

VICTOR COBUZ

## THE COMMITTED WRITER POSTURE: TEODORA COMAN & ELENA VLĂDĂREANU

### *Engaged Literature in the Romanian Literary Field*

“Romanian literature deeply dislikes – *et pour cause!* – writing with a political thesis”<sup>1</sup> is the observation with which Rita Chirian opens her review of Ruxandra Cesereanu’s book of poetry, *Scrisoare către un prieten și înapoi către țara mea* [*A Letter to a Friend and Back to My Country*], one of the most politically marked books of the last years in Romanian literature. This statement is downright symptomatic of the way in which engaged literature is perceived in the current Romanian literary field. Indeed, Romanian writers avoid or do not sincerely believe in “writing with a political thesis”, but to say that there is an irreconcilable rift between them and the engaged literature would be a great mistake.

The explanation “*et pour cause*” is relevant from several points of view. In addition to the obvious purpose of taking the place of a longer explanation that cannot be detailed in a simple book review, this expression refers to the best known cause of this attitude towards engaged literature: the communist experience. Of course, the communist regime systematically cancelled the autonomy of the Romanian literary field, subjecting it to its ideological interests, but the dismissal of engaged literature by the Romanian writers cannot be understood only by referencing the way in which political art and social criticism in literature were discredited in the four decades of Romanian communism.

The ill-fated reputation of engaged literature in Romanian culture has multiple causes and – along with the collective trauma of communism – the most important is the supremacy of the ideology of aesthetic autonomy in the emergence of the Romanian literary field, which translates – at least theoretically – into the categorical rejection of any interference of the extra-literary in the production and reception of the literary work. The reasons why the aesthetic canon of Romanian literature lasted for 150 years have been discussed in great detail, but we must also take into account that “there is a correlation between the success of the principle of aesthetic autonomy and the series of political and institutional coercions that accompanied it throughout Romanian history”<sup>2</sup>. Those who could have countered the supremacy of the aesthetic criterion posed a danger not only to the literary field, which was in a continuous process of becoming autonomous, but also to the

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<sup>1</sup> Rita Chirian, “Roșu, galben și dezastru” [“Red, Yellow and Disaster”], *Poesis*, 2018, 2, p. 73. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Mihai Iovănel, *Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc* [*The Ideologies of Literature in Romanian Post-communism*], București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2017, p. 93.

political *status quo* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The fact that the heteronomous camp had leaders like Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea (Marxist critique) and Nicolae Iorga (ethnicist critique) tells us a lot about the political stakes of the old confrontation between “art for art’s sake” and “art with a thesis”.

The Romanian literary studies of the last decades that have focused on engaged art are mostly about the political dimension of the historical avant-garde or about socialist realism. However, Romanian engaged literature has a tradition that is not limited to these two moments, its episodes being determined by the multiple and rapid changes that the Romanian society has gone through in the last two centuries. The examples at the beginning of the paragraph are cases in which militant writers have pushed forward a left-wing agenda, but there are also many right-wing engaged writers in Romanian literature. Nineteenth-century nationalism, the fascism of the Interwar Young Generation with all its avatars, and the anti-communism of the 1990s and 2000s produced a literature that served these ideological interests. However, many of these examples are not perceived today as advocating one cause or another. As Vasile Mihalache points out, the great fiction of the Romanian literary field is that only certain texts are ideological, especially “the writings of the left; the ones of the right must suggest a clear fascist penchant in order to be seen as such, and sometimes not even then do they achieve that effect”<sup>3</sup>. This situation is not so difficult to understand “since the literary field and the teaching of literature in schools and universities are both creations of nationalism and the nation-state”<sup>4</sup>. We could add to this explanation the fact that some of the writers who noticed the closeness between the principle of aesthetic autonomy and the dominant ideology of that precise moment have hidden their political options behind aestheticism.

One must not forget that adherence to the principle of aesthetic autonomy can be a political act in itself. This fact is most visible in the case of the new generation of critics and writers who appeared in Romania in the early 1960s – also recruiting writers from previous generations. In his famous essay “Despre estetismul socialist” [“On Socialist Aestheticism”], Mircea Martin has pointed out that when it comes to “a totalitarian ideology, then the political non-engagement of aestheticism becomes in the context [...] a political attitude”<sup>5</sup>. The “autonomous” group during the communist regime seems to follow Theodor Adorno’s plea for

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<sup>3</sup> Vasile Mihalache, “Împotriva suprematismului estetic. O perspectivă postumanistă” [“Against the Supremacy of the Aesthetic. A Posthumanist Perspective”], [https://posthum.ro/blog/vasile-mihalache-impotriva-suprematismului-estetic/#\\_ftn4](https://posthum.ro/blog/vasile-mihalache-impotriva-suprematismului-estetic/#_ftn4). Accessed on May 4, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>5</sup> Mircea Martin, “Despre estetismul socialist” [“On Socialist Aestheticism”], *România literară*, 2004, 23, p. 19.

aesthetic art, according to which art “criticizes society by merely existing”<sup>6</sup> or that, “much more importantly, art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art”<sup>7</sup>.

Unfortunately, the ideology of aesthetic autonomy prevented a nuanced and non-biased reception of Romanian literary writings with a political stake. Moreover, the fact that many opportunistic writers strived for economic capital or for access to power positions in the literary field has significantly affected the credibility of engaged literature in the Romanian literary field. Mihail Sadoveanu’s case is probably the most notorious one, as he obtained even political positions after the 1946 general election, but there are many more examples of Romanian writers that collaborated with the various regimes that succeeded each other over the last century for the multiple benefits that resulted from this type of alliance.

We must take into account, however, the fact that for most of its history, modern Romanian culture has been literature-centric, with literature and literary criticism reflecting the dominant ideologies of each period. Thus, a set of expectations was created that the literary *doxa* be formulated in terms of the writer’s position in relation to the political elements of public life, putting extra pressure on writers who wanted to legitimize themselves in the literary field.

However, something has changed in the last decade and “writing with a political thesis” is not avoided by Romanian writers to the same extent as before. There are two causes for this, one specific to the literary field and the other to the political one. First of all, the young generation of critics asserting themselves since the 2000s have strongly challenged the supremacy of aesthetic autonomy in the study of literature. This has contributed to the emergence of a series of works that capitalize on many aspects of literary production that autonomous critics consider to be minor and too irrelevant. Also, the increased attention paid to the political character of literature counteracts the old stigma that engaged literature used to carry. This was the convenient critical and theoretical framework in which a literature with civic and political stakes could materialize, in conjunction with the articulation of a so-called “civil society”. From the anti-austerity protests of 2012 and those against mining in Roşia Montană in 2013, to the anti-corruption and post-Colectiv and anti-government protests after the Social Democratic Party won the parliamentary elections at the end of 2016, all these street movements needed an artistic identity that would represent their ideology. Hence the publishing of an anthology like *Resist! Poetry* (2017), which attests to a reconsideration of engaged literature in the Romanian literary mainstream.

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<sup>6</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*. Edited by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor, New York, Continuum Publishing, 1997, p. 225.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

*Engaged Literature and the Posture of the Committed Writer*

This introduction was necessary because it provided us with a context to understand contemporary Romanian engaged literature. Moreover, this presentation brought us closer to an important premise of our article: there is no innocent art, and every literary work encodes the social and political positions of their author. If we accept all of these considerations, then we can see how the literary text is a central element in the construction of the committed writer posture.

In this paper we will try to analyze the relationship between the writer's *posture* and his or hers *poetics* – in the sense that the two can reflect and even shape each other. In this regard, engaged literature is the most suitable object of such an inquiry because it is the literary form in which posture and poetics seem to be closely linked. We also believe that the theory of literary postures can help us reach a better understanding of the engaged literature and the situation of the committed writer.

In *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur*, Jérôme Meizoz defines the authorial posture as “‘l'identité littéraire' construite par l'auteur lui-même, et souvent relayée par les médias qui la donnent à lire au public...”<sup>8</sup> and as “la manière singulière d'occuper une ‘position’ dans le champ littéraire”<sup>9</sup>. However, Jérôme Meizoz is quite cautious when he discusses the question of whether any mark of the writer's posture can be identified in the literary text. Of course, he is more concerned with prose than poetry and it is hard to disagree with him on this matter. But poetry is a literary genre in which the author does not hide so much behind some characters or behind a narrator as he/she does in fiction. In other words, poetry is a form of literature that places great emphasis on authenticity, and its communicative dimension requires a more “direct” relationship with the reader.

Jérôme Meizoz does include some French poets in his exploration of literary postures, but he is not so much interested in their poetry. As he declares from the start, the main media that convey the posture of an author are his or her interviews, public speeches, diaries and autobiographies. Even so, Meizoz acknowledges that there is a connection between poetics and posture. Throughout the book, he makes a considerable amount of references to this relationship between an author's writing and the way he performs in the public sphere. Perhaps the clearest exposition of this two-way relationship is the following:

Pour moi, cette notion a une double dimension, en prise sur l'histoire et le langage : simultanément elle se donne comme une *conduite* et un *discours*. C'est d'une part la présentation de soi, les conduites publiques en situation littéraire (prix, discours, banquets, entretiens en public etc.) ; d'autre part, l'image de soi donnée dans

<sup>8</sup> Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur*, Genève, Slatkine, 2007, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

et par le discours, ce que la rhétorique nomme l'*ethos*. En parlant de « posture » d'auteur, on veut décrire relationnellement des effets de texte et des conduites sociales. Autrement dit, sur un plan méthodologique, cette notion articule la rhétorique et la sociologie. En effet, elle ne considère pas l'interne textuel sans son pendant externe et vice-versa ; enfin, loin de traiter le discours littéraire comme un document et de l'ancrer dans un fait formel pour sans spécificité, elle permet en déployer les effets dans la communication. Par exemple, celui de donner le ton : la construction de l'orateur dans son discours, son répertoire et ses dispositifs historiques<sup>10</sup>.

As we can see, in the first part of the quoted paragraph, Meizoz goes into detail on what the components of literary posture are. Besides the author's public behaviour, posture is made up of the *discourse* of the writer. More exactly, posture is the result of the interplay between the text and the author's demeanour in society. According to this logic, despite the distance a writer takes from his narrators and his characters, the text itself reveals enough about his social existence.

In another chapter, Jérôme Meizoz discusses Blaise Cendrars's novel *Bourlinguer* and claims that:

Dans « Venise », la posture et la poétique apparaissent solidaires, la conception de la littérature y étant inséparable d'une certaine façon d'assumer l'auctorialité. Elle a pour enjeu d'articuler, dans l'analyse, l'interne et l'externe textuel (la figuration linguistique de l'instance auctoriale et l'auteur biographique), trop souvent dissociés aussi bien par les approches formalistes que par les lectures historiennes<sup>11</sup>.

It is not hard to see how important the text is in the construction of a literary posture, because "l'œuvre constitue aussi une image de soi proposée au public"<sup>12</sup>. Vice versa, posture is an element that shapes the literary text, as Meizoz shows in the example above. Therefore, by analysing the literary posture of an author we can also study "à la fois sa 'stratégie' dans le champ et ses options formelles, à savoir sa poétique propre"<sup>13</sup>.

This insight into Jérôme Meizoz's theory of literary posture proves that the literary work can be taken into consideration when this concept is studied, and that the public image which an author constructs for himself has implications for his writings. We must not understand these conclusions as a return to a biographical criticism already rejected by the Russian formalism and its succeeding schools of literary theory. One of the greatest achievements of Meizoz's theory is that it gives us a middle way between the linguistic and the sociological approaches to literature.

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16.

But what about poetry? When we ask ourselves if this literary genre is able to contribute to the construction of the committed writer posture, we actually run into a tradition that has excluded poetry from this equation for a long time. We are referring here, of course, to Jean-Paul Sartre and his famous essay *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* in which the French philosopher has theorized the literary engagement. For Sartre, the poet is not fit to commit his literature to a cause, because “poets are men who refuse to utilise language”<sup>14</sup>. In other words, poetry has a particular way of expressing itself, it bends the language so much that it makes it unrecognizable or, more exactly, ineffective in a process like engaging literature in a political or civic cause. Sure enough, there are many examples that contradict Sartre’s supposition, but this fact did not stop the diffusion of this attitude. Unfortunately, this topic was overshadowed by the general problem of engaged literature and the debate that started with Jean-Paul Sartre’s articles – it would really not be incorrect to say that this debate concluded with the denunciation of this type of literature.

In *Pour une poétique de l'évènement* (1979), Predrag Matvejević presents the two main and opposite conceptions on engaged poetry in the twentieth century that stem out of the discussions like the one mentioned above. The first one categorically rejects this type of poetry and portrays the poet as an individual who, by committing to a cause, sells himself and his art. Moreover, “even admitting that the *committed* poet may be *disinterested*, he still remains, according to this conception, tributary to his *engagement* by the very fact that his desire for social efficiency leads him to aesthetic conformity”<sup>15</sup>. Simply put, even if the committed author is sincere in his adherence to a cause, his or her writings are aesthetically “compromised”. On the other hand, “by refusing to engage, poetry also refuses to act and, as a result, to exist: thus, it becomes useless due to its own inefficiency”<sup>16</sup>. Predrag Matvejević rejects both opinions, but he does not try to “resolve” this antagonism. In his book, Matvejević exposes at large the complicated history of literary engagement and its public perception. He is aware that a solution to this problem is a chimera. Instead, Matvejević tries to shed some light on the intricate nature and evolution of the concept of committed writing. This is just one example of an echo of Sartre’s theory of *littérature engagée*, a rather moderate one if we may add, that tries to see beyond this antinomy – in the first part of this paper, we came across the case of Theodor Adorno’s position that criticizes Jean-Paul Sartre’s whole construct in an attempt to support autonomous art.

The discussion about Jean-Paul Sartre was inevitable since he is one of those authors who established this type of posture – if not *the one* who did it. Despite the

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<sup>14</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, “*What Is Literature?*” and *Other Essays*. Translated by Bernard Fretchman et al. Introduction by Steven Ungar, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> Predrag Matvejević, *Poetica evenimentului. Poezie și angajare* [*The Poetics of the Event. Poetry and Commitment*]. Translation and comments by Luminița Beiu-Paladi. Preface by Marcel Duță, București, Univers, 1980, p. 108.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

controversy around Sartre's own commitment, the posture that he constructed remains a reference point to other writers that have been interested in committing their writing to a political or civic cause and to the scholars that want to analyze this postural network. To Sartre's virtual disagreement, in the following paragraphs we propose a brief but informative look at two different cases of committed writer posture in the Romanian contemporary literary field.

*Teodora Coman & Elena Vlădăreanu: Two Models of the Committed Writer Posture*

We have chosen two Romanian poets to illustrate the ways in which an author can construct a committed writer posture. There are two main reasons behind our decision to talk about Teodora Coman and Elena Vlădăreanu. As shown above, the Romanian political field had its periods when one ideology or political belief was dominant and this fact was visible especially in the literary field, where the main actors and institutions oscillated between opposing and/or following the political efforts to control this ideology. In post-communism, despite unequal power relations, many more voices from the political spectrum can be heard than before. There we have our first reason of choosing these two poets. Elena Vlădăreanu, with her themes ranging from feminism to the condition of the writer in capitalism, is generally perceived as a Left-wing author, while Teodora Coman with her involvement in the anti-government/anti-corruption protests within the "Vă vedem" ["We see you"] street movement from Sibiu can be categorized at least as a Center-Right protester and, of course, writer. This labeling is rather approximate, but it is useful to our discussion and we believe that it will not be contradicted by their interviews. It is important to note that neither of them has unequivocally affirmed their adherence to an ideology, and that their loyalty seems to be lying more with the social and political causes they believe in. This is important in their process of constructing a committed writer posture, but let's not get ahead of ourselves.

As the reader can see, we tried to bring in a little diversity from the political spectrum, but this was not the decisive reason in opting for these two poets. What is more important is that the two authors have assembled two types of committed writer posture, not necessarily opposite, but with significant differences, as well as commonalities. Therefore, Elena Vlădăreanu has a *hard* committed writer posture, while Teodora Coman has a *soft* one. What is the criterion by which this differentiation was made? It is not political; their beliefs and allegiances are not so relevant here. As simple as it may sound, the *hard/soft* labels indicate how *strong* the posture is. Keep in mind that the strength of these postures can be measured in relation to a model of a fully committed writer posture – like Sartre's, although he is not the only major example here. We don't intend to relate the two postures that we discuss with such reference points, not because we don't believe in the utility of such a process, but because the contexts are so different, and we might need more space to discuss all these particular situations. It is more practical to compare these postures with each other, in their specific context. Accordingly, Teodora Coman

has a “weaker” posture than Elena Vlădăreanu, but not a less effective one. The strength of their postures should not be measured in terms of efficiency or of productivity. It is more a matter of internal strategies and of invested resources in the construction of the committed writer posture.

The consistency with which they maintain their posture is one of the most visible elements by which we can differentiate between the two poets. Teodora Coman’s posture depicts her as a writer who is “forced” by a specific situation to commit her writings to a cause. By this logic, she is a poet who descends into the public arena and fights for “what is right” with a sense of urgency and the awareness of a social crisis. It is not a systematic engagement, but an *occasional* one. We don’t mean that her commitment is also an opportunistic one, we do not comment on its sincerity, but on its degree of “premeditation”. Teodora Coman’s posture portrays her as a poet that has not prepared in advance to be politically engaged. In an interview, she is asked how much she was influenced by the social and political space at the time in writing *soft guerrilla*. She answers:

The socio-political space has changed me a lot in the last two years: there has been a parallel calendar from Colectiv onwards. I entered the third year A.D., that is, after Colectiv. I used to be a simple house animal, concerned only with my own comfort, or a houseplant, thanks to the light absorbed through the window. But the toxic politics has penetrated even this space, my seemingly secure habitat, and I have joined the civic movement “We see you” from Sibiu, together with principled people and wonderful friends of all ages<sup>17</sup>.

Metonymically, Teodora Coman’s path from an apolitical stance to energetic involvement in civic movements represents the political “awakening” of the Romanian urban middle class – and highly educated, to complete the social portrait of this group. As we have seen in the first part of this paper, the amplification of this social class’s civic consciousness has led to a more political literature and Teodora Coman’s example is evocative of that. As she stated in the same interview, in her first two books of poetry, “the socio-political dimension appears anaemic (in the first, absolutely not at all!)”<sup>18</sup> and only with the third one she starts to observe how the external socio-political environment has affected her.

So how does Teodora Coman construct this *soft* and *occasional* posture of a committed writer? First, obviously by participating in the protests. In her words:

Ciprian Mihali is right when he says that you don’t learn civic attitude and behaviour either at school or on TV, but only there, in the street, so to get out of your tight circle and to feel yourself flanked by others in solidarity is an overwhelming

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<sup>17</sup> “Spațiul social-politic m-a schimbat foarte mult în ultimii doi ani” [“The socio-political space has changed me a lot in the last two years”], interview with Teodora Coman by Andra Rotaru. <https://blog.goethe.de/dlite/archives/609-Spaiul-social-politic-m-a-schimbat-foarte-mult-in-ultimii-doi-ani.html>. Accessed on September 14, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.



experience, especially in silence, as we do it. [...] I also opened my eyes and ears to reality and I learned to put this damn self aside, to subordinate it to an urgent cause, to accept the truth of its beneficial relativization<sup>19</sup>.

The physical presence “in the streets”, at a protest, is a fundamental strategy in the construction of the committed writer posture, especially when it’s related to some specific civic movements. More so today, when the writers can benefit from the latest technological advancements, with their presence in the middle of the protestors proved by the many pictures, videos and interviews taken on the spot. In this regard, Teodora Coman’s posture is part of a collective posture that has emerged as a result of this series of protests. Other instances of this collective posture is Radu Vancu’s and Ruxandra Cesereanu’s own postures as committed writers engaged in “We see you” and “#Resist” anti-governmental protests between 2017 and 2019. They were among the most vocal writers involved in these movements and their engagement is supported by all the “evidence” available on social media and in online magazines.

But the simple presence at the protests only makes you a protester. Obviously, to be a committed writer, you must write. This type of posture requires a body of work committed to the cause that the author fights for, from articles and essays to diaries and fiction/poetry. Radu Vancu and Ruxandra Cesereanu have published their fair share of non-fiction texts, but the volumes that really made their postures as committed writers are their diaries: *De la Golan la #resist. Jurnal civic, 2017–2019* [*From Golan to #resist. Civic Journal, 2017–2019*] (2020) by Ruxandra Cesereanu and *Răul. Jurnal, 2016–2020* [*The Evil. Journal, 2016–2020*] (2021) by Radu Vancu. Teodora Coman did not keep a journal, but she wrote some poems that directly address the problems that led to these protests. Asked what the inspiration is behind her third book of poetry *soft guerrilla* (2019), Teodora Coman claims that:

The idea came from the civic experience with the group “We see you” from Sibiu, not before these events, as it usually happens. I did not intend to give a literary character to this protest, for fear that I might fall into the temptation of social narcissism, but look, I still woke up writing, aware of this danger of self-heroicization that lurked everywhere. I recorded some type of diary of less noble states (anger, resignation, doubt, fear, scepticism), but with the gratitude that I can verbalize an experience that no longer belonged to me, that I can melt myself in the plural of «we» or «they», people of all ages with whom I learned in the street what civicism is<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> “Interviu. Teodora Coman, profesoara și poeta din Sibiu: ‘Am consemnat un fel de jurnal al stărilor mai puțin nobile’” [“Interview. Teodora Coman, teacher and poet from Sibiu: ‘I kept some type of diary of less noble states’”], by Denisa Laicaauf, *Turnul sfatului*, 2019, <https://www.turnulsfatului.ro/2019/12/28/interviu-teodora-coman-profesoara-si-poeta-din-sibiu-bdquo-am-consemnat-un-fel-de-jurnal-al-starilor-mai-putin-nobile-rdquo-160827>. Accessed on September 10, 2021.

In conclusion, *soft guerilla* is a diary composed of poems that captures the anger, revolt, hope and hopelessness of this important experience. Teodora Coman's posture is complete only after this book of poetry is published. Here we can see the connection between the poetics of the author and his or her posture. As Teodora Coman said, *soft guerilla* is a product of the protests, an artistic presentation of a civic experience that made her write a type of poetry that she did not even intend to write in the past. The construction of the committed writer posture is realized with this specific type of poetics. In a not so complicated paradox, this posture determines and is determined by the author's migration from one type of poetics to another. Therefore, her posture as a committed writer is backed up by a book of poetry that articulates the ideology of the movement, and the poetry itself is justified by the necessities of the protests. In other words, posture and poetics reinforce each other.

The conclusion that we have reached with the exposition of Teodora Coman's posture is also valid in the case of Elena Vlădăreanu. What is different though is the posture itself and the ways in which is constructed. If Teodora Coman's posture is the result of the combination between physical presence at the protests and a book of engaged poetry, Elena Vlădăreanu has carefully built her posture as an engaged author brick by brick, speech by speech. Every volume, every interview, every public debate, every cultural project that she organized contributes to this powerful image of a writer involved in the cultural and social issues of the community she belongs to. This is why Elena Vlădăreanu's posture can be labelled as *hard*, because it is systematically created over the last two decades, while Teodora Coman's posture is "occasional".

If we look at Elena Vlădăreanu's cultural activity and her trajectory in the literary field, we can better understand her posture as a committed writer. Elena Vlădăreanu's debut is related to the rise of the 2000 generation and its struggle to enter the literary field and to legitimize itself. Since her early beginnings as a poet, Elena Vlădăreanu was politically conscious in her writings and she did not avoid a debate with political stakes. Indeed, the social climate of this generation has encouraged her to construct such a posture. In Mihnea Bălici's words, "fracturism promotes a certain social, political and cultural commitment, the artistic act being only a platform for this collective *ethos*"<sup>21</sup>. Even so, Elena Vlădăreanu's commitment was firmer and more concise than some of her colleagues and, as an argument in support of this idea, we recall the fact that she is one of the few – if not the only one – poets of this generation who have persisted in this direction and who have maintained a committed writer posture in the years since their debut.

At this point, we must take into account that the accumulation of political capital is a strategy by which these writers tried to gain symbolic capital in the

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<sup>21</sup> Mihnea Bălici, "Fracturismul în câmpul literar românesc" ["Fracturism in the Romanian Literary Field"], *Transilvania*, 2021, 5, p. 5.

literary field. As Pierre Bourdieu had theorized, these “new heretical entrants [...] can usually only succeed in imposing recognition of their products by virtue of external changes”<sup>22</sup> and “the most decisive of these changes are the political ruptures, such as revolutionary crises, which change the power relations at the heart of the field”<sup>23</sup>. Of course, the 2000 generation did not really intend to organize a revolution, but the logic behind the process that Bourdieu described applies to the case of the young writers at the turn of the millennium. In this line, Vlădăreanu’s committed writer posture can be seen as a way in which she had gained political capital that she converted then in a literary one. With Teodora Coman is a little bit too early to tell, but we can say that her posture helps her in becoming more visible in the literary and social fields – and, to some extent, to gain a little bit more economic capital than before, but this assumption needs some concrete data to be supported.

Elena Vlădăreanu has a *hard* committed writer posture because all of her literary and cultural endeavours have a political dimension – from her early literary experience within the 2000 generation, to establishing the “Sofia Nădejde” Awards for Literature Written by Women, from the feminism of her first books to the exploration of the social status and the material conditions of the writer. Elena Vlădăreanu’s socio-cultural activity marks her posture as a committed writer and makes it a reference point for those who want to draw a similar public image about themselves. More than all of these, what gives strength to Elena Vlădăreanu’s posture as a committed writer is her outlook on the relationship between art and politics. Asked in an interview if she believes in a political imperative of literature, the poet states that:

Yes, it is essential to me that not only literature, but art should be political. I’m not interested in evasionism right now, but it’s possible that in a short while, when all art is political, being an evasionist may become truly political. I find it essential to be against the system, no matter what system that is; if you can undermine it, do it; for me it is essential that art should not be good, predictable, settled, it should not continue, it should create vanishing points, disturb, question and constantly question. To be a constant experiment, a continuous search. Not to be there for the sake of prizes, I must say that, but to get prizes that can reward it when necessary<sup>24</sup>.

This answer can be read as a manifesto for Elena Vlădăreanu’s poetics and literary politics. This view is the most clearly expressed in her 2017 book of poetry *bani. muncă. timp liber* [money. work. leisure]. Even though all of her books

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<sup>22</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*. Translated by Susan Emanuel, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 253.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> “Mi se pare esențial să fii împotriva sistemului” [“I find it essential to be against the system”], interview with Elena Vlădăreanu by Matei Martin, *Dilema veche*, 2018, 772, <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/la-zi-in-cultura/articol/mi-se-pare-esential-sa-fii-impotriva-sistemului-interviu-cu-scriitoarea-elena-vladareanu>. Accessed September 10, 2021.

contribute to the creation of her posture as a committed writer, this volume in particular is the one that strengthens that posture and reveals the link that her posture establishes with her poetics. The poetry in *bani. muncă. timp liber* [money. work. leisure] contains all of the major themes that Elena Vlădăreanu has visited in her literary career. But more than that, this book brings to the attention of the general public the problems surrounding the author's condition in late capitalism.

It is hard to unfold the relationship between Elena Vlădăreanu's posture and her poetics. With *bani. muncă. timp liber* we are the closest to the essence of this relationship, but the overview given here would inevitably be limited. However, we can draw some conclusions on this subject. Elena Vlădăreanu's writing – and we refer here to her literature and journalism alike – positions itself in the direction of some left-wing writers that are trying to cultivate “a certain didacticism, alternative journalism, the desire to present a realistic version or to drop a pamphlet without overstylizing it”<sup>25</sup>. Her themes and styles can also be understood through the posture she has carefully built over the last two decades. Authenticity is one of the key terms that Elena Vlădăreanu relies on, in the second sense (“aesthetic”) that Meizoz mentions when he talks about the proletarian postures, as opposed to the “artistic”, a way of writing or a tone opposing aesthetics/aestheticism. Of course, Elena Vlădăreanu does not intend to build a proletarian posture, but she shares this posture with that of Henry Poulaille, as in the example given by Jérôme Meizoz, in the “fidelity to spoken language”<sup>26</sup> that can offer that “tone” of opposing bourgeois aesthetics or, in our Romanian and extremely contemporary case, of arguing against the hyper-expressiveness and rhetoric of the right-wing discourse.

### *Conclusion*

It is worth noticing that neither Elena Vlădăreanu, nor Teodora Coman talk about themselves as committed poets. Besides the stigma around this concept, we think that these writers know that this idea is very hard to grasp and mirrors a rather volatile social position. In their interviews, they use modesty as a strategy of avoiding to fully assume this posture of a committed writer. Nevertheless, they are two of the most prominent committed poets of the last five years and their example was – we hope – the right pretext to start a debate about the importance of committing one's art to a political or civic belief in contemporary Romanian literary field. As we have seen, Jérôme Meizoz's theory of literary postures has offered us a complex insight into the complex relationship between an author's social existence and his/her poetics. More so, this concept proves to be a very useful tool in analysing the premises of engaged literature. We can only hope that

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<sup>25</sup> Costi Rogozanu, *Epoca de mijloc [The Middle Epoch]*, Cluj-Napoca, Tact, 2019, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires*, p. 76.

more scholars will take into consideration this theory, and that more writers will think differently and more understandingly about committed literature.

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THE COMMITTED WRITER POSTURE: TEODORA COMAN & ELENA  
VLĂDĂREANU

(Abstract)

This paper aims to explore the way in which the literary posture of a writer and his or hers poetics reflect and influence each other. To analyze the possibilities of this relation I chose to look upon the case of the engaged literature, a type of writing in which the link between the text and the context is obvious. The engaged literature carries with it a stigma in the Romanian literary field of which historical and social causes I exhibit in the first part of the paper. This excursus through the history of Romanian culture reveals that not only the communist experience compromised the engaged literature, but there is also a certain resistance inherent to the Romanian literary field to anything that could affect the so-called *aesthetic autonomy*, one of the guiding principles of the Romanian literature of the last century and a half. A change is taking place in the last two decades, with the development of the material conditions conducive to the emergence of an urban middle class that can artistically articulate its political ideology. In the last part of the paper I bring into discussion two contemporary poets who are known for their strongly politically marked volumes of poetry, Teodora Coman and Elena Vlădăreanu. There are two reasons for choosing these two poets. On the one hand, Teodora Coman and Elena Vlădăreanu present two different types of a committed writer's posture, which I differentiated as a *soft* one and a *hard* one. On the other hand, through these two poets I managed to bring together themes of both the left and the right from Romania in recent years.

*Keywords:* literary posture, engaged literature, ideology, romanian literature, poetry.

POSTURA SCRITORULUI ANGAJAT: TEODORA COMAN & ELENA  
VLĂDĂREANU

(Rezumat)

Articolul își propune să exploreze modul în care postura literară a unui scriitor și poetica sa se reflectă și se influențează reciproc. Pentru a analiza posibilitățile acestei relații am ales să ne oprim asupra cazului literaturii angajate, un tip de scriere în care legătura dintre text și context este evidentă. Literatura angajată poartă cu sine un stigmat în câmpul literar românesc ale cărui cauze istorice și sociale le-am expus în prima parte a lucrării. Acest excurs prin istoria culturii române ne relevă faptul că nu doar experiența comunistă a compromis literatura angajată, ci că există și o anumită rezistență inerentă câmpului literar românesc față de orice ar putea afecta așa-numita *autonomie estetică*, unul dintre principiile directoare ale literaturii române din ultimul secol și jumătate. O schimbare are loc în ultimele două decenii, odată cu dezvoltarea condițiilor materiale propice apariției unei clase de mijloc urbane care să poată să-și articuleze artistic ideologia politică. În ultima parte a lucrării am adus în discuție două poete contemporane care sunt cunoscute pentru volume de poezie puternic marcate politic, Teodora Coman și Elena Vlădăreanu. Două au fost motivele pentru alegerea acestor două poete. Pe de-o parte, Teodora Coman și Elena Vlădăreanu prezintă două tipuri diferite de posturi ale scriitorului angajat pe care eu le-am diferențiat ca fiind una *slabă* și una *tare*. Pe de altă parte, prin cele două poete am reușit să aduc împreună tematici atât ale stângii, cât și ale dreptei din România ultimilor ani.

*Cuvinte-cheie:* postură literară, literatură angajată, ideologie, literatură română, poezie.