentru nebuni și bestii* (Requiem for Fools and Beasts, 1999), Buzura captured these post-communist transformations and responded to them in a critical manner. In this novel, Buzura articulates the transition from communism to capitalism in terms of reproduction of social relationships rather than radical transformation. The changes were superficial, and the endemic social structures remained the same – dominated as ever by corrupt

⁵³ Brucan, *Social Change in Russia and Eastern Europe: From Party Hacks to Nouveaux Riches*, pp. 75-81.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 52-56.

⁵⁵ G. M. Tamás, ‘Counter-Revolution against a Counter-Revolution’, p. 290.

⁵⁶ Mudure, ‘A Zeugmata Space’, pp. 23-24.

individuals. Matei Popa, the central character of *Recviem*, is a typical Buzura protagonist, and an avatar of Mihai Bogdan from *Absenții*. The conflict between the technical specialist and the political cadre is adapted to the new post-communist social changes engendered by the process of economic privatisation. Matei Popa is a technical specialist turned private entrepreneur; however, he is more interested in moral and professional capital than in economic enrichment. An independent investigative journalist, Matei Popa has as his sole purpose in life the unmasking of the corruption underlying the privatisation process. He is confronted with a network of shadowy figures, characters belonging to a clandestine local “Mafia” network, the intention and scope of which is never completely revealed. These characters represent the privatised avatars of Dr Poenaru and the stranger from *Absenții* – the corrupt political cadre and Securitatea agent transformed into corrupt private entrepreneurs. Structurally, post-communist society remains divided and hierarchically organised along the lines of the social patterns set by the communist period. Yet the changes are quite profound in terms of both class and gender: as regards class conflict and economic structure, the novel presents a revealing insight into the atmosphere of compromised morality common to periods of social upheavals. The narrative does not focus on the cases of corruption that Matei Popa investigates, but rather on his psychological struggle to resist the pressures and threats exerted by the shadowy figures who continue to hound him, and preserve his moral integrity. These circumspect characters attempt to persuade Matei Popa to interrupt his investigations and wade in the murky waters of the market economy. They promise to either facilitate him in his economic enterprises, or, in the case of his refusal to cooperate, they threaten him with physical violence. These would-be, strong-arm, Mafia-style tactics echo the “carrot and stick” strategy of Dr Poenaru in *Absenții*. It can be argued that the pressure exercised on Matei Popa by this shadowy network illustrates the process of post-communist disciplining of the individual. The state disciplinary mechanism has been privatised and replaced by the market economy and the exercising of private violence to enforce the tenets of this new “free” economy. Together these forces ensure that individuals are integrated into the new power structures either by free will or coercion. Matei Popa, however, does not give in to these pressures and preserves his moral and professional integrity by continuing his investigations – even as he fears for his life. However, the unmasking of corruption does not help as regards putting a stop to it, and because the novel does not dwell on the social effect of corruption, Matei Popa’s struggle is ostensibly motivated by individual pride rather than by social consciousness. Moreover, his moral and professional integrity and autonomy is

gained through a miraculous material gift. Matei Popa receives a large sum of money from his expatriate brother, who lives in the USA. The brother made his fortune in dubious circumstances in Las Vegas casinos. This revelation brings to a full circle the meaning of the post-communist social world, by exposing the cash nexus that underlines all social forces. Moral integrity is, in the end, only one step removed from the corrupt world of material interests. In the market economy of private interests, Matei Popa is able to maintain his individual autonomy and moral integrity only because he does not have to earn a living by selling his labour power. By focusing on atypical case, – most people did not have the benefit of a financial gift from abroad – Buzura avoids having to explore the impact of material destitution on moral integrity, as suffered by the majority of the population in the process of economic privatisation. However, by connecting the anti-corruption struggle with Western capital, Buzura hints at the conflict between the comprador and national bourgeoisies underlining the Neoliberal Project of modernisation.⁵⁷

In *Recviem*, Buzura brings some significant changes to the articulation of gender relationships. In his novels from the communist period, men and women are not able to form stable relationships based on love because of the pervasive corruption and fragmentation of society. This view is also reproduced in *Recviem*, where Matei Popa's two relationships that are enacted during the communist period end in tragedy; however, things change after 1989. The novel ends with the love and marriage between Matei Popa and Anca Negru. This marriage represents a sense of the triumph of moral integrity against the generalised state of corruption, as it takes place against the violence exercised by the shadowy figures against both Matei Popa and Anca Negru, an example of which is shown when the country cottage where they were supposed to spend their weekend is burned down. The love between Matei and Anca is based more on intellectual and moral affinity than on physical passion. As such, it stands in contrast to the vision of love corrupted by material interest that surrounds them. Nevertheless, their relationship is presented as a rediscovery of traditional gender roles: Matei is a public figure, Anca being a private one. Matei is a man tormented by the burden of public responsibility; Anca is a caring woman who supports her man in his struggle regardless: her femininity is the balm that alleviates his moral and physical wounds. This gendering of roles is also reflected in their professions: she is a medical doctor while he is a journalist. As

⁵⁷ See the analysis of the conflicts of the transition period in Cornel Ban, *Dependență și dezvoltare. Economia politică a capitalismului românesc*, trans. by Ciprian Șiulea (Cluj: Editura Tact, 2014); Gareth Dale, 'Introduction', in *First the Transition, Then the Crash: Eastern Europe in the 2000s*, ed. by Gareth Dale (London Pluto Press, 2011), pp. 1-20; as well as G. M. Tamás, 'Counter-Revolution against a Counter-Revolution', p. 290.

professionals, Matei and Anca are the ideal subjectivities of the literature of the troubling decade, transposed to the new world of the Neoliberal Project. Paraphrasing Mihaela Mudure, it can be said that Matei and Anca form a family through solidarity and retreat into traditional values as a form of resistance against a corrupt world. With regard to class and gender relationships, there is no room for a discourse on social emancipation. The post-communist social critique, as exemplified in Buzura's novel, is based on moral individualism and traditionalism. The social problems described in the novel are presented as the moral failure of individuals – particularly of individual men who fail in their patriarchal duties.

Buzura's articulation of class and gender relationships, and their corollary subjectivities, presents continuity through redeployment rather than a radical break across the historical divide between the Communist and the Neoliberal Projects. The transfiguration of the political cadre, first into a corrupt bureaucrat and then an equally corrupt entrepreneur, testifies to the enduring value of the "parvenu" typology when dealing with the turbulence of the dislocating processes of modernisation in Romania. Moreover, the retreat into traditional gender roles testifies to the enduring power of the patriarchal discourse as a form of social critique across different political and economic historical changes while also testifying to the hegemony as regards the ideological horizon; a discourse that idealises the past and excludes any discourse of social emancipation.

Buzura's post 1989 novel deploys his well established tropes formulated during communism and adapts them to the new social changes. However, these tropes remain relevant both for the understanding of the past and of present historical changes and social conflicts. The post 1989 class and gender subjectivities have their roots in the social structures and antagonisms that evolved during communism. It is therefore possible to argue that the doubt cast over the continuing significance of the works produced during communism derives from an inability of critics to update their critical frameworks. This inability of renewing a critical framework, of asking different questions, is itself a reflection of the ethos of re-orientation towards a traditionalist framework of literary criticism after 1989. Rather than asking if the literature of the troubling decade lives up to criteria developed during communism, such as the content of historical facts, the presence of lizards, or a vaguely defined aesthetic autonomy, it is more important to ask how they are relevant today. In a time of significant historical changes in society, questions of social structure, gender relationships, and social antagonism have become newly relevant. Buzura's articulation of a vision of social anomie and atomisation, along with his vision of crisis of patriarchal gender structures, continue

to be relevant in the understanding of these changes. This is applicable also in a world comparative context. As long as anomie remains a central aspect of modern life, its articulation in literature remains relevant. However, Buzura's articulation of anomie and atomisation should not be evaluated in an abstract way by subordinating it to Western models. The work of comparative studies is obligated to highlight the differences in the various literary articulations of social anomie and atomisation while seeking to understand how these differences illuminate the specificity of the historical context of each work. This thesis has shown that while Buzura certainly belongs to a literary tradition that includes prominent authors, particularly those in the Existentialist movement, his work is firmly grounded in the Romanian social and political situation. While Western authors have their protagonist rebel against well established social norms, Buzura's protagonists are upholders of established traditional values in a world which is under the corrupting influence of historical changes and social conflicts. This difference has an effect also on his narrative style. His style is intensely subjective which gives an expressionist form to the representation of social reality. Yet the subjective perception is the same as the state of the world represented, giving a realist outlook to the narrative. In other words, Buzura's bleak vision of Romanian socialist and post-socialist social reality – his articulation of social anomie and atomisation – is both a subjective form of expression and a socially and politically situated response to wider modern historical changes and social conflicts.

CONCLUSIONS| Changes and Continuities Throughout Communism and Beyond

This thesis has explored the rearticulating of class and gender relationships and their correlative subjectivities in Romanian fiction during communism. The term “rearticulating” denotes two aspects: first, it refers to the rearticulation of the understanding of socialist subjectivities proposed by this thesis; second, it describes the process of historical rearticulating of subjectivities in Romanian fiction throughout the communist period. The two aspects are connected, the second deriving from the first. This thesis has questioned the framework of the individual versus the party/state that has dominated the understanding of the communist regimes after 1989. This framework rests on the reductive assumption of a clear separation between the subjectivity of the individual and the party and state structures. It places the idea of an authentic individual subjectivity in opposition to the ideological and hence inauthentic subjectivities of the official discourse: the “New Man” and the “faceless masses”. In the field of literature it distinguished between true literature and ideological propaganda, and critical and opportunistic texts. Employing Ernesto Laclau’s and Chantal Mouffe’s theory of discourse analysis, this thesis has proposed a framework that opens up the understanding of socialist subjectivities beyond the reductive binary terms of the individual versus the party/state framework, by situating the individual in the complex network of social relationships through which subjectivity is articulated. Focusing on the articulation of class and gender relationships, this thesis revealed that the socialist subjectivities have developed at the intersection of different and conflicting articulations. Moreover, it was argued that socialist subjectivities were not stable or whole entities, but incomplete discursive formations characterised by a constant rearticulating process. Using the framework of successive projects of modernisation proposed by Alan Dingsdale, this thesis has questioned the view of the Communist Project as a radical break, and, instead, has argued that the Communist Project in Romanian is best understood in terms of both changes and continuities with regard to the National Project that it replaced after the Second World War, and to the Neoliberal Project that followed it after 1989.

Laclau’s and Mouffe’s concepts of hegemony and social antagonism proved useful in understanding the dynamics of the articulations of socialist subjectivities during the Communist project. Two aspects of Laclau’s and Mouffe’s understanding of hegemony are valuable in accounting for both the limits and possibilities

developed under the historically fluctuating levels of restrictions imposed by the communist regime. First, the discursive hegemony imposed by the communist regime never managed to close off the field of articulations of subjectivity and instead remained a project characterised by both a drive towards totalization and the endless production and reproduction of differences that made such a closure impossible. Second, the discursive hegemony imposed by the communist regime was not elimination of differences, but rather a discriminating articulation of differences; some articulations were privileged at the expense of others. In terms of class this meant the replacement of the bourgeois self-interested individual by the socialist categories of worker, technical specialist and political cadre. In terms of gender, while the communist regime promoted equality, it also reproduced the traditional patriarchal relationships between men and women. Similarly, Laclau's and Mouffe's concept of social antagonism denoting the competition between different articulations of social relationship is useful because it provides a theoretical tool for the understanding of the changes and continuities registered in the articulation of socialist social relationships and subjectivities. These two concepts shift the focus of attention from how the regime oppressed individuals to what kind of subjectivities were articulated within the ideological limits imposed by the regime, and how they were articulated. Such a shift is not a dismissal of the repressive nature of the communist regime, but rather it seeks to understand the way it changed the social reality. It helps probe deeper and in a less reductive manner into the processes of socialist socialisation. This approach is particularly well suited to trace the legacies of the communist regime after the sudden collapse of its party and state structures. The socialist subjectivities, and especially the social antagonism, did not disappear with the collapse of the party/state structures, and had a determining influence on the evolution of the Neoliberal Project after 1989.

Combined, Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of discourse analysis and Dingsdale's theory of modernising projects, have helped articulate an approach to literature that moves beyond the impasses of the reading modalities developed during communism. This new approach helps make relevant again the works produced during the Communist Project by a change in the questions through which they are interrogated. As the concluding section of the last chapter argued, the current questions framing the reading of Augustin Buzura's work, and in general the literature of the troubling decade, reproduce the reception framework developed during the communist regime. Regarding these works as sources of historical hard facts, or in terms of the insertion of "lizards", is either no longer relevant, or difficult to appreciate in the post-communist era. However, this does not mean that these

texts have become contemporarily irrelevant. Their structures and visions remain valuable sources that allow a better understanding the communist past as well as its legacies in the present.

The same situation is applicable to the Socialist Realist works. The distinction between ideological texts and “true art” reproduces in an inverted way the method of the communist regime, and transfigures into a reductive ideological mechanism for the creation of a highly selective canon of works, handpicked from a heterogeneous field. In contrast, following Franco Moretti, this thesis has looked at different literary articulations of socialist subjectivities as competing discursive answers to historical changes and social conflicts. It is true the Socialist Realist hegemony imposed a rather limited ideological vision of social reality. Even so, however, different articulations were generated, as illustrated by the contrasts highlighted by this thesis between the works of Mihail Sadoveanu, Marin Preda, Petru Dumitriu, and the early work of Augustin Buzura. These differences are significant for two reasons. First, because they show that Socialist Realism was not a complete project, but one in a constant state of change and expansion in response to historical changes. Second, these differences highlight the underlying antagonism around which socialist social relationships were articulated. The same diversity of articulations within a limited horizon was noted in the case of the literature of the troubling decade. Augustin Buzura and Dinu Săraru are the polar opposites of a continuum of articulations responding to the same set of historical changes and social conflicts. Moreover, as the analysis of Buzura’s post 1898 novel has demonstrated, the articulations of social antagonism in the literature of the troubling decade have direct relevance for the understanding of changes and continuities after the collapse of the communist regime.

The employ of Laclau’s and Mouffe’s theory of discourse analysis makes the understanding of the evolution of literary articulations of subjectivity possible in a way that eliminates the problematic view of deviation and the distinction between “true art” and “ideological lies”. This thesis’ analysis of the evolution of literary forms from *Ciocolii vechi și noi* to Augustin Buzura’s novels shows that each age, even each work, proposed its own understanding of literature and literary values, just as they propose different articulations of subjectivity. The distinction between “true art” and “ideological propaganda” is determined by what is inscribed by each hegemonic project as “social reality”. However, what emerges out of the contestation of hegemony between various articulations is the articulation of social relations as perceived in a certain historical moment to be the “social reality”. The National Project imposed the bourgeois social order as the social reality of the moment. The

Communist Project imposed a new socialist social order as social reality and dismissed the bourgeois ideology as retrograde. After 1989, the Neoliberal Project saw the restoration of a bourgeois social order as social reality and rejected the communist vision as a toxic ideology that contaminated the collective brains of the population. Whether this new social order possessed similarities to the one developed in the inter-war period remains to be determined by scholars. What has been proven historically, however, is that the changes that followed after 1989 were deeply influenced by the transformations brought about by the communist regime. Therefore, the exploration of these social changes is useful to understand the communist period as well as its aftermath.

The discourse analysis theory proposed by Laclau and Mouffe is instrumental not only in eliminating what can arguably be viewed as false oppositions, including individual versus party/state, works of art and ideological propaganda, but also for an assessment of the way in which writers engaged with the official discourses. The question of whether writers engaged with the discursive hegemonic horizon imposed by the communist regime out of opportunism or because of true belief, may have relevance for the judgement of their personal character, but has little relevance for the meaning of their literary articulations. The literary text has a discursive reality beyond the moral stance of the author. More importantly is the fact that these same writers took distinctive trajectories within the Socialist Realist ideological horizon, ensuring their individual voices and visions were not diminished. The writers analysed in this thesis, Sadoveanu, Marin Preda, and Petru Dumitriu, and even the early works of Buzura, all worked within the Socialist Realist ideological parameters. They all engaged and redeployed tropes from one another and the past, and through this ostensibly osmotic literary and cultural process they fashioned distinct visions. While imposing clear ideological limits on the articulation of social relationships, the Socialist Realist discursive horizon was – as Laclau and Mouffe describe hegemony – both a process of homogenisation and of differentiation. The same process of homogenisation and differentiation is also present in the case of the literature of the troubling decade. Writers responded in different ways to the political and ideological changes that occurred in the 1960s – Ceaușescu's criticism of the "errors" committed in the first decade of socialist construction, and the growing importance of national ideology being two examples. This was illustrated by Augustin Buzura and Dinu Săraru, two authors who represent the opposite ends of the literary spectrum, but who nonetheless developed within the same discursive hegemony. To dismiss these

differences is to create a false image of the conflicts and antagonism that developed during communism and had greatly influenced post-communist developments.

Another important change proposed by this thesis regards the place of the communist regime, and the literature produced during its rule, within the wider historical framework. Romanian literary criticism has regarded the communist regime as the interruption of the process of synchronisation with Western literary values, which Romanian literature, and more widely, society as a whole had been engaged in since the mid nineteenth century. Such a radical framework captures certain important changes but it does not necessarily account for continuities. This thesis has employed the framework proposed by Alan Dingsdale that sees historical changes as a succession of modernisation projects. Each project had at its core a contradiction: it was a radical attempt to eradicate the past social structures, and at the same time, imagined itself in the mould of that past. In this was Dingsdale's framework is able to capture both changes and continuities. The example of Mihail Sadoveanu, who's career straddles the divide between the National and Communist Projects, is particularly illuminating. The usual reading of Sadoveanu takes the view that, before the Second World War, he produced what are widely considered to be great literary works – *Baltagul* being generally regarded as one of the canonical works of the period – while his post-war work is dismissed as ideological propaganda. Reading Sadoveanu in this way seems to illustrate the radical break and the interruption brought by the communist regime. However, the comparative reading of works before and after the war conducted in this thesis reveals both changes and continuities. While Sadoveanu adopted the Socialist Realist method, and thus changed in a significant way his vision of social relationships, of equal significance is the way he reproduced and built upon the articulation of subjectivities he produced before the war. Because Sadoveanu's work was central to the Socialist Realist literary canon, these continuities cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. Moreover, they complicate the view of the communist regime imposing a closed ideological field. Sadoveanu's employment of Socialist Realism was a process of adopting imported formulas to local realities and in this process articulating hybrid subjectivities, rearticulating rather than simply erasing the past. The reading of Sadoveanu as conducted in this thesis opens up the possibility for more research in terms of changes and continuities between the National and Communist projects of modernisation. Moreover, this kind of analysis could be extended to any other writer – such as the novelists Camil Petrescu and George Călinescu, and the poet Tudor Arghezi – whose career bridged the change of political regimes. George Călinescu's work would be of particular interest for future analysis because it extends the

rearticulating of socialist subjectivities into the urban sphere, and articulated a specific vision of the intellectual's role and place in the socialist social reality.

This thesis has argued that the communist transformation of society cannot be understood simply as the state's violent repression of the individual. Individuals are always situated in a social context. During communism, individuals' subjectivity was discursively constituted at the intersection of many social relationships upon which the communist regime acted and transformed. In order to understand the extent of the communist social transformation, the socialist social structures, as well as the conflicts within these new socialist formations, must be analysed and unpacked. This thesis has analysed class and gender relationships, which were central to the communist social transformation and has explored their different degrees of change and continuity.

The Communist Project's most radical transformation was in terms of class: the elimination of class structures based on private property and their corollary subjectivity the bourgeois individual. However, this change did not eliminate class inequalities and conflicts. Moreover, as testified by the recurrent figure of the parvenu in the literature of the communist period, the self-interested individual – albeit in a different form than its bourgeois avatar – continued to be part of the new socialist social order. This thesis has used the class analysis formulated by George Konrad and Ivan Szelenyi. Their distinction between three social classes – worker, technical specialist and political activist – captures both the continued division of labour and the complexity of social antagonism in the socialist society. Equally significant is Szelenyi's later revision, in which he claimed that while the intellectuals – the technical specialists and the political activists – were the dominant social class, there was no proper ruling class in socialist societies. This was because political cadre claimed political legitimacy on behalf of workers, while at the same time workers were subordinated to both technical specialists and political cadre. This revision explains both the lack of legitimacy of the dominant intellectual social strata, and the symbolic capital of the worker. In this way, this theory places at the core of socialist social relationships the contradiction between the drive for social emancipation of the worker and the concomitant reproduction of hierarchical structures of power subordinating the worker. The complexity of social differentiation that created the socialist social hierarchies, together with class antagonism, generated various responses in literature. Sadoveanu's vision in *Mitrea Cocor*, can be seen to emulate the Stalinist model, as outlined by Andrei Zhdanov. Zhdanov presented a vision of socialist reality divided between the working people rallied around the party and its leader, on the one hand, and the remnants of bourgeois

mentalities, on the other. In Sadoveanu, the potential social antagonism between the three socialist classes is resolved by unifying the subjectivities of the worker, the technical specialist and the political activist in the figure of the leader. At the same time, the novel presents the hierarchy of personal relationships between individuals and the communist leader: peasants/workers, women, children, and the rejected bourgeois subjectivities are all arranged of in various degrees of closeness proximal to the character of the leader. This vision clearly articulates the socialist process of transformation of social classes and the production of new social differences and inequalities, rather than a process of social erasure of differences and the creation of “faceless masses”. Yet, Sadoveanu inserts tension between the present and the future in the form of the difference between the present reality and the communist leader’s visions of the communist future. In this way, rather than creating a vision of socialist society as static totality, Sadoveanu leaves his articulation of the new socialist social order open to transformation and conflict. Moreover, Sadoveanu’s view of the communist social transformation was not the only one. Marin Preda and Petru Dumitriu, while working within the Socialist Realist horizon, produced distinct and different articulations. In *Moromeții*, Marin Preda engaged with and transformed Sadoveanu’s vision of the interwar period articulated in *Mitrea Cocor*, producing a distinct vision of a tragic destiny. In *Drum fără pulbere*, Dumitriu gave shape to the construction of socialism that was only hinted at by Sadoveanu. At the same time, by distributing the subjectivities of the worker, technical specialist and political activist among different characters, he unwittingly highlighted the potential conflicts between them – especially that between the technical specialist and the political activist. In his early short stories, Buzura, engaged with the same problem from the perspective of generational change; that of the emergence into the social scene of the first generation of people formed in the socialist system. He highlighted the growing conflict between the young technical specialist and the old political activist of working class origins. He also tackled the articulation of new gender relationships beyond the patriarchal structures. Regardless, such instances remained surprisingly rare in a political regime that in its official discourse propagated gender equality and women’s emancipation. However, Buzura’s story captured both the difficulty of forging a new female subjectivity solely on the basis of women’s integration in the work place without developing a new intimate relationship between genders. Buzura’s early stories were also the place where he developed his narrative structures and themes, including the individual’s quest for self-affirmation, and of the private life outside the realm of work, and the relationship between the two. These few examples present the hegemony of Socialist Realism as a limited horizon while

at the same time representing a space for articulating different variations between socialist social classes. Moreover, it was not a finite space but one that with every new articulation reproduced both itself and its conflicts, and was expanding.

The abandonment of Socialist Realism in the 1960s meant a certain ideological liberalisation. But the real significance lies in the fact that it opened the possibility of rearticulating the responses to the problem and conflicts of the socialist social reality. This is reflected in the literature of the troubling decade, which proposed different responses to the class conflicts between the worker, the technical specialist and the political activist. The most significant aspect is the full emergence of the conflict between the technical specialist and the political activist, together with the subordination of the worker to this struggle. Buzura's vision is arguably the most consistent in articulating this struggle. Throughout his work he employed a moral framework in which the technical specialist represents the person of integrity and the political activist the corrupt individual. The workers become less central to the plot, and their portrayal is either positive or negative depending on whose side they happen to be, the technical specialist or the political activist. The central source of conflict in the novel is the technical specialist's desire for the emancipation of professional values from the distorting effect of political ideology. This development has great importance because it shows the extent to which the literature of the troubling decade was rooted in the socialist problematic, and at the same time the break from the ideological drive for emancipation in terms of social equality. Buzura's vision presents the drive for emancipation as the defence of a certain social hierarchy based on professional values against a false social hierarchy based on political ideology. This change is significant not only in ideological terms but also in literary terms. While Buzura's vision of the individual's quest for self-affirmation through the upholding of moral and professional principles is akin to that formulated in a range of Western works, particularly Existentialism, there is a significant difference. In Western existentialist works the individual rebels against the established bourgeois social values and customs. In contrast, in Buzura's works, and more generally in the literature of the troubling decade, the individual rebels against a corrupting influence and defends well-established values.

Buzura's vision forms one extreme of the spectrum of responses to historical changes and social conflicts that developed under the umbrella term of the literature of the troubling decade. Dinu Săraru is situated at the other extreme. He attempts to rewrite the figure of the political activist in terms of a critique of the process of collectivisation that took place in the early 1950s. Yet, while he preserves the figure of the political activist of peasant origins in a dominant position, his work also

registers a major shift in the articulation of class conflict and ideological orientation. The political activist becomes the mediator of conflicts between the technical specialist and the bureaucrat, each embodying different principles and attitudes. More significantly, the worker registers a marginalisation and is replaced by the figure of the peasant as the upholder of traditional values. The peasant and traditional values are presented as positive and in contrast to the degeneracy of urban values embodied by the technical specialist and the bureaucrat. Moreover, Săraru abandoned completely the discourse of social emancipation and naturalised social hierarchies based on political ideology and traditional patriarchal values. This is significant because it shows that while Buzura and Săraru are at the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum as regards their articulation of the class struggle between the technical specialist and the political activist, they both participated in the ideological shift away from the principles of social emancipation and equality, and advocated the defence of social hierarchies. In this way the literature of the troubling decade can be seen as a major ideological shift that took place within the cultural field administered by the Communist Party; a shift that articulated a different set of values than the official rhetoric that continued to propagate ideas of equality and emancipation. Given that both Socialist Realism and the literature of the troubling decade were responses to the complex and dynamic socialist social antagonism, the analysis of class structures and struggles is of paramount importance to the understanding of the various discourses that took shape during communism.

The analysis of class structures and social conflicts highlights several other important aspects of the Communist Project. It reveals the ambiguous situation of the worker and of manual work within the socialist symbolic sphere. The worker was both a privileged category and at the same time was always subordinated to the intellectual – the technical specialist, the political activist or both. Similarly, manual labour was both a symbolically privileged category and at the same time, as this thesis has shown in *Mitrea Cocor* and also in Buzura, was also a form of punishment; a form of physical destruction and subjective disarticulation. To a degree this concords with the view held by Lilya Kaganovsky that the making of the Soviet New Man was also an unmaking. However, it goes further in that it shows that the division between manual and intellectual labour was not abolished, but formed the basis of the socialist social hierarchies. From the perspective of the shift from the rhetoric of social emancipation and equality to a defence of various hierarchies based on intellectual values that took place in the transition from socialist Realism to the literature of the troubling decade, the problematic of the

worker and of the division of labour takes on a central importance for the understanding of social conflict and historical changes during communism. It opens the possibility for new research in the way work functioned as form of socialisation on the threshold between emancipation and subordination.

The analysis of class relationships has relevance also for the understanding of wider trends in change and continuity between the National, Communist and Neoliberal Projects of modernisation. One recurrent figure identified by this thesis is that of the parvenu. The parvenu is an articulation at the intersection of literature and social relationship. It is a device that aims to contain certain social dynamics and conflicts by casting them in a negative light. It developed during the National project as a response to the social dislocation produced by the emergence of the bourgeois self-interested individual. It was employed by the Socialist Realist literature as the antagonist of the communist protagonist. Here a paradox is encountered in that both the bourgeois parvenu and the communist protagonist are dislocating forces. Symbolically this means that the new social reality is defined as a struggle between two transforming forces, rather than between stability and transformation. With the literature of the troubling decade, the figure of the parvenu is reassigned to the political activist. Political ideology is the veil under and through which the political activist pursues his or her self-interest. With the advent of the Neoliberal Project, the figure of the parvenu remains relevant for the containment of the new dislocating forces generated by the transition to capitalism and economic privatisation. Yet as Buzura shows in the novel, *Recviem pentru nebuni și bestii*, the rearticulation of subjectivities after communism is much indebted to the socialist subjectivities, prominent being the conflict between the men of integrity represented by the technical specialist turned entrepreneur, and the corrupt political activist turned parvenu. The redeployment of the figure of the parvenu as a form of containment during communism signals the continued presence of the self-interested individual. This shows that the Communist Project of social transformation did not manage to engender social equality. The self-interested individual as parvenu testifies to the solidity of the socialist hierarchical social structures which he or she sought to climb.

Changes and continuities were also registered in the articulation of gender relationships. However, here the balance is tipped on the side of continuity. The communist regime sought to dissolve the patriarchal structures that dominated the articulation of gender relationships and feminine and masculine subjectivities during the National Project. Nevertheless, the whole period remained under the patriarchal hegemony. In fact, the discourse of gender equality and women's emancipation,

while officially promoted, made few inroads in the fiction of the time. From the its beginning – as the example of *Mitrea Cocor* convincingly demonstrates – the Socialist Realist literature redeployed the patriarchal strategies articulated during the National Project as a form of legitimising the Communist Project. Sadoveanu artfully constructed the advent of communism as the answer to the crisis of masculinity that had become a dominant theme in the literature of the interwar period. The communist protagonist turns out to be the longed for patriarchal father figure that re-established order in both the privacy of the family and the public sphere. In the private sphere this figure controls and subordinates women; in the public sphere he replaces the bourgeois as the dominant male figure and subordinates the peasants, reducing them to childlike figures that need to be guided and educated. The articulation of the communist protagonist as father/master functions as an ideological quilting point that ensures the stability of the socialist hierarchies of power/knowledge and the direction of the Communist Project. It is a way of containing the complex conflicts that the Communist Project of social transformation generated, both in terms of class, the conflict between the worker, the technical specialist and the political leader, and also the gender antagonism between the discourse of women's emancipation and the patriarchal subordination of women.

One issue related to the articulation of gender relationships is that of the private and public spheres. It is evident that the communist regime did not manage to restructure this dual structure inherited from the National Project, but redeployed it as a power structure. On the one hand, the communist regime gendered the two spheres of life – the private sphere becoming the place of femininity while the public sphere became that of masculinity. At the same time, the public and private spheres were intersected with the class structures. Discussion and decision making were restricted as a privilege of the political leadership, and enclosed into a private sphere that was inaccessible to the workers. The public sphere was reduced to a space where the leadership's decisions were implemented without question. This complex division of the social space is usually interpreted as a discrepancy between the official ideological propaganda displayed in the public sphere and reality as experienced in private life. However, such an interpretation is misleading: the separation between the private and public was an integral part of the social restructuring implemented in the Communist Project.

However, despite the prevalence of hierarchical social structures in both class and gender in Socialist Realism, the importance of the discourse of emancipation cannot be altogether excluded and reduced to mere empty

propaganda. As the story 'Capul bunei speranțe' shows, the articulation of femininity in terms of emancipation and self-affirmation by breaking out of the patriarchal gender mould was an important development – even if it remained marginal. The articulation of a new woman was a significant development because it confronted directly the patriarchal structures. This is in marked contrast to the interwar period when the powerful articulations of femininity were emergency responses to a perceived crisis of masculinity. In Buzura's story, through work and education, the female protagonist finds a way of being outside the confines of home and marriage.

With the emergence of the literature of the troubling decade there is a reinforcement of the traditional gender relationships. The figure of the passionate and ambitious career woman becomes a negative character. Women are integrated into the workforce and education system, but this is a secondary aspect of their life. Their self-affirmation and fulfilment is in the private sphere of feelings. Moreover, the discourse of women's emancipation and gender equality is abandoned. This is evident even in the works of writers who declared their support for socialism, such as Dinu Săraru who articulated a return to strict patriarchal values modelled on the peasant. As with the case of class, this thesis has questioned the understanding of the communist transformation of gender relationships in terms of the imposition of the discourse of equality that erased differences. The hegemonic discourse on gender was structured around the conflict between the discourse of emancipation and the reproduction of traditional patriarchal structures; moreover, these intersected with the class structures and generated complex hierarchies and conflicts. In fact, the gender and class relationships – while distinct discursive articulations – were intrinsically intersected.

This thesis has highlighted the continuing relevance of the class and gender structures and social conflicts engendered by the Communist Project after 1989. Rather than seeing the transition from the Communist Project to the Neoliberal Project as a return to an idealised past, or as a confrontation between an ideologically intoxicated "communist brain" and a non ideological "normal brain", this thesis has argued that the process of transition from communism to capitalism was a redeployment of the conflict between the technical specialist and the political cadre. In contrast, the worker lost all symbolic relevance and disappeared from the scene. In terms of gender relations, Buzura's post 1989 novel, *Recviem pentru nebuni si bestii*, seems to lend validity to the view that the post-communist articulation of gender relationships saw a retreat into traditional family values, and opposed the discourse of gender equality. However, as this thesis has shown, the redeployment in moments of social crisis of the patriarchal discourse as a source of

social critique – the rendering of social conflicts into a crisis of patriarchal masculinity – is a well established trend throughout Romanian modern social and cultural history. In this view, it could be accorded that the communist regime did not manage to replace the “traditional brain” with the “extreme left ideological toxins” of the egalitarian discourse. As this thesis has shown, this situation simultaneously rendered the individual’s retreat into traditional family values as both a form of resistance against the egalitarian discourse, and a form of acquiescence with the regime’s traditional gender discourse. As this thesis has shown, the egalitarian discourse of social emancipation never gained ground in the fictional articulation of class and gender relationships during communism. This renders paradoxical the presentation after 1989 of the anti-egalitarian discourse as a form of resistance against communism. The conflict between the drive for social emancipation and the reproduction of social hierarchies of power was an internal and constitutive antagonism of the communist regime.

This thesis has departed from the established framework dominating Romanian literary criticism – that of the synchronisation with Western literary values – taking the view that a parallel comparison of the similarities and differences on thematic and ideological frameworks would prove more illuminating than subordinating Romanian works to Western models. The employ of this comparative approach is not intended to generate a self-celebratory rhetoric of Romanian achievements, but rather endeavours to understand the evolution of literature in a global, historical and socio-political framework, accounting for both transnational trends and for local differences. Thus, this thesis takes the contextual perspective that different literary trends respond to modern and postmodern challenges in different locations, consequently presenting a more pertinent question than any postulation exclusively dealing with whether any peripheral literature has come into synchronisation with Western models. This thesis has not developed to its fullest expression this approach; however, as the comparison of Buzura’s work with works of western Existentialism has shown it can represent a fruitful and less reductive approach: it is through the understanding of differences that the measure of specificity and the significance of the literary works is gained. However, in order to understand the function of the appropriation of foreign structures and tropes and their local deployment, it is important to situate them in relation to the local historical changes and social conflicts. The global spread of literary forms does not necessarily mean a harmonious synchronisation, but can generate differentiation and the potential for antagonism, and the competition for hegemony between different articulations of subjectivities.

In cases of class and gender, what was an internal social conflict within the communist regime was reformulated during the Neoliberal Project as resistance against the regime, privileging one side: the technical specialist and patriarchal gender relationships triumphed over the political cadre and the emancipation of women. It was on the basis of these two structures and conflicts that the new bourgeois subject of post-communism was imagined. As was the case with the National and Communist projects, the new and traumatic changes were articulated in terms of a return to “normality” and to tradition. Again, as with the case of the Communist project, the Neoliberal project of transformation was marked by continuity as much as by change and complex redeployment, rather than a radical break with the past. As with the case of social conflict between the technical specialist and the political cadre, gender conflicts internal to the regime were being redeployed as forms of anti-communist resistance against the regime. This situation signifies that beneath the anti-communist rhetorical demand for change there was a deep anxiety for the dissolution of the social hierarchies and subjectivities engendered during the communist regime. In this vein, the relevance of the transformations in the articulation of class and gender subjectivities charted in this thesis can best be understood in terms of the parallels drawn between the ideological dynamics of the communist period and the similarly dynamic deployments and articulations found in the literature common to the same period. Thus, this thesis contributes to the scholarship of the evolution of the articulation of socialist subjectivities during the Communist Project in Romania by taking the view of literature as an engaged participation in the discursive articulation of social relationships, rather than merely an ideological distortion of social reality. Moreover, by doing so, this thesis extends the analysis of the communist deployments – as examined through the prism of the literary works produced during this turbulent chapter of European history – to a greater understanding of the post-communist redeployments as regards gender, class and social conflicts.

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