

## ALEXANDRU MUȘINA BETWEEN BEAT POET AND “BALNEAL GENIUS”

The recent theoretical contributions discussing posturalism in the Western space renders possible an analysis of the writer profile that, correlating his social conduct and aesthetic choices, would allow for the singular definition of a “self-image” of the writer. Besides discussing “posture”, a concept defined by Meizoz in 2007<sup>1</sup> and then revived in 2013, or the “photographic portrait”<sup>2</sup>, whether it is about “the imaginary writer” or “authorial scenography”<sup>3</sup>, “authorial ethos”<sup>4</sup>, or “the authorial mark”<sup>5</sup>, what is of interest in these approaches resides in the construction of the writer as a public figure, obtained through self-representation strategies, as well as by the aid of the publishing houses that market the writer figure through the consecration effect achieved by prize systems or schoolbook entry status. What we are proposing in the present text is an analysis of the ways by which Alexandru Mușina constructs his presence in the public space along with his image as a writer.

Mușina’s belonging to the 1980s generation determines from the outset his choice as subject for such a study which refers to two key moments: the period of the totalitarian regime, and the period after the Revolution of 1989, which correspond to two different ways of understanding the role and position of the writer in society and the process of recognition. We will be interested in how the writer represents himself as a public figure in each of these historical phases, in the interviews he gives, in his fiction, in the way he carries and describes his own body – when alone or in a group (at Cenaclul de Luni [Monday Literary Circle] or at Cercul literar 19 [Literary Circle 19]). We will also be interested in the figure of Mușina constructed through his reception, including posthumous reception.

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<sup>1</sup> Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l’auteur*, Genève, Slatkine, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Jérôme Meizoz, “Cendras, Houellebecq: Portrait photographique et présentation de soi”, *COnTEXTES*, 2014, 14, <http://journals.openedition.org/contextes/5908>. Accessed June 15, 2020. See the dossier in *COnTEXTES* magazine that tackles the photographic portraits of writers. “Le portrait photographique de l’écrivain”, *COnTEXTES*, 2014, 14, <https://journals.openedition.org/contextes/5904>. Accessed June 15, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> José-Luis Diaz, *L’Écrivain imaginaire. Scénographies auctoriales à l’époque romantique*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Amossy (ed.), *Images de soi dans le discours: la construction de l’ethos*, Lausanne-Paris, Delachaux et Niestlé, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Marie-Ève Thérenty, Adeline Wrona, *L’écrivain comme marque*, Paris, Sorbonne Université Presses, 2020.

*The Collective Corpus in the Literary Circle and the Influence of the Beat Generation*

The very existence of the Romanian writer during the communist regime is conditioned by the emergence of some alternative ways of manifestation in the literary space, the only option to escape anonymity, even though positioning oneself is not manifested directly. Setting up literary circles specialized in prose or poetry implicitly becomes the survival condition of the writer. If on the one hand this means an apparent pact with the system to allow the literary circle to function, there is nevertheless a certain freedom of expression<sup>6</sup> inside the literary circle, born out of the need to mark a difference with respect to the institutions of the time. A first image of Alexandru Mușina is thus outlined as a member of *Cenaclul de Luni* [the Monday Literary Circle], therefore as a member of a collective corpus, since the system imposed a group appearance in order to allow the publication of the writer's work. Daniel Puia Dumitrescu<sup>7</sup> reconstitutes the practice of these collective debuts, through which the limitation of the writer's freedoms and the postponing of the individual debut (something that became less and less frequent) are accomplished. The recognized mentor of the 1980s poets, Nicolae Manolescu, also underlines the difficulty of publishing: "It had started to become difficult for the young writers to publish in magazines, let alone in books [...] we were forced into anthologies, it was impossible to have a debut of one's own. There were only common graves – that is what the communist regime wanted"<sup>8</sup>. As the interviews with members of the literary circle testify, being defined in relation to the group also involves a form of cohesion derived from the marginal status and based on the "solidarity of the excluded, of the self-excluded"<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, the literary circle represents, besides the proper environment for sharing ideas and assuming an aesthetic credo, a way of cohabitation. Writing becomes the result of an identity transfer, since "we were so impregnated with each other that we practically wrote each other's poetry lines"<sup>10</sup>.

Under the influence of the American model, the safe framework established within the literary circle favours the emergence of a *hippie* or *rock star* figure. Here is how the poets of the 1980s represent themselves: "[...] a generation of hippie practice. We are the Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Deep Purple generation; however, we

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Puia Dumitrescu presents the literary circle as a "form of freedom and compromise". See Daniel Puia Dumitrescu, *O istorie a Cenaclului de Luni [A History of Monday Literary Circle]*, București, Cartea Românească, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 245-284.

<sup>8</sup> Nicolae Manolescu, interview in Mihail Vakulovski, *Portret de grup cu generația '80: interviuri [Group Portrait with 1980s Generation]*, București, Tracus Arte, 2011, pp. 376-382.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandru Mușina, *Sinapse [Synapses]*, București, Aula, 2001, pp. 147-148.

<sup>10</sup> Florin Iaru, interview in Mihail Vakulovski, *Portret de grup*, pp. 11-37. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

are not connected with T.S. Eliot and Saint-John Perse for nothing... It was a small West, with a small margin of aristocrats at the helm”<sup>11</sup>. Beyond the attraction exerted by the Beatles, the 1980s poets are also influenced by the Beat generation, which represents the American counter-culture and promotes an iconoclastic attitude by manifesting a freedom to which the 1980s poets also aspire: “In our moments of student exaltation we said to ourselves: We are a generation. Even more so since we got our hands on a book about the Beat generation: Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, Kerouac, Corso [...] They are free, unlike us. And we became free... in our minds”<sup>12</sup>. As is the case for any relevant imported model, it is compulsory to note the manner in which this model is employed in the autochthonous space, in order to establish to what extent and in what manner the 1980s poets allow themselves to be contaminated by this borrowed figures: where imitation lies and where the differences and variations begin, since a position is always constructed in relation to former models that enter a dialogue with it<sup>13</sup>. This is also the aim of Teodora Dumitru’s study which establishes connections between the 1980s generation and the Beat generation in the context of World Literature studies, noting that similarities do exist and function, but, as the context is different, the attitude of the 1980s poets is different, inscribed as it is in the larger context of a “cultural form of resistance”<sup>14</sup>.

The collective figure of the ‘80s poet as a rock star is built in terms of visibility in the public space, especially through a series of photographs taken by Tudor Jebeleanu, that illustrate the anthologies *Aer cu diamante* [*Air with Diamonds*] and *Cinci* [*Five*], two volumes that initiate the series of collective debuts at Cenaclul de Luni. The cover photo of *Aer cu diamante* (Annex, 1), in which (from left to right) Ion Stratan, Mircea Cărtărescu, Traian Coșovei, Florin Iaru are shown sitting on an engine, contains explicit references to the figure of the rock star through the taste for extravagance borrowed from the Beatles and which they use to obtain legitimation through association (the picture of the Beatles in a yellow submarine is well known). The image of the Beatles becomes a brand for the 1980s poets. They “wanted to be a sort of a literary equivalent of the Beatles quartet and, when they went to have their photograph taken at the CFR Museum, where they climbed on the engines [...], they were imagining themselves as the four Beatles and found their corresponding figures”<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, the name of the volume and the eponymous poem encouraged the association with the Beatles through an

<sup>11</sup> Doru Mareș, interview in Daniel Puia-Dumitrescu, *O istorie a Cenaclului*, pp. 239-240.

<sup>12</sup> Bogdan Ghiu, interview in Mihail Vakulovski, *Portret de grup*, p. 257.

<sup>13</sup> Michèle Bokobza Kahan, “Image d’auteur”, in Anthony Glinoe and Denis Saint-Amand, *Le lexique Socius*, <http://ressources-socius.info/index.php/lexique/21-lexique/197-image-d-auteur>. Accessed June 15, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Teodora Dumitru, “Gaming the World System: Creativity, Politics, and Beat Influence in the Poetry of the 1980s Generation”, in Mircea Martin, Cristian Moraru, Andrei Terian (eds.), *Romanian Literature as World Literature*, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, pp. 271-287.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ion Bogdan Lefter, in Daniel Puia Dumitrescu, *O istorie a Cenaclului*, p. 259.

invocation of the song *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*, a reference to a psychedelic effect<sup>16</sup>. In the case of the poets grouped in the anthology called *Cinci*, the reference to the mentioned figures is made rather implicitly and evasively in the photograph, through gestures that express an apparently tacit revolt. In a photograph where four of the five members – Ion Bogdan Lefter, Bogdan Ghiu, Mariana Marin and Alexandru Mușina – appear (Annex, 2), the gesture of the crossed arms imposes a distance suggesting their trying to avoid any form of intrusion into their personal, private space while at the same time highlighting an expressly nonconformist attitude.

Therefore, embracing the figure of the hippie is, at Cenuclul de Luni, an practice that assumes the same existential engagement visible in several poems from the anthology *Cinci*, that point to the influence of the rock star through characteristic dress code and appearance (jeans and long hair<sup>17</sup>) and, implicitly, to iconoclastic gestures that reconstitute a way of living and acting:

just arrived in bucharest/ in the 6<sup>th</sup> March dorm/ I was welcomed by a strange sturdy fellow/ with long hair and a moustache/ that introduced himself as ion [...]/ to type on the machine the word courage/ to fall on the table knocked over by the effort/ and piles of books to bury you quietly/ to pull out the poem from the heap at dusk// to have the chance of hearing the level, frozen voice of T.S. Eliot reciting Prufrock// to chat with Sandu Mușina/ about all of these// to be/ the knife thrust between night and day<sup>18</sup>.

Another poem expresses revolt and nonconformity: “You don’t test your fate by submitting yourself to it/ but by resisting it;/ so turn around and fight/ until the corpse of utopia will lie/ at your feet”<sup>19</sup>. In his recent volume dedicated to Cenuclul de Luni, Cosmin Ciotloș highlights the effects of recording the relationships between the 1980s poets in the poetic texts. Far from being deprived of finality, the biographical insertions testify to the atmosphere of the group, revealing the manner through which they choose to represent themselves:

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<sup>16</sup> Andrei Oișteanu, *Narcotice în cultura română. Istorie, religie și literatură* [*Narcotics in the Romanian Culture. History, Religion and Literature*], third edition, Iași, Polirom, 2014, p. 528.

<sup>17</sup> Alexandru Mușina, *Sinapse*, p. 172: “We were very young, with long hair (even Ioan Groșan and myself) and jeans, we didn’t like the poetry of our immediate predecessors, too ‘metaphorical’, falsely ‘transcendental’, we thought – yes, we did have that naivety – that it is possible for a flower power movement to exist in Romania, under communism as well. We didn’t notice the difference between us and the youngsters of the free world”.

<sup>18</sup> Romulus Bucur, *1 poem & 1/2*, in *Cinci* [*Five*], second edition, București, Tracus Arte, 2011, p. 13: “proaspăt sosit în bucurești/ în căminul 6 martie/ am fost întâmpinat de un vlăjgan dubios/ cu plete și mustăți/ ce mi s-a recomandat ion [...]/ să bați la mașină cuvântul curaj/ pe masă să cazi doborât de efort/ și vrafuri de cărți să te-ngroape tăcut/ poemul să-l scoată în zori din morman// să ai șansa să auzi vocea egală înghețată a lui T.S. Elliot recitând Prufrock// să stai cu Sandu Mușina de vorbă/ despre toate acestea// să fii/ cuțit înfipt între noapte și zi”.

<sup>19</sup> Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Față în față cu dublul*, in *Cinci*, p. 46: “Nu-ți verifici soarta supunându-i-te/ ci împotrivindu-i-te;/ deci întoarce-te și luptă/ până când leșul utopiei va fi/ la picioarele tale”.

It is about a true underground legitimacy system consisting of dedications that the young authors launch to one another and of explicitly biographical references (again: mutual) submerged in the text. All animated by the tacit influence of publicly articulating what otherwise would have remained in the private realm of friendship or affinity<sup>20</sup>.

The way in which the loud reading of the texts took place at *Cenaclul de Luni* indicates a particularity of this framework of literary sociability that reveals, from the very start, a new program for the production and the experiencing of poetry: “The reading sessions of the literary circle also had an undisputable agonistic charge: they were recitals, but also poetic tournaments in front of a competent audience [...]. Each reading and the subsequent commentaries were a show”<sup>21</sup>. The one who reads must be an actor, a showman, and his gestures are shaped to correspond to this previously established model in which the stage play and spontaneity of the one reading his text become defining gestures. The meetings reveal creative impulse and a manner of reading that Mușina explains precisely by the influence of the American poets. About the work of the 1980s poets, he states that “it is the first poetic formula meant to be read publicly. So there would be the orality<sup>22</sup> of this poetry, its dynamism, its references to the immediate, to places, persons, situations also drawn on in the type of American poetry meant to be declaimed in front of a large audience”<sup>23</sup>. The specificity of the reading atmosphere that the 1980s poets created cannot therefore be understood without referring to the poets of the Beat generation, those who had invented a “personal mythology”<sup>24</sup> in order to construct – appealing to performance – an identity in which the negatory attitude of revolt, manifested in presence and discourse, constituted forms of affirmation conveying, at the same time, disgust and alienation as a reaction to the materialism or conformism of American society. The gestures of the participants in *Cenaclul de Luni*, taken over as such from those of the Beat generation, were radical, configuring a form of biographism in which the figure of the poet was as much deconstructed and denounced as it was derived from a political protest commitment that will reach a climax in the Romanian space only in the works of

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<sup>20</sup> Cosmin Ciotloș, *Cenaclul de Luni. Viața și opera [Monday Literary Circle. Life and Work]*, București, Pandora, 2021, p. 379.

<sup>21</sup> Alexandru Mușina, *Sinapse*, p. 149.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Puia Dumitrescu evokes the importance of orality in a context in which, as we have previously noted, the editorial entries were limited, and the literary circle became a substitute for publication, understood as a “spoken magazine”. The interviews also reconstitute the image of the commentators, constructed in the same spontaneous game and reflected in gestures. See, for instance, the interview with Bogdan Ghiu in Daniel Puia Dumitrescu, *O istorie a Cenaclului*, p. 200: “People would comment very lively, almost ferociously, I would say. Florin Iaru would set the tone most of the time, giggling and jumping from his chair”.

<sup>23</sup> Alexandru Mușina, an interview with Daniel Puia-Dumitrescu, *O istorie a Cenaclului*, p. 236.

<sup>24</sup> Jonah Raskin, *American Scream: Allen Ginsberg’s Howl and the Making of the Beat Generation*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2004.

poets from the generation 2000, the one that explores precisely an exposure of the self in a disadvantaged position by investigating personal traumas in a programmatic manner<sup>25</sup>.

*Strategies of Self-exclusion. From the Figure of the Commuter to Self-figuration through Negation*

The first writer stance that Alexandru Mușina constructs for himself, initially as part of this collective figure, will ultimately become the specific trademark of his personality: it will remain connected to the atmosphere of the Beat generation through this collective ethos that imprints itself in one's way of being<sup>26</sup>. For instance, his poem *Budila Express* conveys desperation, although in a quiet, suppressed form, without the pathos of revolt that permeates a similar poem, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, a future manifesto of the cry against a devalued society causing madness, hallucinatory states and the self-destruction of individuals. Here is how the collective identity is created in Mușina's poem, appreciated by the critics as the poem of an entire generation:

From time to time we sit at the table/ We knock some red eggs or raise glasses of wine, we chat [...] from time to time/ A poster./ Colourful, promises us the New Jerusalem/ In exchange for 30 cents or our silence [...] And we traveled with Budila-Express./ And we saw the drained faces like spent rags/ At the utmost limit, of the young lady-commuters./ And we felt the fluid of blind mistrust/ Descending like sulphuric acid in the bones [...] We entered the catacombs of reality./ At the bottom of the newspaper page and below the bottom./ There, where only/ Flesh and time, the fatigued sensor, exist./ And we got the tinfoil laurels/ Of the afternoons spent in meetings, and we/ Fought in the darkness with various/ County gods, and we lay/ On the bank of the river and cried [...] we howled, we expectorated/ The rancid sophistry of acceptance, and we/ Heard the whistle of the bullet by our ears/ in Budila-Express/ [...] Budila-Express! Budila-Express! Budila-Express!/ And we knew, and we loved./ And we had and could, wrote and read!<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion about Romanian poetry after the year 2000, see Ștefania Mincu, *Douămiismul poetic românesc. despre starea poeziei II* [Generation 2000 in Poetry. On the State of Poetry II], Constanța, Pontica, 2007. See also Grațiela Benga, *Rețeaua. Poezia românească a anilor 2000* [The Network. Romanian poetry after the year 2000], Timișoara, Editura Universității de Vest, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Jérôme Meizoz, "Postures d'auteur et poétique (Ajar, Rousseau, Céline, Houellebecq)". Texte présenté au colloque *Text und Feld*, Berlin, 5 février 2004, puis, sous une forme plus développée, au colloque international *Analyse textuelle et comparée des discours*, Université de Lausanne, 7 mai 2004, *Vox Poetica. Lettres et sciences humaines*, <http://www.vox-poetica.org/t/articles/meizoz.html>. Accessed June 15, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Alexandru Mușina, *Budila-Express*, in *Poeme alese (1975–2000)* [Selected Poems (1975–2000)], Brașov, Aula, 2003, pp. 50-56: "Din când în când ne așezăm la masă/ Ciocnim ouă roșii sau pahare de vin, conversăm [...] din când în când/ Câte un afix/ Multicolor ne promite Noul Ierusalim/ În schimbul a treizeci de bani sau al tăcerii [...] / Și noi am călătorit cu Budila-Express./ Și noi am văzut fețele stoarse, ca niște cârpe ajunse/ La gradul zero al folosirii, ale junelor navetiste./ Și noi am simțit fluidul neîncrederii oarbe/ Coborând ca acidul sulfuric în oase [...] / Am pătruns în catacombele realității./ În subsolul paginii de ziar și mai jos de subsol./ Acolo unde nu mai există decât/ Carnea și timpul, senzorul obosit./ Și noi am cules laurii de staniol/ Ai după-amiezilor petrecute-n ședințe, și

The gestures that characterize the collective profile (the knocking of eggs by a glass of wine, the conversations) translate a form of cohabitation marked by the experience of helplessness becoming concrete as a “fight in the dark”, as a natural consequence of a policy of silencing which actually hides another common position well illustrated in Mușina’s texts: that of the commuter<sup>28</sup> subjected to a state of (self-)exclusion. For the individual carries with himself a stigma inscribed in this paradoxical condition: membership and non-membership at the same time, from which the feelings of self-dissipation and loss of landmarks emerge through unavoidable oblivion that creates the feeling of expulsion as well, since “The doormen of the hotels have forgotten us, the tender and aristocratic women/ Have forgotten us, the station porters have forgotten us and the lift boys,/ The flower vendors and the gem merchants,/ The streets have forgotten us, the white houses have forgotten us/ Houses climbed by the crimson ivy of the old ‘la bella estate’./ We have lost everything”<sup>29</sup>. From this moment on, the model of the Beat generation is resized in the profile of Mușina, who remains, in later stances, faithful to the condition of the *self-excluded* turned into a distinctive trademark and employed both at discursive and at behavioural level.

All the strategies of self-representation, derived in Mușina’s case from a play of masks which becomes fundamental not only for his conception of poetry, but also for his formation as a writer figure, will work in the service of this stance of the self-excluded. By appealing to a mask, Mușina not only relates polemically to the totalitarian regime where disguise has become a condition of survival and a form of subversion (we are including here the perception of the literary circle as a way of masking a vision that does not submit to the regime), but also reinvents himself, adopting another identity or even creating a fictional identity through a pseudonym: Mușina participates in the 2002 debut prizes of *România Liberă* as Andor Vass, with the short anthology entitled *Dermata* (Brașov: Aula, 2002). Recalled and mentioned in a 2010 interview<sup>30</sup>, the moment is validated by Alexandru Cistelean:

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noi/ Am luptat în întuneric cu diverși/ Dumnezeii județeni, și noi am stat/ Pe malul fluviului și am plâns [...] am răcnit, am expectorat/ Sofistica râncedă a acceptării, și noi/ Am auzit șuierul glonțului pe lângă urechi/ în Budila-Express/[...] Budila-Express! Budila-Express! Budila-Express!/ Și noi am știut și noi am iubit,/ Și noi am avut și-am putut, am scris și-am citit!”

<sup>28</sup> For the figure of the commuter see *Lecția întâi. Spre culmi* [*The first lesson. To the top*], part of *Lecțiile deschise ale profesorului de limba franceză franceză A.M* [*The Open Classes of the French Teacher A.M.*], in Alexandru Mușina, *Poeme alese*, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> Alexandru Mușina, *Budila-Express*, p. 50: “Portarii hotelurilor ne-au uitat, femeile fragede și aristocrate/ Ne-au uitat, hamalii din gări ne-au uitat și liftierii,/ Vanzătoarele de flori și negustorii de nestemate./ Ne-au uitat străzile, ne-au uitat casele albe/ Pe care urca iedera ruginie a vechii la bella estate./ Am pierdut totul”.

<sup>30</sup> Doina Ioanid, “Interview with Alexandru Mușina”, *Observator Cultural*, 2010, 526, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/am-incercat-sa-proiectez-chipuri-diferite-ale-neantului-din-interior/>. Accessed June 15, 2020.

The attempt was serious nonetheless; I don't know if it succeeded though. It could be said that it did, since Andor Vass received (almost) no commentaries – for had it been known that Andor was Mușina, the comments would have been present for sure. But, for the same reason, it could also be said that it wasn't successful. In any case, the experiment was not continued. I also feel responsible for its failure, since (at Mușina's request) I lent him a hand in getting into the role, presenting Andor Vass (in no. 11/1999 of *Vatra*) as a poet discovered on the Internet, and I gifted him with a minimal biography. I do not know if I am entirely guilty for this failure, as perhaps they took my word for it and nobody believed that Vass could be a fictitious invention or a mask<sup>31</sup>.

More than a contextualization of the poetry program that the writer is faithful to, the mask game designated, at the same time, an opposite option materialized in a poetics that Mușina wishes to distinguish himself from. In the same above-mentioned interview, the writer defines his formula as the desire to transpose into poetry a *Theatre of the Self* (a definition that reiterates/is derived from the theory of the new anthropocentrism), opposed to a formula that promotes the transformation of poetry into *Reality Show*. The distinction he makes actually demarcates two poetic programs and two types of stage presence of the poet as a public persona. On the one hand, there is (in Mușina's view), the artifice revealed in the Reality Show-type poetics, understood as a form of forging the self; on the other side of this issue, one can find the poet that lives his poetry, one that embraces existence, but not in the sense of reportage, for

to be in the world means to choose: to be yourself, alive in this world, with all of its complexity, or to appear on TV, to speak about how you argued with your boyfriend. But there you are on a stage. True poetry does not mean acting for others but accomplishing all that Mallarmé articulated: a 'Theatre of the Self', a sort of interior theatre that the other (the reader) is able to reconstitute within himself [...] then you feel this is poetry, you feel that you are receiving it as such<sup>32</sup>.

A figure complementary to that of the poet engaged in a *Theatre of the Self* is that of the *hunter-poet* whose aim is to cross reality and transcribe it without passing it through a strong bookish filter, which implies the repositioning of the human being in the poetic text from the perspective of “his own corporality; the mastery – through words – of his own sensations”<sup>33</sup>. Beyond the theoretical aspects that nuance the hypothesis of the new anthropocentrism, poetry as a theatre of the

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<sup>31</sup> Al. Cistelean, “Erotica in nuce (O contribuție bibliografică strict necesară)” [“Eroticism in nuce (A Strictly Necessary Bibliographical Contribution)”], *Vatra*, 2014, 4-5, <https://revistavatra.org/2014/07/26/erotica-in-nuce-o-contributie-bibliografica-strict-necesara/>. Accessed April 14, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Doina Ioanid, “Interview with Alexandru Mușina”, *Observator Cultural*, 2010, 526, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/am-incercat-sa-proiectez-chipuri-diferite-ale-neantului-din-interior/>. Accessed June 15, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Alexandru Mușina, *Sinapse*, p. 61.



self can be connected with the use of the heteronym as a way of disguising, and the definition of poetry as a route that involves a succession of different authors. In *Jurnal* [Diary], published posthumously<sup>34</sup>, the identification of the writer Mușina with authors that correspond to him at different moments of creation becomes the only possible definition of the self, while the projections designate the drama resulting from acknowledging the ontological deficiency of fragmentation and determining a questioning of identity: “Sometimes I feel like I am Tolstoy, another time Byron, sometimes Camus, another time T.S. Eliot, sometimes Shelley, another time Dostoevsky, and rarely Kavafis or Tournier [...] I wonder if I have any centre, if my ‘biography’ means anything other than some deluded enterprise with frequent changes of direction”<sup>35</sup>. The role of heteronyms is not reduced to designating a free game of disguise, in the sense of performance. The stress falls rather on the illustration of “faces of the nothingness from the inside. For I believe that the modern man has a sort of inner, specific, defining incoherence”<sup>36</sup> that actually masks fleeing from oneself, a consequence of self-exclusion. Interpreting Mușina’s poetics as a form of disguise understood from the perspective of heteronyms, the writer thus appears in the position of a character from Ibsen’s theatre, Peer Gynt, while the mask becomes a way of salvation from nothingness.

Self-representation through negation and deconstruction is precisely the manner of engagement that Mușina adopts after 1989, subordinating it to the same figure of the self-excluded already crossing his biography. The disadvantaged or pessimist position displayed in his diary is also a form of deconstruction. The pretext is a disease purposefully highlighted in order to underline the passivity and, simultaneously, the liberation from the control exerted by the totalitarian regime, a freedom nonetheless experienced through lethargy, suggesting lack of a creative force, compensated or explained through the exposure of frailty, vulnerability, as well as through the exhibition of the hidden side of one’s existence. The reader becomes witness to the writer allowing intrusion in a private space, this time. In his diary, Mușina offers numerous images of the illness as retreat, decomposition and devitalization, while becoming sick is at the same time presented as a consequence of cultural trauma, for “the disease is within yourself, including in that inability to forget.” The same image of the (nostalgic) ailing person appears in poetry lines: “trucks and trolleybuses pass by my window/ dacia cars and vans, kneeling in the room/ and holding in hand two pictures, an elephant and a rooster/ my son is singing ‘the voice of america’ personally, I am down with the flu/ I have my scarf

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<sup>34</sup> Fragments of *Jurnal* [Diary] appear in *Vatra* magazine beginning with 2014, which initiates the series of unpublished writings of Alexandru Mușina.

<sup>35</sup> Alexandru Mușina, “Jurnal”, *Vatra*, 2014, 10, <https://revistavatra.org/2014/12/16/alexandru-musina-jurnal-continua-re-2/>. Accessed June 16, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Doina Ioanid, “Interview with Alexandru Mușina”, *Observator Cultural*, 2010, 526, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/am-incercat-sa-proiectez-chipuri-diferite-ale-neantului-din-interior/>. Accessed June 15, 2020.

around my neck my hat on the head I lie under the blanket and I smell/ of chinese ointment.”<sup>37</sup>. The voluntary self-exclusion from literature through the refusal or postponing of writing is an attitude that ultimately emerges from the refusal of conformism, but not without self-persiflage:

Ultimately, everything revolves around the wish (vocation, eventually) of writing [...] Alu made me laugh. He likes to ‘make a fool of himself’, he has a tendency to clown around, a tendency which belongs – in general – to children, but which is also – he makes me believe it – is inherited from me. It’s all about not caring (only then are you free from the normal mediocrity of the others). If you really possess a piece of information or an intuition of information that is truly new, different, it is normal not to care about a ‘routine’, constancy, waiting, about the others. The dissimulation, the game in which you do not – apparently – contradict the program of those around you, but remain yourself, is difficult<sup>38</sup>.

Thus, in *Jurnal*, the poet uses the right to be different through wilful infantilization transposed in a caricatural manner, as a sign of attitudinal revolt amplified in discourse: “I repeat the same clauses, the same sentences and expressions endlessly, Tania is right to be exasperated, but that is my way of getting revenge: On what? On the surrounding world, on myself, the one that has become a sort of intellectual fungus. A sort of fungus king, the fungus poet of a limp mind”<sup>39</sup>. At the same time, he refers (self-ironically) to the freedom that he had promoted: “the liberty of being sleazy, untrustworthy and – nevertheless – of having access to a (small) audience”<sup>40</sup>.

#### “The Balneal Genius”

*Scrisorile unui geniu balnear* [*The Letters of a Balneal Genius*] reiterate, in epistolary form, the pretext of illness and retreat, subordinating it to some assumed positions on the cultural scene. The position of “balneal genius” is also underlined by means of the photographic portrait taken by Tudor Jebeleanu for the cover of the book (Annex, 4). Mușina is captured in his pyjamas, lying in bed and holding a writing instrument in his hand. The image allows for his placement in an inter-textual dialogue with Caragiale’s piece *Conul Leonida față cu reacțiunea* [*Mr.*

<sup>37</sup>Alexandru Mușina, *Scrisoare clipei care-a fost* [*Letter to the Past Moment*], from *Tomografia și alte explorări* [*Tomography and Other Explorations*], in *Poeme alese*, p. 112: “prin fața ferestrei mele trec camioane și troleibuze/ dacia și furgonetele în cameră stând în genunchi/ și ținând în mână două poze un elefant și-un cocoș/ fiul meu cântă ‘the voice of america’ eu personal sunt gripat/ am fularul la gât căciula în cap stau întins sub plapumă și miros/ a alifie chinezească”.

<sup>38</sup> Alexandru Mușina, “Jurnal”, *Vatra*, 2015, 3-4, p. 11, [https://vatraoficial.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/vatra\\_3\\_4\\_2015-2.pdf](https://vatraoficial.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/vatra_3_4_2015-2.pdf). Accessed June 16 2020.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

*Leonida Facing the Reaction*], whose figure he imbues with new (ironic) meaning in order to introduce himself:

Sir Leonida was reading the gazette in his bed, in his pyjamas. I wrote the majority of the letters addressed to you in my bed, in my pyjamas. This way, the ontological-epistolary circle is closed. In the extreme, I would define the revelatory experience that lies at the core of the Olănești letters in this way: you can be brilliant, responsible, useful to the nation, and be in your pyjamas<sup>41</sup>.

One can notice here a specific manner of acting “against the grain,” an attitude explicitly adopted as Alexandru Mușina represents himself as *Gică Contra*, a position rooted, as we have noticed, at the very beginning of the writer’s formation through the rock star figure functioning against the totalitarian background. Nevertheless, after the Romanian Revolution, Mușina’s contrarian attitude is visible especially with respect to his generational colleagues: “And what tribe should I join? I was part of the tribe of the 1980s generation, but I backed out disgusted by ‘its mercantilisation’, by the loss of the ordinary and the dissipation of the initial ethos”<sup>42</sup>.

The disappointment causing the withdrawal emerges on the basis of the voluntary self-exclusion from the institutions in which his generational colleagues are also enrolled, institutions seen as able to confer prestige and legitimization, understood by Paul Dirks<sup>43</sup> as a form of accepting or rather obtaining a privileged position, as well as a way of sealing value in. After the fall of the Ceaușescu regime, the literary scene was divided in two groups: *Uniunea Scriitorilor* [The Writers’ Union] and *Asociația Scriitorilor Profesioniști* [The Professional Writers’ Association]. The latter was crystallized around the 1980s poets as an alternative to The Writer’s Union, which was accused of being organised according to the model used during the regime, with lack of transparency in granting positions and awards, and the precarious justification of internal decisions<sup>44</sup>. A source of the disputes was the double membership of the writers both to ASPRO (The Professional Writers’ Association) and the USR (The Writers’ Union), a status that Mușina explains in the epistle called *Gică Contra între ASPRO și US* [*Gică Contra between ASPRO and US*]<sup>45</sup>, where he underlines his position. What Mușina rejects is not legitimization and consecration in themselves, but the mechanisms through which these distinctions are obtained in the literary world, thus displaying an attitude that

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<sup>41</sup> Alexandru Mușina, *Scrisorile unui geniu balnear* [*The Letters of a Balneal Genius*], București, Aula, 2007, p. 202.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 125.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Dirks, “Le corps de l’écrivain, instrument et enjeu de reconnaissance”, *Carnets*, 2017, 9, <http://journals.openedition.org/carnets/2024>. Accessed June, 15, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Mircea Vasilescu, *Cultura română pe înțelesul patrioților* [*Romanian Culture in the Sense of Patriots*], București, Humanitas, 2018, p. 54.

<sup>45</sup> Alexandru Mușina, “Gică Contra între ASPRO și U.S.” [*Gică Contra between ASPRO and US*], in *Scrisorile unui geniu balnear*, pp. 29-43.

is vehemently directed against imposture, even at the risk of marginality, understood this time as a sign of distinction and consequently valued positively. The writer therefore prefers marginality, using it as a weapon and pleading for assuming freedom through writing, since “here, in writing, I feel truly free to address the others just the way I would like to”<sup>46</sup>. His obstinate attitude and the idea of social engagement can be noticed in the photographic portrait taken by Tudor Jebeleanu, where Mușina is pictured holding a gun to his head (Annex, 3). At the same time, Mușina stages a double reflection through the insertion of his own photograph on his T-shirt, completed by the message “Poesia o muerte”, which suggests the reactionary force of the word, as well the equivalence between writing and living.

#### *Instead of Concluding Remarks*

Existential engagement is invoked almost obsessively in discussions about Alexandru Mușina. The portrait recently compiled in *Vatra*<sup>47</sup> magazine, in a special tribute issue, is symptomatic as it articulates and completes the self-construction of the writer. The figure of the writer assembled from the outside is not fundamentally different from the one that he inscribed himself into, with special emphasis on the humoristic and ironic dimension. Humour and irony are effects of assuming and promoting a freedom which, as we have seen so far, functions as a nexus between different faces that the writer assumes, from collective to particular representations. The reconstitution of the mentor position and, implicitly, of the image of the founder around whom a mythology is built, brings again into focus the issue of freedom as fundamental element in the poetic program that Mușina assumes when he tries to define himself. In the biography of the writer, the moment when *Cercul literar 19* was born constitutes a reference point, as it is the place where his mentor status is configured. *Cercul literar 19*, founded in Brașov, was set up, just as *Cenaclul de Luni*, out of the need to create an environment different from that of the official system. Among those who frequented it we can count, along with Alexandru Mușina, Gheorghe Crăciun, Paul Grigore, Angela Nache, Vasile Gogea, Claudiu Mitan, Al. Sion<sup>48</sup>, also Simona Popescu, Caius Dobrescu, Marius Oprea, Andrei Bodiu, who were high school students back then. Although he is acknowledged as a master, thus affirming himself, gaining a well-defined position within the group and subsequently contributing to the foundation of the philology

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 22.

<sup>47</sup> See dossier “Școala de la Brașov” [“The Brașov School”], *Vatra*, 2019, 6-7, [https://vatraofficial.files.wordpress.com/2019/11/vatra\\_6\\_7\\_2019-1.pdf](https://vatraofficial.files.wordpress.com/2019/11/vatra_6_7_2019-1.pdf). See also dossier “Alexandru Mușina”, *Vatra*, 2014, 4-5, <https://vatraofficial.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/vatra-nr-4-5-2014.pdf>. Accessed June 10, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Caius Dobrescu invokes these names in Mihail Vakulovski, *Portret de grup*, p. 163. The list of participants is slightly modified depending on the person interviewed.

school in Brașov known as “Școala de la Brașov” [“The Brașov School”], Mușina does not completely identify himself with the position of a host: he does not reclaim and use the privileges of the mentor position by imposing a hierarchy. The relation he establishes with the members of literary circle is rather one of equality, where readings are guided by the motto of cultivating a radical attitude with respect to what the literary tradition means.

Through the stakes he formulates, Mușina reveals not only the profile of a generation and implicitly of related poetry, but also a personal trademark, noticeable in gestures and discourse through successive trials of (self-)exclusion. Some features, reconstituted in the interventions collected in the *Vatra* issue, certify the influence exerted by the writer, as well as by the man that Alexandru Mușina was, one derived precisely from the freedom he promotes: “a man with a founding vocation” (Mircea Martin), “a special talent for mobilizing and engaging people. A talent for animating” (Ciprian Șulea), “the convincing tone” (Diana Tătăuș), “he had the abilities of a leader, not those of a mere boss”, “the hallucinating way in which he managed to keep you captive” (Cristina Palaș). Fascination with Mușina can be explained by his capacity of juggling the serious and playful tones, the writer constantly switching from character to character, in the same way that explains his preference for the use of heteronyms.

Mușina’s public appearances, as well as the manner in which he relates to others, are explained by reference to his irony, a characteristic feature of the writer’s behaviour, also present at discursive level<sup>49</sup> where it functions as self-irony. Transposed into behaviour, irony manifests itself through laughter, with the alternative smile and grin, variably present in the interviews about Mușina, confirming the position that he adopts. Laughter as a way of public manifestation initially appears in *Cenaclul de Luni*, with two distinct values: the *palliative-laughter* (of thaumaturgical value), as exploration of freedom, as relief, opposite *critical laughter* as a caustic form directed towards the others as critical reaction. The atmosphere can also be discovered in the Creative Writing Master’s degree classes, although Mușina particularly cultivates laughter in its caustic variation, as a sign of a personality that interrogates, questions or lambasts the world and himself, something that leads Ruxandra Ivăncescu to circumscribe a particular Mușina style in that “cascading laughter that I am sure everyone who knew Alexandru Mușina still remembers; Sandu, who butted in on complex scientific and theoretical discussions with his style of a Păcală-philosopher, ready to carry the door on his back just to show you how ridiculous you can be with all of your

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<sup>49</sup> In an article dedicated to Houellebecq appears this strategy/ option of the writer to orient his readers through a transfer from the intra-discursive position to the extra-discursive one. See Louise Moor, “Posture polémique ou polémisation de la posture?”, *COnTEXTES*, 2012, 10, <http://journals.openedition.org/contextes/4921>. Accessed April 20, 2021.

scientific pretence.”<sup>50</sup> This Păcală-philosopher style recreated the playful, jolly stance of Mușina and must be understood in relation to the figure of the balneal genius that he had adopted, an ironic and subversive figure. The notes that refer to the grin that “chastises stupidity” (Aurel Pantea) or the smile that draws attention: “beware! beware!” (Nicolae Coande) can fit into the same category.

At the end of this analysis regarding the ways in which Alexandru Mușina’s writer stance is construed over time, we can ascertain that the writer from Brașov evolves from a rock star figure that he shares with the whole group of Cenușarii, to putting into effect a “Theatre of the self” by using the mask as figuration of alterity and reinterpretation, lambasting the self, and ending with the figure of the “balneal genius”. However, all of these function as “faces” or facets of a single mould: that of the self-excluded, which ends up criss-crossing his poetry and prose, as well as his literary research, formed into a sarcastic, self-ironic, caustic and negatory discourse.

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<sup>50</sup> Ruxandra Ivăncescu, “Despre literatură și viață” [“On Literature and Life”], *Vatra*, 2014, 4-5, <https://vatraoficial.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/vatra-nr-4-5-2014.pdf>. Accessed June 12, 2020.

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ANNEXE-PHOTO



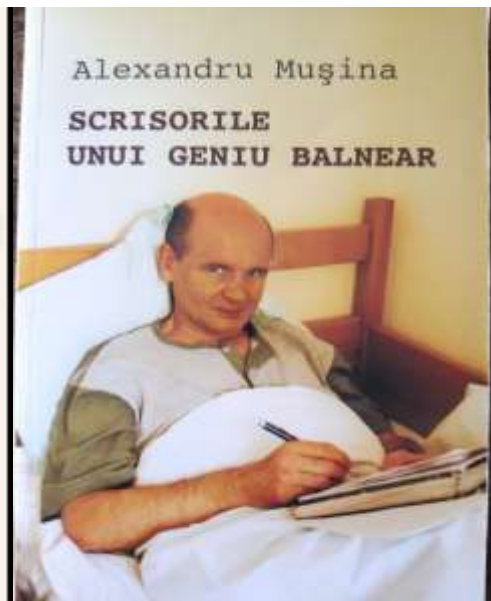
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ALEXANDRU MUȘINA BETWEEN THE BEAT POET  
AND THE “BALNEAL GENIUS”*(Abstract)*

Redefining auctoriality involves both literary and extra-literary criteria. Relying mostly on Jérôme Meizoz's concept of posture introduced in *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur*, the purpose of this article is to investigate or to (re)evaluate the ways in which the writer imposes himself on the literary scene through self-figuration, involving, at the same time, the reception process. I analysed, for instance, the different representations of Alexandru Mușina, a writer from 80s generation, from the collective corpus, defined in the group formed at Monday Literary Circle, to individual presence. I was interested in the position of the Romanian writer during the totalitarian regime and which were the alternative ways of obtaining visibility, taking into account the influence of rock star or the influence of Beat Poets. Another point of interest was the engagement that the writer adopts after '89, in his fiction and as a public figure.

*Keywords:* 1980s generation, totalitarian regime, Monday Literary Circle, literary posture, Beat generation, “Balneal Genius”.

## ALEXANDRU MUȘINA ÎNTRE POETUL BEAT ȘI „GENIUL BALNEAR”

*(Rezumat)*

Redefinirea auctorialității implică deopotrivă criterii literare și extraliterare. Având în vedere mai ales conceptul de postură formulat de către Jérôme Meizoz în *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur*, scopul prezentului articol este de a investiga sau de a (re)evalua modalitățile prin care scriitorul se impune pe scena literară prin figurarea de sine, implicând, în același timp, procesul receptării. Am analizat diferitele reprezentări ale lui Alexandru Mușina, un scriitor din generația '80, de la corpul colectiv definit în grupul format la Cenaclul de Luni, la prezența individuală. M-a interesat poziția scriitorului român în timpul regimului totalitar și care au fost modurile alternative de a obține vizibilitate, luând în considerare influența starului rock sau influența poezilor din generația Beat. Un alt punct de interes a fost modalitatea de angajare a scriitorului după '89, în textele sale și ca prezență publică.

*Cuvinte-cheie:* generația '80, regim totalitar, Cenaclul de Luni, postură literară, generația Beat, „geniul balnear”.