

HISTORY AND MEMORY IN INTELLIGENCE

LIFE IN CEAUȘESCU'S WORLD IN 1977 – WITH THE SECURITATE EVER PRESENT

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Abstract

On 6 July 1971, Ceaușescu announced his Chinese influenced intentions to the members of the political Executive Committee. The "Cultural Revolution" which he now sought to bring to Romania, and which would subsequently put its stamp on the cultural climate of the Seventies in that country, represented the purposeful annihilation of all artistic and cultural life. In its stead, popular culture was preferred. 1977 was a year characterised by manifold insurrections by writers, artists, ethnic minorities and social subcultures such as the miners in Romania. In the end, the Conducător and his Communist Party used the Securitate as an instrument to rid themselves of their adversaries.

Keywords: Ceaușescu's World, 1977, "Cultural Revolution", Securitate.

Introduction

It is often said that Mao Zedong's (1893–1976) China inspired Nicolae Ceaușescu (1918–1989) (Kunze, 2009, p. 188). The younger Romanian statesman – a full quarter century younger than Mao – travelled in 1971 to the People's Republic, which at that time was shunned by the socialist camp in Europe. There, the "Great Helmsman", as he is often dubbed, was trying to cement his power within the Chinese Communist Party as well as in the whole of the country with his ruthless "Cultural Revolution". This was, to be sure, no minor undertaking. The Chinese Party's own newspaper, "Red Banner", sung the following paean: "The great Cultural Revolution is a revolution which has claimed the hearts of mankind. The revolution fulfils the fundamental political desires of all men, underscores their convictions, blazes the trail that they have already travelled upon or are about to travel: It represents the entire history of revolution in China. This is the most monumental societal cataclysm ever seen in the history of mankind. This will be the touchstone for a whole generation of

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steadfast Communists" (Li, 2010, p. 99). Soon, in China, two thirds of the officials in the Politburo, in the Central Committee, but also in the provinces, were to be discharged from their posts. Then came the destruction of cultural traditions, artefacts and rituals, the humiliations, the persecutions, and the harassments within society (Plänkers, 2010) – the dictatorship of the Dictator. This all seemed to have mightily impressed the 53 year-old Ceaușescu.

On 6 July 1971, Ceaușescu, the Secretary General, announced his Chinese influenced intentions to the members of the political Executive Committee. The "Cultural Revolution" which he now sought to bring to Romania, and which would subsequently put its stamp on the cultural climate of the Seventies in that country (Langer, 2010, pp. 18-30), represented the purposeful annihilation of all artistic and cultural life. In its stead, popular culture was preferred. The State Committee for Culture and the Arts was now placed directly under the thumb of the Central Committee. Henceforth, "politico-ideological ideals" should seep into even the most minute capillaries of Romanian culture, artistic freedom was to be confined within the Marxist-Leninist cage, and the Stalinist rallying cry of "Fight cosmopolitanism!" was to resound from every corner (Weißgerber, 2010, pp 181–184).

Ceaușescu effected the ultimate climate change: the balmy political spring of the 60's was transformed into an icy Romanian Winter. "Liberalist, petty bourgeois and anarchical nonsense" were to be vigorously fought (Kunze, 2009, p. 190; Dalos, 2010, pp. 205–238). What was perfectly legitimate yesterday was now past tense. In that yesterday, to quote the German weekly *Der Spiegel*: "Theatres featured Western playwrights such as Sartre, Miller, Osborne and even the native-born playwright of the Theatre of the Absurd Ionesco; Romanian publishers printed books by Kafka, Proust and Joyce. Cinemas and television showed the latest films by Fellini and Antonioni – a rarity even in the rural areas of Western Europe. A guest performance by Louis Armstrong in 1966 was the inspiration for the establishment of a Chair for Jazz Music at the Conservatorium in Bucharest" (*Rumänien. Stumpfer Kampfgeist*, 1971, p. 132).

Caught up in this maelstrom was Ana Blandiana (*1942), at the time of that legendary jazz concert by Louis Armstrong mere 24 years old. In 1964 she had published "First Person Plural" (Persoana întâia plural), followed by a volume of poetry called "Achilles Heel" (Călcâiul vulnerabil) (1966); "The Third Sacrament" (A treia taină) appeared in 1969. She studied philology in Cluj (Klausenburg), completing her degree in 1967. It was during her time as editor of the magazine "Student Life" (Viața Studențească) and then "Amphitheatre" (Amfiteatru) that she got caught up in the Romanian Ice Age after 1971 (Blandiana, 2014).

Official censorship in Romania from then on was not given the enlightened misnomer "Cultural Revolution" as in China, but the rather more poetic name "Advancement of the Ideological Consciousness in the many-faceted Socialist Society" (Windgassen, 2002, p. 136). And it was within this new climate that Blandiana published her next volume of poetry with the astutely political title "October, November, December" (Octombrie, Noiembrie, Decembrie).

Gone were the days of Cultural Thaw, that had begun when Ceaușescu, a long-serving official, was nominated to be the new First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers' Party (Partidul Muncitorilor din România - PMR) on 22 March 1965, voted in as expected four months later. The loyal bonds to Communism were evident then in the new party name Partidul Comunist Român (PCR).

A scant two year later, on 9 December 1967, the Party anointed him Chairman of the State Council, erasing the long-standing separation of powers as Ceaușescu assumed at the same time the role of Supreme Commander of the Romanian Armed Forces. Now all power was concentrated in a single hand – his hand. In 1974 (ratified 1975) he reached the pinnacle of political possibilities as State President. But an over-arching title that would adequately reflect his power was needed. And a worthy appellation was soon found in "Conducător", which in German would be equivalent to the notorious "Führer", or in Italian, the equally portentous "Duce". It fell to writers, poets and songwriters to enhance the aura, whose most dramatic form culminated in the hagiographic "Son of Suns" (Kunze, 2009, p. 273).

This was the constellation before Ana Blandiana published her volume of short stories "The Four Seasons" (Cele patru anotimpuri) (1977). What options remained open for Romanian intellectuals at that time? The easy way out was to submit, to conform, to take the back alley of opportunism. We will not be considering those options in our further exposition.

An atmosphere of dread encases Romania like a viscous syrup

What wonder then, that everyone wants to extricate himself from this morass. This overwhelming desire is evident in the tale of the Major General Ion Mihai Pacepa (*1928) of the Romanian Secret Police (the Departamentul Securității Statului). He had been State Secretary in the Romanian Ministry of the Interior and Deputy Head of the Romanian Foreign Intelligence Service („Departamentul de Informatii Externe”) since 1972, having direct access to the ear of Nicolae Ceaușescu in all questions regarding security. The then 49 year-old used his attendance at a state visit to Bonn, where he was to deliver a message to the German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (*1918), to ask for asylum

in the United States on 28 July 1978 (Pacepa, 1987). Pacepa was the highest-ranking Eastern European defector during the Cold War. He subsequently divulged all his secrets, and – as it was later viewed in Romania – contributed to the exposure of the criminal nature of the Communist dictatorship in Romania (Schwarz, 16 November 2013).

All this happened one year after Blandiana's manuscript of "The Four Seasons" miraculously survived the earthquake in Bucharest of 4 March 1977: it had been on the desk of an editor at the Bucharest National Publishing House, yet survived intact after the collapse of the entire building. The earthquake left more than a 1,000 citizens dead, over 10,000 injured, and caused more than 30,000 buildings to collapse. In its trail it left more than that number homeless (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 March 1977 and 29 March 1977, p. 8).¹ The catastrophe precipitated a wave of donations from the East as well as from the West of millions of dollars (Meier, 12 April 1977, p. 8).²

However, the secrets divulged by Pacepa didn't at that time fit into the political calculations of the West (His autobiography appeared nine years later in Washington DC.).³ The reason appears in hindsight to be obvious: At that time, Romania offered the West a „spanner” to pry open the seemingly monolithic world of Socialist Europe.

The inviting gestures made by the West to the Soviet powers, which were also intended to appeal to the Western public, and which Ceaușescu had himself solicited, were countered in Romania with a tightening political hand. One example of his contradictory actions is highlighted in the fact that in March 1977, he encouraged a closer co-operation with the European Community (EC), in order to further détente between East and West, especially as, in his own words, the EC has established itself as a historical “reality”.

¹A contemporary account of the earthquake can be found in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 March 1977, p. 1: *Schicksalsschlag*: “Only the earthquake 1940 in the vicinity of Vrancea was minimally stronger: that was 7.3 on the Richter scale, the Bucharest quake measured 7.2”; p. 7, “Herd in großer Tiefe. Wissenschaftler: Heftiges Nachbeben nicht zu befürchten” and “The earthquake is a national disaster for Romania. The resulting damage is even greater than the previous floods”; p. 7, “It is to be expected that there are still survivors under the rubble. After more than five days some rescued. Romania not expecting further quakes”.

²Retrospectively, Viktor Meier's reporting delivers a remarkable survey of the tensions plaguing 1977, so it remains an indispensable tool in reconstructing the complex problems of that year.

³Regarding Ion Pacepa Cf. Dennis Deletant, (1995), *Ceaușescu and the Securitate. Coercion and Dissent in Romania. 1965–1989*, New York; Jefferson Adams, (2014), *Strategic Intelligence in the Cold War and Beyond. The Making of the Contemporary World*, London/New York, p. 61; Ion Mihai Pacepa, (2014), *Moștenirea Kremlinului. Rolul spionajului în sistemul comunist de guvernare*, Bukarest; Nigel West, (2015), *Historical Dictionary of International Intelligence*, Lanham, p. 259; Arch Puddington, (2015), *Broadcasting Freedom. The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*, Lexington, p. 240.

Paul Goma case

Meanwhile, those who rebelled openly could expect to feel the full brunt of repression by the Secret Police, which could ultimately lead to exile. That was the fate allotted to Paul Goma (*1935). While still a pupil at school, he spent a week in jail in Sibiu (Hermannstadt), because he had expressed sympathy with the anti-Communist Resistance. As a student he belonged to the inner circle of the Bucharest student movement which sympathised with the Hungarian Uprising 1956; for that he was imprisoned and later put under house arrest. Ten years later, he attempted to resume his studies, which he had to soon abandon under pressure.

Yet he remained utterly loyal to the principles of the Prague Spring (1968). His novel with the sly title "Ostinato", meaning "stubborn", "pertinacious", and in musicology a persistent repetition of a motif, could not be published in Romania, but was later published in German by Suhrkamp (Goma, 1971). But his political fate culminated in the year 1977 with his expulsion from the Romanian Writers' Union, and in November that year, his exile in France (Olărescu, 2008; Petrescu, 2014, p. 396; Breban, 2014).

Together with others, Paul Goma had campaigned for an international conference for the "Protection of Human Rights" in an open letter which was sent to the attendees of the follow-up to the Helsinki Conference regarding European Security and Co-operation beginning June 1977 in Belgrad. The letter was unapologetically frank: "Regardless which participating nations might have committed crimes against humanity, we protest against all forms of psychological, moral and intellectual repression in political prisons, camps, so-called mental clinics, in new or old gulags, in which violence and lies trample upon liberty and dignity" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 February 1977, p. 2).

Unmistakeably clear was also the reference to "contemporary dictatorships", whereby in Romania neither freedom of speech, nor freedom of the press, nor freedom of conscience, nor the inviolability of the individual, nor the privacy of post and telecommunications were respected. "Dignity and Liberty are spoken about throughout the world. But how many people in all those countries where freedom and human dignity actually exist know that there are countries in which people are chained for life to the land they were born in?... How many people know that [...] there are still places on earth where free expression is violently repressed? We see it as inadmissible that the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation be extended to human rights" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 February 1977, p. 2). These statements retain their validity even today.

However, for Paul Goma these refreshingly clear and courageous words meant that he was robbed of any further possibility of having an effect within the dictatorship. His courageous stance led subsequently to his being imprisoned (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 April 1977, p. 2), and then later to his exile, meaning that he could only – rather ineffectively – excoriate the dictatorship from afar. It also led to defamatory statements made by Ceaușescu such as those hurled at the “domestic dissidents” in February 1977 whom he denounced: “You can always find people who overstep the elementary boundaries of social co-existence, who are unwilling to work, to co-exist, who commit treacherous acts and betray their country” (Meier, 19 February 1977, p. 2).

Paul Goma wasn’t alone in this ordeal; also the painter Carmen Maria Maniolu, part of the same artistic circle, whose name has faded from collective memory, suffered this fate. A leading figure in the Romanian human rights movement, she was nonetheless seen by the ruling powers as an “upper-class banker’s brat” or as a “social parasite”. She arrived in Paris in March 1977, but the road there had been long. She had already sought a way to leave Romania in 1974; she had written a justification for her desire to leave which was read in Radio Free Europe. She had called attention to mental institutions in Bucharest, Brașov (Kronstadt), and one near Timișoara (Temeschburg), where “members of the opposition” and “dissidents” were “reformed” according to Soviet ideals. Especially the situation for artists and writers had worsened considerably in the past few months (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 March 1977, p. 2). Goma (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 March 1977, p. 1) voiced the same concerns that “dissidents” were being committed to Romanian mental wards.

With all this in mind, the cluelessness touted by quite a number of West German intellectuals about the status of Romanian literature when visiting the country is noteworthy. In this regard, the report of the German writer Hans Jürgen Fröhlich (1932–1986) (von Wilpert, 1988, p. 496), who had “travelled throughout Romania” in those crucial weeks, serves as an example (Fröhlich, 26 February 1977, p. 1). At the Bucharest residence of the then German ambassador - Erwin Wickert (1915–2008) (Killy, 1988–1991) - he spoke with Nichita Stănescu (1933–1983) (see more on Nichita Stănescu in Braga, 2002; Bârsilă, 2006), a poet “honoured with the Herder Prize, a publisher, specialist in German Studies, editor and writer, with whom we spent a long evening and an even longer night conversing. Our embarrassment, that we knew virtually nothing about Romanian literature (beyond a few poems by Eminescu, a handful of verses by Blaga, a couple of essays by Eliade; a bit more of Tzara and Ionesco), increased all the more as

we discovered that our Romanian counterparts were well-versed in the entire German-speaking literary canon, from the Minnesingers to Hans Carl Artmann and Peter Rühmkorf. What can be the reason, the head of a publishing house, who was at the same time a member of the Central Committee asked, that Romanian literature is so little known in West Germany? My answer that the literature of other countries such as Italy was not as well known as it would befit did not satisfy him. So I brought in the argument that we have little contact: at the large literary events in West Germany one could meet Polish, Czech, Hungarian or Soviet authors, but rarely was a Romanian to be found. Yes, he conceded, that's true more or less, and we must change that in future" (Fröhlich, 26 February 1977, p. 1).

The propaganda bubble aside, of more interest is what Fröhlich innocently rattled off in regards to his knowledge of Romanian literature: Mihai Eminescu (1850–1889) was one of the preeminent Romanian poets, Lucian Blaga (1895–1961), a poet and philosopher, eked out his last days as a librarian in the local branch of the Academy Library in Cluj (Klausenburg), and the influential writer and philosopher Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) lived abroad since 1945, lastly in Chicago. The poet Tristan Tzara (1896–1963) also lived abroad as well as the reknowned playwright Eugène Ionesco (1909–1994).

To put in simply, the literary lights of Romania which Fröhlich had mentioned were either long dead or lived abroad. Fröhlich was not able to name any contemporary writers living in the year 1977 (beyond Stănescu, who was sitting before him), nor was he able to mention any of the writers caught up in the "Cultural Revolution" in Romania, nor even the circumstances under which these writers lived and wrote under Ceaușescu. He didn't seem to have a clue, an indication of the lack of empathy for Romanian writers who did not bow to the Conducător.

And yet Fröhlich did feel the breath of the secret police down his own collar. He wrote: "At dinner with a writer, a young man who understood German suddenly sat down at our table, yet did not speak a word. I began to feel unsure of myself. I felt I was being observed, and began to watch my words. My earlobe itched, but I didn't dare scratch, because I felt that my 'overseer' (in case he really was so,) would think this was a pre-arranged signal between myself and the writer to change the subject. Our conversation stalled, and the digressions of the local writer into historical side-alleys was not really what we wanted to hear. I really don't know if my suspicions were warranted. But alone the fact that an inkling of a suspicion had crept into our behaviour and changed its course leads one to question what psychic and somatic effects are experienced by those who feel they are permanently being observed, because they are, in truth" (Fröhlich, 26 February 1977, p. 1). When

alone the spoken word could present such a burden, how must it be with the written word, much less the printed word?

The problem of emigration and the pressure upon dissidents

While the pressure exerted by the Conducător to conform drove many to seek exile, at the same time he himself prohibited all means of escape. He used the opportunity during a conference after the 1977 earthquake to expound upon his views on this issue. The insistence upon a universal right to leave a country – including Romania – represented a serious interference in the internal affairs and the intrinsic rights of a nation. He welcomed the reunification of families beyond the country's borders, but emigration remained taboo. "The problem of emigration is a political issue for every nation and for international relations – and by no means a humanitarian affair", he declared. He interpreted the beckons received from abroad to emigrate as a "hostile action" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 March 1977, p. 3). This hostility towards emigration included by no means only artists, but also minority groups within Romania; thus the ruling class used these pronouncements to extract submissiveness from their subjects. As a result, the Romanian Press Agency called upon ethnic Germans and Hungarians living in Romania to denounce emigration (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 April 1977, p. 5).

Practising Christians were also part of this bundle of those yearning to emigrate. However, whoever made his desire known, as had many a believing Christian, had to reckon with imprisonment. On Easter Sunday 1977 it was said that six Christians, amongst them three priests, were detained because they had publicly protested against the persecution of Christians. Long interrogations and beatings had proceeded the arrests, as experienced by the member of the Baptist Church, Pavel I. Nicolescu (*1936). There are indications that this wave of repressions included around a hundred Christians (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 April 1977, p. 6). What might at first sight appear to be singular incidents accumulate to form a picture which also includes writers in Romania.

For it was in that very Spring, in May 1977, that the long-planned National Congress of Romanian Writers was to have taken place, when it was abruptly cancelled. That may have had to do with the events of the last week of April 1977, when the General Assembly of the Section of the Writers' Union convened in Bucharest – during which the palpable discord amongst the attendees erupted.

The pressure upon dissidents and the constrictions upon the writer Paul Goma were the two factors which had coloured the Conference from the start. The government wished to avoid an open confrontation at the

Conference at any cost. But the exclusion of Goma was on the conference agenda. He had announced in advance, in the event that he would be ousted from the Writer's Union and be arrested – which indeed occurred – , that he would go on a hunger strike. He also made clear in advance that any 'confession', which would subsequent to his arrest be made public, would have been extracted under pressure or invented.

Yet this was to be the conference where the reins upon the writers were to be pulled in ever tighter, especially as their contacts with Western journalists were considered most unwelcome. The government was especially keen upon coercing two signatories of the Goma Petition to retract their support – certainly not voluntarily. These were the literary critic Ion Negoițescu (1921–1993), who chose at the next opportunity to remain in Belgium, and later resided in Munich, Germany, and Francisc Munteanu (1924–1993) living at that time in Bucharest (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 April 1977, p. 5).

Of course, it was necessary for the government to go easy on the domestic pressure in order to maintain a more civil face for their Western counterparts. Included in this gesture was the amnesty granted soon after to 19,000 prisoners and the annulation of legal proceedings against a further 9,500 citizens (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 May 1977, p. 2). Paul Goma himself was released after four weeks (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 May 1977, p. 1).

Weakening the opposition within the writers' scene

Ceaușescu thought that these measures would suffice to weaken the opposition within the writers' scene, and so the planned National Writers' Congress could then be held as originally planned. The writer Viktor Meier (1929–2014), (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 July 2009, p. 4) who followed the developments in Romania over a number of years, made this estimate of the situation: "The impressions I have received are contradictory, especially considering that we are speaking of a whole complex of problems. No one has really understood why Ceaușescu suddenly reversed course, especially as he had just made amicable efforts to resolve the unrest regarding human rights". The about-face was particularly incomprehensible because just after the 1977 earthquake the contacts established between the Party leadership and the citizens had nurtured hope that a more liberal stance would prevail. And the follow-up to the Helsinki Conference to be held in Belgrade was soon approaching...

One explanation given was the characteristic impulsivity of Ceaușescu, another was the apprehension on the part of the State Police that this unrest could fester and become organised. All such stirrings for a countrywide 'oppositional movement' were, as far as they appeared at all, indeed nipped in

the bud. Consequently, Ceaușescu could have shown a bit more sang-froid (Meier, 21 May 1977, p. 5). Meier appears to have hit upon a plausible explanation: "The main reason for the nervous reaction of the Party heads appears to be the connection between the human rights movement and those seeking to leave the country, especially at the most inopportune moment just after the 1977 earthquake (Meier, 21 May 1977, p. 5). Adding to these considerations was the fact that by mid-April 1977 almost 4,000 citizens of German background had emigrated, and scores had managed to leave the country through marriage with a foreigner. There upon Ceaușescu prohibited further emigration. And this was the precarious backdrop to the immanent Writers' Congress.

Everything hinged upon the speech of the Conducător: And he put a leash on the writers. He preferred to see Romanian Literature not oriented in the direction of Western freedoms, that is, in no way clinging to "diverse societal and philosophical concepts of human and civil rights" as found in the West. Moreover: "We desire a Literature that is actively contributing to forming the New Man, the human model of a Communist order" (Meier, 1 June 1977, p. 5). He demanded that Literature connect with traditions such as those which existed during the Stalin era in the form of "literary circles" or as those which prevailed in July 1971 as – and here he finally used the phrase – "a small cultural revolution". A "genuine" cultural industry should flourish. The necessary "self-control" was intended to be a government-directed self-censure. Accordingly, the long-serving Foreign Minister and writer George Macovescu (1913–2002) was appointed President of the Writers' Union. Furthermore, compliant writers such as Eugen Barbu (1924–1993) and Marin Preda (1922–1980) were also given key positions (Meier, 1 June 1977, p. 5). In an act of remarkable cynicism, the Central Committee of the governing party then decided to abolish "the centralised censorship of the news media and of literary productions" which had hitherto been in the hands of the State Committee for the Media and Publications as a form of "preventative control". In its stead, the party functionaries in the publishing houses and in the media were now deemed responsible, of course with the added admonishment, not to let anything contrary to socialist Romania seep through. This all amounted to a mere shift of responsibility for censorship (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 July 1977, p. 2).

The miners went on strike

But it was not alone the writers and the diverse minorities who made life hard for the Conducător. In addition, a further group within Romanian society aligned itself with those problems: a group, which had been hitherto considered the vanguard of the party. The workers in general, but particularly the miners had a different understanding of what a "cultural revolution"

should be. This did not make the Conducător happy, especially as it was made worse by the fact that he had to interrupt his holiday in order to rush to the scene in the Romanian mining region in the southwest of Transylvania, to Valea Jiului (Schiltal), in order to personally take charge. But the miners booed him out and expressed their displeasure in other ways. The cause of this disruption was a change to the Social Legislation that resulted in deep cuts in sick pay and other benefits. The miners went on strike for several days in the mining areas in the Carpathian Mountains between Craiova (Krajowa) and Hunedoara (Eisenmarkt) (Meier, 12 August 1977, p. 3).

Already in June of 1977 there had been unrest in the large factories in Bucharest, in Galați in the western part of Moldova, in Pitești in Walachia, and in Brasov (Kronstadt), disturbances as large then as later seen in December 1989 towards the end of the socialist era in Romania. These disturbances incited other riots in early August of 1977 in Valea Jiului, which was of especial significance, as over 60% of the Romanian coal deposits were concentrated in that valley. The entire workforce of around 35,000 miners lay down their tools. The workers' unrest, which had started in the Transylvanian town of Lupeni (Schylwolsbach) on 1 August 1977, reverberated throughout the region, reaching cities in the county of Hunedoara such as Uricani, Aninoasa and Petrila, but also Vulcan (Wolkersdorf), Bărbăteni (in Lupeni County), Paroșeni, Livezeni, Dâlj and Lonea. The strikers had occupied the factories for three days with the goal of negotiating directly with Ceaușescu. Even the use of water cannon by the fire brigade did not cool the heated atmosphere.

Members of the Politburo of the Communist Party, Ilie Verdeț (1925–2001) and Gheorghe Pană (*1927), tried their best to negotiate with the strikers on the following day, the 2nd of August 1977, but to no avail. Ceaușescu arrived in Lupeni on the 3rd of August, believing that with harsh words and some concessions he could restore order, but his efforts were in vain. Apparently, he threatened to bring in the military, which prompted a score of miners to read a letter from "Radio Free Europe" to the crowds.

After that, Ceaușescu then appeared to have made some compromises - work hours were subsequently limited to six hours - , but at the same time he designated the various coalmines as special access areas, put the military at readiness, and ordered the Securitate to penetrate the gang of conspirators. It was quite obvious to the locals what had transpired when leaders of the strike, such as the engineer Jurca and the head of the working unit Ioan Dobre, died soon after in motor accidents⁴. The miners appointed delegates from amongst

⁴ His real name was Costica Dobre. The Securitate released a false rumour of his death. However, in the 1990s he requested political asylum in the Uk and became an English citizen. Events are detailed in Ioan Velica, *LUPENI '77 REMEMBER*, Editura Info, Craiova, 2007.

their ranks to appeal to Ceaușescu in Bucharest to keep his promises. But the group of delegates was not received by Ceaușescu, instead they lost their jobs. As a result, strikes flared up again in October only to be quickly put down. Even worse was the edict that followed: around 4,000 miners and their families were banished from the region (Hausleitner, Oktober 1996, pp. 67–79; Hausleitner, 1996, p. 56). As a consequence, unrest quickly broke out in diverse other social groups – which was just as quickly extinguished.

Extinguished was also the friendly, warm lightcast upon Ceaușescu in the second half of the 60's. With a view to this frosty situation, it seemed necessary to proffer at least some sort of friendly signal – to those within and outside of Romania. So it was fitting that soon after, an article in a Romanian review of an historical institute closely tied with the Central Committee unexpectedly referred to “mistakes of the past” – and that the former Soviet one-size-fits-all model for the Eastern European countries was now considered “defunct”. The new diction recorded the “tragic events in 1956 in Hungary”, and –perhaps unconsciously referring to Ceaușescu's own dilemma – mentioned the “justifiable revolts resulting from the mounting discontent of the population and the misguided policies of the Rákosi-Clique”. That put Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971), who was Stalin's protégé in Hungary between 1949–1956, in the spotlight (see more in Applebaum, 20013).

Now Rákosi was lambasted for “overstating industrial production, for reductions in the living standards of the Romanian population, the disregard of the socialist rule of law, the loss of national independence, grievous abuse and disregard of the principles of equal treatment under the law and of the mutual respect in relations between socialist countries”.

Contrary to the ironclad Soviet contention that the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 – in which Romania did not take part – was launched to crush the “counterrevolution”, the cited Romanian review now stated that: “It must be emphasised that at that time there was no ‘counterrevolution’ and there was no danger of one occurring.” On top of that, the various and diffuse paths to socialism were expressly outlined, citing the “example of Yugoslavia”, of the “historical compromise” of the Italian Communist Party as well as the “Socialism with a national flavour” of the French Communist Party, as well providing a defence for the new phenomenon of “Eurocommunism” which had by no means trod a “heretical path”, but rather showed the way to “freely chosen singularly national routes” (Meier, 9 September 1977, p. 4).

With this unexpected drumroll the Conducător showcased a clear break with the Soviet claim to leadership and thus made Romania again interesting for the Western sphere, perhaps also once again for the remaining intellectuals in Romania.

But this magic act was soon over. The Conducător continued to defend the previous Romanian industrialisation policies and criticised the blossoming affluence in the Romanian society (Meier, 15 September 1977, p. 5). Again, he interfered in the policies regarding ethnic minorities, for instance, when he ordered the further closing of German-language schools (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 September 1977, p. 2). And he intensified relations with China while again restricting foreign travel from Romania, even one year after the death of Mao Zedong (Meier, 17 October 1977, p. 12). In the end, Paul Goma used his liberty as an exile in Paris to demand the release of Romanian dissidents (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25 November 1977, p. 1 and 12). But continued to insist upon the existing political principles and made a show of 'triumphalism' at the interim political convention (Meier, 12 December 1977, p. 6).

Conclusion

1977 was a year characterised by manifold insurrections by writers, artists, ethnic minorities and social subcultures such as the miners in Romania. In the end, the Conducător and his Communist Party used the Securitate as an instrument to rid themselves of their adversaries. For the writers this meant repression, arrest or banishment. How difficult it must have been for a writer to keep the balance between a morally upright stance, remaining true to oneself and one's ideals, and yet not falling victim to the manifold political and social pressures! Writing in Ceaușescu's world of 1977 is coloured by these strictures. One method of coping was using the escape route of the fantasy narrative, far away from the maddening crowd of real-time threats, released into a world of images, visions and figures beyond the reach of reality.

Ana Blandiana lived at that time in Bucharest, working in the Library of Visual Arts after leaving her post as editor-in-chief of the review "Amfiteatru", where she had worked from 1975 to 1977. She had left that position when she could no longer endure the omnipresent political pressure. In addition, her husband Romulus Rusan had been trapped under the rubble of the devastating 1977 earthquake, then rescued. They both moved to the countryside, fleeing from the pervasive spirit of the Conducători to Comana, southeast of the Bărăgan-Plain. There, they both dedicated themselves mainly to writing. Ana Blandiana continued working on "The Four Seasons" – neither enroute to exile nor tracing the path of a civil servant – sparing herself for the moment, when all would be risked.

That moment came for her during the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, when she became the mouthpiece for the manifold oppressed. She used her voice sparingly, entering the fray only when everyone could hear her clearly – and everyone could understand her. The resulting

“cultural revolution” was then at last one which captured souls, represented the political views of the citizens - and led to ground-shaking cataclysms never before seen in the history of Romania.

All this was completely different from the revolution envisioned by Mao Zedong and Ceaușescu. It was worth it, to have waited for the final, the real, the fourth season, which was to release Romania from the icy brace of Winter. And now they were all there: the miners, the writers and the ethnic minorities. At least in the beginning. Notwithstanding, it was possible in 1989 for a writer to write freely, now that Ceaușescu and his world of 1977 belonged to history.

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