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The Literature Published at Balta-Tiraspol (1932–May 1937): A Forgotten Ideological Current

Abstract

Between 1932–1937, books in Romanian language and Latin script were printed in Tiraspol and Balta, in the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova /the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSRM). New literature emerged, mostly produced by radically left-wing émigré Romanian intellectuals, and by a young generation of writers from the villages with Moldovan population. Previously, during the tsarist period, there were no publications in Romanian or institutions operating in this language. In our opinion, the literature of the ASSRM belongs to no one. Most authors were tried and murdered during the cruel purges of 1937–1938 (S. Lehttîr, D. Milev, L. Madan, P. Chior, N. Cabac and many others whose actual names are unknown). Some of the most fortunate were able to flee, others survived either because they were tolerated by the regime or for other unknown reasons (I. Canna, I.D. Ciobanu, L. Cornfeld, V. Galit, M. Oprea).

Literary activity was centered around the journal “Octeabriu” which became “Octombrie” (“October”) in 1932. The books issued were edited by employees of the State Publishing House of

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Moldova, which had two printing houses in Balta and Tiraspol (the latter gained most importance after 1936).

Keywords

Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova (ASSRM),
Romanian language, ideology, literature, social aspects

Introduction

The situation of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova (ASSRM) – a state entity created in October 1924 at Kharkov – has often been addressed through the lens of geopolitics and international relations and from a post-communist perspective. The use of dichotomous patterns in investigating its development has lost sight of the local dimension, and thus of essential elements in reconstructing the past. Without aiming to formulate any definitive conclusions, the present study focuses on the cultural-literary dimension of life in this republic (nominally autonomous only).

Among the works published so far – be they original forays into the exegetical terrain, or writings on the cultural atmosphere of the period – it is worth mentioning those authored by Elena Negru (1998) and Petru Negură (2014), providing important factual data. The former focuses on the ethnocultural policy of the times, while the latter is centered on the state of affairs in the MSSR, subsequently reflected in the evolution of literature in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR) in the post-war period. At that time, it appears that between the authors from the left bank of the Dniester and those from Bessarabia there was a somehow antagonistic relationship.

A few months before the creation of the autonomous republic, the Bolshevik newspaper “Plugarul Roș” (“The Red Ploughman”) was issued at Odessa in Romanian and simplified Cyrillic script. Later it became the main Romanian-language bi-weekly publication of Balta, Birzula (also known as Bârză) and Tiraspol (the three capitals

of the republic, in their successive order). Towards the end of the 1920s, the supplement “Moldova Literară” (“Literary Moldova”) also appeared under Dumitru Milev, its first editor-in-chief.

In the autumn of 1931, the newspaper “Red Ploughman” was renamed “Moldova Socialistă” (“Socialist Moldova”), and the literary supplement became the journal “Octeabriu”, with the subtitle “hudojestvenno-publitsysticeski jurnal” (artistic-publicistis journal). With the shift to Latin script (in 1932), the name was changed to the correct form “Octombrie” (Romanian for “October”). From May 1938, with the return to the simplified Cyrillic script, it was again renamed “Octeabri”, a loanword from the Russian language. After the Second World War, the title “Octombrie” was used again in Chişinău.

In late 1931, in the ASSRM, reflecting the developments across the entire Union, a defamation campaign was launched against several writers, including Mihail Andriescu, Leonid Cornfeld (Corneanu), and Samuil Lehtîr. The campaign also included public self-criticism on the part of those targeted, which was published in the pages of “Octeabriu” journal. Although elsewhere in the Union, certain changes had occurred much earlier, in the ASSRM they took place later. In 1932, the third issue of this journal published critical and self-critical statements on the writers mentioned above. They were aimed at the so-called “bourgeois” influence and, indirectly, that political deviation from the central line of thought of the communist party. A special case was issue 5–6 of the literary journal “Octeabriu”, the last pages of which contained texts printed in Latin script. Andriescu and Cornfeld’s extensive criticism was placed in a section in the first part, which featured Cyrillic script. The literature had to be purged, cleansed of “rubbish” and all that was “rotten”. The author of the critical note proposed the removal of all Andriescu’s books, without any concessions, since they would have “poisoned” the readership (Corcinschi, 1932, pp. 177–178). We deem it important to mention this campaign because, in its early phase (1937), it resulted in purges according to the methods of 1931–1932 (see Appendix 2).

We shall hereby address the following aspects: the language used in the ASSRM, the thematic niche covered by its literature, the ideological prose and the reprisals in the ASSRM that were given the green light in May 1937 (at the meeting of the Tiraspol Party Committee).

The appendices attached to the present study, which contain excerpts from texts published in the Romanian language in Balta and/or Tiraspol before 1932, between 1932–1938, respectively after May 1938, indicate in square brackets the words that were intelligible only to the times' readers. The texts were printed in one of the two cities mentioned, each possessing its own printing house, but usually both cities were indicated alongside the publisher. The illustrative fragments from the period before and after the use of Latin script, have been transcribed in Latin letters according to the current rules of transliteration from the Cyrillic (Russian) script¹.

Since linguistic and literary research on this topic is almost non-existent, the present study relies mostly on primary sources, i.e. on the actual publications issued at Balta, Tiraspol and in the twofold Balta-Tiraspol format, during the years of existence of the ASSRM, especially during the period when the Romanian language was used (1932–1938).

The language used in the official and local publications in ASSRM

The language employed in ASSRM was Romanian. However, even since the early years, it had an obvious local "flavour". At least two factors may account for this: on the one hand, the need to make the written texts accessible to the Romanian-speaking population

¹ For instance, "i" for "ы" inside the words, "io" for "ё", "ț" for "и", "k" for "к", "ce" for "че", "cea" for "ча", etc. *Translator's note:* Much (virtually all) of the "local flavour," as the author so aptly puts it, has inevitably been lost in translation. Its distinctive character is partly acquired via linguistic contamination (direct imports from Russian language or spelling differences intended to render the local pronunciation influenced by Russian – Romanian is a phonetic language, so the pronunciation of words would depend on the spelling; also, it is due to a very peculiar use of the language, and to the occurrence of local (regional) terms, hardly intelligible to today's Romanian readership. Archaisms are not predominant, thus recourse to old English equivalents would do little to render the text's character. Rather, the texts quoted by the author could be described as a peculiar idiom, significantly different from contemporary standard Romanian and even hardly comprehensible. Since the English translation cannot possibly do justice to the author's intentions, the translator has included the original text of the excerpts included as appendices, for the benefit of the speakers of Romanian language.

on the left bank of the Dniester, and on the other, the high fluctuation of rules, making it difficult to develop a single framework or model to follow. We believe that the widespread introduction of the literary Romanian language was not possible on the territory of the ASSRM, even if it had been desired. In this case, the implementation of the local version can also be seen as the first stage of the phenomenon of 1932–1937/38. In 1926 the lexicographic work *Slovar ruso-moldovenesc* [*Russian-Moldovan Lexicon*] was published; its author was Gavril Buciușcanu, with Pavel Chior(u) and Dumitru Milev as editors. It does not provide any evidence of attempts to create a new language. Some of the existing differences can be attributed to the fact that the script was Cyrillic, in the simplified version imposed by the Bolsheviks. Certain disagreements and controversies over the language arose locally in the early 1930s. It is generally accepted that there were three currents of opinion on the matter. However, Buciușcanu's dictionary did not remain a reference work for long; it was superseded by the works of Pavel Chior, which were reprinted in several editions. These dictionaries – either by the choice of Chior or through additions and alterations by the editors of the main publishing house in the republic – contained calques or loan translations of Russian terms, which were also found in the version of the language used by the Bolsheviks.

As for the literary language (of the scarce literature which was published between the late 1920s, and 1932), it oscillated between two versions: a more readable one, consisting of a local version of the Romanian language, and another including obvious interventions. The latter – which promotes the spelling based on the criterion of pronunciation in accordance with the local speech (“**și**”, “**șini**”, “**li**”, “**parti**”, “**mari**” instead of “ce”, “cine”, “le” “parte” “mare”; “**și**” instead of “și”, “**cî**” instead of “că”, etc.) – also includes contrived words or artificial constructions. These include “**sfatnic**” for “Soviet”, “**soiuz**” for “union”, “**privatnic**” instead of “privat” (private), “**obștime**” (“obște” or “de obște” would have sounded more appropriate) instead of “society”, “**partii**” instead of “partid” (party), etc. (see appendices 1 and 2). Most likely, there were divergences even on the basic level of the language, which is also reflected in P. Chioru's 1929 work, in which the author claimed that not all five Moldovan idioms could be

unified (1929, pp. 4–5). It is possible that this work was a guideline for writing and spelling rules until the introduction of the Latin script.

This language was difficult to follow in written form. It is even more complicated to assess today the extent to which the Romanian-speaking inhabitants of the ASSRM were able to recognize themselves in this language for communication. On the other hand, after several years of writing in this language, when in 1931 the communists' struggle with a kind of "democratic nationalism" and deviations from the party line was transposed to the small Moldovan ASSR, the language had taken a completely contrived form, and not infrequently was even made up. To get a sense of how the campaign of vilification of the Bessarabian poet M. Andriescu sounded like, see the above mention and Appendix 2.

The transition to Latin script was gradual. Republican publications such as "Moldova Socialistă" implemented it without hesitation, while district (Raion) publications continued to appear in Cyrillic script in the following months. The main beneficiaries of the shift to Latin script were schoolchildren. Textbooks for all grades were published in the Latin alphabet. Several model textbooks were produced for the primary school and adult literacy courses and were reprinted annually. For an example of a typical text included in a primer (textbook) for Moldovan schools see Appendix 3. The print run of this primer was 6,100 copies. In general, there was a large-scale publishing activity which has yet to be evaluated. In addition to grammar textbooks, more textbooks were printed for various subjects depending on the school type or profile (e.g. mathematics, arithmetic, algebra, history, social sciences, chemistry, geography and German language); these were no longer produced locally, but were translations from Russian into Romanian.

In May 1938, after the purges had already achieved their aim of physically eliminating – under ludicrous and completely absurd pretexts such as "espionage" or "counter-revolutionary activity" – those intellectuals and officials who were even remotely autonomous in their thinking, the Cyrillic script was reinstated. An interesting phenomenon would occur later. Although the entire territory of Bessarabia was taken over in early September 1944, in April-May 1945 the central newspapers in Chișinău were printed in Latin letters.

The language in which the Balta-Tiraspol newspapers were written and published between 1932–1938 (May) is intelligible to readers throughout the territory where contemporary Romanian is spoken. Certain differences appeared between the Romanian language of the leftist activists (a phrase that seems more appropriate to us) who had arrived from Romania and the Romanian language of the local writers who asserted themselves in the literary realm – most of whom usually came from the countryside.

Among the last books published in Tiraspol in the Romanian language with Latin script was the one authored by Borisiuc and Mamaev, dedicated to ASSRM. In addition to hyperbolic, extravagant praise of its Constitution, its successes, etc., the book also condemns the enemies of the regime and is thus eminently Stalinist. Those who were prosecuted and put to staged trials, then killed, were described in the following way: “The bourgeois nationalists were determined to turn the development of Moldovan culture, national in form, socialist in content, back onto the path of Romanian bourgeois culture” (Borisiuc, Mamaev, 1938, p. 61).

Thematic niche and poetry

For almost a decade (from the late 1920s until the beginning of the Terror in 1937) the thematic niche fluctuated, but from May 1937 onwards it was no longer legitimising at the pinnacle of power. On the one hand, beyond the anti-bourgeois stance, some of the authors had participated in the civil war on the side of the Bolsheviks, and others had been part of the illegal communist movement in Romania in the early 1920s. The themes in this literature include social injustice (seen from the radical left perspective), but also realities of the Romanian world of the 1920s. With regard to the civil war and the years that followed, this literature explores anarchism and banditry, as well as the plight of orphaned children (see Appendix 1, which presents the case of two little brothers in the care of their older sister).

A common theme with most of the authors originating from the Moldovan villages of the ASSRM is that of their native place, with more or less of an ideological agenda. The depiction of the rural universe involved specific figures with a certain role in

the community: either a wealthier villager (therefore less of a positive character), or a person beloved by children, or various mythical creatures that inspired fear (e.g. werewolves), or some dirt poor, destitute fellow. A natural element that appears in both prose and poetry is the Dniester River – an impersonal presence that is organically part of the landscape, inherently linked to it. Several authors dwelt in particular on the theme of the two river banks, on the situation of the brethren left on the other side (namely the Bessarabians); a frequently reiterated literary motif was the garden. The ostensible peace and stillness of this rural life is shattered by the horrors of the civil war in former Tsarist Russia. This literature was not proletarian, despite extolling the communist regime and some of the elements of modernisation it brought about. Even in its new form imposed by the Bolshevik changes, the world of the village remained anchored in a traditional atmosphere, where communication was based on social relations differing from those which the regime wanted to enforce as the norm.

Despite the imperfections of language, some texts also reveal certain traumas of their authors – orphaned in young age or having lost beloved ones in the years of anarchy and civil war. For example, A. Sfeciă evokes, without being able to attribute a political affiliation to them, the men in uniforms with green epaulettes who forcibly took his sister away (Appendix 1).

Poetry enjoyed some popularity in the ASSRM, but the books still extant demonstrate a clear preference for prose. Among the poets, the Bessarabian M. Andriescu, as well as S. Lehtțir and L. Cornfeld stood out.

An example of poetry in keeping with the atmosphere and tenets put forth by the communist party (the country of the proletariat surrounded by enemies) is provided by Lehtțir's poem *De pază* (*Standing Guard*). Here he dwells on the image of the sentinel guarding "the land's freedom": „O umbră întunecată spre râu se furișază, / Al lunii ochiu rece privește după plai, / Dar ochiul sentinelei pătrunzător veghează, / Cine? Stai!” [“A dark shadow creeps towards the river, / The moon's cold gaze wanders over the plain, / But the sentinel's piercing eye watches, / Who goes there? Halt!”] (Lehtțir, 1935, p. 6).

Quite likely, the “cold gaze” was borrowed from Eminescu, and the furtive shadow sneaking was inspired by the well-known image in Alexandrescu’s poem dedicated to Mircea the Elder; but it could also be a mere coincidence. In his early period of creation, prior to the introduction of the Latin script, Lehttîr pays poetic homage to the Dniester, choosing a similar approach: a depiction of the river in a nocturnal setting: „Tăceri, noaptea, Nistru curge,/ Apili șoptesc, șoptesc.../ Parcă Nestru cîntî o doină.../ Parcă’i grai moldovinesc./ Și pădurea parcî doarmi.../ Sus pi șeri plutești luna,/ Iar copacii di diparti/ Sî închin cu «noaptea bună»” [“Silent, at night, the Dniester flows,/ Its waters whisper, whisper away.../ As if the Dniester is singing a doina [traditional lyrical folk song].../ In the sweet Moldovan language./ And the forest seems asleep.../ The moon floats high above the hills,/ And the trees of the countryside/ Bid «good night»”] (Lehttîr, 1929, p. 8).

The Dniester was also celebrated in verse by the young poet Nistor Cabac (b. 1913, Culna village, Odessa reg.): “Nistre, Nistre, – apă tulburată,/ Ce-așa greu din mal în mal te zbați?../ Ce mă’ndemni să-ți cînt de bucurie/ Și-mi răspunzi mîhnit dela Carpați?/ Sau că țărmurile pietruite,/ Roase-ți sînt de valul zbîntuit./ Sau că rîde luna cea mășcată,/ Cînd ea goală’n apă s’a ivit” [“Dniester, Dniester, – troubled water,/ Why do you struggle so hard from bank to bank?... / Why do you ask me to sing to you of joy / And you answer me mournfully from the Carpathians?/ Whether your stony banks / Are gnawed at by the rushing wave./ Or that the full moon laughs,/ When she rises naked from your waters?”] (Cabac, 1935, p. 7).

The image of the small provincial town (Russian: “uezdnîi gorodișko”) of Tiraspol is tellingly rendered in Cornfeld’s 1932 poem. Its atmosphere and ethnic-social character are depicted thus: “Cu opt biserici,/ Zece sinagogi,/ Cu trei oloiniți,/ Și ‘ncă vr’o morișcă,/ Tu te numei:/ «Uezdnîi gorodișco»./ Cu pristavi,/ Cu urednici mustețoși,/ Bazaruri multe,/ Croitori, crîșmari,/ Cu «Bakaleinaia trgovlea»,/ Mărunțică,/ Tu te hrănei/ Din rupta bucățică,/ Sub tejghea furînd dela cîntari.” [“With your eight churches,/ Ten synagogues,/ With three oil presses,/ And also a mill,/ You are called:/ “Uezdnîi gorodișko” [Russian phrase in the original] / With town criers, / With your mustached governor, / Many bazaars, / Tailors, tavern keepers, /

With «Bakaleinaia torgovlea» [Russian phrase in the original], / You barely scraped by/ Made a living on the stolen goods under the counter/ And false weights and measures.”] (Cornfeld, 1932, p. 5).

Although he also wrote propaganda poetry, M. Andriescu left many verses that reflect a universe of emotions rooted in the rural world. A relevant example is *Scripcei mele* [To my violin]: “Scripcă, hăi bătrână,/ Nu boci din strună./ Nu stîrni din inimi/ Vechile suspinuri,/ Nu săpa din suflet/ Durerile uitate/ Lasă’n pace’n piepturi/ Oftările culcate./ Nu turna în plazma/ Pietrarilor noi, jună,/ Sînge vechi și putred,/ Plazm-ă rea, bătrînă./ Că destul am plîns/ Ș’am oftat de-ajuns, -/ Tot trecutul nostru/ De jale ne-e pătruns./ Cîntecele noastră/ Din dor ne au fost țesute/ Și noatele de doină/ Din lăcrămi împletite.” [“My old violin,/ Do not sound so mournfully/ Do not stir the old pain of hearts/ Do not awaken the soul’s forgotten aches/ Leave alone in our breasts/ The forgotten sorrows./ Do not pour into young ones’ bodies/ Old and rotten blood,/ For we have wept enough / And have sighed enough, -/ All our past/ Is suffused with sorrow./ Our songs/ have been woven from longing/ And the *doina*’s notes/ Are born from our tears.”] (Andriescu, 1932, p. 21).

The young poets’ creations evoke their first loves, but also their reflections on the transformation of village girls turned activists. Despite abiding by the aesthetic and ideological patterns dictated by the officials, many writings are interesting because, as already mentioned, they come from an area where there was previously no official literature in Romanian and no culture similar to the one that crystallized in Bessarabia, although there the Romanian population was treated by the Tsarist regime as a minority.

One of the few young writers who succeeded in publishing a volume of poetry as sole author was Doibani. In 1935 he published the little volume *Răsai lună de cu sară* [Moon, Rise Early], in which the influence of folk poetry is evident. And although the discourse belonged to a writer taking the “correct” position in the Stalinist society, its imagery still reflects the rural universe.

An important landmark in the local poetry production, showcasing the talent of some young authors, is the volume *Versurile tinereții* [Verses of Youth], published in 1936. The publisher of the volume is not specified. The colophon only mentions the editor-in-chief Soloviova,

the technical editor M. Dobrominski and the proofreader I.I. Colțov. The book was printed by the printing house “C. Vorosișilov” in Balta in a print run of 3,500 copies. The contributors to the volume were Săteanu, Stepanov, Coverdeac, Andronic, Prodan, Oprea and Galiț. Some names may be pseudonyms. Of them, only Galiț later made a career for himself as a writer in the post-war Moldovan SSR. Oprea is possibly also the same person as the eponymous author of primary school textbooks, who died in battle as a soldier during the years of the Second World War.

Prose writings

Prose writing was quite widespread in the ASSRM. The natural narrative awkwardness (given the peculiarities of the cultural climate) does not make it any less interesting. It was the first time that people who had come *ad integrum* from the countryside and who had not lived in the Romanian-speaking area, not even in Bessarabia, strove to convey their impressions of the events that had impacted their lives.

The first narrative that particularly attracts our attention dates from the period before the introduction of Latin script: *Patima lui Petrică* [*The sufferings of Petrică*] by Ion Canna, published in 1931. This short story is also interesting because its 1934 edition contains obvious interventions in the text and has had some paragraphs deleted. The original version began as follows:

Luna lui mart din anu 1919 sî sfîrșă. Aiasta o arăta și soarili, cari tot mai tari și mai tari înșepusî a'ncălzi pămîntu nu dimult digerat, și florișelili rumîni – bălăi de jișini și di zarzari împejiuru cărora bîzîie roiuri din alghini, și toloaca, și erbîșoara din grădini verdi-crunședî și chiar șă sătenii, cari deamu lipădasî ochincuțli și îmbla discuț.

Petrică – copchil di vo doișpriși ani – voios alergând discuț, cînd pi cărari, cînd pin glod, vine acasî dila școală cu străistuța albî di pînzi di tort în mîinî plinî cu cărț. [March of 1919 was coming to an end. One could see it in the sunlight – lending more and more warmth to the thawing earth, still frozen until recently, and in the rosy and white blossoms of the sour cherry and cherry plum trees, surrounded by

swarms of buzzing bees, in the pastureland, in the tender green grass of the backyards, and even in the appearance of the villagers who had taken off their shoes and were now walking around barefooted.

Petrică – a boy of about twelve – was running cheerfully unshod, now along the path, then through the mud, returning from school with his little white homespun hemp bag, full of books”] (Canna, 1931, p. 3);

Petrică, un copil de vr’o doisprezece ani, vine acasă dela școală cu traistuța albă de pînă, plină de cărți

[Petrică, a child of about twelve, is coming home from school with his little white hemp bag full of books.”] (Canna, 1935, p. 3).

The short story offers glimpses into the life of the village community, against whose background the author reveals the dramatic story of an orphaned child. As a result of the fighting between the White Guard and the Bolsheviks, Petrică’s parents were killed. In the end, Petrică is drafted into the Red Army. Although Canna was 17 years old in 1919, the short story likely contains autobiographical facts. Canna had indeed been enlisted in the Bolshevik army at some point, but in reality, he may have been forced to join the military, rather than making a voluntary choice.

In another short story – *În gura mării* [*On the Sea Shore*] (1936) – I. Canna mentions the Tsarist period, sharing impressions (probably based on the accounts of family members or others) about the experience of Moldovans who had been displaced from Bessarabia to the Caucasus.

The text includes lyrical elements, such as the description of early morning in the author’s hometown:

E frumos dimineața să stai pe o bancă în bulevard sprijinit cu mâinile la piept și să cum încetul cu încetul strada începe să se învioneze. Se aude zgomotul pe care îl fac deschiderea obloanelor și ușilor ale caselor, troncănesc căruțele, sirenele automobilelor. Dar strada se învionează deabinelea după ce au șuerat sirenele fabricilor și uzinelor. [“It’s nice in the morning to lean back on a bench in the boulevard, arms folded on your chest, watching the street slowly start to stir. You can hear the noise of the shutters and doors of houses opening, the thunder of carts,

the horns of automobiles. But the street is completely awake only after the sirens of factories and plants have sounded.”]

Grammar awkwardness aside, the novel is written in Romanian and has no localisms whatsoever. Such a text, written in Latin letters, had little chance of finding acceptance in the following period among the authors who had survived the years of 1937–1938 and were later attempting to make a name for themselves in the Moldovan SSR. This is also important in the context of the ironic “folklore” that at the time was unofficially circulating in the intellectual circles of Chişinău about the ability of writers from the left bank of the Dniester to express themselves in Romanian.

The forcible relocation of Moldovan peasant families to the Caucasus, which is mentioned in the short story *În gura mării*, is introduced via the reminiscences of an old man (“grandfather Gligore”), who gathers the children around him. The plot revolves around his involvement in a clash with gendarmes during the Tsarist period in Bessarabia and, later, by the forced displacement to the Caucasus of those found guilty by Tsarist justice.

Mergeam pe jos. Nu cunoşteam locurile. Mulţi din noi n’aveau căruţă şi copiii mergeau derînd cu noi. Pe drum se îmbolnăveau şi mureau. Foamea ne doboră cum furtuna scutură frunzele galbene de pe copaci. Dar nici asta nu e lucru de căpetenie despre care vreau să vă spun. Vasăzică acolo, la Caucaz noi am alcătuit sate de moldoveni şi am început a trăi nici mai amar dar nici mai dulce decît în Basarabia. Pentru omul sărac şi bătut de neazuri pestotlocul era ca în patul de ciulini. [“We were travelling on foot. We did not know the places. Many of us didn’t have a cart and the children had to walk as well. Along the way they would get sick and die. Hunger was reaping us away like a storm shaking the yellow leaves off the trees. But that’s not even the most important thing I want to tell you about either. There, in the Caucasus, we made villages of Moldovans and began to live no more bitterly but no more sweetly than in Bessarabia. For the poor and afflicted ones, any place felt like a bed of thistles.”] (Canna, 1936, pp. 8–9).

Several novels and short stories were written by Nichita Marcov. His heroes are caught up in the events that began in 1917 and experience the typical developments after that date. A separate analysis of this author's literary output might be useful in order to establish the degree of peculiarity in the destinies of the people of these territories, caught in the whirlwind of history. Marcov was a victim of reprisals conducted by the USSR secret police in 1937–1938. His name appears on a list containing the names of 117 people rehabilitated in 1956. In Marcov's case, only the year and place of birth (1903, Corjevo) and the patronymic name Afanasie were specified.

Ideological and autobiographical literature

Among the texts published from 1932 onwards, there are also works signed by various Romanian (communist) activists or speakers of Romanian (P.V. Corneliu seems to have been Hungarian), who adhered to the illegal movement in interwar Romania. Some had been imprisoned. Their impressions, written in the Romanian language that is considerably more literary than that of the writers who were just emerging in the ASSRM, have strong ideological overtones. Further analysis might reveal the extent to which the contestation of Romania's existence was part of a wider discourse in the USSR at the time. This discourse was somewhat "muted" during the Soviet-Romanian rapprochement which tightened economic relations in 1934–1936.

On the other hand, in the case of most of these authors, their radical left-wing convictions must have been genuine since prominent intellectuals with such views had emerged in various countries of Central and Western Europe. But what these writings reveal – allowing for subjectivism and the denial of certain realities due to ideological commitment – is the social struggle in which these authors were engaged, while they were also aware of the contribution of the left-wing movement understood in a broader sense. Such people, with their memories, became dispensable and even dangerous from the standpoint of the Stalinist regime, which entered a new phase with the reprisals conventionally deemed to have been initiated in May 1937. These repressive measures also involved the

physical elimination of most of these activists, some of whom even managed to publish their writings in the ASSRM between 1932–1936. A desideratum for historiography research in the future should be to determine the causes and limits of this Jacobin-style purging of ideas. We could accept that it was a large-scale “settling of accounts” between of careerist Bolsheviks rallied around Stalin and an “archipelago” of members of the communist party with similar traits to the Bolsheviks, in the cultural sphere. Nothing is known about the fate of most of the authors of memoirs we will mention below, or at least nothing has been established by investigative endeavours so far. Apart from those executed, it is possible that some may have escaped by blending into the anonymous proletarian masses.

In 1932, with the transition to the Latin script in the Moldovan ASSR, several books were published by those who considered Romania, somewhat anachronistically, as the embodiment of the boyars’ (local nobility, or social elites) state. The new period was ushered in by the publication in Latin script of the “Communist Manifesto” (Tiraspol), translated from German by N. Vișoiu. It was edited by a team including I. Ocinschi, M. Andriescu, S. Lehtëtir and P. Corneliu.

Another significant work, standing out both due to its volume and its radical ideological orientation, is “xv Octombrie: Almanah politico-literar” [“xv October: Political-Literary Almanac”]. The text worth mentioning among the satirical pieces included in this book is the one authored by P.V. Corneliu. In addition to an account of an illegal meeting prior to 7 November in Bucharest, he also evinced a certain talent for describing the atmosphere with lyrical overtones (see Appendix 4).

The issues of “Octombrie” journal published at Balta-Tiraspol in 1933–1937 are not available for research. They are not included in the collections of the Old and Rare Book Department of the National Library in Chișinău. In 1970–1980 many books from that period were retrieved by ordering copies from Kyiv. However, the journal’s issues dating from 1933–1938 have not been recovered. Only the issues of the children’s literary magazine “Scînteia leninistă” of those years can be read almost in their entirety.

The first work in a series of several belonging to this “niche”, is B. I. Borisov’s 1932 book on the Tatar-Bunar uprising of 1924. It was

printed in Latin script, with S. Lehttîr as the art editor and I. V. as a proofreader. The author dedicated his work to communist activist Pavel Tkachenko, who had been assassinated in September 1926. With this work the publisher addressed, probably following the communist party's directions, the matter of Bessarabia. At that time, it targeted the Romanian-speaking inhabitants of the ASSRM; however, since it was published in Latin script, the book could also be distributed across the Dniester.

In 1933, *Garda Doftanei* [*Doftana's Guard*] by Ionel Focar, (most likely a pseudonym) was published. The work describes the life of the common soldiers who were used as guards at Doftana prison. Another book, contemporary with the workers' protests that broke out in 1932–1933 and dedicated to the so-called peasants' movement was authored by A. Tătaru. Prison experience was described by Gh. Marin in 1934 (*Evadarea din Jilava* [*Escaping From Jilava*]). Leftist stance aside, this work is important because Jilava became a place where crimes against political opponents would constantly take place, both in the period prior to 1940 and during the war years, and under the communist regime. According to this account, the author was able to escape from this prison together with a group of detainees.

To complete the picture, mention must be made of a history book that presents the Bolshevik perspective on the 1917–1918 events in Bessarabia. This work of almost 250 pages, written by E. Bagrov, was unparalleled in communist party literature until the collapse of the USSR. Published in small print and containing numerous copy documents (the authenticity of which has yet to be assessed), it is the only comprehensive Bolshevik effort by a contemporary of the events. The fact that such activists subsequently came to be regarded as out-of-line and outside the (Bolshevik) law is illustrated by the events shortly after the publication of this book, in Tiraspol, when attacks were directed against Bagrov's "wavering" stance (a context in which P.V. Cornelius and others were also targeted).

Anticlericalism is an important aspect, which however is beyond the scope of this study. A number of virulent thematic works were published against the church hierarchy and – to a greater or lesser extent – against religion itself, with authors taking various degrees of liberty in their attacks.

Among the latest ideological writings to be published in the period is that of Vladimir Dembo. In 1935 he issued a booklet commemorating the uprising led by Horea, Cloșca and Crișan. In addition to criticising the interpretation of this peasants' uprising as a national movement, and insisting that it actually had social character, Dembo also put forth speculations. He claimed that in Zarand, but also elsewhere, most landowners were not Hungarians but Romanians. The few members of local Romanian political elites that existed in Transylvania became Hungarianized in the Reformation era. The fact that the uprising was commemorated by the Romanian political class in 1935 also had cynical motivations, but this could not serve as an argument for Dembo's approach. It should be noted, however, that his booklet is the least ideologized among the series of texts that qualify as ideological.

The degree of compliance with the anti-religious discourse of Balta and Tiraspol writers and publicists could only be ascertained by close reading of their works. The point of reference was, in fact, the writings coming from the central authorities, translated into Romanian from Russian. In 1931, three books were printed in Balta under the aegis of the State Publishing House of Moldavia in Tiraspol [Editura Statnica a Moldovii la Tirișpolea]: *Împotriva cozonacului ș'a pașii* by V. Alexandrov (against traditional Easter practices), *A cui sărbătoari-i Creciunu* [Whose feast is Christmas] by S. Burnov and *Sfârșitul sărbătorilor bete* [The End of Drunkards' Holidays] by N. Amosov.

The fate of the literati in 1937–1938

The works cited above indicate that, thanks to a cultural horizon acquired before the Soviet power was established, some writers produced noteworthy lyrical creations and panoramic descriptions. Others, although they made their debut in the 1930s and wrote laudatory texts extolling the new regime, also expressed pride in their homeland – which was soon to be reviled. Once terror began in 1937, this ideological-literary production as well as its authors were no longer useful to the Communist Party.

Among the first to be arrested was D. Milev. His imminent arrest was announced by the article *O piesă dăunătoare* [A harmful play],

published in “Moldova Socialistă” [“Socialist Moldova”] of 28 July 1937 (no. 171). Its author, A. Chiricenko, criticized Milev for the fact that his play *Două lumi* [*Two Worlds*] (Editura de Stat a Moldovei – the State Publishing House of Moldova, 1935) failed to denounce the counter-revolutionary activity of foreign spies, and also failed to mention the struggle of the communist party organization to strengthen the collective farms (kolkhozy). “Moreover, we find that Milev’s play grossly falsifies, distorts the facts, the truth of the days past”. Afterwards, the communist youth’s newspaper “Comsomolistul Moldovei” (3 August 1937) criticised Milev and Cornfeld on the grounds that they had not been active in the Writers’ Union (the text had an anonymous author who signed: Începătorul [The Beginner]).

These accusations, which could have been grounds for a literary indictment if the authorities so intended, instead resulted in Milev’s execution by shooting. Among those executed as well was S. Lehttir – who as an employee of the State Publishing House of Moldova had made a major contribution to the development of literature in the autonomous republic. The young poet N. Cabac was also among the victims. Even the so-called “envoy” of Glavlit – the official censorship body, Criulean (by the name he is mentioned in the documents), the one who supervised the publishing of books, was subject to repression. The fate of many writers is unknown. This is also due to the fact that the works were signed with literary pseudonyms, but also with possibly authentic names in the case of the illegalists.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

The episode of sister's abduction in *Doi și una* (1928)

Într'o noapți întunerici o'ncunjiurat căsuța pi malu Nestrului oaste vrăjmași în mântăli verzi și epoleturi pi umeri, o prinso pi una și cu cuvinti groaznici di ocarî o scoso la o cămăruți.

Din cămăruți s'auză sfadî, plesnit di arapnic și suschin slab, da piurmî o aruncato într'o căruți.

Atunci o suschinat, o răcnit doi frați.

Di dureri pintru sorî-sa cei iubitî tari o suschinat altu – copchil încî. O rămas sînguri doi frați. Așa o fost odatî, dar piurmî încî o fost...

Mult o fost piurmî... Of tari mult...

On a dark night, the little house on the Dniester's bank was surrounded by the enemy military wearing green coats with epaulettes on the shoulders. They seized the girl and pushed her into a room with terrible swearing. Foul words, whip sounds and faint sobs could be heard from the room, but then they threw her into a cart.

Two siblings then burst into bitter sobs and sighs.

One of them, still a child, wept for his dearly beloved sister. Two brothers were now alone in the world. This happened then, but what happened afterwards...

So many things happened... Oh, so many...

Source: Sfecla, 1928, p. 4.

Appendix 2

Self-criticism of writer M. Andriescu in December 1931:

1. În poezia "O sută de ani" îi încântat [elogiat] on mijlocul avut, cari sî trași cu toată gloata lui în partea comunistă nu de-atîta cî o "înstăpănit programa partii și ideinic vrea sî stăi în rîndurile avangardului clasului proletar, cari sî luptă pînă la zădărnicierea soțului, da deatîta cî-n partii ești "disciplinat" [disciplină]... băieții cînd aud de "disciplinat" înșep a lucra în gospodăria lui mai tîrziu și a.m. Chipu [imaginea] ista și istorisești nu-i adevărat. În vremea luptii cu țărăniștii partea crește rapidă, da'n partii intră nu "mijloc" de aștepta.

2. În poezia "Sara", "Iarna", "Revederea" îi romantică nișburjuaznică [romantism mic-burghez], dicăderi, rupiri dila adivăru epocii ș.a.m.

3. În poeziile "Dor de țară" și "Amintiri" încânt [elogiez] Basarabia "întregi" fără arătarea feții clasurilor ș'a antagonismului întrii clasuri. Așăjderea [De asemenea] n'ari fați clasnică și "norocos" din poezia "Hangu norocosului".

4. O parte mare de poezii îi pătrunsă de individualism, egoism, trizism putred; autoru-i rupt dila clasă muncitorească [muncitorească], grăiești dila dînsu, da nu de la masă.

5. În avîntu închinării însuflețită a Moldovii Sfatniși [Sovietice], rupînd Moldova dila tot Soiuzu Sfatnic, eu ob'ectivnic întăresc pozițiile democratizmului național [naționalist].

Cunoscînd rolul și zădășii [sarcinile] literaturii proletariștii; și văzîndu-ni greșăliile făcute, eu li recunosc ș'a li judec [condamn] hotărât.

1. The poem "O sută de ani" [One hundred years] praises a wealthy commoner, who sides with the party together with all his family not because he "has mastered the platform of the party and the ideas

and he wants to join the ranks of the avantgarde of the proletariat, who strives to build socialism”, but because the party has “discipline”... when the boys hear of discipline, they work better in his household, and so on. This image and this story are not true. During the fight against Trotskysts the Party grew fast, but no such wealthy commoners joined the party.

2. In the poems “Evening”, “Winter”, “Meeting again” there is *romanticî nicburjuaznicî* [petite bourgeoisie romanticism], decay, departures from the truth of the epoch, and so on.

3. In the poems “Missing the homeland” and “Memories” I extol the “entire” Bessarabia without showing the character of social classes and the antagonism between classes. Also the class character is not shown with the “lucky” one in the poem “Hangu norocosului”.

4. Many of my poems are pervaded by rotten individualism and egocentrism; the author is far from the working class and speaks his own words, not the words of the masses.

5. In my enthusiast praise of Soviet Moldova, separating Moldova from the other Soviet republics, I actually take the positions of nationalism democratism.

Aware of the role and tasks of proletarian literature and of my own mistakes, I acknowledge them and firmly denounce them.

Source: Octeabriu, 1932, pp. 146-147.

Appendix 3

Excerpt from a primary school textbook (1932):

Copiii, mergeau la școală.

– Oare ce se aude? – a întrebat Costachel și a stat pe loc.

Toți au stat și ascultă.

– Cocorii zboară, a zis Vasilică.

– Co-co-ri-i zboară-ă-ă...! scîncea și Mihalaș. Ridicînd capul în sus, el s’a împiedicat de o piatră și a căzut jos. Mihalaș a început a plînge.

– Măi, Mihalaș!

– Prost ai fost cu ceafa lată și ai rămas gura căscată! – rîdeau băieții uitîndu-se la dînsul.

Mihalaș s’a sculat și plîngînd zicea: co-o-co-o-ri-i..!

– Mihalaș, ian taci, nu plînge! – i-a zis Costachel – cocorii se duc dela noi pe iarnă în țările calde. Acuma ei n’au ce mânca la noi. Primăvara cocorii se vor întoarce la noi.

– Tu zici că ei vor veni?

– Da, vor veni numai decît! – i-a răspuns Costachel.

Copiii au petrecut cocorii și s’au dus voioși la școală.

The children were walking to school.

“What’s that sound?” – asked Costachel and stood still.

They all sat and listened.

“The cranes are flying away”, Vasilică said.

“Cra-nes fly-ing a-way!” Mihalaș also squealed. Raising his head to look up, he tripped over a stone and fell. Mihalaș began to cry.

“Hey, Mihalaș! You’re such a fool with your big head and your mouth hanging open!” – the boys laughed as they looked at him.

Mihalaș got up and cried: “the cra-a-nes...!”

“Mihalaș, come on, stop crying,” said Costachel, “the cranes are leaving for the warm countries in winter. Now they have nothing to eat here. In spring the cranes will come back to us.”

“You say they will come?”

“Yes, they’ll surely come!” – replied Costachel.

The children watched the cranes fly away, then went to school happily.

Source: Onufrievici, 1932, p. 40.

Appendix 4

Autumn in Bucharest before November 7, as described by P.V. Corneliu:

Se apropia 7 Noiembrie. Bucureștul se desbracă de frunzele sale verzi, acum ruginite. Seara venea de cu vreme. Prin grădinile publice frunzele căzute, – cele cari nu erau încă strînse în mormane, – fășăiau, printre picioarele celor cari se plimbau a lene, sorbind aerul răcoros al serii și pierzîndu-se în brațele melancoliei de toamnă, privind cum căde[a] frunză după frunză în formă spirală, atingea pîmîntul, se amesteca cu celelalte cu cari s’au născut deodată, a trăit și a murit.

Din cînd în cînd, cîte’o stea căzătoare albăstruie strălucea pentru scurtă vreme și apoi nu se mai auzea decît trompeta unei mașini, ce trecea în grabă, pe una din străzile apropiate.

Mai apoi a eșit și luna privind parcă mirată la copacii golinași, ce-ți inspira[u] numai tristețe, ce-ți reamintea[u] de iarnă, de frig, de lemne și..., brr... te strângeai mai tare în pardesiu...

Pe o astfel de seară târzie se întorcea[u] de la o ședință, – traversând de-a curmezișul, parcul Carol, – trei conducători ai mișcării revoluționare din România.

November 7 was approaching. Bucharest was shedding its green leaves, now rusty. Evening fell early. In the public gardens the fallen leaves, – those which had not yet been gathered in heaps, – rustled under the feet of those who strolled idly, breathing with delight the cool evening air and losing themselves in the arms of autumn melancholy, watching how leaf after leaf fell in a spiral, touched the ground, and mingled with the others with which they had been born, lived and died together.

Every now and then a bluish shooting star flickered briefly, and then the only sound that could be heard was the trumpet of a car rushing past in one of the nearby streets.

Then the moon came out, looking as if in astonishment at the bare trees, which only made you sad, reminded you of winter, of the cold, of firewood..., brr... you wrapped yourself tighter in your coat...

On such a sad evening three leaders of the revolutionary movement in Romania were returning from a meeting, crossing the Carol Park.

Source: P.V. Corneliu, 1932, p. 83.

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