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**BOHEMIAN LITERARY LIFE
AND CLANDESTINE EMOTIONS:
WAYS OF BEING BETWEEN THE FICTIONAL AND
THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL**

“...and yet/ from time to time someone would come out of books/ they’d lay eyes on something to drink/ a dry stone:/ they’d lay eyes on it and drink it up./ Then books were drunk too./ Black worms and white birds were drunk./ Blue fish and red horses were drunk./ The air under the nails and the marrow from the bones and blood were drunk./ Skin and hair were drunk/ Geography and painting and sculpture and poetry were drunk./ They were pawned, blended, dissolved like pills under the tongue/ and were drunk...”¹

Ion Mureșan

The image of all that has been lived and “drunk” receives a little twist in Ion Mureșan’s poems from his *Alcohol Book* (2010) – a textualist scenario, which is quite plausible inside this lead poem: “someone would come out of books/ they’d lay eyes on something to drink/ a dry stone:/ they’d spot and drink it up” (*Întoarcerea fiului risipitor*). It is as if an anonymous “someone” emerged from the pages of the book, to spend an eternity in pubs, which, as we know from *Poemul alcoolicilor* [*The Poem of the Alcoholics*], that “God, in His great goodness, [are] put [...] in their path”. Without coinciding with a squalid condition, bohemian life acquires the contours of a culturally-shaped existence, which is all the more worthy of being paraded in front of a savvy audience. It is a paradoxically romanticized condition, sponging multiple literary references, a condition that can be borrowed or experienced (also) from books, or imitated by the “poor alcoholics”, those who “sometimes [...] fall to their knees and they’re

¹ “...și încă/ din timp în timp apărea din cărți cineva/ care vedea ceva de băut/ o piatră seacă:/ vedea și bea./ Apoi și cărțile s-au băut./ Viermii negri și păsările albe s-au băut./ Peștii albaștri și caii roșii s-au băut./ S-au băut aerul de sub unghii și măduva din oase și sângele./ Pielea și părul s-au băut./ S-au băut geografia și pictura și sculptura și poezia./ S-au amanetat, s-au amestecat, s-au dizolvat ca bumbuții sub limbă/ și s-au băut...” (Ion Mureșan, *Întoarcerea fiului risipitor* [*The Return of the Prodigal Son*]).

like letters traced by a cack-handed schoolboy” [the original verse: „...uneori cad în genunchi și-s ca niște litere/ scrise de un școlar stângaci”]².

Lens-like Character and Living Fiction: Interpretive Keys

The fictional and lyrical character appears to be turning his gaze towards both the writer and the reader, opening himself thus towards an *outside* of fiction, of the poem, eventually coming outside of himself, albeit temporarily. And the inhabitants of real life, of quotidian reality, are to continue the “life” of fiction, or even to let themselves be impregnated with the specific rhetoric of fictional characters who may emerge from inside [the](#) book.

I intend to analyze how several writers from Romania of the 1960-70s developed a style of everyday living, becoming protagonists of their own lives, letting themselves – knowingly or involuntarily – be contaminated by literary characters and attitudes from their own fictional writings. This is a process of subjectivation, of reciprocal and transformative mirroring between, on the one hand, everyday manners of being, and, on the other hand, manners of fictional life. The bohemian ethos can be seen as a form of artistic survival for individuals with an ambiguous social and intellectual identity, who probed for means of survival by complying with the often comfortable perks of their own professional guild. Whether they resorted to aesthetic escapism and “resistance” or to compromises and negotiations with the censorship of the time, bohemian writers enacted the state of being simili-characters, in the sense that they shared a state of exception, a poeticized existence, a collective self-delusion.

I started with a motto comprising a few lines by Ion Mureșan because they call for a fictional-biographical analysis, which is oriented from fiction to biography. The lens-like character through which we can *look back* at his author can become something else than a unit of fiction interpretable through the prism of biography. By reversing the direction from which we look at this fictional character, he will behave like a filter, or a guiding character, who will accompany us in the process of tracing some ways of being of the writer and of the reader, as well, should the reader decide to let himself be contaminated by the beings of fiction. In this type of interpretation, fictional characters acquire a function similar to that of volunteer actors in some immersive contemporary theatre performances. In such performances, therapist-actors, who trigger and enhance the viewers’ experience, become guides who, paradoxically, play the role of spectators inside the fictional scenario.

² Ion Mureșan, *The Poem of the Alcoholics*. Translated by Alistair Ian Blyth, in *20 Romanian Writers*, București, Institutul Cultural Român, 2007. See <http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poem/item/19331/auto/0/THE-POEM-OF-THE-ALCOHOLICS>

Bohemian life is one of the life behaviours or formulas that reveal a “stylistics of existence”, to resort to a phrase launched by Marielle Macé in a recent book. Rebellious, ostensibly anarchic existence, which is, in fact, poeticized and aestheticized, is a recognizable code of sociability, of professional and human complicity, predicated on Bovaristic constructions of selfhood inside a microcommunity and in agreement with its expectations. These ways of being of the bohemian individual can pertain to the sphere of interest of cultural anthropology, but they also belong to an aesthetics of everyday life, or to the specific formalities of a *style*. After all, in the sense proposed by Marielle Macé, style is an evaluative, critical notion, linked to the idea of that “comment”³ on modes of being. A morphological and poetic reflection on forms, extrapolated from art into life. If the bohemian individual sometimes allows himself to be modeled by his own creation, he does more than just exhibit a style, an existential “coat of arms”: he also typically oscillates between two manners or styles of being: that of biography and that of fiction. Bohemian writers often lead a life that is filtered through bookish references, a borrowed life, located at the crossroads of several lives or several regimes of experience, whether they be simili-autobiographical or simili-fictional.

In an attempt to decode these regimes of fictional-biographical experience, I will use the comprehensive syntagm of *mode of existence*, in the sense that the philosopher and anthropologist Bruno Latour ascribes to it. A *mode of existence*, for Latour, encompasses and goes beyond the semantic sphere of a mere *style of being*. According to Latour, at the heart of the modes of existence lie *beings of fiction*, which are comprehensible outside any grid of narratological or semantic interpretation. These fictional beings (yet not fictive, but formative) are given a rhetorical and aesthetic sense, both of which are complemented by a powerful anthropological function. Fiction, understood as actual self-exposure and self-figuration, is basically a matrix of modes of existence: it shapes and harmonizes subjectivity, in and through the artistic language (be it textual, visual, or performative), as well as in the everyday, non-artistic sphere.

In other words, at the core of all modes of existence stands, predictably, the mechanism of *con-figuring* various manners of *being together*, these manners being co-dependent, folded into a network. In the case of the beings of fiction, subjectivity (of the reader, of the writer himself) is formed, Latour considers, through a process of extending the trajectory that is specific to fiction into life. A subjectivation of the reader or the viewer in relation to the being of fiction entails capturing and cultivating the echo of this being in herself. Hence, following on the thread of the kaleidoscopic suggestions encountered in Bruno Latour's philosophical prose, we can analyze the mutual reflection of the fictional

³ Marielle Macé, *Styles. Critique de nos formes de vie*, Paris, Gallimard, 2016, p. 13: “Une stylistique de l’existence prend en charge, autrement dit, la question foncièrement ouverte, requérante, et toujours réengagée, du ‘comment’ de la vie”.

character's life into the lifestyle of a writer or reader, and vice versa. Latour talks about a gradual shift towards the position of a subject: "we know that the subject has been unmoored; we arrive at the subject without starting from the subject"⁴. Subjectivity is therefore not a given or a point of origin, but a process and the anticipation of an effect. And if "the work needs a subjective interpretation, it is in a very special sense of the adjective: we are subject to it, or rather we win our subjectivity through it"⁵.

Life Exhibited as Art

As a way of enacting episodes that seem to belong to a novel or a short story, as a way of *performing* poems, of assuming fictional-biographical poses, or of capturing scenes from fictional biographies, bohemian life is a *threshold* experience, marked by (quasi-clandestine) crossings between the artistic and the nonartistic. One might say that Ion Mureșan's lyrics from *The Book of Alcohol* encapsulate not only a considerable part of the lives of his colleagues from the 1980s generation (we could recall here, for instance, Traian T. Coșovei and Mariana Marin), but also legends about bohemians from the 1960s or the 1970s, such as Nichita Stănescu, Virgil Mazilescu, or Leonid Dimov. When they avoided being turned into easily manipulable tools of ideological propaganda, Romanian writers who were deemed to be subversive or "Aesopian" in the seventh or eighth decade of the twentieth century were not, however, promoters of any ethical radicalism or of overt opposition to the dictatorial political regime. They preferred to cultivate a bohemian ethos, a poeticized and self-delusional state of being, which implied either escapist or subversive attitudes, or a rather comfortable cohabitation with the ideological censorship of the time. The compromises with the ideological censorship had become possible in the 1960s, when the regime allowed the establishment of hierarchies among writers and the development of successful literary careers, the appearance of national "stars" whose works were published with large print runs and who received all manner of bonuses and fees. All these led to "overemphasizing on literature and the role of the writer in the community"⁶.

Nichita Stănescu, an author whose poems – in which the frankness of self-confession and the aesthetics of everyday life combined with a mythologizing

⁴ See Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence. An Anthropology of the Moderns* [2012]. Translated by Catherine Porter, Cambridge – London, Harvard University Press, 2013, p. 372.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 241.

⁶ See Ioana Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenția. Instituții literare în comunismul românesc* [*Privilighentsia: Literary Institutions in Communist Romania*], Cluj, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2009, p. 162: "Editing books of fiction in large quantities was a constituent part of the pedagogical project of modernizing society. Even if, in terms of its mode of action, communist pedagogy turned out to be correctional, aggressive or falsified, it nonetheless participated, by way of its sheer scale of action, in overemphasizing literature and the role of the writer in the community".

patriotic rhetoric – were introduced into the textbooks of the communist era⁷, was the protagonist of many urban legends. Stănescu appears to have lived at the “aesthetic” limit, so to speak, of poverty, as he lavished the earnings of his literary awards by fraternizing, bohemian style, with his fellow writers and numerous fans. His private life resembled, paradoxically, an endless street *happening*. As one of his friends remembers, the poet did not have even a doorknob at the entrance. According to the painter Mircea Dumitrescu, those who visited Nichita Stănescu at home realized they were attending “nothing less than a cancan”. There they met their friends and literary brethren, opportunistic buddies, as well as various informants or even Security generals:

Everything was magical about him... from the moment you walked in. You were welcomed by a poor man who, prior to marrying Dora, had a mattress placed on the floor and a table with six bonanza chairs, which had been given to him, I think, by someone, and a bonanza wardrobe, but the battle, the words, the ideas... It was a place where you could get informed and come to know everything. From the outside. All of a sudden. You'd be swept into nothing less than a cancan. I can remember... Security generals and very important people would come, there were also many mediocre many who hang around. You do realize that, since he was a man who didn't have a doorknob at the entrance... You could push the door open and go into the house, as simple as that. The same happened when he lived at the other address, on Grigore Alexandrescu St., at Mrs. Covaci, who had a small house in the backyard on that street, but life went on in the public space. I can remember a scene from when someone came and said to him: “Watch out, this is a Security general”. To which Nichita replied: “Well, it's better if a Security general listens in than any underling who may be twisting my words...”⁸.

Beyond the inevitable mythicization of such recollections, or perhaps because of them, Nichita appears as a representative figure for the apparently fragile, but also theatricalized, compensatory condition of the bohemian individual. To this is added a certain poetic irresponsibility, or, maybe more appropriately said, a self-incurred, recurrent way of becoming irresponsible, specific to life on the threshold, on the shifting border between art and life, between the private and the public space.

⁷ We could mention *Adolescență* [*Adolescence*] here: “The feeling of the sun rising/ together with the softest doina played on a flute,/ the tree under which I had my first kiss,/ the canopy, the bunch with a thousand grapes,/ the manly smile of my father/ my first strand of white hair, and the graceful gait of adolescence,/ they're all yours, my Homeland/ always”.

⁸ Monica Andronescu, “Ultima seară pe pământ. De ce a murit Nichita Stănescu” [*The Last Evening on Earth. Why Nichita Stănescu died*], *Ziarul Metropolis*, 12 December 2015.

Entering the Competition with the Character

On the one hand, bohemian literary life and the quasi-clandestine manifestations associated with it (in aesthetic, identity and, sometimes, political terms) pertain to a lifestyle whose documentation becomes itself a form of art⁹, a live installation. Both flesh-and-blood and cardboard characters “document” and, ultimately, perform their life-as-art, engaging in endless debates about it. In a recently published autobiographical volume entitled *Viața mea [My Life]*, Nicolae Breban devotes a chapter to the literary and artistic bohemian life of the 1970s, which he understands as a privileged form of intensified emotion, bursting with creativity, but also as a quixotic way of promoting collective self-delusion. Breban invokes Proust as a master of seemingly static, repetitive prose, as well as of the art of portraiture, yet he also resonates with the Proustian extolment of frivolous, socialite existence, as a way of aestheticized living. Breban’s novels leisurely describe the rituals and rhythms of the mundane life of protagonists who seem to live in order to meet up and play out their existence or their dramas in front of others. Just like for his fictional characters, for the group of friends and writers whom Breban evokes in *Viața mea* (Grigore Hagiu and “we, Cezar, Nichita, Matei and I”) bohemian life is a form of “active” day-dreaming, a sample of the “first paradise”, or:

...The first certainty, a sort of quixotic war [...] in which people chased after and fought fierce battles with light wine, with cheerful carelessness, with complex puns, with real or fake citations, with quaint stories involving women, books and false biographies or flamboyant adolescences [...]. At the elegant Mon Jardin, in the garden, in summer, we, our group, would always find a reserved table, where a friendly waiter, Stoica, gave us ‘free’ wine, steaks, coffees; but we, who were, in all, around 10-15 ‘comrades in dreams and art,’ we were fair, dropping by, whenever we came across a one-hundred lei bill, and handing it over to Stoica, who was always most genial¹⁰.

If what we expect from an autobiography is a considerable dose of “authenticity”, in the case of Nicolae Breban this authenticity is entwined with consistent self-fictionalization, with the fervor (or the slightly disenchanted nostalgia, at times) with

⁹ This phenomenon that could be analysed through the grid of interpretation proposed by Boris Groys, who has theorized contemporary artistic documentation in the following terms: “It is no coincidence that museums are traditionally compared to cemeteries: by presenting art as the end result of life, they obliterate life once and for all. Art documentation, by contrast, marks the attempt to use artistic media within art spaces to refer to life itself, that is, to a pure activity, to pure practice, to an artistic life, as it were, without presenting it directly. Art becomes a life form, whereas the artwork becomes non-art, a mere documentation of this life form”, Boris Groys, *Art Power*, Cambridge – London, MIT Press, 2008, p. 53.

¹⁰ Nicolae Breban, *Viața mea [My Life]*, Iași, Polirom, 2017, p. 411.

which the retrospective account is given. Fictionalization is imminent, I would say, in Breban's case, and his confessions from *Viața mea* belong to Breban *the character* equally as much as they can be ascribed to protagonists like Rogulski from *Don Juan*, Ovidiu Minda from *Îngerul de gips* [*The Plaster Angel*], Grobei from *Bunavestire* [*The Annunciation*], or Castor Ionescu from *Drumul la zid* [*The Back to the Wall*]. Typically, *fakeness* and *falsity* (affective, ideological, artistic, or existential) are positively connoted: the atmosphere of literary and artistic bohemian life in the 1960s and 1970s was steeped in a charmingly quixotic "social or group dreaming". Fellow writers and same-generation peers shared "real and false stories", but also "real or fake citations", or entire "books and fake biographies", even a *false* form of imposture, an "imposture to imposture itself".

The clandestine or underground essence of bohemian existence depends on the acceptance of this typical (im)posture. A bohemian individual will indulge in a state of "in-betweenness", of liminality (social, professional), but he will also torment and exhaust himself inside this state or "imposture". His dual, fictional-biographical identity reveals his theoretically limitless propensity towards playfulness, hence, towards the histrionic condition – which is neither entirely fictional, nor entirely "real" – of the participants, be they writers, artists, critics, censors, "complicitous" informers, or duplicitous or reliable drinking pals. The literary critic and theorist Matei Călinescu, a member of the bohemian group evoked by Breban, created, in fact, a prototypical bohemian character, occupying a privileged state, located halfway between bohemian exuberance and asceticism: Zacharias Lichter. A playful, ingenuous and cynical prophet, at the same time, the protagonist of the essayistic novel *Viața și opiniile lui Zacharias Lichter* [*The Life and Opinions of Zacharias Lichter*] (whose first edition was published in 1969) accepts the fact that, as a disciple of Diogenes, he occupies a privileged form of "imposture". In his twofold role as clown and philosopher of the city, Lichter "practices" and even theorizes mendacity, and his destiny as *homo sacer* highlights what Giorgio Agamben calls "naked life" and the "state of exception"¹¹. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that he praises mendaciousness, ultimately resorting to the classical logical paradox of the liar:

Everything I say – the cynical Zacharias Lichter says, symptomatically contradicting himself – is a lie. *Yes*, it is a lie and *no*, it is not a lie. Anything that can be said about everything is a lie. [...] And, if we admit a hierarchy of deceit, I,

¹¹ See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attell, Chicago – London, University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 50: "The state of exception is not a dictatorship (whether constitutional or unconstitutional, commissarial or sovereign) but a space devoid of law, a zone of anomie in which all legal determinations – and above all the very distinction between public and private – are deactivated".

Zacharias Lichter, am the greatest lie of all: for my apothegm is: I *lie*, therefore I *don't exist*¹².

The argument by which the prophet denounces himself as a *lie*, by virtue of a fatally linguistic, hence deceitful *cogito*, which denies the Cartesian *sum* instead of upholding it, is, predictably, based on circular reasoning: “It is our destiny to speak, to speak, to speak – silence itself is a word like any other”¹³. And the exorcism of deception is achieved through a naive receptivity, or even through an almost mystical gullibility and “idiocy”, which is quite revealing in the face of everything that mimics the truth. Lichter’s utopia is but the realization of a pataphysical society à la Jarry. This society is “perfectly circular”, being composed of thieves and beggars, with “the thieves perpetually robbing the beggars (who also worked, but without being paid), while the latter scraped a living from the alms the thieves deemed to give them”¹⁴. The idea of falsehood-as-truth is reminiscent of the Nietzschean theory of truths which are nothing but the result of interpretations, of the will to power in interpretation and misinterpretation, of a game of forces and of inevitably relative perspectives. Whether they appear to be contaminated by the “imposture to imposture” of Breban’s heroes Rogulski and Grobei, or by a lie that is not very different from the truth, preached by the pseudo-prophet Zacharias Lichter in Matei Călinescu’s novel, the protagonists of bohemian life practice Bovaristic self-imitation. The writer who has become a protagonist in everyday life enacts a coveted exceptional condition, the condition of his own celebrity (or at least his longing after this), aestheticized existence also becoming, in itself, a form of consecration.

The bohemian mode of existence, however, is not so much a formula of artificial self-construction, of the dandy-esque type, but a version of life that lends itself to contemplation, to being documented and exposed as a sort of readymade existence. As an artistic and existential praxis, bohemian life is close to what Allan Kaprow called, in an essay from the 1990s, *lifelike art/art as life*, a life that formulates its message through a *feedback loop*¹⁵, from the artist to us, and back again, from the readers, spectators or disciples to the artist or the writer. As a sample of lifelike-art, a relevant scene of the *happening* type occurs in the old headquarters of the Writers’ Union at Casa Monteoru, where, in 1969, Dumitru

¹² Matei Călinescu, *Viața și opiniile lui Zacharias Lichter* [*The Life and Opinions of Zacharias Lichter*], București, Humanitas, 2016, p. 135.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 134.

¹⁴ Matei Călinescu, Ion Vianu, *Amintiri în dialog. Memorii* [*Memories in Dialogue*], București, Humanitas, 2016, p. 324.

¹⁵ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Expanded Edition. Edited by Jeff Kelley, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, University of California Press, 2003, p. 204: “Lifelike art’s message is sent on a feedback loop: from the artist to us (including machines, animals, nature) and around again to the artist. You can’t ‘talk back’ to, and thus change, an artlike artwork; but ‘conversation’ is the very means of lifelike art, which is always changing”.

Țepeneag, the young prose writer and theoretician of aesthetic oneirism (along with Leonid Dimov), “performed” nothing less than a leap from the second floor, in the Hall of Mirrors, and broke a leg. The story is recounted in Andrei Pogorilowski’s novel, *Nic Studeno. Al doilea cartuș* [*Nic Studeno. The Second Cartridge*]¹⁶: it was told to him by his father, the translator Aurel Covaci, who had witnessed, in his youth, the incident from Casa Monteoru.

Among the other witnesses was the “poet” (none other than Nichita Stănescu), as well as two bohemian figures who were famous in the 1970s, with paronymic names: Teodor Pîcă (also a poet) and his pal, Florin Pucă, a cartoonist, graphic artist and poet whose fame rested on the fact that he had illustrated most of Leonid Dimov’s poetry volumes and that he had an almost Rasputinian beard. As for Țepeneag’s leap, it caused the oneiric writer to remain bed-ridden in hospital for a good amount of time. Moreover, it seems inspired by an obsession that haunted some of the characters from the fictional narratives of his youth. The incident from Casa Monteoru occurred in 1969, and Țepeneag’s first volumes were written and published during the same period: *Exerciții* [*Exercises*] (1966), *Frig* [*Cold*] (1967), *Așteptare* [*Waiting*] (1971). The characters of these prose writings evince Sisyphean attempts at flying, but they eventually abandon their Bovaristic fantasies and indulge in ridiculous and pathetic everyday experiences, like in the case of the protagonist of the short story *Icar* [*Icarus*]. In the narrative *Accidental* [*Accident*], another maniac of flight is a certain Nea Leu, who discovers an injured angel. The griffins in the novella *Prin gaura cheii* [*Through the Keyhole*] are oneiric extensions or substitutes of the hero.

Țepeneag’s astonishing-risible experiment is reminiscent, incidentally, of a performance-artwork from the 1960s, *Le Saut dans le vide/Leap into the Void*, captured on camera and then processed through photo editing, belonging to the conceptual artist Yves Klein, the founder of *nouveau réalisme*. Klein trick shot a photo, which shows him ready to jump off a building located on a quiet street in a suburb of Paris, Fontenay-aux-Roses, while a cyclist appears to be continuing imperturbably on his way (an intertextual reference to the work *Fall of Icarus*, painted in the second half of the sixteenth century by Pieter Breughel the Elder, in which a farmer unflaggingly minds his ploughing, failing to notice the miracle of the flight of Icarus). Of course, compared to Yves Klein’s leap into the void, which is mystified, counterfeited in order to produce meaning and which be interpreted as a well-grounded artistic gesture, Țepeneag’s leap was (painfully) real. And yet, in the case of the Romanian writer, the incident can be treated as a case of almost involuntary theft or transplantation of a literary motif into existence, or of a mutual contamination between, on the one hand, the fictitious forms of life of some oneiric characters, and on the other hand, the ways through which the writer (a live

¹⁶ Andrei Pogorilowski, *Nic Studeno. Al doilea cartuș* [*Nic Studeno. The Second Cartridge*], București, Cartea Românească, 2013.

performer, this time) attempts to fictionalize his life. What Țepeneag did was to adjust and, ultimately, to intensify his life in keeping with an aesthetic pattern, entering in competition with the lives of his characters.

The Construction of Self-Identity and the Poetics of Life

Bohemian life makes visible a private life of fiction, or of the fictionalized self, so to speak. A more adequate term in this context would be, perhaps, that of *co-fiction*, or the *co-fictionalizing* process, through a *fiction-like life* or through *self-inflicted fiction*, marking the way in which fictional characters and situations, on the one hand, and writers, artists, readers (the “inhabitants” of the literary and artistic world), on the other hand, lend to one another their modes of existence, their manners of being. The action of getting self-fictionalized/self-fabricated as a *fictional being*, as in the sense conveyed by Bruno Latour, is suggested by the very etymology of the word “fiction”: the Latin verb *fingere* (to shape) can be, in turn, moulded into the form *fictus*, from which are derived the roots or morphemes *fig* and *fict*. About the poetess Nina Cassian, we might say, for instance, that she almost *fabricates* her biography, as she confesses in the pages of her diary, as well as in her memoirs from *Memoria ca zestre* [*Memory as a Dowry*], relying on a sort of “politics of the self” in relation to the community of writers and to the Stalinist power regime of the 1950s. In her diary entries of 26 June 1965, she noted that she had indulged in a relentless self-exposure. Speaking from an inevitably theatrical¹⁷ position, she stated:

Since I’m still in the grips of a self-analytical fever, I wonder if my entire existence was perhaps a permanent display of myself ‘to the eyes of the world’; poetry itself is a form of exhibitionism and I sometimes get the feeling that I have made a type with which I comply lest I should disappoint the viewers¹⁸.

In a *reservation* of writers in which opportunistic followers of socialist realism lived side by side with the much vilified “escapists” and with subversive, aesthetically emancipated artists, Nina Cassian oscillated between adopting the party ideology, in the 1950s, and putting on a vaguely subversive attitude, until her final departure from the country in 1985. If one can notice a certain subversiveness in Nina Cassian’s case, this is found, predominantly, in her emphatic construction

¹⁷ Anca Hațiegan analyzes extensively the culture of duplicity, a form of paradoxically “solid” duplicity, since “the everyday life of the socialist camp population was burdened with an ‘overload’ of theatricality, with the imposition of the ‘new man’ model”. See Anca Hațiegan, *Cărțile omului dublu. Teatralitate și roman în regimul comunist* [*The Double Man’s Books. Theatricality and the Novel in the Communist Regime*], Cluj-Napoca, Limes, 2010, p. 352.

¹⁸ Nina Cassian, *Memoria ca zestre. Cartea a II-a (1954-1985, 2003-2004)*, București, Editura Institutului Cultural Român, 2004, p. 129.

of the self, in a creative singularity full of disproportionate ego-centrism, in delusions of persecution, in all manner of idiosyncrasies in relation to the other writers, whom she accused of discriminating against her or of refusing to recognize her true literary value, and whom she suspected of anti-Semitism. Beyond the opportunism of the ideologically “committed” literature of the 1950s, the poetic, musical and visual creativity of Nina Cassian was dependent on a strongly eroticized bohemian lifestyle, which she referred to as an “excess of erotic episodes”. The intense erotic feelings, which stirred a kind of vitalist-erotic hysteria, served as a psychological drug to “Ninicuța” (as Marin Preda called her). Cassian deliberately built, with great lucidity and tenacity (in spite of her narcissistic whims), a character who was somewhat bookish, quasi-Bovaristic – a Dona Juana of the proletarians. Her self-portrait, which is unavoidably (and often deliberately) fictionalized, leaves the impression of authenticity to the extent that it corresponds to her personal myth; a myth in which emotional Don Juanism is associated with a somewhat clichéd literary typology, that of a *femme fatale*, like Wedekind’s Lulu.

One might identify in the character of Nina a sort of Frieda Uhl (the Austrian who was famous not so much for her writings, as for her fulminant bohemian life and her relationships with prominent writers, including Strindberg and Wedekind) transported, as if by miracle, into the Romanian communist regime of the 1950s and 1960s, or some kind of remake of Mina Loy (a British poetess and actress, associated with Futurism, but also an early feminist, well-known for her love affairs with Marinetti and Papini), as in the 1960-70s she became a protagonist of the bohemian writers’ circles in Bucharest, Sinaia or the seaside resort 2 Mai. There are several remarkable notes in the second volume of *Memoria ca zestre* [*Memory as a Dowry*], from 23 October 1954:

“Zwei Seelen wohnen, ah!, in meiner Brust”, wrote Goethe, referring, of course, to something entirely different, but in my heart took there’s room for two and three (not more) men, it’s the truth, yet it’s so hard to explain! I wonder if anybody will believe me if I declare that this embrace allowed for no kind of confusion or promiscuity? I wonder if anybody will believe me when I say that I was pure each and every time, that did not deceive and or lie to anyone?¹⁹

These entries date back to the period of elaborating a poem-manifesto, *Rezolvuneori ecuații* [*I Sometimes Solve Equations*] (from the volume *Vârstele anului* [*Year’s Ages*]), in which the writer outlines more than a poetic art (a synthetic expression of her partly post-symbolist, partly traditional and even ideological-militant poetry): she delineates a literary and existential pose, rendered through

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

bold, theatrical brush strokes, in declamatory verses, of autobiographical inspiration:

I'm greedy. Puritans scold me/ for running breathlessly/ over life's table of contents/ and for wishing and longing for everything.// They rebuke me for not distributing love/ according to a plan, for not rationing it [...].// Well, that's my way! I'm hungry, I'm thirsty,/ I rush through the world like a living sound./ I refuse to walk slowly, to crawl,/ or to remain indebted for a kiss...²⁰

Experiencing bohemian life, with all its mythicizations and specific fictionalization processes, denotes, most of the times, a surplus of existence, a certain "greed" (erotic, aesthetic, ideological), as in the case of Nina Cassian, but also a paradoxical deficit of existence, when the character seems to be replacing more and more the person, to be displacing her private identity, and when everyday life is "framed" and offered as an exhibit, all the while as it is lived. Bohemian individuals enact the state of being as-if characters, in the sense that they share a state of exception, a poeticized existence, a collective self-delusion.

I believe that, to a certain extent, we can resort to the notion proposed by Bruno Latour, "beings of fiction", to characterize these dual modes of existence, whose coming into being depends on the subjectivity of those who notice and receive them. Latour recognizes that beings of fiction have a distinct ontological condition, which is vulnerable, fluctuating, dependent on the subjectivities which, in turn, it gives life to, *morphing* them, lending them existential shape and consistency.²¹

In *Amintiri în dialog* [*Memories in Dialogue*], Matei Călinescu notes that the lives of some fellow writers are shaped aesthetically, covered with a patina of ceaseless self-fictionalization. From the position of a memoirist, the literary critic remarks that, after all, the writers' singular subjectivities are reasserted even through the most exasperantly monotonous and banal everyday behaviours. The latter can be considered to be relevant to what Bruno Latour calls *modes of existence* and *beings of fiction*. The aestheticism of Ion Negoïtescu's attitude was predicated, Călinescu believes, on "an ethics of *insubordination*, on the

²⁰ Nina Cassian, *Greed*. Translated by Stanley Kunitz, from *Life Sentence: Selected Poems by Nina Cassian*. Edited and with an introduction by William Jay Smith, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1991. The original verses are: "Lacomă sunt. Mă ceartă asceții/ că parcurg pe nerăsuflăte/ tabla de materii a vieții/ și că râvnesc și mi-e poftă de toate.// [...] Că nu-mi împart dragostea chiar/ după plan și pe rații [...]./ Ei, da, ce să-i faci? Mi-e foame, mi-e sete./ Ca sunetul umblu prin lumea cea vie./ Nu cunosc mersul pe îndelete/ nici sărutul pe datorie...".

²¹ See Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry*, p. 242: "But if we don't take in these beings [of fiction], if we don't appreciate them, they risk disappearing altogether. They have this peculiarity, then: their objectivity depends on their being reprised, taken up again by subjectivities that would not exist themselves if these beings had not given them to us".

individualistic, quasi-anarchic refusal to obey an arbitrary and abusive authority”²², and Țepeneag was admired for his defiant non-conformism towards ideological censorship, as well as for his original combination of anarchism and aestheticism²³. As for Nichita Stănescu, he stands out through a singular poetic angelicism, translated from art into life, not just through words or spontaneous-metaphorical lyrics, but also through symbolic attitudes and gestures that bear his signature:

Even when he was joking, he [Nichita] quipped delicately, metaphorically, as for instance one day in Călărași when, during a break from the physical training program, as I was lying on a patch of dry and dusty grass, tired, absent-minded, staring into the distant void, he approached me and, imitating a pair of scissors with the index and middle fingers of his right hand in front of my eyes, said to me: ‘Would you mind if I cut out your gaze?’ Such metaphors interpreted through gestures were the ways in which he signaled out his presence, through which he launched a dialogue, placing his ethereal signature on a moment of communion through friendship unto poetry, a lived poetry that could become possible only if it first broke the ordinary shell of prosaic communication: all of a sudden, everyday speech revealed its inconsistency, the fact that it was thin and fragile like an egg shell²⁴.

Cutting through the air with his fingers, Nichita poeticized existence; in other words, he extended the always hesitant trajectory or mode of being of a fragile *being of fiction*. He instantiated it, presentified it, made it almost palpable, through a gesture that was specific to an artist-performer – himself a creator of conceptual art. He instituted himself, in the background, as the prototypical character of this form of dual, liminal, fictional-biographical life, that is, of bohemian life, next to the Alcoholic of Ion Mureșan’s poetry, accompanied by his gentle “angels of the glass”, or to Icarus, aka the oneiric Țepeneag, or Breban’s Rogulski-Don Juan, or to a *femme fatale* like Breban’s Lelia, from *Bunavestire* [*The Annunciation*], or to Ninicuța – Nina Cassian from *Memoria ca zestre* [*Memory as a Dowry*], or to Matei Călinescu’s Zacharias Licher, the cynical prophet who playfully “professed” mendicity.

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²² Matei Călinescu, Ion Vianu, *Amintiri* [*Memories*], p. 307.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 291.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 137-138.

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BOHEMIAN LITERARY LIFE AND CLANDESTINE EMOTIONS: WAYS OF
BEING BETWEEN THE FICTIONAL AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL
(Abstract)

A bohemian individual will indulge in a state of “in-betweenness”, of liminality (social, professional), but he will also torment and exhaust himself inside this state or “imposture”. His dual, fictional-biographical identity reveals his theoretically limitless propensity towards playfulness, hence, towards the histrionic condition – which is neither entirely fictional, nor entirely “real” – of the participants, be they writers, artists, critics, censors, “complicitous” informers, or duplicitous or reliable drinking pals. Actually, bohemian life makes visible a private life of fiction, or that of the fictionalized self, so to speak. A more adequate term in this context would be, perhaps, that of *co-fiction*, or the *co-fictionalizing* process, through a *fiction-like life* or through *self-inflicted fiction*, marking the way in which fictional characters and situations, on the one hand, and writers, artists, readers (the “inhabitants” of the literary and artistic world), on the other hand, lend to one another their modes of existence, their manners of being. When they avoided being turned into easily manipulable tools of ideological propaganda, Romanian writers who were deemed to be subversive or “Aesopian” in the seventh or eighth decade of the twentieth century were not, however, promoters of any ethical radicalism or of overt opposition to the dictatorial political regime. They preferred to cultivate a bohemian ethos, as a form of artistic survival for individuals with an ambiguous social and intellectual identity, who probed for means of survival by compliance with the often comfortable perks of their own professional guild. Whether they resorted to aesthetic escapism and “resistance” or to compromises and negotiations with the censorship, bohemian writers enacted the state of being characters of their own lives, in the sense that they shared a state of exception, a poeticized existence, a collective self-delusion.

Keywords: private life of fiction, *fiction-like life*, bohemian ethos, poeticized existence, collective self-delusion.

BOEMĂ LITERARĂ ȘI TRĂIRI CLANDESTINE: MODURI DE A FI ÎNTRE AUTOBIOGRAFIC ȘI FICȚIONAL

(Rezumat)

Boemul se complace într-o stare a lui „între”, de liminalitate (socială, profesională), dar se și autoflagează și se epuizează pe sine în interiorul acestei stări ori „imposturi”. Identitatea duală, ficțio-biografică, este relevantă pentru o disponibilitate ludică teoretic neîngrădită, deci pentru condiția histrionică, nici propriu-zis ficțională, nici propriu-zis „starea civilă” a participanților, fie ei scriitori, artiști, critici, cenzeni, informatori „complici”, confrăți de pahar, duplicitari sau de nădejde. În fond, boemia ajunge să facă vizibilă o anume viață privată a ficțiunii, sau a ficționării sinelui, să îi spunem așa. Un termen mai adecvat în acest context este, probabil, *co-ficționare*, marcând modul în care personaje și situații ficționale, pe de o parte, și scriitori, artiști, cititori, „locuitori” ai lumii literare și artistice, pe de altă parte, își împrumută unii altora modurile de existență, manierele de a fi. Atunci când evitau să ajungă instrumente ușor manipulabile ale propagandei ideologice, scriitorii considerați subversivi sau „esopici” nu erau totuși, în deceniile 7 și 8, nici promotorii vreunui radicalism etic al opoziției fățișe față cu regimul politic dictatorial. Ei preferau să cultive un ethos al supraviețuirii identitare ambigue, tatonante. Boema, ca modalitate de estetizare ori poetizare a existenței, de epuizare de sine și de *iresponsabilizare de sine*, corespundea acestui ethos al supraviețuirii prin adaptare, în interiorul adeseori confortabil al prestigiului propriei bresle profesionale. Dispuși nu doar la evazionisme sau la „rezistență” estetică, ci și la compromisuri și la negocieri cu cenzura, scriitorii boemi pun în act starea de a fi personaje, adică împărtășesc o condiție de excepționalitate, de existență poetizată, de autoiluzionare colectivă.

Cuvinte-cheie: viața privată a ficțiunii, *ficționare/* confecționare de sine, ethosul boemiei, existență poetizată, autoiluzionare colectivă.