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ADRIAN PĂUNESCU – POSTURAL POLYPHONIES IN *THE GOLDEN AGE*

Adrian Păunescu between Posture and Imposture: Constitutive Ambiguities

A reassessment of the work of Adrian Păunescu nowadays is inextricably linked to the socio-cultural phenomenon the poet fostered by means of the Flacăra [Flame] Cenacle. The Flacăra Cenacle forged a unique synthesis between mass culture – a socialist *pop culture* – and high culture, through the inclusion, in the artists' repertoire, of texts by canonical Romanian poets such as Mihai Eminescu, George Bacovia, Nichita Stănescu, Marin Sorescu, Ioan Alexandru and others, as well as of world literature such as poems by Serghei Esenin.

The Flacăra Cenacle was founded in September 1973 at the initiative of Adrian Păunescu; its last show took place on 12 June 1985. As the poet confessed, the enterprise took off with as few as 60 spectators in the auditorium of the “Ion Creangă” Theatre in Bucharest. Yet, the very ascension of Adrian Păunescu had started earlier, and it is fraught with ambivalence, in that his literary position was buttressed by his allegiance to the Romanian Communist Party: as early as 1967 the poet became the secretary of the Communist Youth Union of the Writers' Union. He was also, at the time, the deputy editor-in-chief of two of the most prominent literary magazines, the *România literară* [Literary Romania] and *Luceafărul* [The Evening Star]. 1973 turned out to be the poet's *annus mirabilis*: Adrian Păunescu was appointed editor-in-chief of the *Flacăra* magazine on 1 February; subsequently (in February) he founded the cenacle of the same name. Although in 1976 the Flacăra Cenacle would be assimilated into the nationwide *Cântarea României* [Praise Song to Romania] festivities in praise of Nicolae Ceaușescu, Adrian Păunescu never lost control of its organisation.

However, both the founding and the disbanding of the Cenacle followed the decisions of the uppermost political echelons. From 1979, Adrian Păunescu also received weekly airtime as the “Radiocenaclul Flacăra – Valori ale muzicii tinere” [“Flacăra Radio-Cenacle – Young Promising Talents of Music”] where he promoted the Cenacle and young talented folk singers. From being a journalist and editor-in-chief, as well as a poet, Adrian Păunescu gradually also became a culture animator, as well as a propagandist. It is one of the many cases when Păunescu merged vastly different public roles. In fact, he emphatically stated as much during one of his shows:

If on the Iza Valley, in a Maramureș peasant household, they are aware of Tatiana Filipoiu, it means that our *propaganda* with the Flacăra Cenacle has achieved its goal. Otherwise, everything else is just words. What's the point of sending a message if it fails to be received? *Propaganda* is precisely sending and

receiving. [...] *Propaganda* entails competence, and the competence of a propagandist is the very human soul¹.

The final sentence falls within the ambit of Stalin's reflection concerning the role Stalin entrusted to writers/ artists, assigned to be "engineers of the human soul". Overtly assuming a propagandist role – as befits an activist, if not a creator – becomes, through the ambiguity it fosters between cultural propaganda qua popularization of young talented artists and political propaganda, one of the poet's strategies of "humanizing" the process of re-stalinization of Romanian society by Nicolae Ceaușescu, begun with the July 1971 Theses, or the "taming of socialist Romania" (Paul Cernat's phrase in the essay "Îmblânzitorul României socialiste" ["The Tamer of Socialist Romania"]², and implicitly of the "bluejeans generation", with its aspirations for freedom. The taming also addresses an unpopular terminology, worn-out ideological clichés now recycled in poetic idiom. Thus, Adrian Păunescu converts the role of the agitprop activist, of the political activist, into that of the man of culture, of the revolutionary poet who conveys the message in a different form. Păunescu fashions for himself an apparently paradoxical image: that of the contestatory voice against Ceaușescu's bureaucracy, though issued by a follower of the politics of the new secretary general. He thus engages himself in spectacular acrobatics, the strenuous art of the reconciliation of opposites – which he assumes as part and parcel of his personality, as the autoscopic poem *Un prim romantic* [*A First Romantic*] insightfully puts it: "Contrasts anyway suit me only too well/ Plus and minus alike deep in my soul dwell"³.

In the preface to *Cartea cărților de poezie* [*The Book of Poetry Books*], 1999, signed by his son Andrei Păunescu – written in compliance with his father's wishes and perhaps penned by the poet himself – we witness an attempt at portraying a tolerated subversive figure. The poet's avowed and quite opportune antisovietism, contemporaneous with Nicolae Ceaușescu's public disassociation from the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the troops of the Warsaw Pact led by the Soviet Union, is conveyed the poem *Soartă* [*Fate*], which emblemizes the

¹ Unless mentioned otherwise, the quotations come from the 1983 documentary film *Cenacul Flacăra – Te salut generație în blugi* [*The Flacăra Cenacle – Hail to You, Bluejeans Generation*] by Cornel Diaconu, banned at the time despite the ideological conformity of its director. Diaconu also directed *Salutări de la Agigea* [*Greetings from Agigea*], 1984, one of the emblematic films of the Golden Age, which praised one of Nicolae Ceaușescu's "works", the Danube-Black Sea Canal. The documentary is available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIjrn54Oh0&ab_channel=AndreiP%C4%83unescu. Accessed November 10, 2021.

² Paul Cernat, "Îmblânzitorul României socialiste" ["The Tamer of Socialist Romania"], in Paul Cernat, Ion Manolescu, Angelo Mitchievici, Ioan Stanomir, *Explorări în comunismul românesc* [*Explorations of Romanian Communism*], I, Iași, Polirom, 2004, pp. 341-381.

³ Adrian Păunescu, *Un prim romantic* [*A First Romantic*], in *Cartea cărților de poezie* [*The Book of Poetry Books*], București, Editura Păunescu, Fundația Iubirea, Fundația Constantin, 1999, p. 347: "Contrastele și așa îmi vin prea bine,/ Și plus și minus zac mereu în mine". Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

transmogrification of a political topic into a poetic one and is moreover a definitive expression of both his poetics and the literary posture Adrian Păunescu adopted. Many of his poems evoke the real, translate an event, engage in a dialogue with the present couched in terms of the poet's "encounter with History", which projects the present moment onto the background of a glorious national history, with its representative figures, or even of world history. In fact, virtually all of his *political* statements and attitudes as articulated in his editorials were subsequently translated into poetic idiom, transmogrified into poetic attitudes, or rather into attitudes staged poetically. His 1970s anti-Sovietism – aligned to the party line – was but an aspect of the literary posture of a writer devoted to the national cause, a patriot. This way, Adrian Păunescu constructed for himself a singularity akin to that of Mihai Eminescu, thus obliquely insinuating himself in a major role such as the one assigned to the 19th-century romantic poet – that of the "national poet"⁴ – by the 20th-century critic George Călinescu, yet also offering a romantic pose. It was not, however, the pose of a belated, nostalgic post-romanticism, but of a revolutionary romanticism, foundational of a new age: "Not the last romantic in an age/ When all is waning, with no aspirations,/ But when rottenness gives way,/ A first romantic in a new age"⁵.

Thus, the poet of the new age took up the xenophobic nationalism of Eminescu not only through poems dedicated to the latter such as *Dor de Eminescu* [*Missing Eminescu*], which became a musical hit, or through the evocation of one of the latter's banned poems, *Doină* – which may have led to the banning of *Istoria unei secunde* [*The History of a Second*] in 1971 –, but also through poems concerned with Bukovina and Bessarabia. This divided self – that of the impenitent, outspoken critic of the manifold failures of the communist regime, yet also that of the grandiloquent worshipper of the dictatorial Ceaușescu couple – contributed to the self-fashioning of Adrian Păunescu's literary posture. The poet thus became a master of *public relations* at the time, a genuine mediation institution whose self-assumed task was to effect a rapprochement between politically ostracized, even banned, writers and artists, and the dictator and prominent activists and members of the ruling committee of the Romanian Communist Party, such as Cornel Burtică or the chief censorer Dumitru Popescu, as well as high Securitate officers and apparatchiki from a vast entourage of "acquaintances". It is worth mentioning, though, that the criticism levelled at party bureaucracy – which pitted rigid Dej-era communists against revolutionary, initiative-driven Ceaușescu-era communists, as in the emblematic 1971 film *Puterea și adevărul* [*The Power and the Truth*] by Manole Marcus – was one sanctioned by the regime. Nonetheless, the polemical message of Adrian Păunescu's poems, emphasised in his interpretation on the stage

⁴ George Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* [*The History of Romanian Literature from the Origins to the Present*], București, Minerva, 1988.

⁵ Adrian Păunescu, *Un prim romantic*, p. 347: "Nu ultimul romantic dintr-o eră/ Când toate amurgesc și rar mai speră,/ Ci când putreziciunea pe din două,/ Un prim romantic într-o eră nouă".

of the Flacăra Cenacle, often rippled beyond the approved “pedagogical” framework. The poet provided, through the Flacăra Cenacle, an outlet for venting ever-greater frustrations seething in the Romanian society of the 1980s due to fast pauperization and ever-increasing shortages. Furthermore, the cenacle leader knew how to deflect the people’s opprobrium away from Ceaușescu towards an anonymous stereotyped scapegoat, the incompetent party activist: “Let’s make sure the seed falls on rich soil. This on condition we don’t meet daily a stupid-head who, though not even aware of the subject-verb agreement, presumes to teach us how to be human, how to stand straight, how to turn to the left or right. One cannot teach others unless one truly believes what one says”⁶. A poem such as *Analfabeților* [*To the Illiterate*], published in 1980, illustrates such overt pseudo-dissidence – “I’ve warned you I get terribly pissed off/ If you’re infringing my liberty in the least bit”⁷ – yet also openly announces the genuine power wielded by the poet who “denounces” propagandistic falsifications in the economy and in official culture: “And the world cannot be conquered/ by blowing up figures and miming tumultuousness”⁸. The poet vacillates, as reflected in his adoption of a literary posture, between being the regime’s terribilistic *enfant gâté*, all whims and regrets, and being the mouthpiece of “the many disempowered”.

Unsurprisingly, Cornel Diaconu, a devotee of the regime, shot the documentary *Cenacul Flacăra – Te salut generație în blugi* [*The Flacăra Cenacle – Hail to You, Bluejeans Generation*] at a moment which marked the poet’s apogee, even though the film was banned on its release in 1983. By then, however, Adrian Păunescu’s dual game – vacillating between Ceaușescu and the people, between accepting the leadership of the former and contesting the status quo by blaming the subalterns, between slogan and poem, between the propagandist and the poet – had reached a critical point. The official *pop star* was disloyally competing with *Cântarea României*, the nationwide tribute-festival dedicated exclusively to the presidential couple, on Chinese and North-Korean template, with its unappealing rigid props, unable to convey any emotion or authenticity. By 1985, Adrian Păunescu’s popularity had by far exceeded Nicolae Ceaușescu’s – all this against the obvious worsening of the Romanian people’s lives – and the poet had succeeded to foster his own personality cult. Hence, the disbanding of the cenacle under the pretext of a commotion with casualties during a show at Ploiești also presented the opportunity to drive Adrian Păunescu away from the magazine. His withdrawal from the forefront of cultural life and from the stagelights translated as

⁶ “Să facem în așa fel încât bobul să prindă-n brazdă. Numai cu condiția să nu ne-nvețe în fiecare zi câte un deștept care nici nu știe să facă acordul între subiect și predicat cum să fim oameni, cum să stăm drepti, cum să facem la stânga, cum să facem la dreapta. Nu se poate face educația altora dacă tu nu crezi în ceea ce spui”.

⁷ Adrian Păunescu, *Analfabeților* [*To the Illiterate*], in *Cartea cârților de poezie*, p. 742: “V-am spus că fac teribil de urât/ De sunt călcat puțin pe libertate”.

⁸ *Ibidem*: “Și lumea nu se poate cuceri/ umflând la cifre și mimând tumulturi”.

a fall from grace ordered by the supreme Party ruler.

After the 1989 Revolution, Adrian Păunescu entered politics (in 1992) to become a senator for Dolj and the Social-Democrat Party chair of the Senate's Culture Commission. He re-established the cenacle – if under a different name, *Totuși iubirea* [*Still, love*] – on 7 May 1990, yet this *remake* enjoyed significantly less popularity, with less touring, save for its success in Bessarabia. The poet tried a gesticulation and a tone of voice nevertheless tinged with his previous ambivalence, now also linked to his political role, as well as affected by a reassessment of his equivocal roles under the communist regime. His literary posture after the Revolution still owed to the rich cultural phenomenon of the Flacăra Cenacle. His efforts to reinvent and relegitimize his literary position were at the same time meant to promote and rehabilitate his image as a patriotic writer, one owing allegiance to values and to a cause, rather than to a regime or to a political leader. The subject of numerous polemics and virulent contestation by prominent intellectuals (such as Mircea Mihăieș), which he sometimes peppered with invectives, Adrian Păunescu enjoyed an ambivalent position even in death. A minor member of the Romanian literary canon, Păunescu was nevertheless one of the few writers to receive national funerals – as a prominent member of the most powerful post-revolutionary party – as well as a eulogy by the President of the Romanian Academy, Eugen Simion, in the preface of a posthumous *Festschrift*⁹. Regarded from the perspective of the East-algia rampant within all post-totalitarian societies of Central and Eastern Europe, the fate of the Flacăra Cenacle may well be a first in contemporary Romania.

Posture between Text and Discourse

In her book *Du peintre à l'artiste*¹⁰, Nathalie Heinich distinguishes between two ways of assigning value: a work-centred one (*opéraliste*), which focuses on the work as the *fons et origo* of value, and a person-centred one (*personnaliste*), which focuses on the artist as an individual. The two converge, however, in a somewhat more recent notion, that of *posture*, as theorized with regard to literature by Jérôme Meizoz in *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur*. The study makes Meizoz one of a series of theorists concerned with the effect a writer has not only through his/her work, but also through his/her social and mediatic presence. A concise definition of posture appears in Alain Viala's *Eléments de sociopoétique*: the posture is “a way to occupy a position” (“façon d'occuper une position”) in the

⁹ Adrian Păunescu 1943–2013. *Omagiu adus memoriei poetului la data când ar fi aniversat 70 de ani de la naștere* [Adrian Păunescu 1943–2013: *In Honorem Adrian Păunescu on the Date He Would Have Turned 70*], București, Liga Culturală pentru Unitatea Românilor de Pretutindeni și Editura Semne, 2013.

¹⁰ Nathalie Heinich, *Du peintre à l'artiste. Artisans et académiciens à l'âge classique*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1993.

socio-literary field, within the performative context of social existence¹¹. It is what, within the formative context of existence proper, Natalie Zemon Davis (in *Léon l'Africain : un voyageur entre deux mondes*) names a “façonnement de soi”¹², Marielle Macé (in *Styles. Critiques de nos formes de vie*) a “stylistique de l'existence”¹³ and Boris Groys (in *Going Public*) “autodesign” or “autopoetics”, namely “the production of one's own public self”¹⁴.

Jérôme Meizoz claims that posture cannot be reduced to the mise en scène of one's intentions, to the performative context of certain acts and the social conduct assumed as an author/artist, “une pose, une coquetterie, un artifice conscient [...] à un acte promotionnel ou à une ‘stratégie’ au sens concerté du terme”¹⁵. Rather, posture reflects a much richer context, to which fellow authors/artists also contribute and which exceeds the level of the classical *intentio auctoris*, with its public stakes. According to Meizoz, posture manifests itself simultaneously on two levels, of conduct and of discourse. The former concerns social conduct in contexts peculiar to literary life; the other concerns a self-image which the discourse expresses, “des effets de texte” or, in rhetorical terms, one's *ethos*. Meizoz emphasizes the inextricability of the two dimensions within an integrative representation. The analogy between the orator and the author may also entail a scenic effect, which Meizoz rather downplays, yet which may at times acquire signal importance. Such is the case of Adrian Păunescu, in a context that provides for mediatic exposure and nationwide dissemination of the image, akin to that of a *pop star*. Specifically, to the *logos*, which concerns validation through argumentation, and to the *pathos*, which concerns validation through emotion, is added the *ethos*, a component – defining for posture in Meizoz's view – which concerns not average morals, but one's self-image, to secure the impact of one's discourse. I would rather not invoke here the notion of credibility, grounded though it is in all the above-mentioned undercurrents of discourse; nonetheless, I ought to mention that the other two components – *logos* and *pathos* – which structure discourse, yet also underpin one's personality, contribute to the construction of one's “self-image” too. For a poet like Adrian Păunescu the *pathos* signally contributes to engendering a postural dominant, which associates him to the significant figure of the *tribune* as a popular orator in a political context, as academician Dan Berindei defines him – “a resurrected 1848 tribune, who inflames the people” – but also to the *rhapsode*, “a rhapsode of the entire Romanian

¹¹ Alain Viala, *Eléments de sociopoétique*, apud Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires. Mises en scène modernes de l'auteur*, Genève, Slatkine, 2007, p. 16.

¹² Natalie Zemon Davis, *Léon l'Africain : un voyageur entre deux mondes*, apud Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires*, p. 18.

¹³ Marielle Macé, *Styles. Critiques de nos formes de vie*, Paris, Gallimard, 2016.

¹⁴ Boris Groys, *Going Public*, New York, Sternberg Press, 2010, p. 16.

¹⁵ Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires*, p. 19.

people”¹⁶, as Mihai Cimpoi, the President of the Writers’ Union of the Republic of Moldavia, dubbed Adrian Păunescu at the latter’s funerals. For parsing the literary posture of the poet with the vastest presence in the media under communism, I also find helpful Antonio Patraș’s theorization of personality, even though his case study, the Romanian critic Garabet Ibrăileanu, would be the very opposite of Adrian Păunescu in terms of stage performance¹⁷.

Meizoz nuances his definition of posture by distinguishing between an *external* form, which has to do with the writer’s public presence within the context of literary life, and an *internal* one, through his/ her texts, as an “enunciative posture”. Yet, what happens when the two dimensions merge within a performative context, as is the case at hand, is that much of the distinction may be retained, at least in theory. This is so, I argue, because the literary posture which Adrian Păunescu deliberately fashioned for himself benefited as much from his histrionism (exaggerated towards exhibitionism) and as from a genuine charisma combined with narcissism of the megalomaniac type, as also manifested in the poet’s public discourse.

Jérôme Meizoz has further elaborated the topic of posture in another book, *La littérature « en personne ». Scène médiatique et formes d’incarnation*, where he relates *posture* to *scenography*, whose choice is reflected formally: “Le fait qu’un auteur s’adosse à telle ou telle scénographie a des conséquences formelles sur la généricité des textes, les choix d’*ethos* et de style”¹⁸. Interested as he is in the performative dimension inferrable from *posture*, the theorist distinguishes the former notion from the notion of *scenography* in that

la scénographie est un fait générique et collectif, propre, par exemple, à telle école ou mouvement. La posture, quant à elle, désigne la singularisation d’un positionnement auctorial: une tentative de se présenter comme unique, hors de toute appartenance¹⁹.

This division which he posits between the individual and the collective strikes me as no more than a form of vacillation, as long as a writer, even as s/he may never acknowledge belonging to a “school” or literary movement, still belongs within an aesthetic genealogy, can identify her/his formation landmarks, and acts within a continuum that s/he may validate even polemically. The scenography which Adrian Păunescu chose corresponds not so much to a literary school as to

¹⁶ “un tribun reînviat de la ’48, un însuflețitor al oamenilor”, “un rapsod al întregului neam românesc” – both quotes come from the article “Adrian Păunescu a fost înmormântat cu onoruri militare” [“Adrian Păunescu Was Buried with Military Honors”], www.dcnnews.ro, November 7, 2010: https://www.dcnnews.ro/adrian-paunescu-a-fost-inmormantat-cu-onoruri-militare_18809.html. Accessed November 10, 2021.

¹⁷ Antonio Patraș, *Ibrăileanu. Către o teorie a personalității* [*Ibrăileanu: Towards a Theory of Personality*], București, Cartea Românească, 2007.

¹⁸ Jérôme Meizoz, *La littérature « en personne ». Scène médiatique et formes d’incarnation*, Genève, Slatkine, 2016, p. 12.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

conducts related to typologies, namely the typology of poets representative of revolutionary romanticism, with which its poetics shares clear affinities, and that of the *poeta vates*. His literary posture was fashioned through the contact of this poetry with the public scene via the Flacăra Cenacle stage, which simultaneously rendered impactful both the poem and its creator.

Poeta vates, the Court Poet and Revolutionary Romanticism

To the public, Adrian Păunescu is the poet par excellence, his literary quality is brought to the fore. His roles as an anchor, an entertainer, a DJ and a reciting actor derive from that of a poet. What kind of *poet* is Adrian Păunescu, though? For there is a relationship between poetics and literary posture: tell me what kind of poet you are, and I will tell you which literary posture suits you. To revert to Meizoz, literary postures can be regarded as “un répertoire historique d’*ethos* incorporés, affichés, renversés ou singés”²⁰, where the *ethos* fashions a self-image delivered with the aid of discursive strategies.

The founder and leader of the Flacăra Cenacle fashioned for himself the posture of a citizen-writer, *l’écrivain-citoyen* (in Jérôme Meizoz’s words), a writer dedicated to “values”, who, accordingly, acquires his/her legitimacy beyond the literary world, through public statements. This is the case of the activist-writers of the radical left, “fellows” and “comrades” of the Soviet Union, such as Henri Barbusse, Jean-Paul Sartre, Nikos Kazantzakis or Panait Istrati. The cause upheld by Adrian Păunescu – communism with nationalist inflexions, with which he forged a trademark thanks to Ceaușescu’s political doctrine – was a winning one in Romania. Păunescu established and shored up, within the Flacăra Cenacle framework, the legitimacy of Romania’s communist leader. He bestowed on communism a “human face”, to use the popular phrase coined by Alexander Dubček, the reformist President of Czechoslovakia, in 1968. Păunescu risked nothing, for he was not in any opposition, but rather in position – at the disposal of his political commander, by being Ceaușescu’s mouthpiece. His likeness to other engagé writers, activist-poets such as the Chilean Victor Jara Martinez, a contemporary of Adrian Păunescu’s, himself a playwright, poet, songwriter and founder of Nueva Canción Chilena, stops short where the Chilean writer, the cultural ambassador of socialist President Salvador Allende (the target of the successful coup of 1973), paid with his life for his activism during the Pinochet dictatorship.

Adrian Păunescu seems to belong to a classical typology, that of the *poeta vates*. What recommends him as such are his public attitude and the rhetoric of his poetry. His discourse-poetry was destined not for simple recitation, but for declamation; he acted on a stroke of inspiration, which he staged accordingly and

²⁰ Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires*, p. 23.

voiced in prophetic-visionary idiom, appealing to the people and to the entire humankind. The role is all the more suitable as all these constitutive traits emerge not only from the poetic text, but also from its performance, a kind of *stand-up poetry* with musical accompaniment, framed within a larger scenic representation (folk dancing, men's choruses, poetic recitation and so on), and also from the poet's assumption of a mission, that of "the encounter with History".

There is still one more poetic pattern in Adrian Păunescu's case, although it has nothing to do with a poetics; rather, it concerns a literary posture, namely that of the court poet, ever so different from the citizen-writer poet. The latter boasts a moral profile; the writer answers to a *creed*, not to any pecuniary reward, which sometimes places him/her in a risk zone. On the other hand, to be a court poet, the author of "commissioned odes", as such productions – remunerated either directly or through an advantageous social promotion – were called, was at odds with the other role assumed by Adrian Păunescu, the *poeta vates*, just as the offices associated with the two roles were in conflict with each other. Such conflictual roles would undermine Păunescu's credibility. At the same time, however, conflict was constitutive of the leader of the Flacăra Cenacle.

Cartea cărților de poezie [*The Book of Poetry Books*], the monumental anthology of verse edited by Adrian Păunescu after 1989, does not include the occasional poems dedicated exclusively to the presidential couple, published in the *Flacăra* magazine alongside countless celebratory articles. Both categories of writings share common topics and similar tropes of canonical value in the patriotic poetry of the likes of Corneliu Vadim Tudor, Victor Tulbure, Alexandru Andrițoiu, Nicolae Dragoș and many others.

The two literary roles – the *court poet* and the *poeta vates* – bestow on the poet the dominant traits of his posture, as well as a Janus Bifrons profile, akin to his histrionism. With the Flacăra Cenacle, Adrian Păunescu as *poeta vates* did his best to harmonize the two roles: to gain credit for Nicolae Ceaușescu and the party politics, thereby also crediting himself, on the one hand, and to defuse the tensions between the dictator and society as much as possible, on the other. To achieve this, the poet resorted to yet another literary posture, that of the revolutionary poet akin to Victor Jara, Mayakovsky, or, closer to home, Nicolae Labiș. Adrian Păunescu's concern with stage effect contributed massively to the configuration of a literary posture linked to the creation of discourse poetry, the expression of a poeticization of public discourse, with a high degree of addressee-appeal, sometimes live, graced with calculated rhetorical effects intended to produce a response, an instant connection. Poetry was thereby granted the effect of political discourse; certain messages were pure propaganda aligned to party politics. For instance, the topics peculiar to an effusive, vindictive, pathos-laden nationalism worked in tandem with the ever-stronger anti-Western attitude of Romania's communist regime in the 1980s. Adrian Păunescu declaims:

We were all too often lied to by the history books which empires equipped us

with for our generation, not to claim its right to perceive its heroes. Our national history has no expiry date. Today Romania makes its national history. Hardships notwithstanding. We are not an orphan people; we do not come from Europe's nurseries – just as the trunk of Wallachia shields the cosmic tree which is our country. Without Putna and Alba Iulia, Romania would be like a shot bird. Shot in both of its eyes²¹.

The sense of the nation's grandeur, of national beauty, is conveyed alongside realistic details of the everyday hardships encountered by most people. Yet, the poet succeeds in transmogrifying this distressful reality by disseminating the myth of the assaulted citadel, of externalized adversity, couched in terms of an orthodoxist revival, a Romanian prophecy-mongering drive with the flavour of local protocronist messianism.

There were two highly popular poets at the time, Nichita Stănescu and Adrian Păunescu. The former cultivated the image of the bohemian poet, whose conviviality is free of arrogance or public solemnity. Nichita Stănescu's charming accessibility was all the more appealing as the poet's fame soared with each new volume, acclaimed as each was by the topmost literary critics. In fact, there is an interesting early trajectory of the two poets. Nichita Stănescu debuted in 1960 with the volume of poetry entitled *Sensul iubirii* [*The Sense of Love*]; his second volume, *O viziune a sentimentelor* [*A Vision of Sentiments*], 1964, was virtually synchronous with Adrian Păunescu's debut volume, *Ultrasentimente* [*Ultrasentiments*], 1965, itself shortly followed by *Mieii primi* [*The Early Lambs*], 1966. The titles of both poets' debut volumes suggested a shared starting point and direction: the revaluation of affect, of "sentiment", i.e., of lyricism as enshrined traditionally in poetry. Not the slightest militancy transpires from Nichita Stănescu's verse; by contrast, in Adrian Păunescu's, it definitely shapes the poetic discourse. Furthermore, starting from 1973, Păunescu could rely both on a publicistic forum and on a stage medium, which enabled him to unleash all his dramatic expression. Both poets share a precursor in Nicolae Labiș, one of the poets whose verse merged the purest lyricism with the allegiance to a cause, to a political ideal. Young Labiș's poems curb lyricism, with its apolitical topics, by their engagé bias: see the titles both of his debut volume, *Primele iubiri* [*The First Loves*], 1956, and especially of his second one, *Lupta cu inerția* [*Struggle against Inertia*], 1958, with a motif borrowed from political discourse. It is noteworthy that love and sentiment are the keywords of all three poets.

In an age of the masses, the revolutionary figure appeals to the masses

²¹ "De prea multe ori s-a mințit în cartea de istorie cu care am fost dotați de diferite imperii pentru ca generația noastră umană să nu ai aibă dreptul să-și simtă eroii. Termenul de garanție al istoriei naționale n-a expirat. Astăzi în România se face istorie națională. Cu toate greutățile. Noi nu suntem un popor orfan, nu suntem culeși de la creșele Europei așa cum trunchiul Munteniei stă pavază acestui copac cosmic care este țara noastră. Fără Putna și fără Alba Iulia, România ar fi ca o pasăre împușcată. În amândoi ochii".

straightforwardly, sometimes from a makeshift tribune, from a balcony or a stage. In his *Die Verachtung der Massen* [*The Contempt for the Masses*], 2000, Peter Sloterdijk notes that the figure of the revolutionary as a political leader is framed rhetorically by a large stage, with its own scenography and stage direction. The German philosopher examines the similarities and shared means by which in today's mass culture the political spectacle and the show of pop and rock music transform the masses into an easily manipulable "ecstatic collective corps"²² reduced to the lowest common denominator of the mediocrity of the political leader or pop star. What matters is not the mediocrity of the discourse with its stereotypes, but the speaker's posture, (typically) his way to articulate his thoughts, to gesticulate – his *tone*. The political agitator and the revolutionary poet share the revolutionary pathos which fuels an ethics of indignation. The orator qua revolutionary is bound to inflame the masses, to disturb their spirits so that what is said is virtually no longer relevant, and the masses become a soundboard. This kind of discursive energy can infect everyone, it gives them an impetus; it is used by dictators and politicians alike. The two roles merge in Adrian Păunescu's case; the poet borrows the tone and tonus of both the revolutionary driven by his political agenda and the pop star who inflames the spectators into participative enthusiasm. Only two personages wielded the power afforded by grand stages at the time: Nicolae Ceaușescu, the head of state and secretary general of the Romanian Communist Party, and Adrian Păunescu, the founder of the Flacăra Cenacle.

Action Poetry and Flower Power Nationalism

The stage image of Adrian Păunescu includes a small table at which the poet sits to conduct the entire poetic-folk show like a DJ. Occasionally he rises tempestuously from his chair to recite and gesticulate. The table actually does double duty: it is used as a writing desk and also as a temporary storage area for various objects: the poet's volumes, scraps of paper with messages from the spectators, flowers, oranges, apples, quinces, a traditional loaf of bread, and also arts and crafts artefacts such as a miniature traditional wooden gate (from various historic regions of Romania such as Țara Loviștei or Țara Oașului). A symbolically charged object gifted to Adrian Păunescu may instantly become the object of a poem, a poetic object. Messages are passed from hand to hand to reach the poet, or, alternatively, they are brought to his table by their own author and Adrian Păunescu reads them aloud to the public, mentioning the author's name as well. Each one in the public may thus enjoy their brief moment of popularity. There is here a significant dialogic dimension, where private correspondence nevertheless becomes public, as does the name of its author; a sense is fostered of genuine

²² Peter Sloterdijk, *Disprețuirea maselor. Eseu asupra luptelor culturale în societatea modernă* [*The Contempt for the Masses. Essay on Cultural Struggles in the Modern Society*]. Translation and preface by Aurel Codoban, Cluj, Idea Design & Print, 2002, p. 19.

discussion between the poet and the people or between the pop star and his fans.

Yet, there is more to this table on the stage where the poet is seated, for it becomes the literary workshop of the poet at work. Inspired by the atmosphere, Adrian Păunescu can write poems on the spot, often without as much as altering a comma, which he afterwards reads aloud to the public, so that the poem – and poetry – becomes *performance*, a *happening*. He stages the very image we may have pictured at the back of our mind, of the poet seated at his (*sic*) table – such as the table of Eminescu’s productive melancholy, “I’m sitting at my fir table”²³ –, which thus comes to life and can be seen *live*. However, the traditional reclusion and introspection of the poet gives way here to communicative, digressive, agitatorial effervescence. Poems are made right in front of the public, just as in certain Japanese restaurants food is cooked in front of the customers, which transforms culinary art into a gastronomic show, into spectacle. What is more, the creative act receives an incentive from the public, and the poems are delivered fresh – steamy, one might say; such a poem is like a jet of water: it still retains the impression of an emotion shared with the public. The militant tone of such poems perfectly matches both the pathos which has fuelled it and the presence of a thrilled public, with whom the poet is in permanent exchange, counting as he does on overlapping affects. A poem is elicited not only by the spirits of the poet, but also by the circumstances of its production, viz., the venue, the local colour; he brings up identity-related topics, appealing to the place *geist*, to the collective imagination. Cornel Diaconu’s film features the recitation of such an ad-hoc poem, *Poarta Maramureşului* [*The Maramureş Gate*], occasioned not simply by the Cenacle’s touring of Maramureş, an ethnographic region which best embodies the traditions of Romania’s rural society, but also by a miniature artefact in the shape of a traditional Maramureş gate. The poet’s gesticulation is linked to this artefact, now a poetic object ranking as an ethnic symbol, a metaphor for transcendence. The impact is instantaneous and overwhelming since the poem benefits from the complex soundboard provided by a large audience, the musical background for enhancing reception, and the live presence, onstage, of the poet, as well as the dialogue he has established with the spectators all along. It also draws upon the privileged moment when Adrian Păunescu dedicates the poem to his spectators, taking into account local pride and collective emotions alike, which renders it particular, unique.

The Flacăra Cenacle became a vast social laboratory, a factory of the national imaginary, which shaped characters, instructed people and afforded immediate socialization, in which a private document, the letter, would be made public and commented upon and would receive a public answer. It is one of the attitudes which built up a role for Adrian Păunescu, which enabled him to fashion his

²³ Mihai Eminescu, *Singurătate* [*Solitude*], in *Poezii* [*Poems*]. Selection, chronology and notes by Cătălin Cioabă, Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2014, p. 235: “Şed la masa mea de brad”.

literary posture, a role which he defined in reply to a eulogistic question: “What drives you, poet, to offer yourself so passionately to so many thousands of people?”²⁴. He answered: “Hard to tell. Yet, I realize I cannot cease now. I feel like a truck driver who mustn’t fall sleep behind the wheel”²⁵. Here, Păunescu employs a deceptively modest simile to champion civic responsibility as one of the poet’s roles, governed by his creative enthusiasm.

What is peculiar to Adrian Păunescu’s poems? First of all, his poetry integrates the slogan as well as the widely popular political topics at the time, rendering the latter lyrical. Păunescu capitalizes on the energy of the slogan enhanced through poetic diction, a strategy that harks back to that of Nicolae Labiș, the Romanian Mayakovsky of the 1950s, who died untimely in a suspicious tramway accident. If we look closely at Labiș’s poetry, we will find in it the seeds of Păunescu’s: it is a declarative and interpellating poetry, one that calls out to the reader, akin to the public discourse, with a tremendous rhetoric load. The common denominator of their respective poetics lies in the two poets’ ability to transform political-propagandistic discourse – the slogan – into poetry: “To an idle, amorphous eulogy/ I prefer enthusiastic invective”; “In the name of our innate class/ We will eradicate predation, leprosy and scurvy alike”; “Our humaneness we won’t repudiate –/ One can’t renege what makes one human”²⁶. The militancy of such poems peculiar to revolutionary romanticism is manifested both in their slogan-sentences – their political message – and in the lyricized polemical stance.

A poem such as *Niciodată* [*Never*], for which Octavian Bud composed the music, includes criticism of office-based communist bureaucracy: “The disinherited struggle for a living/ The wretched shuffle by/ One cannot sit down in one’s office/ Dismissing them as they pass by”²⁷ or the slogan “We owe it to the poor, the disinherited²⁸/ To do the best in our powers”. The poem is powerful, with its social and emotional load; it appeals to socially disfavoured categories – to the marginals, the oppressed, “impoverished children”, “the disinherited”, “the poor, deprived of opportunity”, “the destitute”, “those sadder than we are”²⁹ – whom the revolutionary discourse should call to arms. The great achievement of Adrian Păunescu’s poem is to transfigure a political discourse into poetry thanks to his

²⁴ “Ce te determină, poetule, să te dăruiești cu atâta pasiune atâtor mii de oameni?”.

²⁵ “Greu de spus. Dar văd că nu mă mai pot opri. Mă simt ca un șofer de tir care nu are voie să adoarmă la volan”.

²⁶ Nicolae Labiș, *Era entuziasmului* [*The Era of Enthusiasm*], in *Primele iubiri* [*First Loves*], București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1962, p. 309: “Unui elogi trândav și inform/ Prefer injuria entuziastă”; “În numele natalei noastre clase/ Stârpi-vom jaf, și lepră, și scorbut.”; “Noi omenia nu ne-om săraci-o –/ Nimic din ce-i uman nu poți să negi”.

²⁷ Adrian Păunescu, *Niciodată* [*Never*], in *Cartea cârșilor de poezie*, p. 429: “Dezmoșteniții-și caută o cale/ Nenorociții trec cu pașii grei/ Nu ne putem închide-n cabinet/ Făcând ușor abstracție de ei”.

²⁸ *Ibidem*: “Noi pentru cei săraci și fără șanse/ Suntem mereu datori să facem tot”.

²⁹ *Ibidem*: “copiii săraci”, “dezmoșteniții”, “cei săraci și fără șanse”, “celor care n-au nimic”, “mai triști ca noi”.

remarkable capacity for versification. Păunescu can blend different registers and lyricize the prosaic mobilist discourse. He can switch from an elegiac register to a militant one and thereby his poem turns into a cry, an appeal, an inflammatory discourse or an indignant plea, which refashions the poet into a tribune. His own interpretation of the poem becomes the hallmark of his poetry and capitalizes on the musical background of the Flacăra Cenacle for emotional enhancement. The poet doesn't simply recite. Rather, he repeats the verses in his peculiar baritone voice either after the folk artist's singing or as if to cue the artist, who echoes them. Unsurprisingly, the poetic discourse as recited contrapuntally with the artist either through anticipation or through incantatory repetition creates a genuine Păunescu effect.

Adrian Păunescu thus successfully blended together the heterodox tastes of the flower power generation, the rocker generation, "the bluejeans generation", "the Adidas generation", who claimed their liberty in sartorial and musical terms, and the national culture of "hymns and pleas", to quote a hit of the Flacăra Cenacle, a genuine pedagogical poem: *Te salut generație-n blugi*. An echo of the 1968 emancipation movements in the West, for instance France's "il est l'interdit de l'interdire", could be heard in Adrian Păunescu's discourse: "This is the essence of the Flacăra Cenacle: it is mandatory that nothing is mandatory!"³⁰. Likewise, "Make love not war", the message of the American hippy counterculture, became, with Adrian Păunescu, *Iubiți-vă pe tunuri* [*Make love on cannons*], which he used as the title of one of his volumes of poetry. The reason for such echoing transpires in the same text, "For if we didn't provide them culture/ They would secretly borrow it from abroad"³¹, which moreover spells out the ideological role of the Flacăra Cenacle: Adrian Păunescu aimed strategically to provide an alternative culture which appealed to the taste of "the bluejeans generation", a blend of *pop culture* and national culture. Unsurprisingly, some of Adrian Păunescu's poems, once they made it into folk hits, became – in true pop culture spirit – popular culture, folklore³². Accordingly, the Flacăra Cenacle promoted Romanian folk and rock that incorporated national topics; it thereby furnished a suitable culture to a

³⁰ "Aceasta este esența Cenaclului Flacăra – este obligatoriu ca nimic să nu fie obligatoriu!"

³¹ Mădălina Amon, *Te salut generație în blugi* [*Hail to You, Bluejeans Generation*], <https://www.versuri.ro/versuri/madalina-amon-te-salut-generatie-n-blugi-iz02.html#:~:q=Și+dacă+nu+am+face+cultură+pentru+ei/Ei+și-ar+lua+o+în+taină+de+prin+străinătate>.

³² See – in Costel Crângan, "Interviu cu Nica Zaharia" ["Interview with Nica Zaharia"], *Adevărul*, February 3, 2019 – the testimony of Nica Zaharia, a member of the Flacăra Cenacle and the composer of the music to Adrian Păunescu's poem *Galbenă gutuie* [*Yellow Quince*], a hit in its own right: "Ever since, whenever I sing, I am requested to perform 'Yellow Quince' regardless of the season. I am told it is sung nationwide, that even kindergarten kids know it, that they perform it at weddings and baptisms and that it has virtually become a part of national folklore", https://adevarul.ro/locale/galati/autoarea-celebrei-piese-galbena-gutuie-adrian-paunescu-s-a-intors-mine-mi-a-zambit-zis-bravo-nicuta-1_5c53f836df52022f753d0a3e/index.html. Accessed November 10, 2021.

generation hard to keep off western music and consumer culture. Yet, the poet attained this desideratum primarily by using his own poetry and deploying legions of troubadours, trouvères, minstrels and ballad-makers, as well as his own orchestra, to sing his poems. He thereby fostered another personality cult – albeit in artistic terms – which, nevertheless, as the authorities would figure out, could only too well be converted politically.

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ADRIAN PĂUNESCU – POSTURAL POLYPHONIES IN *THE GOLDEN AGE*
(Abstract)

Adrian Păunescu is the initiator of an unprecedented cultural phenomenon in communist Romania, *Cenaclul Flacăra*, which, together with poetry, incorporates music and choreography into a show that synthesizes nationalist themes with those of Western pop culture. From the perspective of literary postures and the idea of the author as the sum of social representations and theatricalization of the self as theorized by Jérôme Meizoz, Nathalie Heinlich or Boris Groys, Adrian Păunescu assumes different “roles”; from that of *poeta vates* to that of court poet, from the entertainer to the educator of a new generation of young people, the bluejeans generation, from the propagandist to the liberator from the yoke of conventions. The present study reviews these roles by analyzing their significance in the context of the age, also called “the Golden Age” in terms of propaganda.

Keywords: Flacăra Cenacle, literary posture, the court poet, pop culture, propaganda, nationalism.

ADRIAN PĂUNESCU – POLIFONII POSTURALE ÎN *EPOCA DE AUR*
(Rezumat)

Adrian Păunescu este inițiatorul unui fenomen cultural fără precedent în România comunistă, *Cenaclul Flacăra*, care încorporează alături de poezie muzica și coregrafia într-un spectacol sinteză a temelor naționaliste cu cele ale culturii pop occidentale. Din perspectiva posturilor literare și a ideii de autor ca sumă a reprezentărilor sociale și teatralizare a sinelui așa cum le teoretizează Jérôme Meizoz, Nathalie Heinlich sau Boris Groys, Adrian Păunescu asumă diferite „roluri” de la cel de *poeta vates* la cel al poetului de curte, de la cel de entertainer la cel de educator al unei noi generații de tineri, generația în blugi, de la cel de propagandist la cel de eliberator de sub jugul convențiilor. Studiul de față trece în revistă aceste roluri analizându-le semnificația în contextul epocii, numită și „Epoca de Aur” cu termenii propagandei.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Cenaclul Flacăra*, postură literară, poet de curte, cultură pop, propagandă, naționalism.