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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Literature

The Underground Writer

Case Study: Ion D. Sirbu

(Summary/ English version)

Supervisor: Professor Doctor Ion Vartic

PhD Candidate: Mihai Barbu

“More and more often I want to quote watchamacallhim who said: *all that I have written is a simple Foreword: foreword to the great masterpiece which has been my poor life.*” (*Şantier dramaturgic, [Dramaturgic Construction Site], in Teatrul [The Theater], no. 9, 1980, p. 28*)

Proposed Objectives:

- I. The Underground Writer: what is s/he, what does s/he want, how do they express themselves. Differences and similarities in the cases of Solzhenitsyn and Sirbu.**
- II. Clarifying most of the biographic aspects linked to the „underground:” frontlines (Chapter VII – 1001 Days and Nights on the Frontline), the writer’s trials and sentences (Chapter XII – The Detailed Presentation of the Three Cases Based on the Documents in the CNSAS Archives), incarceration (Chapter XIV – The Prisons of Inmate Ion D. Sirbu – 5 Years, 4 Months and 20 Days), literal underground (Chapter XV – the Mine of the Ancestors), The Surveillance Files (Chapter XVI – The “Serbanescu” Objective, The “Bear” Objective, The “Grey” Objective, Chapter XVII – The “Sirbulescu” Objective in “1977 – a year under the Securitate’s Eye), sustained description of Craiova as a possible political exile (Chapter XXI Isarlik, Histroy and Sybol of Dinastic Communism, and in Chapter X – Heroes, Victims, and Collateral Casualties)**
- III. The Reconstruction – based on research conducted in archives as well as public and private libraries – of the chapters which the author desired to expand upon in the Memoirs he planned to write during his last year of life.** These were supposed to engage **Petrila** (which is the main subject of Chapter IV – The Valley and the Petrila Colony, Chapter V – The Natal Matrix, Chapter VI – The Home of his Birth), **War** (Chapter VIII – The Frontlines), **Philosophy** (Chapter VII – Sirb Dezideriu’s School and Formative Years), **Blaga** (Chapter I.6 Solidary Writers and Solitary Writers, Chapters X.5 and X.6 – Heroes and Destinies, Collateral Casualties), **Outlawry** (Chapter IX – The Red Dice), **Prison** (Chapter XIV – The Prisons of the Inmate Sirb Dezideriu), **Craiova** (Chapter XXI – The Works), “I will start on Monday,

11th of April [1989] my volume of memoirs, leaving aside all that I have on my table: Blaga, the diary, the study of neologisms. I see, for now, the first chapters: **The Home** (see Chapter VI), **Mother and Father** (see for parents and relatives Chapter III – *Sagrada Familia*). **Blaga** will be in this volume, as will be **the Party, my Colleagues, the University, the years of the obsessed ... the Jiu Valley**: a working class which was a fighting class. **The Prison and Craiova (the penal exile)** I will leave for the second volume.”ⁱ On May 11th 1989, the *Securitate* notes that the state of the objective is getting worse and that he gives up writing his *Memoirs*.

IV. **Evaluating the antemortem and the posthumous works of the writer**
(Chapter XXI – The Works/ The antemortem reception/ The posthumous reception in the Literary Histories of Nicolae Manolescu, Alex Stefanescu and Marian Popa. Conclusions)

The Underground Writer. The Solzhenitsyn and Sirbu Versions.

“The definition of talent – as divine grace, as a gift of bio-genesis, as a destiny and a calling – now, in the middle of this terrible century in which we live, must be completed. Talent is a grace, a gift, a calling and a destiny, but with the condition that it must necessarily be complemented by three social factors, namely: culture, character and courage. Only political talent (true political talent is rarer than musical talent) can no longer lack these ontological coordinates which are culture, character and courage.” Sirbu defines talent thusly in January –February 1989, during an interview with Ion Jianu, a publicist from Craiova. Sirbu hopes not to have falsified the Blagian origins of this idea. According to Sirbu, Blaga saw the Romanian Language as the embodiment of a goddess which one must fear as “a metaphysical force, a transcendental one, capable of both great gifts but also of terrible punishment.” In *The Oak and the Calf*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn engages the “outlaw writer” in an entire chapter. After his expulsion from the USSR – in February 1974 – *The Oak and the Calf* (henceforth referred to as *The Oak*) has been published, in Russian, in the Parisian offices of YMCA Press, in 1975. This was immediately followed by editions in several other languages. In Russia, the text of *The Oak*, including five additional materials (the first part of the book was written in 1967), appeared for the first time in the magazine *Novii Mir* [New World]. This text was included by the author in what he calls “secondary literature.” This category includes literature about literature, literature on literary themes and literature generated by literature.ⁱⁱ It is very likely, the author concedes, that if the former did not exist, the second would have never been born. Though read with pleasure, Solzhenitsyn ranks it „categorically lower than literature-literature.” He did not believe that, at the early age of 49, he will write memoirs. What pushed him to commit to paper all that happened behind the iron curtain is precisely “the entrenched and fearful mania for secrecy from

which stem all the misfortunes of our country.” The second reason is because for the past two years he felt that he was hung by the neck with a chain, and he wished to know whether the chain will loosen or suffocate him.ⁱⁱⁱ Ion D. Sirbu could have about the same reasons to write his *Memoirs*. It is likely that he would have considered them just a secondary literature, which has meaning only if one had written, before, literature-literature. Otherwise, we cannot explain why this work has been put off and left for last, towards the end of his life, to be started only after he had finished the works he wrote in secret [henceforth the latter will be called “drawer literature” as it encompasses works which could not have been published during Communism, and which the author wrote only to hide them in his drawers]. Solzhenitsyn was luckier as he had the opportunity to publish his clandestinely written works during his lifetime, and even in his country. After his expulsion from the USSR they were published abroad. Solzhenitsyn benefited from the breach created by the 22nd Congress of the CPSU, and his publication of *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* was conforming to the official party policy regarding the condemnation of Stalinist horrors. He had the right work at the right historical time. In our country, Sirbu had to keep his drawers locked during his entire lifetime. A terrible disease ended his illusions regarding his ability to write the *Memoirs* he had announced. The same disease, defeated by the Russian writer, gave the latter a completely unhopd-for chance to be able to bring to a conclusion all his important literary projects. “That revolutionaries are active outside of the law, surprises no-one. What is surprising then is when writers are doing this,” writes the Nobel prize winner.^{iv} The most important problem for true writers is to tell “capital truth,” that is to say exactly the uncomfortable truth which jumps at people even without the help of literature. Those who entered the soviet literary canon (social novelists, pathetic playwrights, political poets, and even more so, publicists and critics) agreed, from the very beginning, that no matter the subject or the theme, they were not to say “capital truth.” This oath to abstain from the utterance of truth was called, according to Solzhenitsyn “socialist realism.”^v Only for the writers which engaged in telling capital truth life was never simple. Depending on the writer, “one was taken down by calumny, the other one by duel, this one by failed family life, that one by ruin or miserable and inescapable poverty, one was sent to the madhouse, and another in prison.”

To be an underground writer, means, according to the great Russian dissident, “to immerse yourself in outlawry and to arduously desire not to be discovered.”^{vi} But this “ideal” appears in flagrant contradiction with every writer’s motivation: that his work be known, that it influence the society of its time, and that he be recognized by that society. A underground (or outlaw, *apud* Solzhenitsyn) writer has one major advantage: the absolute freedom of his writing, as his imagination needs not heed either censors or editors. Since in our country, the term “*illegalist*” [outlaw] leads us to think, unavoidably, about the communists and the ways in which they falsified history, we shall use “the underground writer,” as a more adequate term, one innocent of connotations that belong to the past regime. “Above his head, nothing floats but the truth,” concludes Solzhenitsyn. If this is the

major advantage, the main disadvantage is “the lack of readers, and especially of exigent readers endowed with literary sensibilities.” Solzhenitsyn “enjoyed” clandestinely only about 10 writers, all of them former political prisoners. The criteria used by the underground writer to select his readership is totally different from those of the public writer: they must be safe politically speaking, and more than anything, they must know how to be silent. But, alas, writes the author of *The Gulag Archipelago*, “these two qualities are but rarely associated with a refined artistic taste.”^{vii} Consequently, the “outlaw” writer cannot confront a strict literary critique which is aware of the literary tendencies of the age. S/he should benefit, as any writer, from a critique able to establish her/his topographic position in the aesthetic space. The lack of a critique can have dramatic effects. There are people who spent long and hard years in political prisons, and which, upon being freed from prison published what they had composed and memorized even in the extremely painful conditions of communist prisons. Many a time the result was, esthetically speaking, disappointing. It appears that Sadoveanu’s paradox – uttered at the inauguration of the School of [Communist] Literature: “as many writers will leave these gates as have entered them” – applies here as well. A first attempt to quit the “burrow” aims to bring to light works which, if they cannot be published, can at least be shown to people without fear of repercussions. Solzhenitsyn’s attempt to make *A Candle in the Wind* such a “light” text (re-writing it for these purposes about 4-5 times) was a complete disillusionment. By the end, the author considered it his least successful play, and the one, which gave him, paradoxically, the most trouble to write. The Soviet Writers’ Union, was to Solzhenitsyn, a image of Sodom and Gomorrah, of the peddlers and usurers who defiled the temple with their dross. The formulation of the dissident appears exact, because, after all, this union rejected Tsvetaeva, condemned Zamiatin, persecuted Bulgakov, accepted the liquidation of Mandelsham, Pavel Vasisliev, Pliniak, Artiom Vesiol’I, excluded Akhmatova and Pastenak.^{viii} A reformer could only act like Jesus: throw down the tables, and whip them out of the temple. For Solzhenitsyn “capital truth” must, absolutely, be told by a real writer. This capital truth, contained, in the case of the Soviet Union, something else besides jails, executions, concentrations camps and exile. This something else risked to remain hidden if the above components would be completely silent. One cannot describe the whole if one ignores its hidden parts. The outlaw writer has many times the feeling, like any man, that “one cannot hole reinforced concrete towers with a wicker rod.”^{ix} But there is also a optimistic version: if the towers are only drawings on a mat then all is possible. The colossus proved to be similar with the second version: it had feet of clay. In the camp, Solzhenitsyn memorized thousands and thousands of lyrics, dialogues and even “some prose-prose.” Each month, he repeated all the body of memorized works and this gnawed into extremely precious time. A quarter of the time, one week a month, the underground writer needed to review what he had “written” and thus, he had only three weeks to create. Yet, without this periodical exercise of remembering, it is very probable that the mind of a man would simply refuse to retain anything. What Solzhenitsyn achieved, in these tremendously adverse conditions, was the ability and the habit of writing anywhere and anyhow. The radio

statements of “writers who had free time and material welfare assured” made him smile. They explained how to “concentrate at the beginning of a day of work and how important it is to surround oneself with inspiring objects.”^x The underground writer had learned in the concentration camp to compose and “write” walking “under escort in a column, in the middle of the frozen steppes, in the foundry and in the deafening dormitory.” These conditioned reflexes are compared with those of the soldier who falls asleep as soon as he sits on the ground, and with those of the dog which, when it is bitterly cold uses its own fur as a stove. This type of writer accustoms his brain to work in any conditions. When s/he becomes a free man (in the sense of no longer being incarcerated) the writer is bothered, when s/he writes, by radio shows, by the discussions going on around him/her and by the noise of trucks passing under his windows. S/he became, from this point of view, a writer “with assured free time” (material goods were yet out of the question...) and began to have the same habits he was mocking before. Coming out to the surface is conditioned by the unpredictable political factor. The “freezing –unfreezing” cycle in ideology had to be speculated efficiently by the underground writer as well. He could have, at the opportune moment, a un-hoped-for chance to reach the light of day. If, as an underground writer, one was lucky enough to publish during ones’ lifetime, this could only come about due to a decision reached at the highest levels. This meant that the work could bring to light, for the benefit of every-day men, uncomfortable truths about predecessors. In our country, Marin Preda speaks, in *The Most Beloved on Earth*, about the philosopher Victor Petrini, a possible model of the writer Ion D. Sirbu, in the context of Ceausescu’s desire to repaint the Gheorghe-Gheorgiu Dej period in bleaker colors. About Antonescu, Preda is allowed to write *The Delirium*, for, the deeds of the marshal implicitly supported Ceausescu’s take and promotion of the nationalist idea. All these works appear at the opportune moment, and are stopped once they no longer serve the initial idea. Khrushchev tells Tvardovski that he had collected already three volumes of materials regarding Stalin’s crimes, but that, at the moment, nothing further will be published. After signaling the re-evaluation of the Stalinist period, the soviet leader is content to let history judge it. The undercurrent was completely different. Meanwhile, the Cuban Missile Crisis had started, and the Americans had solicited the agreement of the international community to control soviet ships going towards Fidel Castro’s homeland. The ships had to return.

The Underground, in a Primordial Sense

Even though the Master in Bulgakov’s novel does not consider himself a professional writer, he is a model of the underground writer. Firstly, in the literal sense of the word, and in the tradition started by Dostoyevsky in *Notes from the Underground*. The “hole” in which the master hides, to protect his creative inspiration, reflects a clear regressive movement, similar to the theatrical “burrow” of Maxudov [the writer from *A Dead Man’s Memoir (A Theatrical Novel)*]. Bulgakov’s Master lives at first on the Myasnitskaya ulitsa, that is to say in an “accursed hole,” and later moves to another “hiding place” or “secret refuge” in Arabat. He then hides, under the number 118 in Stravinsky’s “House of Suffering” to come

back, in the end, still anonymously, to his secret basement. Finally, to disappear “as if he had never existed.” The phantom of the “hole” in Bulgakov is evidently similar with Kafka’s “basement,” with the “mole borrows” which Isaac Babel is looking for during his creation, or with Proust’s “room with cork walls.” According to Ion Vartic, this is the first meaning of the underground for a creator. Secondly, Bulgakov’s Master is the writer from the depth of the underground, in the political and moral sense later defined by Solzhenitsyn. He produces “illegal literature,” thus a underground literature, attached to the integral truth. Also concordant with the meaning established later by Solzhenitsyn, we can establish the equivalence between the “underground” and the small cities and towns in which Osip Mandelstam hid for years waiting to be forgotten. He disappeared from the most surveyed areas to try to be at least partially forgotten by the Muscovite secret police. Sirbu’s entire activity as an underground writer can be correlated with both the former meaning and the latter one, the political and moral established by Solzhenitsyn. Kafka’s “basement” also appears among the privileged places for writing. In a letter to Felice Bauer, he states that the ideal place to work would be a completely isolated basement, so he would see no one, in which all he would require is to receive some food. To only walk between the table and the door. Paradoxically, Cioran’s “loft” and Kafka’s “basement” have the same meaning.^{xi} In Ion Brad’s *Here, among Transylvanians*, on page 450, we find out that the loft Sirbu dreams about in Bucharest has for the writer the same meaning with the underground. A isolated place in which he can conceive. The loft, appears as the underground projected into the sky. The “bridge” which Kafka effectively looked for as a writer is seen as a “burrow.” In the letter to Ion Brad, Sirbu states: I need a attic, a loft, and asks him to facilitate getting an Bucharest identity card, which colleagues, in the same situation with him, have already obtained. Richard Wurmbbrand’s *In God’s Underground* represents a different case. He was considered a messianic Jew who reached Christ after being Marx’s apprentice. He was also called the Apostle Paul from the Iron Curtain. He was brought to Romanians’ awareness due to the Romanian Television’s investigation, which desired to establish the hierarchy of the ten most important Romanians of all times. For a long time heading the hierarchy, Wurmbbrand was overtaken in the end by King Stephen the Great and King Carol I.

Reconstructing Sirbu’s Underground with the Help of the CNSAS Archive.

I discovered at CNSAS four big Sirbu files, numbered I5265 I through IV. Overall, they follow Sirbu’s life from his release from prison to the moment he is buried in the Sineasca Cemetery in Craiova on the 19th of September 1989. On that date, lieutenant Andreias Ion reports to Service I of the Dolj Inspectorate belonging to the Ministry of Interior/Security that he had been present at the funeral of the writer and Stefan Augustin Doinas evoked the activity of the deceased. “The following aspects have been of interest:” the deceased was the son of a worker who “has permanently been intent on reflecting the realities of quotidian life in his work,” he had a contradictory life, and “that is why, the letters left behind will bring light to this.”

During this period of a quarter of a century (1963-1989) Sirbu had four code-names through which the *Securitate* hid, in official documents, the real identity of the writer: “Serbanescu,” “The Bear,” “Sirbulescu,” and “Grey”

The majority of informers were from Craiova, but there were some also in the various localities Sirbu traveled to. In Petrosani, the source was “Silviu Oproiu,” who, on the 15th of April 1976 related his discussion with Sirbu in the yard of the State Theater Jiu Valley from Petrosani: “If we are talking about prison, this is what I actually want, for them to put me in jail for telling the truth. They don’t find the truth convenient? I know they suspect me, but I am inoffensive, there’s just mouth to me. Only when I write...” The “Source” sighs: “That’s the bad, that you write! And from writing comes all the evil!”

Sirbu has a true premonition: “All that I have written will not be read by anyone until after my death. I don’t understand why hundreds of people must be crazed because I, I. D. Sirbu, do not wish to let them walk all over me and I tell the truth...”

The files contain informative notes, resolutions by the *Securitate* officers, requests for the installation of surveillance technology, requests to prolong the duration of existing mandates, transcriptions of taped calls, copies after intercepted letters (which were either retained by the *Securitate* or delivered after photocopying them), official correspondence between the *Securitate* county inspectorates discussing the writer’s travels, summaries of letters detailing only his travel plans, or plans to appeal to the leadership of the Writers’ Union, of the Party, or of the Ministry for Socialist Culture and Education, plans for the necessary activities to educate and influence the objective, solicitations addressed to the police for the identification of the persons in contact with the writer, of his neighbors, as well as solicitations of continued surveillance of these individuals if they presented operative interest.

The Planned Memoirs – “petrified in the stage of planning”

At the beginning of 1989, the writer is firmly resolved to write his memoirs. He is enthusiastic about the idea, and because the essay does not seem to him the best approach, he decides to write them as dialogues. He writes about this to his editor, Maria Graciov: “My head rings with ideas, projects. I deeply desire to write a volume of essays but the politologist in me cannot be reconciled with my autobiographic memory. What would you say to a volume of dialogues (I and an imaginary young reporter speaking about **Petrila, War, Philosophy, Blaga, Outlawry, Prison, Craiova**, etc)?^{xiii} In three weeks the belief that he will be able to finish the project began to shake. Now he is reticent because he does not know if his disease will recur or not. He is afraid that the end is coming, and he will take with him, without leaving a material trace, his fantastic memory and history: “This year, health permitting, I feel in my mouth the tail of a snake, I am afraid they did not pull out everything – thus, if I will have the necessary conditions, I will write my first volume of my Memoirs. Cheerful. Yesterday I finished a long interview about Blaga, they ask for another about the

Jiu Valley, my friends here are afraid I will take to my grave my fantastic memory and history.”^{xiii} Half way through March he writes, in a good mood, to an old friend in Germany, Mariana Sora. He tells her of his oral talent and about his imminent Memoirs. We note that the writer still believes that the dialogue is the best form, because it would emphasize his great quality: orality. The dialogue would have stimulated the *qualite maitresse* of the Petrila writer: the ability to tell a story enchantingly. “But I will begin to recount our dialectical meetings. I am returning to my original talent, the oral one, because I am and I remain a story-teller: childhood, the army, the war, the wife, the husband, the colony, were horizons in which I was shaped, finding out, before I started to read and study, mostly everything about the World, Life, People...” The argument he employs to convince his partner of epistolary dialogue that his story is tremendously interesting is also the fact that someone will cross countries and seas to listen to it: “A friend from Israel will come here, not for conversations and discussions, but... to tell some stories.”^{xiv} The writer promises his editor, Maria Graciov, that Monday, 11th of April 1989, he will begin his volume of memoirs leaving aside any other literary project. Mrs. Graciov summarizes his story in her article titled “Sirbu from Craiova to the Critical Notebooks:” “In the beginning of September 1988, after the publication of this elegant children’s novel, Cartea Romaneasca Publisher was invited, together with others, to a book salon opening in Baile Herculane. They elected me to present, together with the author, *The Bear’s Dance*. There were two or three meetings with the readers, during which Gary surpassed himself in verve and spirit. The colleagues from the Facla, Eminescu, and Dacia publishing houses, who were present at these meetings discovered with a sense of wonder the intellectual stature and the unequalled charm of the a truly ravishing personality... We parted, promising to meet again in month at the latest, to work on the two volumes of memoirs. In November I received a very terse letter, in which he told me that he was feeling he owed me to tell me that our projects need to be postponed *sine die*, as he was diagnosed with a form of throat cancer and he needed to undergo surgery. Nonetheless, I went to Craiova after his surgery. He was still strong, fighting against the disease, but washing, eating, speaking – everything was torture. I offered to go twice a month to Craiova, so I could take dictation, after which I could edit the manuscript and then he could read the proofs before giving the go-ahead. At first he agreed, but after a week he let me know he will forgo this. I ran to see him again. I could not believe that the illness had wreaked such ravages in such a short time. He spoke to me, seeming to leave me a geas, of a series of articles he published during the war in the magazine *Tara* [The Country], and signed by him under a pseudonym. It just so happened that his pseudonym coincided with the real name of a professor who, arrested, testified under torture that he had written them himself. I should clarify how things truly stand, because him, Gary, has no more time. Then, when Lizi left the room, he asked me to get him some strychnine, not to leave him to the humiliation of disease. I did not have the strength to promise him. When I was leaving he asked me not to visit him again.”^{xv} The first chapters from the first volume would have referred to Home, Mama, Papa, Blaga, The Party, the Colleagues, the University, etc. Prison and Craiova (the penal exile) would have been the

center of a second volume. Therefore, the *Securitate* wished to intensify their work to influence “the Grey” objective. They believed that, just as in their own work, the Writer should not leave material traces of his passing through life either. Sadly, this generous literary project could not be completed. The writer was very sick and too close to the “Otopeni to Thereafter” for the memorialist to become a reality. Rather, as we can see in the text reproduced above, Sirbu explicitly asks his editor not to visit him and never to breach the subject again. In February 1989, in a letter addressed to the family of Dr. Steiner, in America, and of course intercepted by the ever-vigilant *Securitate*, Sirbu returns to his literary obsession: his memoirs. He believes he could exchange comic stories with those who lived in the Valley he abandoned. In time, choosing the brave New World. “I do not fear Death, as a playwright I have killed many men in my plays but *ich furchte das Sterben*, I am afraid of dying, of the long agony, of the misery of unraveling little by little. But because I have two or three important books to write, I fight for every day in which I can still work *normally*; I lack 17 years from my inventory, I was pensioned (to my great luck and divine inspiration) in 1973, and only in these twilight years I have managed to pull myself together, to write, to be what I have always been, but...” These are the reasons for which the work at hand tried to discuss, with wide strokes, exactly those subjects and chapters which the writer could not commit to paper. Maybe some of the approaches will appear excessive in the economy of the paper, but it would have been a pity not to extract maximum value from the deluge of information obtained in the CNSAS archives. Furthermore, I considered necessary that a discussion of the Home of his Birth should include absolutely necessary information about his Natal Matrix (the Jiu Valley, as a border between the Empire and the Country, Petrila, the Colony, the Mine, etc).

Similarly, it appeared necessary that speaking of the writer’s father, we would insist on his union activity, describing in some detail a exemplary collective contract signed by the administration and the workers in the mining industry. The contract has the precision of a Swiss watch and a detailed description, of typical German inspiration, of all the possible eventualities which could emerge between the two parts of the underground labor process. To understand well what are his maternal roots, we have proceeded to offer a description of the place where Empress Maria Theresa settled the Bohemian colonists. The Prison appeared, initially a hard to engage project, but revisiting the literature inspired by the penitentiary was tremendously useful to understand the hell of communist prisons. His great friends (teachers, members of the same associations, colleagues) were, unfortunately “objectives” for *Securitate* surveillance as well. We have located in the CNSAS archives a series of informative notes which regarded all these intellectuals which opposed communization. Before he died, Sirbu hoped that his physical disappearance would not also mean the loss of his fantastical memory and history. Our dissertation is attempting to recover, using the methodologies of literary history, what the writer did not live long enough to write himself. Twenty years after the death of Sirbu, his more fortunate contemporaries survived. They were the witnesses which, together with the documents we

have consulted, constituted imaginary pieces of puzzle used to re-compose the whole. This was a very laborious work, but, to use a key-word for a past age, a mobilizing one. The result, we hope, is in the spirit of the epitaph written by Sirbu in 1971, during a time in which his end was, somewhere, very far... Five months before the end, which at the moment he did not predict, Sirbu seems staunchly determined to commit to paper the essential memories of his life. He no longer mentions the dialogue he proposed to his editor at the beginning of the year. Now he takes everything upon himself: in the middle of April 1989 the writer believes his end is still somewhere far. He did not yet enter the final stage of the illness and he is convinced that he has more to write and time to write at least two volumes of memoirs. He confesses to his friend, adding a bit to the truth, that he already has a firm contract with a great Romanian editing house for their publication. The contract he mentions never existed, but only a series of letters (mentioned above) with the editor Maria Graciov, in which the possibility to collaborate and write the memoirs as a dialogue was also mentioned. "This laying in wait and stalking will last for many months to come; I am in pain, but for the moment the metastasis seems to delay. The drug of hope tries me still; I am starting to look with love at the typewriter which is waiting for me. We have, still, five books to write, among which two volumes of memoirs and a volume of literary theater are imperative-categorical... I have a contract with Cartea Romaneasca Publishing for one volume of Memoirs... I award long audiences to my memories... I return full of feeling and gratitude to the Petrila Colony and Petrosani Highschool."^{xvi} During the following month, we find that he is still preparing to start the Memoirs. He seeks alibis for not being able to start writing. For instance, he lacks some of his considerations on the people from Craiova. Sadly, he has only four months to live: "I sent Regman, 2-3 years ago, as a long letter, some considerations on Olenians and Oltenia; I lost the original, and now that I am writing my memoirs ... I need those pages."^{xvii} His memoirs, purported to be sometimes gay, sometimes sad, would have probably been, according to the notes Sirbu had on the period of history he lived through, political writings. The *Securitate* did not worry on this account. They knew that the end of the "objective" was close, and that the Memoirs would never be written. "Children are born politically, they are fed politically. In kindergarten they learn to recite politically, to play politically. School is fully political, air, food, the identity card, medicine, etc. All are political. I myself cannot define myself except as a idiot Jacob, who all his life had nothing better to do than to fight with this degraded angel, which is the politics of the world in which Hitler and Stalin have lived. It summarizes the destiny of our generation..." The above are found in note no. 0014693 of May 11th 1989^{xviii}. At the end of this note, the *Securitate* notes that the health of "the Grey" is getting worse. *The game is over*. This thesis aims, among other objectives, to reconstruct the chapters Sirbu intended to write in the pages of his Memoirs. The letter in which he complained that Regman had lost the pages in which he laid down some considerations about Oltenians and Oltenia is relevant to ascertain what he needed in putting them together. Our research proposed to identify those documents which could serve as a basis of a chronology of the times he lived through and the places which marked the man. Memoirs are, unlike journals, approximate

discussions. Memory is uncertain, and many times this way of evoking a place and a time is not credible. Moreover, knowing the end result of each action gives rise to an all-knowing narrator, surreptitiously. “Did I tell you that things would pass as I have predicted?” can be a leitmotif of a rather uninteresting, and relatively mendacious account. Our idea would be to discuss, based on archival documents, the chapters which would have constituted the living matter of the two volumes of *Memoirs* (Home, Mother, Father, Blaga, Party, Colleagues, University, the years of the obsessed, Jiu Valley, Prison, and Craiova – the penal exile). This project appeared to us a moral restoration *vis-à-vis* both the Writer and the Work he did not live to write. The reconstruction of a life is an operation that must respect the short time allotted to each of us. The disappearance of witnesses is felt dramatically by every researcher of persons whose contemporaries they were. Thusly, it appeared imperative to us that two decades after the author’s departure to the “Otopeni to Thereafter” we should rethread the line of his life, and only afterwards, analyze his Work.

The Antemortem and Posthumous Critiques.

For any respectable work the test of time is essential. To reconstruct the biography of a writer, things are somewhat different. The closer one is to the subject, temporally speaking, the more spectacular the results. Regarding the Works of the writer, the inverse is true: time works in its favor. All his life, Sirbu wrote in a *contretemps* with History. All the novels and theater plays I had written in those years, appeared, in volumes after 1968, the author points out bitterly. He invokes a latin phrase (“*Difficile fuit satiram non scribere*”), which summarizes, in many ways his philosophy. It was difficult to write satire, not to write. Indeed. But, sadly, if he is to follow this wisdom, the writer forefronts what is problematic for that time, and ranks artistic considerations as secondary. He wants to be the first to say that the emperor wears no clothes, and the world should take action accordingly. This type of writer takes up the position of an ideal journalist, always attentive, and always at the service of the many. As the journalist of the past age did not attack sensitive subjects unless he had the express permission of the censors, there was a glut of explosive information on the black market which could never be officially used. Sirbu writes courageously, accepting a temporal gap of a couple of decades. The downside of this courageous approach (I write as no one does, and what no one did) is that, as time passes, subversive truth becomes accepted truth. Khrushchev speaks of Stalin's horrors, Brezhnev criticizes Khrushchev, and so with Andropov and Brezhnev, and Cernenko and Andropov, and lastly, Gorbachev criticizes them all. Death at Kremlin did not, during communism, create a predictable succession. The red reigns were long in the beginning, and short towards the end. Sirbu waited, tenaciously, for the time of his subversive writings to arrive. He was imprisoned (also) for a play which criticizes SOVROM mismanagement in Jiu Valley. Initially, it was read by a very closed circle Blaga, Rusu, Breazu, Agarbiceanu, Ladea, Eta Boeriu and Eugen Todoran. After his release he re-wrote it (“Sovrom Coal” became *Frunze care Ard* [Burning Leaves]), moving the action to 1941. The logic is simple: in 1941 one could still talk about strikes. The play no longer shocked the audience, as “Sovrom Coal” had, due to the fact that

the Party had expressed its censure of the latter through the authorized voice of comrade Ilie Verdet. During communism, literature critical of the system proved efficient only if the author managed to publish them outside the Curtain. This would mean that occidental public opinion could express itself, and the author would no longer feel as lonely. The author could feel protected (and privileged) by the attention s/he received from western mass-media. In these cases, most important was not the literary value of the work, but the courage required to uncover the well-hidden truths of a totalitarian system. The Occident appreciated and sought after arguments which undermined the communist system, caring less about their formulation. Such books had to be addressed to as wide of an audience as possible, one which did not care especially much for literature. Sirbu's attempt to send "Sovrom Coal" to Paris fails lamentably. Those who do find out about the play are the *Securitate*. Without actually being in possession of the incriminating play, which had never been either played or published, the witnesses for the prosecution supposedly quote from "Sovrom Coal" at the trial. Even if the critic reception of his work before 1989 only entitled him to a subaltern position in the Sibiu Literary Circle, Sirbu was convinced that posterity would prove him right. On September 17th 1987, he had written already most of his "drawer works." In that day, he decides to address "a destiny letter" to his cousin Edmund Pollak. Thus Sirbu writes a letter-testament, which through bizarre coincidence, is dated exactly two years before his death, on the day. It is a dramatic letter, infused with the shivers of the otherworld: "if I die tomorrow these would be my posthumous work: I would thus inscribe myself in the tradition Stanca Radu, Blaga, Eta Boeriu, Cotruș— and other friends who were published especially after their disappearance." The four works in which Sirbu places his faith are *Adio Europa [Farewell Europe!]*, *Lupul și Catedrala [The Wolf and the Cathedral]*, *Dansul ursului Buru [The Dance of the Buru Bear]* and *Exerciții-le de luciditate [Exercises of Lucidity]* (whose title was changed posthumously to, *Jurnalul unui jurnalist fără jurnal [The Journal of a Journalist without a Journal]*). He describes to Mr. Pollak these works on which he had worked "like a galley slave." About *Farewell Europe!* (ironic French title: *La Condition Roumaine [The Romanian Condition]*) he states that it is a 1,000 page novel destined for the Occident. "I have not shown it to anyone, it is not for my prudent, and tremendously scaredy colleagues. My attempts, my careful and desperate explorations to send it "on the other side" have failed; I live at the bottom of a rat hole, I have no possibility, no connections, no hope to be able to send it. I believe that this novel is better (or at least as good as) the writings of some of the famous Russians or Poles, in the same situation I am in. Rather, it is very Romanian, very current, it begins ridiculously and it ends tragically. A synthesis. A intelligent scream, a yalta fever, hallucination and death, truth and accusation. I finished it in the fall of 1985." The second novel mentioned by Sirbu is *The Wolf and the Cathedral*. It was written in 1986, and submitted, in the same year to the Cartea Romaneasca Publisher. "It enjoyed a categorical rejection, from the highest levels. This novel could be published in any other socialist country, even in Russia. Even here, ten, fifteen years ago. Not today!" The novel circulated as a manuscript among friends and received high praise: "I cannot tell you what praised I received, but I could be wrong: the

public and posterity are the true judges of a work about today, and I have no access to the public, and I am denied posterity." In 1987, the writer worked on a novel he wanted "to work, to pass" the Caudine Forks of communist censorship. He subtitled it "a novel for children and grandparents" and wanted to sell it in the libraries as soon as possible. He needed a public and money. He felt that, writing for his drawer alone, his name is growing rusty and will perish. The novel was conceived during February-August 1987, during which time Sirbu spent eight hours at a time writing. It was extenuating work, also because it was infernally hot during this time. He produced a 320 page novel titled *The Dance of the Buru Bear*. The writer saw *The Dance* as a "rights of passage novel, grave and full of symbols." He submitted it, initially, to the *Scrisul Romanesc* Publishing House in Craiova. All he received from there was a "polar silence," while on the street they avoided him like one ill of the plague, a murderer, or one who perpetrated break-ins. "I am not surprised [states the author] *Șoarecele B* [*B Mouse*] was the object of analysis at the level of Dulea, it was declared shameful, garbage, the editor who published my stories received a vote of censorship." Sirbu notices that once it appeared in Romania, it was also slated to be published, with no problems, in the USSR and Czechoslovakia. All this said, the author does not wish to boast with these literary successes because he does not desire to draw attention to a book which was published only with great difficulty in the country. In Craiova he feels he will not be successful because "the fearful in Craiova investigate every word of my novel with a magnifying glass: I will be postponed, stringed along, boiled in an empty pot. Nerves and helpless despair." The only solution is to reclaim his manuscript from Craiova. Lizica Sirbu had this unpleasant mission. Finally, *The Bear* appears in Bucharest, largely due to his editor, Maria Graciov. Besides these three novels, Sirbu also transcribed five tick copybooks of micro-essays and glosses which seemed to him "crumbs from a poor man's table." In the fall of 1987, Sirbu was preparing to write a definitive version. The glosses would become, in their final embodiment *The Journal of a Journalist without a Journal*. "Some time ago I have been studying philosophy of culture, I know what folklore is, I know what a myth is. These stories, some older than 1,000 years, are almost myths. I realize their ethnographic, cultural value. Ultimately, I believe, there are only three occupations which have the right to consider themselves, for the moment, *ontological*, global, thus creators of their own culture: agriculture, sailing... and mining (each being tied to the specific material conditions of a certain landscape and form of labor). Peasant folklore is known, and so are the sailors' sagas; I have gathered from old men and women, about 30 old mining myths. They reflect a world, a way of thought, a "stylistic horizon" Blaga would say. I carry them in my bag (as Sincai did his chronicle) for ten years. Part of them I tried to sneak into the volume *Povestiri Petrilene* [*Stories from Petrila*] which I have at the Tin Editing House. That one never got published either. And now I say: A son of a miner wants to write about miners, in a regime based on their justice. I cannot, it cannot be possible. It would be tragic and ridiculous."^{xix} *Mutatis mutandis*, Sirbu becomes a great writer after he enters – spiritually speaking – into the embrace of the Big Brother. His departure, imposed by difficult times, from Genopolis to Isarlak gives him the opportunity

to write as if from exile. There the official language is that of the simple perfect. Writing with verbs conjugated in the composite perfect, he appears to be a writer which appeals, just as Antioh Cantemir did, to a foreign language. In troubled times, roles can easily be inverted. The two heroes of socialist absurd, the imperative political director and the intransigent teaching assistant Sirbu see each other again in 1957 when he was a editor of the magazine *Teatrul* [The Theater]. “He came after several years of prison – I was before several years of prison.” the guilty party cried on his shoulder, confessing that after the inferno of the prison, he passed, with weapons and luggage, on the side of Hegel. “I understood him, I pitied him. The executioner, is, himself a victim.” From 1967 until 1987, in a 20 year interval, he wrote 17 theatrical plays: *Arca Bunei Speranțe*, [*The Ark of Good Hope*], *Iarna Lupului cenușiu*, [*The Winter of the Grey Wolf*], *La o piatră de hotar*, [*Next to a Milestone*], *Frunze care ard*, [*Burning Leaves*], *Covor oltenesc*, [*Oltenian Carpet*], *Simion cel Drept*, [*Simion the Just*], *A doua față a medaliei*, [*The Second Face of the Coin*], *Amurgul acela violet*, [*That Purple Sunset*], *Rapsodie transilvană*, [*Transylvanian Rhapsody*], *Catrafusele*, [*Odds and Ends*], *Legenda Naiului*, [*The Legend of Pan's Pipes*], *Singurătatea mierlei, toamna*, [*The Loneliness of the Blackbird in Autumn*], *Sâmbăta amăgirilor*, [*Saturday of Delusions*], *Bieții comedianți*, [*The Poor Comedians*], *Dacia 1301*, [*Dacia 1301*], *Plautus și fanfaronii* [*Plautus and the Hectors*], *Pragul albastru*, [*The Blue Threshold*]. Some of these plays have been collected in the volumes *Teatru* [*Theater*] (1976), *Arca Bunei Speranțe* [*The Ark of Good Hope*], (1982) and *Bieții comedianți* [*The Poor Comedians*], (1985). “I believe a short story is closer to theater and the novel is closer to movies. But the structure of theater seems to me different from both short story and novel. Theater is movement, conflict. In its almost pure stat. And dialogue appears to me the materialization of the dialectical essence of the world, of people and of values. When I write prose I dream. I let the pen free. When I write plays I am tortured: I think for three hours, I speak to myself, and only afterwards I write three lines. There is a difference.” The effort to elaborate is felt, sadly, everywhere. “To my shame, I have to admit that the three scenarios I wrote and I will publish soon are actually concentrated novels. Concentrated and translated into the language of the camera. When I read them, I have the impression that I am skipping pages, that I am scanning in a hurry a longer story. But let us not forget that to be simple is a very complex and late work. To be short is similarly [a very complex and late work]” (1971).^{xx} In the afterword of *The Journal of a Journalist without a Journal*, Marin Sorescu happily discovers, that “in the underground some masterpieces of the genre were produced, such as *Jurnalul Fericirii* [*A Diary of Happiness*] by Steinhardt or this one by Ion D Sirbu.” The two drawer works, “come to contradict Cioran's bitter reflection, who told me at some point, sadly, that we, Romanians, almost surpassed the Russians in years spent in prison, only, unlike the latter, we are incapable to write a post-card.” Sirbu writes, according to his neighbor, Sorescu, “in a state of metaphysical fear.” This state “generates the courage of spiritual investigation. It is propitious to creation. Our being is alert, our senses hunting, marvels open their corolla in front of our maximum-dilated pupil.” Metaphysical fear can come also from the existence of the three prisons known by all political prisoners. According to the study *Memoria*

Represiunii Politice din Perioada Comunista, [The Memory of Political Repression during the Communist Period] by George Florian Macarie, former political prisoners speak of the presence of three prisons: the big one, the small one, and the inner one. Just like in *Iona* [Jonah] by Marin Sorescu, evading one fish only leads one in the belly of a bigger fish. “The big prison was represented by the perimeter of the prison. Any attempt to escape or simply coming close to the wall of the prison was punished by shooting without warning. A second prison, the small one, was the cell itself. It could be considered so because sometimes going into the prison yard was forbidden, so for some the cell was their whole universe for years. A third penitentiary circle was the inner one, determined by the fear to express one's own thoughts, also named the prison of the soul. Its existence was owed to the informers in the cell, recruited among the prisoners, but also *Securitate* agents infiltrated in the cell. Also, in some prisons, torture, humiliations, and privation (also of family visitation rights) were, continuously, present.” Ion D. Sirbu died on September 17th 1989, only 96 days before the fall of communism in Romania. Were he to have lived 55 days more, he could have at least seen the fall of the Wall. From the perspective of the Ass Gary, death is seen as a geographical formation, the last obstacle to passing to the Otherworld. Seeing the last hill fills Gary with sadness and bitterness. “He felt that the thread was ending, that the hard hour was coming closer. His despair was the despair of he who could no longer say anything, because nothing has meaning or value anymore. He had to let go of something, he, who had been somebody. He was forced to begin the last, the great, the definitive loneliness. That of his ancestors. That of ass-hood itself. That of the white skins who beat drums when you pass from one world to the next, from being into ceasing to be. From the ridiculous into the tragical. Or the other way around.” In the CNSAS Archives I have found a note (no. 0015418 from June 17th 1989) in which “The GREY” told a former colleague of detention, Augustin Silviu Prundus, 20 Gheorghe Lazar Street, apt. 3, Cluj Napoca, the following: “...I worked a lot, I sit straight and clean in front of death. Here, in Craiova, having been well-taught in the Transylvanian School, I have wrote a work. I published over 10 volumes, I still have 4 in manuscript. My heart aches for the 4-5 books which I should have written... All for naught, as the sand in my glass has fallen... Brother Silviu, our battle was long. We have won. Even if we have lost everything in this battle...” As all true literary masterpieces, Sirbu's life offers an open ending.

ⁱ “The Grey” – information by Maria Graciov from Bucharest, note 0014257 from April 19th, 1989, File I5265, vol. IV, p. 43 bis

ⁱⁱ Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, *Vițelul și stejarul/Însemnări din viața literară*, [The Oak and the Calf: Sketches of Literary Life in the Soviet Union], vol. 1, Maria and Ion Nastasia trans., (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002), p. 7. All translations of Solzhenitsyn are from Romanian to English, and done by the translator of the summary.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Idem*, p. 7.

^{iv} *Ibidem*, p. 9.

^v *Ibidem*, p. 16.

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- ^{vi} *Ibidem*, p. 9.
- ^{vii} *Ibidem*, p. 19.
- ^{viii} *Ibidem*, p. 17.
- ^{ix} *Ibidem*, p. 18.
- ^x *Ibidem*, p. 10.
- ^{xi} Ion Vartic, *Bulgakov și secretul lui Koroviev Interpretare figurală la Maestrul și Margareta*, [Bulgakov and Koroviev's Secret. Alegorical Interpretation of The Master and Margarita]. 2nd ed. (Cluj-Iași: Biblioteca Apostrof-Polirom, 2006), p.77-78, 91.
- ^{xii} Note 0012417 of 16 January 1989, p.81.
- ^{xiii} Letter to Ladislau Steiner, Craiova, 7 February 1989, File I5265, vol.IV.
- ^{xiv} Letter to Marianne Șora, Craiova, 12 March 1989, Dosar I5265, vol.IV, pp. 54, 55, 56.
- ^{xv} *Caiete critice*, [Notebooks of Critique] special edition dedicated to Ion D. Sîrbu, no. 10-12 95-97, (1995), p. 117, 118.
- ^{xvi} Letter to Lucian Giurchescu, Craiova, 12 April 1989, File I5265, vol. IV, p.38, 38 bis, 39.
- ^{xvii} Note no. 001493 of 11 May 1989.
- ^{xviii} File I5265, vol. IV, p. 24.
- ^{xix} Ion Brad, *Aicea, printre ardeleni*, [Here, among Transylvanians], p. 449.
- ^{xx} *Obligația morală*, [The Moral Obligation], p. 52, 53.

Note de Traducere

Note de subsol, note parantetice și alte forme de referințe la surse au fost schimbate în formatul MLA, folosit de obicei de Academia din Statele Unite. În restul textului s-au folosit convențiile de notare prevalente în engleza academică americană.

Toate titlurile cărților se bazează pe titlul sub care au fost publicate în limba engleză. În cazul în care nu au fost publicate, traducerea se referă la titlul tradus în limba engleză sub care apar, cel mai des, în publicații academice.

Whatchamacallit – se folosește colocvial (există și instanțe în care a fost folosit în literatură). Traducere mot-a-mot: “cum-îi-spune”, “cum îl cheamă”. Este folosit în loc de un cuvânt (watchamacallit) sau nume (watchamacallit/watchamacallher) pe care vorbitorul nu și-l mai aminteste.

s/he -- uz comun în limba engleză academică după al doilea val al studiilor de gen. În afara de cazurile în care se vorbește despre: o persoană unică (genul este clar); doar despre bărbați; sau doar despre femei, dacă uzul pronumelui este generic pentru ființe umane, atât pronumele feminin cât și cel masculin trebuie folosite concomitent.

Solidary există în limba engleză, deși nu e folosit frecvent. A fost păstrat în traducere pentru a păstra jocul de cuvinte din titlul sub-capitolului I.6.

The Securitate Numele nu a fost tradus deoarece textele academice în engleză care discută despre numita instituție se referă la ea doar în limba română. E folosită o grafie “italizată” deoarece în limba engleză, orice substantiv în limba originară, trebuie să apară în italice.

The Oak and the Calf – titlul sub care s-a publicat *Vițelul și stejarul* în limba engleză.