

ASPECTS OF HISTORICAL ROMANIAN DRAMATURGY DURING THE COMMUNIST TOTALITARIAN REGIME

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Abstract

An insight that can greatly help us in our understanding of Romanian history during the era of the Communist totalitarian regime, is without a doubt provided by the historical dramaturgy of the period. During those years, a large number of historical plays were written and directed. It is for this very reason that historical theatre cannot be ignored by any historian interested in how the social representation of the past was constructed in the context of the four decades in which Romania was held in the grip of Communist ideology.

There is an obvious parallel between the evolution of Romanian literature during the period in question (including dramaturgy) and Romanian historiography. In the latter field, changes that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s have been highlighted over the last two decades by Lucian Boia¹. An analysis of literary criticism and writings reveals similar characteristics and developments in that field. Moreover, the literary genre of historical theatre can be closely linked to the rise of nationalism within the political discourse of the Communist regime, so it should not come as any surprise that the number of historical themes had been growing steadily since the mid-1960s. In a manner similar to other cultural policies of the time, the ideological twists and turns of Romanian Communism can be found in the evolution of historical theatre.

Indeed, the closest comparison that can be made is with the historical cinematography of the time, which was better known and more popular than the dramaturgy of the era, through its themes, subjects and artistic approaches.

However, while the historical movies of the era are still available today and indeed are frequently broadcast on Romanian TV, the historical plays of the time are available to the modern researcher only in specialized books in which they had been collected before 1989, in the volumes of literary criticism from the Communist period, or in the collective memory of witnesses.

¹ Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* (History and Myth in the Romanian Consciousness), București, Humanias, 1997.

Nevertheless, a study of the impact of theatre under the conditions of communist totalitarianism is essential in order to be able to properly understand the effects of the regime's propaganda, its evolution in terms of ideological orientation, and how it contributed to the crystallization of social representations of the past. This research study is merely a first step.

The themes of the historical plays written and produced during the Communist regime are closely correlated with its historiographical writings. Ideas such as the antiquity of the Romanian nation, its persistency, the permanent nature of the defence of its statehood, and the aspiration toward unity are all now emerging.

One theme highlighted during the 1970s is that of 'heroism', also present in the propaganda of the time. This theme channels us towards a better understanding of the role and attributes of the leader, thus becoming one of the main themes of Romanian historical dramaturgy within a very short time. While a long line of voivodes and heroes appeared on the stage, and via this medium through history, they became in fact the moving parts of a bigger mechanism that would ultimately become the personality cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Keywords: representation of the past; historiography; history of Romanian literature; theatre in the communist era; heroism in Communist Art; communist propaganda; The attributes of the leader.

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A very important aid to our understanding the representation of history in Romanian society during the Communist regime is without a doubt the historical drama of the period.

In recent studies of theater history dedicated to over four decades of totalitarianism, the growing interest in this literary genre is focused on the years 1965-71, a period when playwrights of the time approached things with the consent of the authorities, including the desire to partially abandon the themes most frequented up to that time, such as industrialization or cooperativization, among others². In theater, the process would continue in the 1970s when a new vision of history was imposed, which idealized the great figures of the past, especially the voivodes into whose lineage Ceaușescu inserted himself.

² Oltița Cîntec, *Teatrul românesc postbelic, sub controlul ideologiei comuniste* (Romanian Post-war Theater, under Communist Ideology) in "Coloquium publicum", an I, nr. 1, ianuarie – iunie 2010, Editura Universității de Vest, Timișoara, p.62 – 80, considerations of Historical Dramaturgy at p.75-76.

The modification of the historiographical discourse in a similar sense at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s has already been signaled by Romanian historians for over two decades³.

We can see, therefore, that the historiography and literature of the time go through the same ideological turns, but this should not surprise us, given the nature of a totalitarian regime. Clearly, offering the public a certain representation of the past was pursued through a set of cultural policies, including the encouragement of the officially agreed upon direction for literary or historiographical works. For today's historian, this fact is an invitation to establish the necessary correlations.

How widespread was this literary genre? Romanian historical dramas were written in great numbers during the years of the Communist regime. From a statistical point of view, in the general picture of the dramaturgy of the time, the literary genre of historical drama ranks third, with about 170 plays and 500 premieres, after drama inspired by contemporary subjects (800 plays, 1,700 awards) and comedy (400 plays, 1,000 premieres). The values mentioned above place this genre, for example, above children's plays (100 plays, 200 premieres, although these data refer to dramatic theater but not puppet theaters)⁴. As a value to which we can relate in a general way, in total, between 1944 and 1984, according to a 1995 source, about 3,400 premieres took place in the Romanian theater⁵.

The wide spread of historical drama during the totalitarian era was also recorded in specialized works from that period, the historical theme having been noted since 1970 as the second one in importance in contemporary theater, coming only after the construction of socialism:

“There are two significant formulas for the evolution of the current Romanian drama which appear in the last few years: one, brave, conveying principles and ideas, follows the way in which the individual-society relationship crystallizes in the conditions of the new order. The second formula, adopted in historical drama,

³ Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească*, București, Humanitas (History and Myth in the Romanian Consciousness), 1997, p.69 & following, p.266 & following.

⁴ Mihai Vasiliu, *Istoria teatrului românesc (A History of Romanian Theater)*, București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1995, p.106.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

the formula of sincerity and the lucid examination, without exaltation, of the past, is structurally different from the old way of pathetic evocation of history”⁶.

Going a little beyond historical theatre, in order to better contextualize, the closest connection can be made with the better-known historical cinematography of the time, which has in fact been quite carefully studied by recent historiography⁷. This approach is suggested not only by the themes pursued, the subjects, and artistic approaches, but also by the people involved (some successful screenwriters of the genre were also authors of plays, while by the same token some actors renowned for their portrayal of certain voivodes in films replicated those roles on stage - e.g. Gheorghe Cozorici (1933-1993) in the role of Stephen the Great)⁸. But, if some of the historical films are more often revisited by many Romanians, by specialists in the interpretation of history, or by the general public, the plays vanished from the repertoire of theatres and maybe that is why they are much less visible.

Among the authors of historical plays closely related to the world of cinematography, one could mention Titus Popovici (1930-94, literary debut in 1960) known for films such as *Dacii* (1966), *Columna*⁹ (1968),

⁶ Mihai Florea, *Scurtă istorie a teatrului românesc* (A Short History of Romanian Theatre), București, Editura Meridiane, 1970, p.153.

⁷ Bogdan-Alexandru Jitea, *Cinema în RSR. Conformism și disidență în industria ceaușistă de film* (Cinema in RSR. Conformism and Dissent in the Ceausescu Film Industry), Iași, Polirom, 2021. See also the doctoral thesis: Aurelia Vasile, *Le cinéma roumain pendant la période communiste. Représentations de l'histoire nationale*, Université de Bourgogne – Université de Bucarest, 2011.

⁸ Ștefan cel Mare (Stephen the Great), voivode of Moldavia (1457 – 1504) achieved numerous military victories during his reign, which was also a period of prosperity and cultural achievements. Since the pre-modern period, his reign has been embedded in the historical memory of Romanians as a period of splendor, including during the Romantic era in the 19th century, as well as in the historical propaganda of the communist regime. ‘Ștefan cel Mare’ is still acknowledged as one of the greatest Romanian historical figures, and in 2006 he was designated by public vote as the most important historical figure of Romania in the TV show, 100 Greatest Romanians of All Time.

⁹ “Dacii” and “Columna” (*Dacians* and *The Column*) are two films that evoke the ancestors of Romanians who are, from a national perspective, on the one hand, the Dacians and, on the other, the Roman conquerors. In the historical memory of Romanians, the Dacians have been assimilated to a greater extent, with a local perspective along the way, while the Romans, for many Romanian intellectuals since the eighteenth century, have been a

*Mihai Viteazul*¹⁰ (1970), *Horea*¹¹ (1984) and *Mircea*¹² (1989). Similarly, Mihnea Gheorghiu (1919-2011, debut in 1957), whose career as a screenwriter is marked by films such as *Tudor* (1962), *Cantemir*¹³ (1975) or *Burebista*¹⁴ (1980), springs to mind¹⁵.

symbol of the stature of the Romanians among European peoples. *The Column* reflects precisely the fusion between the Dacians and the Romans.

¹⁰ Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave), voivode of Wallachia (1593 – 1601) occupies a prominent place in the historical memory of Romanians as the first political leader who managed to rule simultaneously in Wallachia, Transylvania and Moldavia, and he is the main historical model for the unity of Romanians in the modern era.

¹¹ Horea together with Cloșca and Crișan, led the uprising in Transylvania in 1784. In the 1980s, Romanian historians of the national-communist period insisted that the movement had had a national character, not just a social one. [For further information, ref. Katherine Verdery, *Compromis și rezistență. Cultura română sub Ceaușescu*, București, Humanitas, 1994, translated from *National Ideology under Socialism*, University of California Press, 1991]. In 1984, the bicentennial of the uprising was celebrated in communist Romania.

¹² Mircea cel Bătrân (Mircea the Elder), voivode of Walachia (1386 – 1418) was one of the most influential Romanian political leaders during the Middle Ages. He was, from the Romantic period on, counted among the representative figures of national history, and his status evolved in this context throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During his reign, the Romanians managed to defeat the Ottoman Empire for a time, and Wallachia secured control of the Black Sea coast, which strengthened its strategic position in regional political and economic relations. Later, Mircea the Elder became a historical landmark in relation to the inclusion of Dobrogea in Romanian national history.

¹³ Dimitrie Cantemir (1673 – 1723), voivode of Moldavia (1693, 1710 – 1711) was the most important Romanian intellectual of the early 1700s with a historical opera and musical compositions to his name. His reign in Moldavia was short, marked by the ill-advised decision to choose an alliance with Russia against the Ottoman Empire, despite having lived in Constantinople almost all of his life until 1710. The victory of the Ottomans left him with no option but exile in Russia. In the Romanian collective historical memory, Cantemir is seen as an intellectual, although his importance on an European scale is currently exaggerated by the promoters of some nationalist political ideologies.

¹⁴ Burebista was a Thracian king of the Getae and Dacian tribes, a contemporary of Julius Caesar, credited with the unification of most Dacian tribes. His historical status grew during the last 10 years of the Ceaușescu regime, thanks to the regime's creation of a cult of unifying leaders in the geo-historical space later occupied by Romanians.

¹⁵ A list of representative Romanian historical films from that period with some details about them, such as the year of their premiere, can be found in Aurelia Vasile, *op.cit.*, pp. 56.

These are joined by a series of playwrights such as Paul Everac (1924-2011, debut in 1959), much honoured during the totalitarian regime; Horia Lovinescu (1917-83, debut in 1953); Dan Tărchilă (b. 1923, debut in 1960), whose play *Io, Mircea Voievod* from 1966 is considered a pivotal moment in terms of returning attention to this literary genre¹⁶; Paul Anghel (1931-95, debut in 1969); Dumitru Radu Popescu (b.1935, debut 1966); Valeriu Anania (1921-2011, debut in 1967) or Marin Sorescu (1936-96, debut in 1968)¹⁷. It should be mentioned, however, that the historical plays of the latter are placed by post-communist literary critics in another category, as we will see in due course. Some of the authors cited above enjoyed a privileged position during the communist regime, winning important awards, honours and positions (such as membership in the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, and leadership positions in the Romanian Writers' Union). Attractive fees were received by the playwrights in the respective period.¹⁸

If we are to evoke the stages of development of Romanian historical dramaturgy, we should note the fact that this is a part of the general framework of evolution of Romanian culture during that era. The changes in the political direction of the regime also led to the successive purification of theatrical repertoires while new genres or approaches arose. For example, after 1965, only 30% of the authors published between 1944 and 1965 and only 40% of plays from the period, survived in the repertoires. This tendency to eliminate them continued so that by the final days of the communist regime, only 18% of the authors and 12% of the plays remained. The changes, however, proved even faster, so that from the more than 400 plays written between 1965 and 1975, that is, before Ceaușescu's 'cultural revolution', only about 70 plays were still being staged in the 1980s¹⁹. As for historical theater, the comparison between the different periods of the regime brings no surprises. Between

¹⁶ Oltița Cîntec, *op.cit.*, p.76.

¹⁷ The dates of literary debuts after Mihai Vasiliu, *op. cit.*, p.104-105.

¹⁸ Interview with Dan Tărchilă "Se câștiga bine pe vremea aceea din teatru" ("The playwrights earned well at the time") „Viața medicală”, 7 mai 2021, <https://www.viața-medicala.ro/interviuri/dr-dan-tarchila-se-castiga-bine-pe-vremea-aceea-din-teatru-21490>, accessed on 3rd October 2021.

¹⁹ Mihai Vasiliu, *op cit.*, p. 105.

1944 and 1965, an era marked by a Stalinist, anti-national vision of Romanian history, 40 historical works were staged, while between 1965 and 1989 over 170 such plays were staged²⁰. This significant production imposed during the Ceaușescu years the organization of a 'Festival of Historical Theater'. Also in that context, in 1973, two acts from 'Apus de Soare' ('Sunset')²¹ were chosen, together with a play by Aurel Baranga, for the inauguration of the newly built National Theater in Bucharest.

If we look at the impact of representative authors from the Communist era, a calculation for the period 1944-84 - including the number of plays, the number of years they were staged and the number of premieres made - leads to a ranking from which authors are attracted and historical dramas are not missing: Tudor Popescu (1930-99), Paul Everac, Horia Lovinescu, Dumitru Radu Popescu, and Dan Tărchilă, among others. According to the number of plays staged, the order is a little different: first came Paul Everac, Horia Lovinescu and Dumitru Radu Popescu. According to the number of premieres, the hierarchy is approximately the same: Aurel Baranga (over 230) who wrote mostly comedies, Horia Lovinescu, and Paul Everac (over 130)²².

If we look at the casts of the plays as they were at the time they premiered, we notice that they had the benefit of some very good actors, which not only added to the exquisite artistic performances but also contributed to attracting the public: the play *Petru Rareș*²³ sau *Locțiitorul* (*Petru Rareș or the Lieutenant*, premiere 1967) by Horia Lovinescu had Georghe Constantin as Petru Rareș; *Săptămâna patimilor* (*Passion Week* - premiere 1971) by Paul Anghel had Gheorghe Cozorici as Ștefan cel Mare; *Muntele* (*The Mountain* - premiere in 1977) by Dumitru Radu Popescu with Horațiu Mălăele as Dromichetes²⁴; *The Cold*

²⁰ *Ibidem.*, p. 117.

²¹ "Apus de soare" (*Sunset*) is a historical drama written by Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea (1858 - 1919), which premiered in 1909. It reflects the end of the life and reign of Stephen the Great, who appears as a true titan of Romanian history.

²² Mihai Vasiliu, *Istoria teatrului românesc*, p.107.

²³ Petru Rareș, voivode of Moldavia (1527 – 1538, 1541 – 1546) son of Stephan the Great. His reigns were marked by political upheaval and wars in unstable times, but also by important cultural achievements, including the development of church painters.

²⁴ Dromichetes, king of the Dacians (Getae) who won victories against King Lysimachus of the Macedonians in the early 3rd century BC.

(*Răceala* - premiere 1977) by Marin Sorescu with Virgil Ogășanu as Mahomed²⁵, Ion Caramitru in the role of Pasha of Vidin, Florian Pittiș as Radu cel Frumos²⁶, and Mircea Diaconu as Pânzaru²⁷.

After 1989, this literary genre went into a sharp decline, being perceived as too closely related to the cultural model of national communism. The post-1989 public activism of some of the writers of the time, such as Paul Everac, only intensified the relegation of this generation of writers into an increasingly smaller cultural niche. There is a striking contrast between the genre's place in the works dedicated to Romanian drama before 1989 and those after. Thus, it is seen in an extremely favorable light by literary criticism prior to the collapse of the communist regime, according to the number of plays and awards reported above²⁸. In contrast, it is virtually ignored in recent works on the history of Romanian literature²⁹.

At the end of the 1980s, before the fall of the Communist totalitarian regime, a retrospective edition of some works considered representative of Romanian historical drama appeared. This critical apparatus is a true summary of the ideological program behind its literary genre in the 1980s³⁰.

²⁵ Mehmed the Conqueror, sultan of the Ottoman Empire (1444 - 1446, 1451 - 1481).

²⁶ Radu cel Frumos (Radu the Fair), voivode of Wallachia (1462 - 1473).

²⁷ The distribution of the plays in the work: *Dramaturgia istorică română contemporană* (*A Contemporary Romanian Historical Dramaturgy, Anthology, Introductory Study, Cronology, Presentations, Critical Landmarks and Bibliography* by Ion Nistor, Albatros Publishing, Bucharest, 1988), p.XLV & following. Gheorghe Cozorici (1933 - 1993), Gheorghe Constantin (1933 - 1994), Horațiu Mălăele (b.1952), Virgil Ogășanu (b.1940), Ion Caramitru (1942 - 2021), Florian Pittiș (1943 - 2007) and Mircea Diaconu (b.1949) are among the most popular Romanian theater and film actors.

²⁸ Virgil Brădățeanu, *Viziune și univers în noua dramaturgie românească* (*Vision and Universe in the New Romanian Dramaturgy*), București, Cartea românească, 1977; Mihai Florea, *op.cit.*; Mircea Mancaș, *Trecut și prezent în teatrul românesc*, (*Past and Present in the Romanian Theater*) Ed. Eminescu, 1979; *Dramaturgia istorică română contemporană*, (*Contemporary Romanian Historical Dramaturgy, Anthology*) Antologie, Studiu introductiv, cronologie, Prezentări, Repere critice și Bibliografie de Ion Nistor, București, Editura Albatros, 1988.

²⁹ Alex Ștefănescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane. 1941 - 2000*, (*The history of Contemporary Romanian Literature. 1941 - 2000*), București, Editura Mașina de scris, 2005; Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, (*Critical History of Romanian Literature*), Pitești, Editura Paralela 45, 2008.

³⁰ *Dramaturgia istorică română contemporană*, Antologie, Studiu introductiv, cronologie, Prezentări, Repere critice și Bibliografie de Ion Nistor, București, Editura Albatros, 1988

In the foreground, in the spotlight we would add, we see themes such as origins, "continuity and our national and political unity", and "struggles for the unaltered preservation of the nation", not to mention "prominent personalities of our history, enlivened by captivating patriotic feelings"³¹. The evocation of such authors and plays passes almost obligatorily through the travail of comparisons with classical models from Romanian culture from the end of the 19th century (Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea, Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu, Alexandru Davila³²). In the Ceaușescu era, the characters are generally great voivodes of the Middle Ages (sometimes also characters from ancient Dacian history) or characters that can be inflected in the national perspective, such as Horea or Avram Iancu³³. Various revolutionary figures, however, present in the very early years of the communist regime, such as in *Bălcescu*³⁴ (Camil Petrescu's work from 1949), have become absent from the scene. As a conclusion of the critique of the time, "the return of dramaturgy to the historical theater is the consequence of a vast and profound process of reevaluation and reconsideration of the destiny of the Romanian people", and "our current dramaturgy has projected in convincing images the representative historical moments and faces" and proximity to the present past, so that historical characters become - through an indisputable poetic point of view - our contemporaries.³⁵ To transform historical characters into contemporary ones is a goal that is sincerely taken on and speaks for itself about the purpose of these plays.

When we speak about historical figures, an important theme of the Ceaușescu period immediately comes to light and allows for the

(A Contemporary Romanian Historical Dramaturgy, Anthology, Introductory Study, Cronology, Presentations, Critical Landmarks and Bibliography by Ion Nistor, Albatros Publishing, Bucharest, 1988).

³¹ *Ibidem.*, p.XIV.

³² Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu (1838 - 1907) and Alexandru Davila (1862 - 1929), prominent Romanian intellectuals from the late 19th/early 20th century, both being authors of some historical dramas of reference in Romanian literature (respectively '*Răzvan and Vidra*' and '*Vlaicu Vodă*') that reflect the medieval history of the Romanians.

³³ Avram Iancu (1824 - 1872) was the most important leader of the Romanian revolution of 1848-1849 in Transylvania.

³⁴ Nicolae Bălcescu (1819 - 1852), leader of the 1848 revolution in Wallachia.

³⁵ *Dramaturgia istorică română contemporană*, p. XXVIII.

personalization of history in accordance with the purposes of the propaganda of the time: the 'heroism' that was presented as one of the essential instruments to be used on the road to socialism. It is shown as an important and, at the same time, innovative trait for the historical theater of the time:

"The big problem in today's historical drama was the constructing of characters in their concrete ambiance, released from their mythical aura, doing convincing actions that, far from diminishing their personality in general, correspond to realistic optics and contemporary interpretation in a dialectical sense ... Thus, the dimensions of heroism in contemporary historical drama find their explanation in a unique vision, with its own ways of treatment and interpretation dialectic of the crucial events in the turbulent history of the homeland, which marks the ascending course of the Romanian *people in the struggle for the creation of conditions of the revolutionary era of socialism*"³⁶.

The interpretation given to the emblematic figures of Romanian history allowed, from the 1970s onwards, a new evolution, in which the praise of 'heroism' is just a preparatory step in reaching the primary objective: the praise of the providential leader.

I will reproduce some lines illustrative for this evolution selected from a work dedicated to Romanian theater that comments on the attributes of the characters Horea, Petru Rareș and Avram Iancu, who appear in some historical plays of the time. First, I will quote the critic on the image of Horea, as he appears in Mihail Davidoglu's play, *Horia* (1955)³⁷:

"Davidoglu's *Horia* has a rich existence; it could be said to be complete character, it brings into all situations the inner pathos of famous heroes and at the same time, the quality of being the unifying element of the drama, rising to the function of a common or representative factor of the rebels with the virtue of being a revolutionary. Full of warmth like a father, he feels like the father of everyone and knows how to control, always discreetly and thus even more impressively, his own pains"³⁸.

Now, let us consider what was said about Petru Rareș as he appears in Horia Lovinescu's play, *Petru Rareș or the Lieutenant* (1967):

³⁶ Mircea Mancaș, *op. cit.*, p.185, p.189.

³⁷ Mihail Davidoglu (1910 – 1987).

³⁸ Virgil Brădățeanu, *op. cit.*, p.99.

"Petru Rareș imposes itself as an emotional act of confession made with a deep analytical capacity and dramatic rendering force. It is a portrait made with rare artistic vigor, of a man, a leader of people, of a Romanian voivode, placed here by the commands of history to preserve, together with the nation, the independence of the state and with them to be a guardian of the peace of the western world. It is a monumental dramatic monologue, a confession and a definition through the words and deeds of a normal man, a whole man, put in the situation of ignoring himself for the sake of others. His thoughts are interesting and deep, his confessions full of truth, his actions authentic, and all come together with the quality to broadly and penetratingly characterize this personality, defining one of the strongest characters in Romanian drama, registering as an extraordinary achievement of modern literature where there are not many others to stand by him through its complexity and strength, through its extraordinary dynamics and inner truth"³⁹.

The third example is the character Avram Iancu, from Paul Everac's play, *Iancu la Hălmațiu* (1966):

"Paul Everac suggests the unusual force that illuminated a moment as if it was for eternity and made Iancu immortal in legend, brave, wise and good, as it were, and especially beautiful, as hope, and real as the need for fulfillment. The Iancu of Everac brings the light expected everywhere, and the hero represents the hope and drama of an entire people, shared by all those who were with him or wanted to be."⁴⁰

There is visible here a sum of attributes that we can gather from these three portraits (although there are many others) that probably would not have upset Ceaușescu himself. Horea is an "extraordinary hero", a "unifying element" who is "full of warmth, like a father". Petru Rareș appears as a "leader of people" appointed by the "commands of history" to defend the "being of the nation", the "independence of the state" and to be the "gate protecting" the western world. Avram Iancu is a "hero" made "immortal in legend, brave, wise and good". In a visible way, these are elements through which Nicolae Ceaușescu could very well have been portrayed, and these historical characters became his contemporaries, as seen in the works quoted above. As a long line of voivodes and heroes appears on the stage, the voivodes become, in fact, the elements from which Nicolae Ceaușescu's personality cult is built.

³⁹ *Ibidem.*, p.171.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem.*, p.197.

The situation is totally different today, when the literary genre of historical drama is underestimated. Important works dedicated to the history of Romanian literature after the Second World War ignore it outright because they express the aesthetic choices of literary critics. For historians, however, these plays and the literary commentaries proposed then remain sources for the study of the mentality and sensibilities of the time. If for today's literary criticism an author like Paul Everac can go unnoticed, for the historian dedicated to research about the communist regime, such an author, who wrote over a hundred plays, deserves full attention.

To exemplify the discussions within modern literary criticism, let us turn our attention to the work of Alex Ștefănescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane (The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature, 2005)*⁴¹. This synthesis refers only vaguely to this literary genre. Titus Popovici, for example, is appreciated as a writer, going so far as to consider that in a way it is really “an impiety from the providence of literature to distribute a former member of CC to PCR in the role of the most inspired evocator of the sufferings caused by the communist regime”. However, his work as a playwright and author of historical plays is forgotten. Mihnea Gheorghiu is completely ignored, as are Dan Tărchilă and Paul Everac. Paul Anghel is quoted among others within the group of writers related to the theses of protochronism⁴². In a short chapter dedicated to Horia Lovinescu, the author finds room for a few lines about *Petru Rareș or the Lieutenant*, about which we find that “more than a historical reconstruction, the play is an attempt to represent the condition of the hero for all time / eternal hero”⁴³.

The only highly regarded author of historical plays is Marin Sorescu but, in terms of his dramaturgy, the two historical plays hardly carry any weight. However, Sorescu is appreciated for the fact that his historical plays stand out in a literary genre lacking in courage at the time: “Marin Sorescu manifests himself with the same ease in the theater of historical inspiration (although the domain underwent a process of

⁴¹ Alex Ștefănescu, *op. cit.*

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 824.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 345.

sacralization during communism and was used to paralyze the imagination of other authors" ⁴⁴.

Moreover, the aesthetic criterion is first of all considered by Nicolae Manolescu in his *"Istoria critică a literaturii române"* (*Critical History of Romanian Literature*, 2008) ⁴⁵. Here Paul Everac, considered a "mediocre playwright" ⁴⁶, is among the authors who fail to "leave a mark" ⁴⁷. Dan Tărchilă is not mentioned at all, and Paul Anghel is evoked along with the memory of the "nationalist clichés" that were "so dear to him" ⁴⁸. He is placed, along with Eugen Barbu, Paul Everac and Dan Zamfirescu among the "committed authors who have always played the game of the Communist Party." ⁴⁹ Titus Popovici is presented in a few pages but without references to his plays ⁵⁰, something that cannot be said about his colleague and rival in writing scripts and historical plays, Mihnea Gheorghiu, who is almost forgotten. Valeriu Anania is not mentioned at all, whereas there are several considerations of Horia Lovinescu, with him being presented as a representative playwright of the time, who "hurried to serve the cause of socialist realism" and as the author of "varied and unequal" plays ⁵¹. Lovinescu's only historical play is favorably seen, as "one of the best of its kind in our country." ⁵² Manolescu understands that themes such as the people's love for the prince, the boyars' plots, or the theme of Romanians as a shield for European civilization were all part of the rhetoric of the Ceaușescu regime; nevertheless, the play leaves him with "a good impression" ⁵³. On the other hand, Dumitru Radu Popescu is almost parodied, his plays being seen as "without a rigorous structure", some of them "really chaotic". We read later

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 414.

⁴⁵ Nicolae Manolescu, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 1209.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 982.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 1192.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 1201.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 978 și urm.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 986.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 989.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 989.

that D.R. Popescu is "unrealistic, allegorical, mythical, absurd, dreamy, psychoanalytic, utopian or all of these together"⁵⁴.

Marin Sorescu's theater makes an even better impression on Manolescu. His historical plays, *The Cold* and the *The Third Spike* are seen as an expression of "political theater" and as "parodies on the subject of abuses of totalitarian regimes"⁵⁵. The scene from *The Third Spike* in which Vald Țepeș impales himself on a spike because he had not managed to change the face of Wallachia, is seen as an "allusion to the great projects of Ceaușescu and their failure"⁵⁶.

Conclusions

Let us look again at a text from the 1970s. Contrary to today's reality, its author believed that the historical dramaturgy of his era will have a long life in Romanian literature.

"The rich experience of the last twenty-five years has helped writers and artists to rethink history, to acquire a fundamentally new conception of life, of society; this conception, proper to modern, contemporary man, does not eliminate the presence of permanence, of figures and symbols that explain and define us as a people. On the contrary, the plays that reflect this new and evolved understanding of history mark an advanced stage in the development of the original drama and will, we believe, have a long documentary and artistic value"⁵⁷.

When we consider the current situation, we simply notice an enormous literary work in terms of its volume, but which appears nowadays as having no artistic value - a situation common to other forms of culture and art from the Ceaușescu era, especially those related to the cult of the leader and his personality. They may be excluded from the histories of art and literature, but not from the attention of historians interested in the way in which the propaganda of the era and the cult of personality within it were articulated.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 1099.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 1032.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 1032.

⁵⁷ Mihai Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 153-154.