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LIVING WITH IBRĂILEANU. HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER, HOW TO STAY ALONE

The present study aims to analyze Ibrăileanu's posture inside the Cenacle Viața românească, and the manner in which it shapes the collective life of the group. The rhythm of the community is regulated by the mentor's program, habits, and private space; the writers of the cenacle have to readjust their life to the life of the leader, to adapt to his personal rhythm¹. Moreover, his manner of living is associated, in their collective imaginary, with the vocation of literature. Constructed according to his way of thinking, Ibrăileanu's private space generates passions among the writers of the cenacle; his habits and obsessions, such as insomnia, hypochondria, or smoking, are often received as *behavior associated with literature*. Commenting on the individual posture of the cenacle's leader, the study aims to display a series of behavioral and corporeal techniques as well as collective representations of the entire group. For that purpose, the analysis follows two implications of the concept of *posture*: on the one hand, it considers the social aspect, taking into account the interactions between the leader and the members of the cenacle, and, on the other hand, it explores the discourse employed². The texts used to depict Ibrăileanu's postures are mostly memoirs of the group, some of them written at a considerable distance in time, after the cenacle had ceased to exist, in which case representation through discourse is essential when discussing the subject. At the same time, the image provided by the members of the cenacle is influenced by Ibrăileanu's writings, which the study frequently quotes. Where possible, the text refers to several literary works by writers associated to Viața românească which take elements of Ibrăileanu's life and turn them into fiction, thus contributing to the configuration of the critic's posture.

The Wild Yard and the Library

Analysis of the group's memories renders noticeable the fact that their descriptions of Ibrăileanu's house are quite limited, the writers of the cenacle

¹ For comparison, see Ligia Tudurachi's study discussing the "idiorythmic community" (Roland Barthes) of Sburătorul as a result of the formalization of criticism and acting as a favorable frame for the development of a collective lifestyle (Ligia Tudurachi, *Grup sburător. Trăitul și scrisul împreună în cenaclul lui E. Lovinescu [The Sburătorul Group. Life and Writing in E. Lovinescu's Cenacle]*, Timișoara, Editura Universității de Vest, 2019).

² The two implications employed here are widely discussed by Jérôme Meizoz, who speaks about the (self)representation of the author, referring to its social emergence through gestures, body movements, non-verbal elements, as well as to its construction inside the text (Jérôme Meizoz, *Postures littéraires*, Genève, Slatkine, 2007).

mentioning only a few objects and aspects of design. Nonetheless, two elements attract the visitors: the yard and the library. Octav Botez describes his first visit to Ibrăileanu's, referring to the same two spatial arrangements:

He welcomed me into a vast room, walls lined up to the ceiling with bookshelves, most of which I noticed were unbound and in some disarray. It was summer, and the wide opened windows led to a large but untamed and virgin garden, a setting, as I found out later, which pleased him³.

Mihail Sevastos writes that, although it was suitable for growing flowers, only knotgrass and mallow grew in the yard; Demostene Botez notices “a place plagued by weeds”⁴, and Ștefana Velisar Teodoreanu has to pass through a dark orchard of tall trees at night. Ibrăileanu purposefully leaves his yard untrimmed because the wild view delights him, its state of neglect a choice against organized aesthetics. A garden, which Sevastos imagines could replace the wilderness, is an aesthetically organized space requiring the re-arrangement of nature, a domestication of plants, and, therefore, an artificial composition corresponding to a specific representation of beauty. For Ibrăileanu, style is the exclusive preoccupation for execution to the detriment of thinking, while deficiencies in style, often frowned upon by his contemporaries, are a way of capturing the process of reasoning through compatibility of form and idea.

Nonetheless, examining Ibrăileanu's writing practice, it becomes clear that the so-called reasoning caught in the act is not at all the result of spontaneity but a conscious choice of form. The literary critic struggles with writing; he always revises his manuscripts and even with his published papers; he erases, rewrites, inserts large amounts of notes, trying to enrich the ideas, never to embellish the style. When not accompanied by a philosophy of life, talent becomes artificial; great writers, starting with Tolstoy (also criticized himself for not writing beautifully), do not need stylistic tricks to convince the reader, since they know how to create the impression of life⁵. Therefore, the wild yard is not only a random kind of circumstance, but also the materialization of Ibrăileanu's way of thinking, an arrangement of space according to his mental reflexes. When visitors spend time in the critic's office, their eyes rest upon the wild view they see through the windows. Sometimes, they take out the chairs to the terrace and engage in conversation facing the same disordered landscape. The cenacle is situated in a space deliberately organized against aesthetic rules. Although there are no testimonies about the effects the wild yard has on the collective perception, it can be assumed that, by associating his way of thinking with the natural décor,

³ Octav Botez, “G. Ibrăileanu. Amintiri” [“G. Ibrăileanu. Memories”], in Ion Popescu-Sireteanu, *Amintiri despre G. Ibrăileanu [Memories of G. Ibrăileanu]*, I, Iași, Junimea, 1974, p. 73.

⁴ Demostene Botez, *Memorii [Memoirs]*, I, București, Minerva, 1970, p. 365.

⁵ G. Ibrăileanu, “Tolstoi” [“Tolstoy”], in *Scieri alese [Selected Writings]*. Edited by Antonio Patraș and Roxana Patraș, Iași, Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2010, p. 548.

Ibrăileanu creates a space in which the visitors recognize not only the image of the host, but also the image of the group. The spatial arrangement comes to endorse Ibrăileanu's idea of literature; the neglected style he recommends is carefully "cultivated" in the wilderness of the yard. Practically, there is a difference between discussing literature facing rows of flowers and doing the same thing watching a weedy landscape.

Far from being inoperative, the space is invested with instrumentality: arranged according to Ibrăileanu's taste, it conditions the collective existence of the cenacle. While the visitors find the place rather unpleasant (Sevastos would rather prefer a flower garden), the community identifies with the yard's wilderness, as it not only reflects the image of the host, but also creates a kind of material attachment and participation to his way of thinking. Analyzing the relationship between collective memory and space, Maurice Halbwachs believes that, when inserted in a certain place, the group starts shaping it according to their image, shaping the place in turn by the material features of the space they create:

The group not only transforms the space into which they have been inserted, but also yields and adapts to their physical surroundings. The group becomes enclosed within the framework they have built. The group's image of their external environment, and their stable relationships with this environment, becomes essential to the idea group forms of itself, permeating every element of their consciousness, moderating and governing their evolution⁶.

According to Halbwach, the group that shares a space negotiates its self-image through the characteristics of that particular space, adaptation to the physical environment affecting their physical interactions as well as their way of thinking. Although the space in which the community of the cenacle lives reflects Ibrăileanu's taste, it is accepted by the visitors as their own. The writers adapt their gaze to the wild surroundings, living their common existence according to the space they inhabit. At the same time, this space acts upon their mental forms by shaping the idea they have about literature. By organizing the meetings with his visitors in this natural, wild environment, Ibrăileanu manages to convey his anti-aesthetic conception to the entire group.

The second spatial aspect of Ibrăileanu's house that holds the visitors' attention is the library. Similar to the wilderness of the yard, the library gives the impression of disarray: the books are scattered all over the room, piling up in the corners and on the furniture and forcing the visitors either to stand or sit on top of the stacked books; the majority of the books are not even bound, and there are many reading notes inserted between the pages. The library seems to borrow the idea of neglect from the outside garden, suggesting the same aversion to style that Ibrăileanu considers a shortcoming to creativity. Moreover, the disorder in the library speaks

⁶ Maurice Halbwach, *The Collective Memory*. Translated by Francis J. Ditter, Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter, New York, Harper & Row, 1980, p. 130.

about the literary critic's reading habits. Ibrăileanu's system is founded on a network of texts that refuses the finality of the reading act, a type of circular reading. The observations are written down directly on the pages of the books, the reading notes stick out between the pages looking like books inside books, and the notations are often rich remarks on the subject or even long personal meditations, suggesting re-reading as essential to the practice of literature. The book is a potential work that reveals its secret with each and every experience of reading, which makes it almost impossible to ever finish reading a book⁷. The literary critic arranges his library according to his reading practice: if a literary work is never completed because every reading is to reveal a new mystery, books have no determined place on the shelves and are abandoned wherever they have been browsed or read. Therefore, Ibrăileanu's visitors come into contact with a space that is dedicated not only to reading, as any library may be, but to a particular type of reading as practiced by the host. On this account, the library becomes, in the eyes of the writers, a space filled with meaning. In *La Medeleni* [*At Medeleni*], Ionel Teodoreanu depicts the disorder of the library by focusing on its spatial expressiveness, rather than its simple appearance:

The books were no longer inanimate papers. A sort of sagacity, a flight-like quiver vibrated inside them. And you could see them everywhere. From the floor to the ceiling along the walls, only long shelves curved under the load of the books. Between them, no rigid alignment, no organized constraint; a cheerful, exuberant disorder. They were all crooked, ruffled, tilted as if some wanted to clap, others to fall, and the rest to jump. From some, a long sheet was rising, so long that it disappeared upward like smoke. From others, colorful brochures were glimpsed. Others had a peeled notebook on top. Besides, not only the loaded shelves but the room itself was flooded with books. The stacks of the in-folio volumes, bound in leather, bordered the bottom shelves as the Chinese wall. Under the two windows, fortress upon fortress, *Viața contemporană* [*The Contemporary Life*] in hardcovers was rising. On the chairs – books again. A sofa was covered with magazines and brochures. On the floor, humps of volumes like a camel train were kept together by separate strings. All were browsed, opened, tilted, written over, their edges filled with annotations and the text underlined in red and blue. They were alive. A flock of tame books floated around this man. You were under the impression that he wasn't looking for them, that they were coming of their own accord and that a single sign was enough to call forth the yellow flock of French books or the red flutter of Dickens works⁸.

The library embodies the life of the room. The disorder on the shelves, defying "organized constraint", floods the entire space, the books populate the floor and the furniture, articulating the image of a house made of books. The chaos of the library

⁷ The idea is recurrent in Ibrăileanu's thinking. See, for example, G. Ibrăileanu, "Ana Karenina", "Creație și analiză", "Ape de primăvară" ["Anna Karenina", "Creation and Analysis, "Spring Waters"], in *Scrieri alese*, pp. 549-554, 612-617, 538-543.

⁸ Ionel Teodoreanu, *La Medeleni* [*At Medeleni*], III, București, Cartea Românească, 1927, p. 213.

is perceived by Dănuț as a form that comes to life: the books seem to gain an independent, fantastic existence, directed by a sort of a reader-magician who can control them with a single gesture. Ionel Teodoreanu explores this image of the library that wakes up to life (the passage is re-written almost word for word in his memoirs) not so much for the sake of describing the relationship between the host and his space, as much as to analyze the evolution of the main character, a young man who discovers his literary calling. The library represents, for Dănuț, a mystical space in which he ends up behaving exactly like the books themselves, taking part in the reading ritual as practiced by the host:

His presence deepens and distributes a trepidation of thoughts, a disorder that makes your soul look like the room you are in. You feel browsed, wielded, annotated. You are a new book tamed in this forest of books. And suddenly you feel, as you stand up not daring to shove the books off the chairs, that your soul is at home...⁹.

Creating a novel about the vocation of writing, Teodoreanu is first of all interested in the formative readings of the future writer, described as *corporal experiences of the book*. There are several passages in the novel in which the act of reading gains a materiality invested with erotic connotations. The book is read through multiple senses; the touching and browsing of the pages, precipitation followed by stagnation and meditation, the curiosity and satisfaction of reaching the end translate a form of physical affection felt in the act of reading. Therefore, the book is no longer inert matter but becomes body-like, able to generate desire. Dănuț feels he is part of the professor's library and that he is treated like the books on the shelves. The space he enters leads to a somatic experience, a bodily contact during which the writer is objectified, turned into the object of his desire. Before becoming a writer, Dănuț experiences the act of reading from the perspective of the book: he participates in the life of the library, he is "browsed, wielded, annotated" as the other books in the room and is "tamed" by a reader with magic powers. The end of *La Medeleni* suggests that Dan Deleanu is the writer of the novel that has just finished, inviting the reader to start it from the beginning. Teodoreanu may have imagined his book as part of Ibrăileanu's library, of that ideal library where books are never stuffed into the shelves, but always at hand to be read again.

The library also appears in Mihail Sadoveanu, in the description of Eudoxiu Bărbat's house from *Oameni din lună* [*People of the Moon*]. Sadoveanu writes the novel following a bet with Ibrăileanu that he can write in a style different from that of his former work. The bet inflames the media; the literary magazines talk about a new writer in Romanian literature, called Silviu Deleanu. Leaving aside the anecdote, the episode speaks about Sadoveanu's motivation to construct a new type of intellectual, opposed to the one he had explored before. If the inadequacy of the previous characters is socially motivated, the consequence of a hostile environment in line with the sămănătorist-poporanist movement, Eudoxiu Bărbat's inadequacy

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 214.

seems to be the consequence of a cultural-genetic predisposition. The novel remains an experiment; this new type of intellectual remains unique in the writer's literature, untraceable in its future embodiments. On this account, Sadoveanu develops his character by "copying" features and aspects from the writers he spends time with at *Viața românească*. According to Profira Sadoveanu, the portrait of Eudoxiu Bărbat is inspired by Axinte Frunză (the green round eyes, the thin mustache and the goatee)¹⁰, but he is not the only model for the writer's character. The study Bărbat is working is reminiscent of Radu Rosetti's interests, and the rich and disorganized library shows a striking similarity with that of Ibrăileanu:

From this almost empty room, they passed into another, full and loaded from top to bottom. It consisted solely of shelves of books. In the corners, stacks of brochures and magazines. The oak desk under one of the windows was full of books and papers. On one side of the desk, a little rotating library; on the other side, a narrow tall piece of furniture with a platform on the top and many drawers down to the floor. A couple of leather chairs were also loaded with books¹¹.

The shelves packed with books, the stacks of brochures and magazines, the furniture covered with books, the oak desk loaded with papers from Eudoxiu Bărbat's library replicate the disarray in Ibrăileanu's house. Sadoveanu forges his character by stitching together different features, preoccupations, and elements of décor borrowed from cenacle friends. Eudoxiu Bărbat remains a schematic character, limited to the few details Sadoveanu picks up from his companions. Equally, the plot of the novel has no epic development: the "weird" and awkward Eudoxiu Bărbat asks his nephew, a young lawyer, to handle a property coveted by various WWI speculators, but his mission is reduced to a few brief discussions at the town hall, and the fight seems to be lost before it begins. What is the motivation of Sadoveanu's work, then? The topic seems to be the relationship between master and apprentice, or the initiation of Traian Bălțeanu, the lawyer with a poet's soul, into the "cursed fellowship of the book", an adjacent bloodline genealogy with Mihai Eminescu as an ancestor establishing connections of a vocational nature.

Nevertheless, nothing, not even the interests of the two characters, coincide: the passion for writing cultivated by Traian Bălțeanu, although appreciated by his uncle, is not in any way nourished by his presence; Bărbat's study of archival documents puzzles the nephew rather than stirring his admiration. In this case, what is the explanation of their connection, and what is the vocation that unites them? The object of their passion is the library, an idea emphasized by Sadoveanu in the key-episodes of the novel. In their first meeting, the dialogue between uncle and nephew revolves around the library: Bărbat offers "his companionship and his library", and Traian Bălțeanu asks permission to research the library. For Bărbat,

¹⁰ Profira Sadoveanu, "Note" ["Notes"], in Mihail Sadoveanu, *Opere [Works]*, VII, București, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, 1956, p. 760.

¹¹ Mihail Sadoveanu, *Oameni din lună [People of the Moon]*, in *Opere*, VII, p. 691.

selling the house is, first of all, connected to the danger of losing the library, and the issue of the inheritance is ceding the rights to the library: “I knew you are one of ours, and so I want to leave you everything I have. I especially want to leave you the library. I hope that you will not alienate this Nessus shirt. If you put it on, it will burn you as a felicitous wound, and you will receive into your being the shadow that is myself and everyone of our kind”¹². The “people from the moon” in the title of the novel form a fellowship of the book, and the passion that inspires them and is passed on from generation to generation is the library itself. When the concession of the house becomes imminent, Bărbat looks at the “shadow of the library”. The end of the novel reiterates the same idea: the library is the legacy of this unusual book family. However, it is not so much the material asset that is passed on, but a space-vocation, capable of unleashing great passions. After Eudoxiu Bărbat’s death, Traian Bălțeanu secludes himself in the library, replacing his mentor: “The young neurasthenic poet from Iași locked himself in the shadow of the library in the strange trust that he was the son of the dead, something that, in my opinion as a doctor, foretells nothing good”¹³. Exposing the nature of the narrator’s occupation right at the end, Sadoveanu underlines his irony directed at a passion for books which can take clinical forms. It becomes obvious that the writer’s irony transcends the frames of the novel to tease Ibrăileanu, his neurasthenic friend, locked within the walls of his own library, but also the young writers of the cenacle after the war, many of them lawyers with a vocation for writing (among others, Ionel and Al. O. Teodoreanu). Ibrăileanu’s library induces passions, the cenacle writers are fascinated by this space where books are never finished, waiting to be browsed and read again.

The Need for Friends

A feature of Ibrăileanu’s house is the relation between the private space and the outside world on the coordinates of semi-closure/semi-opening, describing, on the one hand, the host’s isolation and, on the other hand, his need for the society of friends. Analyzing how the configurations of the three spaces changed over the years, what becomes noticeable is Ibrăileanu’s gradual withdrawal from the dining room, pictured as a space for the cenacle’s meetings, to the library in which he receives only a few friends of the household. The first house, at number 4 Română Street, appears as a permeable space that constantly communicates with the outside world:

It was an old, long and low house, as if sunk into the ground, with a large front yard covered in thick grass. The windows, with almost rotten frames, with no blinds

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 694-695.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 754.

and no curtains, were wide and low. One could see the furniture as well as the people indoors, as in a window display. But the streetlight made it just as visible outdoors¹⁴.

The intimate space is, at the same time, an exposed space, with bright windows facing the street in order both to observe the outer world and to let the street and city invade the interior. The visitors see what happens inside the house, who the people present at the meeting are, and they are also watched in turn, recognized by their silhouette, gait, or coat:

Whoever arrived didn't even have to knock, first because the long squeak of the gate could be heard, and then their feet stomped on the wooden path as soon as they reached it. Their footsteps sounded rhythmically, closer and closer. Nobody came walking on the grass. They would have felt like sneaking in¹⁵.

Due to the bright windows, the noise of the gate and the footsteps on the path, the visitors inside the house can notice the newcomers. The ritual is strictly followed, and nobody walks on the grass to get in unnoticed. Although exposed, Ibrăileanu's house remains an intimate space of the cenacle as the visitors are only close friends, so the writers' parade on the wooden path is just an inside game for the benefit of a small community.

The next house, on Coroi Street, drops the scenario of the writers' parade, configuring an isolated space constructed according to a labyrinth pattern. The memoirs of the group focus this time on Ibrăileanu's office, dominated by the library. The windows here also face the street, but the front door is no longer visible from the house, so the host has no perspective on the visitors. On the other side, the guests' access is restricted by a series of obstacles. First of all, the visitor struggles to open the gate and then cross the wild yard in the dark, stumbling in the thick grass and on the bumpy ground. The front door is no longer lit, as at Ibrăileanu's first house, so the visitor is supposed to wait in the dark until the host opens it. It may take a long time, as Ibrăileanu puts on his raincoat, collects his disinfectant napkin and passes through a few rooms, opening and closing each door behind him for fear of draught. After the front door is finally unlocked, the host leaves a candle on a chest of drawers to guide the visitors in the dark and returns to his office in the same manner. The visitors wait until he gets back and then follow the ritual of the doors, like to a walk through a maze. The last house from Fundacul Buzdugan is even more isolated: it is a short building, hidden from view by the big orchard that surrounds it. The front door is always locked, and the visitors are received at the back door, forcing them to cross the dark orchard. Because of the host's insomnia, the bedroom windows are barricaded with boxes and barbed wire rolls, and the blinds at his office windows are always shut. Every time he changes

¹⁴ Demostene Botez, *Memorii*, p. 361.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

places, Ibrăileanu seems to get more and more isolated from the outer world, the bright windows being replaced by barricaded ones.

This retreat of the mentor from the life of the editorial office to the quietness of the library does not distance him from his cenacle friends. In fact, his misanthropy is articulated on the contradiction between his social inadequacy and the organic need to be in the company of friends. Although secluded, installed in a confined space and suffering from insomnia and neurasthenia, Ibrăileanu welcomes visitors. Petru Caraman remembers the mentor's emotion when he visits after a long period: "He told me he was lonely. That it had been a long time since he had any of the guests he wanted. And finally, that my visit was the most unexpected surprise... One more proof of his less common sociability; the guests were for him a necessity of the first order"¹⁶. Demostene Botez notes a similar reaction: "His greatest happiness was to talk to friends. When he saw you come in, his face would brighten and his beautiful eyes would smile. To him, friends were the whole contact with the world"¹⁷. When they come, the visitors are asked to tell anecdotes, speak about the social events in Iași or even gossip. A great deal of memoirs testify to Ibrăileanu's taste for this kind of stories, which he calls *vulgarisms*¹⁸. Otilia Cazimir notes that the mentor shows interest in the city scandals and that he is disappointed when the young writer has no stories to tell:

You have no idea how much it would amuse me if you told me now, for example, that a certain madam (whom I don't know) is cheating on her husband (whom I am not acquainted with) with a young officer (of whom I have never heard). I truly want to know who gets married in this city, what dowry they have, what engagement was canceled and who got divorced¹⁹.

This type of *vulgarisms* connects Ibrăileanu to the outer world; they are the isolated intellectual's contact with daily life. Repeatedly, the literary critic talks about the incompatibility of literature with life (but also about the way literature establishes forms of life), about the alteration of a man's ability to adapt because of literature, leading to isolation and failure. The visitors, bringing news from Iași, appear thus as emissaries of the outside world from which the host feels separated and which he, at the same time, keeps at bay. The need for friends is a chance to preserve simultaneously his solitude and his sociability, defining an indirect contact with the outside world. Secluded in his own house, behind blinded windows, Ibrăileanu eagerly awaits visitors, so his misanthropy, frequently commented upon in the intellectual circles of Iași, appears, in the collective representations of the group, as a sign of an unusual emotional and social state. In

¹⁶ Petru Caraman, "G. Ibrăileanu", in Ion Popescu-Sireteanu, *Amintiri*, I, p. 102.

¹⁷ Demostene Botez, *Memorii*, p. 354.

¹⁸ In Romanian, *mahalașism*, namely language used at the suburbs.

¹⁹ Otilia Cazimir, *Prietenii mei scriitori [My Friends, the Writers]*, București, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, 1960, p. 12.

Privind viața [*Regarding Life*], Ibrăileanu ends his aphorisms with an urge to embrace the frivolous life that he knows from the stories recounted by his friends, even if by doing so he is mocking his own existential maladjustment: “Do not argue with life. Don’t be an abstract being! Join society, party, play cards, drink, get a girlfriend, and if you can’t, do what they say Sainte-Beuve did with servants of the opposite sex. Don’t argue with life; don’t act as an abstract chimpanzee!”²⁰.

The Insomniac, the Hypochondriac, the Smoker

In his portraits by members of the *Viața românească* Cenacle, Ibrăileanu is often depicted in three postures: as the insomniac, as the hypochondriac, and as the smoker. The pathology built around these states, seen as marks of exceptionality, holds little interest for the present analysis, the main idea being the emergence of a living regimen that impacts the interactions of the cenacle, as the members of the group are constantly compelled to adapt to the host’s lifestyle. On entering Ibrăileanu’s house, the writers seek to adapt their own lifestyle to a new *genre de vie*²¹, the life of the host, and to re-educate themselves to follow his routine, habits, or phobias.

A visit to Ibrăileanu takes place at night, because of the critic’s insomnia. The group’s mentor wakes up at three o’clock in the afternoon, spends time between four and nine at the editorial office, and receives visitors after ten o’clock in the evening, or even at midnight. In any case, the group gathers at Ibrăileanu’s house only at night, so they are bound to adapt their life rhythms to the nocturnal existence of the host. Their own insomnia is felt, at first, as an abnormal kind of behavior, but with time it turns into a habit: “But those who nagged him gave up over time; whatever was abnormal became, by habit, normal in the eyes of the others”²². After somatic and mental readjustment to the nocturnal rhythm, the cenacle writers accept the deviant nature of insomnia as a form of interaction specific to the group. Night becomes the time for literary activities; writers divide their hours between social duties and their artistic vocation, sleep deprivation being associated with creative status. Ibrăileanu often writes about his insomnia in the correspondence with friends, describing it as a form of inadaptation to the social mores (in a letter addressed to Brătescu-Voinești, the critic confesses that sleep is

²⁰ G. Ibrăileanu, *Privind viața* [*Regarding Life*], in *Scrieri alese*, p. 712.

²¹ The concept is borrowed from Roland Barthes, who uses it in his lectures at Collège de France between 1978–1979 and 1979–1980 to explain the split in a writer’s existence whenever she/he begins to work on a new work of art, a change that implies not so much an intellectual process as a new experience of life. The writer who prepares to write needs to organize not only the material of her/his future work but also her/his daily activities such as food habits, clothes, working hours, space, and, concurrently, to educate his/her body – the hand, says Barthes – to accept the new conditions that come with the creative state – see Roland Barthes, *La Préparation du Roman*. Edited by Nathalie Léger. Preface by Bernard Comment, Paris, Seuil, 2003.

²² Demostene Botez, *Memorii*, p. 363.

possible only in “extra-social” conditions, namely in the absence of any thought of human interaction²³). However, while it is seen as inconvenient in the context of social interactions, insomnia is appreciated for its artistic qualities. Writing about Proust, the critic insists on the relation between the nocturnal lifestyle and introspection, referring to social abnormality in contrast to artistic normality:

Lacking interest in the exterior world, protected from the duties of diurnal life, Proust, already naturally inclined to introspection, had to turn his whole powerful intelligence to contemplation of his soul. There was no other abnormality about Proust. As social transactions go, yes, it was abnormal to visit and receive visits only after midnight; as an instrument of human analysis, it was perfectly normal for him to do so. Moreover, unfortunately for the animal inside him, he was thus best placed to practically create modern psychology²⁴.

Diurnal life is associated with the social, the time of human relations, while nocturnal life is seen as the period of a writer’s isolation from the outside world, as a catalyst for self-analysis. Ibrăileanu’s insomnia provides the image of a particular emotional nature that exceeds diurnal and social normality, inclining towards a type of nocturnal and artistic abnormality that indicates the difference between everyday space and literary space. In his novel *La Medeleni*, Ionel Teodoreanu chooses to describe the arrival of Dănuț, a writer *à venir*, at the professor’s house as a liminal experience that marks the transition from the diurnal regime of “life in Iași” to the nocturnal regime of the host’s life: “A simple wooden door separated the Copou from the blue gulf floating over Ceahlău. Just as sudden appeared, for Dănuț, the transition from life in Iași – the one he knew during the day – to the atmosphere of the room in which the director of *Viața contemporană* lived”²⁵. “Life in Iași” represents, for the young writer, his career as a lawyer, meaning his social role, while the professor’s house becomes the space of his vocation, an isolated and secure space dedicated to literature and imagination (the writer even forgets he has to plead a case in court the next morning). That is why Dănuț writes his novel at night, imagining a city enveloped in dreams, as opposed to the intellectual environment of Iași, corresponding to an obsolete image of the city.

The second posture of Ibrăileanu that shapes writerly togetherness is that of the hypochondriac. Beyond anecdotes built around Ibrăileanu’s fear of germs, his phobia and hypochondria bring into question issues of contact and distance, but also of human fragility, engendering a particular way of relating to the host. Ibrăileanu is always depicted, in the memories of the group, wrapped in an overcoat. He wears a wide-brimmed hat that shades his face and which he pushes back only when he is content. In the editorial office, he keeps all these garments

²³ G. Ibrăileanu, *Opere [Works]*, VI. Edited by Al Piru and Rodica Rotaru. Preface by Al. Piru, București, Minerva, 1978, p. 344.

²⁴ G. Ibrăileanu, *Creație și analiză*, in *Scrieri alese*, p. 611.

²⁵ Ionel Teodoreanu, *La Medeleni*, pp. 208-209.

on, sinks in his armchair and listens to the conversation of the others, only getting up and starting gesticulating when the subject interests him. When he receives visitors, Ibrăileanu dresses the same: he abandons the coat and the hat but keeps on the overcoat, which wraps almost his entire body. Similar to the costumes used in the *commedia dell'arte* to indicate social status and define characters, the overcoat seems attached to the body of his wearer, practically becoming the surface of contact with the others. Ibrăileanu's clothing creates the impression of distance; the overcoat that covers his entire body and the hat that clouds his face, blocking any facial expression, allow only a secure kind of contact with the outside world. At the same time, Ibrăileanu protects himself from germs by permanently disinfecting his hands. He keeps "little flasks of alcohol and other disinfectants"²⁶ in the drawer, opening the doors with his elbow and always carrying in his pocket a piece of cloth soaked in a disinfectant solution. The objects he uses are passed through a candle flame, he avoids shaking hands, and whenever he is bound to follow this ritual, he disinfects his hands. The overcoat folded around him and the permanent gesture of hand disinfection determine a regime of isolation inside the community: physical contact is avoided by all means so that, in spite of their need for proximity, the *Cenacle* writers have to keep their distance and follow a set of rules around Ibrăileanu. To get to his office, they have to wait until Ibrăileanu opens and closes a series of doors to give them access into the house and follow the same ritual when they enter; the door handles are wrapped in cloths soaked in sanitary alcohol; newcomers are educated not to shake his hand, and if Ibrăileanu makes the gesture, they look blank, hesitating between this restriction and accepting the privilege bestowed on them. George Lesnea remembers his first meeting with Ibrăileanu at the Teodoreanu family, where he is instructed regarding the professor's phobia. Ibrăileanu puts out his hand for a shake, and the gesture disorients the young writer:

"Mister Ibrăileanu, allow me to introduce you to George Lesnea".

He stopped in front of me and examined me with his penetrating eyes. And suddenly, I saw a white, almost surreal, hand extended to me. Embarrassed, I didn't know what to do. Ionel poked me in amusement, and only then I shook mister Ibrăileanu's hand, understanding that he was doing me a favor²⁷.

The gesture remains singular; Ibrăileanu doesn't repeat it in subsequent meetings, so the handshake becomes a mark of exceptionality that acknowledges a writer's vocation. George Lesnea published his poems before his encounter with Ibrăileanu, the gesture coming therefore as a confirmation of his talent.

Although his germophobia is perceived as an expression of intangibility, the writers of the *Viața românească* *Cenacle* often see it as a sign of human frailty.

²⁶ Ionel Teodoreanu, *Masa umbrelor* [*The Table of Shadows*], București, Forum, 1947, p. 21.

²⁷ George Lesnea, "Un favor" ["A Favor"], in Ion Popescu-Sireteanu, *Amintiri* [*Memoirs*], II, Iași, Junimea, 1976.

Despite the distance it creates, it arises compassion. Germophobia gets to be connected to Ibrăileanu's old age way of thinking, seen mainly as corporeal decrepitude:

Old age is old flesh, unaesthetic and impure. It is disgrace, for it is the remains of a body defeated by nature. Sickness, when it is not acute and temporal, shows the same deterioration, the same disgrace; it is premature aging. And death, the final victory of nature against man, is the supreme disgrace²⁸.

The old body or the sick body represents, for Ibrăileanu, an indecent kind of exposure to the others' gaze, a "disgrace" in the biological sense of corporal nakedness that appears, with the aging process, as shameful and "unaesthetic" to the eye. Nonetheless, at the cenacle, Ibrăileanu is perceived as a vivacious personality who speaks passionately (I.D. Suchianu characterizes his manner of speaking as adolescent-like), as if he discovers certain ideas for the first time. The image contrasts clearly to that of the host eternally wrapped in his overcoat for fear of a draught. However, while volubility is connected to the spirit, frailty is derived from corporal degradation. Ionel Teodoreanu reveals this dual image of Ibrăileanu:

He would get inflamed, gesticulate, jump off the chair, weigh in with arguments, pace nervously and engage with hot-blooded intensity. [...] And suddenly he would collapse into the armchair, exhausted, afraid for his health, weary of germs and draught (he was as afraid of draught as card players are of bad luck), weary of the sharp pains in his leg, of old age, overwhelmed with irreparable pessimism²⁹.

His mood is changing rapidly: enthusiasm and verve are replaced by fear and degradation, his vigorous speech fades away into weariness and reluctance, so Ibrăileanu seems to grow old instantly, right under the eyes of his cenacle friends. In my opinion, this quick change from the image of a vivacious Ibrăileanu to that of a man fearful of aging might have appeared in the eyes of the companions as his highest form of vulnerability. As a matter of fact, Ibrăileanu is frequently seen as a fragile human being who needs the care of others: his companions respect all the rituals meant to prevent germ infestation, they educate newcomers about Ibrăileanu's phobia, and they react to his hypochondria with great awareness. Therefore, his intangibility turns into vulnerability. As the central figure of the cenacle, the magnet (the word "magnetism" is often used to describe the critic) that draws together different tempers and personalities, Ibrăileanu leaves the impression of one that needs protection himself, his fragility menacing the existence of the entire cenacle. Apparently, it is the deterioration of Ibrăileanu's health that leads to the dispersion of the community: the magazine relocates to Bucharest, but the cenacle does not, as if it doesn't manage to survive its mentor.

²⁸ G. Ibrăileanu, *Privind viața*, p. 702.

²⁹ Ionel Teodoreanu, *Masa umbrelor*, p. 21.

The last posture to be analyzed is that of the smoker. Entering Ibrăileanu's house, the first thing the guests feel is the smell of tobacco impregnated in books and furniture. The host frequently welcomes them reading and smoking. In fact, at the *Viața românească* cenacle, smoking is a current habit, the conversations accompanied by the lighting of cigarettes, but Ibrăileanu's way of smoking looks like a ritual due to his germophobia: "He smoked enormously but with long pauses conditioned by a ritual of his own. Before lighting the cigarette, he would burn its paper at length over the flame of the match until it carbonized into strips and the intense flame would burn his fingers"³⁰. Interrupted only by his "disinfection" ritual, Ibrăileanu chain smokes, his face bearing the signs of this specific manner of smoking: burnt lips and a yellowed beard. The ritualization of smoking creates a distinctive pattern that becomes easily associated with the act of reading, especially since Ibrăileanu is often seen smoking while reading. The idea is explored at large in *Adela*, where the act of reading is assimilated to the pleasure of smoking³¹. On the other hand, on analyzing the critic's reading practice, the cigarette appears as an instrument of reading in a technical sense, that of a tool or machinery for taking notes. Speaking about his first visit to Ibrăileanu's, Ionel Teodoreanu remembers seeing reading notes written on cigarette packs, and Demostene Botez is asked by the mentor to lock in the drawer all materials susceptible to become manuscripts:

While he was preparing to smoke, my eyes spied on top of the cigarette pack some notes on Samuel Butler. He spied my gaze with the corner of the eye, as he had the plural attention women do. He combed his fingers through his hair, smoking like an idol:

"Mister Teodoreanu, I am doomed to Satan's flames. Look at what I have become: a hand yellowed by tobacco and a passionate pencil. The rest is no more. I write, write, and write again. I am a note on the margin of a book. And don't you think I haven't tried to cure myself! One day I locked in the drawer everything that might have become a manuscript. I gave the key to Mister Demostene Botez, asking him to keep it for seven days: as long as God needed to create the world, including the day of rest. I wanted to recover my life. And what do you think happened? Look: I write on cigarette packs! I forgot to lock in the pencil"³².

The hand that writes turns yellow, and the cigarette packs are transformed into writing sheets, thus turning smoking into an instrument used in the act of reading. As discussed before, Ibrăileanu reads with a pen in hand, writes on the things at hand, and his reading notes are not at all simple notations, but complex reflections, idea associations and rich comments on the subject; his own articles and books are full of insertions, erasures, corrections and interpolations, resulting in an intricate web of printed and handwritten passages, sometimes in different graphic styles. In this context, writing on the cigarette packs is not at all coincidental, as it might

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 77.

³¹ G. Ibrăileanu, *Adela*, in *Scieri alese*, p. 714.

³² Ionel Teodoreanu, *Masa umbrelor*, p. 77.

seem, but part of a complex system in which the objects that surround the critic may become a manuscript. In this network of texts, the critic himself seems to morph into a “note on the margin of a book”, so while the objects around are used as writing instruments, the writer’s body becomes, in turn, a tool, not necessarily an indispensable one, but an accessory at life’s edge. To be a note on a book means to miss your existence.

In fact, the idea of failure through literature is current in Ibrăileanu’s thinking. Although able to sustain a social form of education, literature also leads to the maladjustment of the intellectual to society by making him look ridiculous. Therefore, the theme of the maladjusted intellectual doomed by some exceptional features is revised by Ibrăileanu almost in a Darwinian sense: inadequacy to the environment is a sign of infirmity, not exceptionality, literature being a passive and secondary preoccupation, at the margins of life. However pleasant it may seem, the companionship of books is a vicious habit that poisons one’s existence just like smoking. He who is addicted to tobacco and literature lives indirectly, placing himself as a spectator of the world. In the episode written by Teodoreanu, literary vocation shows all the signs of an addiction: the body is reduced to a yellowed hand, an extension of the “passionate pencil”, the addict tries to save himself from his vice by removing all temptations and even delegating a person to control his addiction, but in the end he relapses and gets back to his vicious habit. Abandoning literature is just as hard as smoking one last cigarette.

Ibrăileanu’s lifestyle, his habits and obsessions depicted in the portraits dedicated to him by the cenacle writers, go beyond simple biographical reconstructions meant to describe relationships with a literary community. The mentor’s life becomes the life of the writers that frequent his house. They remember small gestures, pieces of clothing, fears and vices because they assimilate his life with a manner of living literature. Ibrăileanu’s behavior is seen as *literary* behavior.

Delicacy: une qualite maitresse

In *Privind viața*, Ibrăileanu defines delicacy as a monadic quality that integrates a series of noble virtues, the absence of one endangering the whole:

Delicacy is the supreme and rarest quality of the human soul. It implies all the others: intelligence, kindness, altruism, generosity, discretion, nobility etc. A person lacking a single quality of the soul has delicacy incomplete. Then it has lapses and blockages³³.

Delicacy functions, in Ibrăileanu’s view, as an ethical and social conduit engaging a permanent negotiation with circumstances. Therefore, more than a quality *per se*, delicacy is a relation that raises the question of degree in human

³³ G. Ibrăileanu, *Privind viața*, p. 707.

interactions. In his definition of communitarian “phantasm”³⁴, Roland Barthes appeals to the word delicacy in order to describe a form of “distance and respect” that does not exclude emotion, since it is the distance that triggers the desire of living-together. Delicacy becomes, for Barthes, a way to regulate solitude and the social, distance and emotion, so that relationship between individuals can escape manipulation through the imaginary understood as any type of individual or collective representation that influences human interaction³⁵. Ibrăileanu carefully studies the mechanisms of society and is constantly preoccupied with the problem of degree, since rules of conduct are never prescriptive, but always require nuances and discernment according to circumstances.

In this case, sincerity may become vulgar, as it alters tactfulness and is detectable as a form of abusing the others. Concurrently, discretion, praised by the critic, may have adverse effects when used excessively and, under certain circumstances, is an indication of emotional sterility: “Sometimes, by an excess of discretion, we signal, through our reserve, what the other wished passed unnoticed, and we become indiscrete as a result. In some other cases, we manage to play our role perfectly, and the excess of discretion makes us appear insensitive”³⁶. The danger of manipulation, to which Barthes counters delicacy as an ethics of distance inside the community, also concerns Ibrăileanu, who writes about the mask of modesty hiding vanity, about politeness as a defensive strategy, or about intelligence as domination attitude. The tendency to manipulate the other is so strong that one’s actions and opinions are distorted according to one’s self-image: “You act, and I assume the reasons why I would have acted if I were you. You utter a sentence, and I give it the meaning I would have put in your words. Then how do you want me to understand you? How are we to understand each other?”³⁷. If the mask is necessary in society to perpetuate conventions and so preserve its mechanism (for Ibrăileanu, excessive sincerity can lead to the destruction of society), in the intimate circle of friends relationships are even more difficult, not only because of possible misunderstanding, but also because of lack of discernment:

If you have close friendships, you participate in a collective soul and you no longer have your own, meaning a defined personal soul for observation. And, unable to understand one’s soul, your own, you cannot understand anyone else’s. Hence the paradoxical fact that only the isolated understand the human soul well³⁸.

³⁴ For Barthes, living-together is the result of a physics and ethics of the distance that allows preserving one’s solitude inside the community without eliminating affection – see Roland Barthes, *Comment Vivre-Ensemble. Simulations romanesques de quelques espaces quotidiens*. Edited by Claude Coste. Preface by Éric Marty, Paris, Seuil, 2002.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 179-180.

³⁶ G. Ibrăileanu, *Privind viața*, p. 708.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 706.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 705.

Therefore, the strong intimate connections end up manipulating others on the grounds of the solidarity they incorporate. Singularity fades away in favor of commonality and, with personality, the capacity of analysis is also diminished. Isolation seems to be more conducive to knowledge than friendship, and the distance is necessary to understand the other since it escapes manipulation. Delicacy is, for Ibrăileanu, the right way to regulate the social mechanism so that discretion meets affection, and, at the same time, emotion avoids manipulation by preserving solitude. In the intimate space of the cenacle, Ibrăileanu appears as an exuberant, social, and extremely vivacious person, friends frequently depicting his ample gestures, mobility, verve and enthusiasm. At the same time, however, companions keep in mind his reservations that force them to decode gestures, body movements, and face expressions in order to understand his actions and attitude. Living with Ibrăileanu is clearly a subtle relationship of opening and closing, of affection and distance, in which delicacy plays the central role.

Defining delicacy as a matter of tactfulness, Ibrăileanu is trying to attribute it a specific behavioral form by assimilating it with femininity. For the literary critic, delicacy is a feminine manifestation of organic intelligence as opposed to intellectualism, considered a simulacrum of intelligence and specific only to masculine behavior. Therefore, a woman is more subtle in her social interactions than a man, and more able to observe human nature and select partners according to the degree of intimacy she seeks. Also, in literature, women's superiority lies in "the delicate attitude to the subject"³⁹, a moral rather than aesthetic quality referring to women's empathetic capacity towards vulnerable beings. In the cenacle's memoirs, Ibrăileanu is portrayed as a feminine figure that exerts considerable influence on the companions and shapes their behavior. The *Viața românească* Cenacle is mostly a group of men (the presence of women is rarely recorded in the memoirs of the group) where Ibrăileanu's feminine presence regulates the social interactions and shapes a particular relationship based on attraction rather than camaraderie. In *Masa umbrelor*, Ionel Teodoreanu explains the mentor's magnetism on the cenacle writers as a consequence of his femininity that captivates while simultaneously influencing collective behavior:

There is something feminine, from this point of view, in his being. He enforces tact, decency, good will, delicacy, mutual respect as certain women have the gift to inspire the men around them, pacifying, disconnecting them from themselves and perhaps giving them a feeling of liberation from heavy clay into spirited light⁴⁰.

Further on, Teodoreanu underlines Ibrăileanu's feminine delicacy that impacts the relationships inside the cenacle, showing that, unlike an erotic relation in which men only simulate delicacy to appeal to the woman they love, in the interaction with the leader, delicacy is subtly educated in the absence of constraints. In this

³⁹ G. Ibrăileanu, *Creație și analiză*, p. 624.

⁴⁰ Ionel Teodoreanu, *Masa umbrelor*, p. 36.

way, although it sustains a relationship based on charm between the cenacle partners, femininity also carries a form of intimacy that dissipates the possibility of manipulation. Looking at the configuration of the aristocratic salons, it is noticeable that the interactions between writers are organized around a woman, distinguished by intelligence and charm, the sensual atmosphere maintaining the smooth interactions of the literary meetings. Ibrăileanu's posture inside the cenacle is similar to that of the women of the literary salons: writers gather together to listen to the mentor; they visit him because they are charmed or mesmerized by his presence. Connections in the community are welded due to this almost erotic stimulus Ibrăileanu instills. Based on intellectual and vocational affinities, the life of the cenacle is articulated, however, on a collective passion triggered by the fascination for a person.

In the end, I would like to comment on the function of Ibrăileanu's image for the memory of the group. First of all, the common point of the memoirs rests on the writers' need to give a meaning to the intimacy they share with Ibrăileanu, reflected in behavior, gestures, habits, or space. This interest in such signs of physical presence is related to the feeling of loss, activating the affective memory of the witness. They become precious because they are fragile, subject to momentariness and familiar only to a small community. Therefore, the memory of Ibrăileanu is constructed on an emotional pattern stimulated by the awareness of loss. In an article entitled "Celor care nu l-au cunoscut" ["To Those Who Haven't Met Him"], Profira Sadoveanu speaks about an ignorant posterity that, having access only to Ibrăileanu's written work, will conjure the false image of a "rigid, sterile" critic⁴¹. In fact, the memory of Ibrăileanu is related to a community of intimates that is seen not only as a witnessing public, passively recording the traces of the mentor, but as a living work of art shaped by Ibrăileanu. On the other hand, intimacy with the mentor has a collective significance. Ibrăileanu's portrait describes not only his biography but also the relationships formed within a community of writers. Therefore, remembering Ibrăileanu is remembering the cenacle. By focusing on the same gestures, habits, expressions, spatial elements, the lives of these witnessing writers acquire a certain similarity, the memory of the mentor acting as a cohesive element for their collective memory.

⁴¹ Profira Sadoveanu, "Celor care nu l-au cunoscut" ["To Those Who Haven't Met Him"], in Ion Popescu-Sireteanu, *Amintiri*, I, p. 103.

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LIVING WITH IBRĂILEANU.
 HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER, HOW TO STAY ALONE
 (Abstract)

The article investigates different postures of G. Ibrăileanu, the leader of the Viața românească Cenacle, and the impact his manner of living has on the collective existence of the group. First of all, I am interested in how the writers' lives get accommodated to the life of the mentor, how they manage to adapt their rhythm to his habits, gestures, obsessions, or spatial configurations. Secondly, I analyze the way Ibrăileanu's life is invested, in the collective imaginary, with a vocational component. Therefore, the host's gestures become gestures with literature, while his lifestyle, and the space he inhabits end up producing passions among the cenacle writers.

Keywords: postures, cenacle, gesture, delicacy, G. Ibrăileanu.

CONVIEȚUIREA CU IBRĂILEANU.
TRĂITUL ÎMPREUNĂ, TRĂITUL SOLITAR
(Rezumat)

Articolul investighează diferite posturi ale criticului G. Ibrăileanu, liderul Cenaclului Viața românească, și impactul pe care stilul său de viață îl are asupra existenței de grup. În primul rând, mă interesează modalitățile de ritmare a vieții scriitorilor la viața mentorului, felul în care aceștia se adaptează în funcție de obiceiurile, gesturile, obsesiile sau configurațiile spațiale. În al doilea rând, urmăresc modul în care viața lui Ibrăileanu este investită, în imaginarul colectiv, cu o componentă vocațională. Astfel, gesturile amfitrionului devin gesturi cu literatura, în timp ce maniera de a trăi sau spațiul pe care îl locuiește ajung să producă pasiuni printre cenacliști.

Cuvinte-cheie: posturi, cenaclu, gest, delicatețe, G. Ibrăileanu.