

# For a History of the “Underground” Postwar Romanian Literature

GEORGE ARDELEANU

**Résumé:** *L’article vise l’histoire alternative, hors l’officiel, de la littérature roumaine d’après la guerre, faisant référence aux documents de la Sécurité, pour décrire et exposer les horreurs du régime communiste.*

**Keywords:** *Aktionsgruppe Banat, Gaëtan Picon, CNSAS – The National Council for the Study of the Securitate (Security) Archives, “Noica – Pillat” trial*

In the summer of 1982 an unofficial collaborator of the Stasi (MfS) takes a trip to Romania and goes also to Timișoara. He is code-named “Buche”, his real name being Erich Kriemer. He is a small-time writer, but a high-ranking official of Writers’ Union from the GDR. In Timișoara, he is particularly interested in the activities and state of mind of the group of German writers in Romania. Let us remember that in 1975 *Aktionsgruppe Banat* was forbidden by *Securitate*, and William Totok suffered nine months of detention. In 1976, this group reunited in the “Adam Müller-Guttenbrun” literary circle closely watched by the *Securitate*. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1982, the *Neuer Weg* announces the following meeting of the circle, which included a reading from the poetry of Richard Wagner and a musical audition from Wolf Biermann, the most famous dissident from the GDR. In all likelihood, such a notice prompted the GDR embassy in Bucharest to lodge a protest at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania. The fact is that Horst Samson who had the idea of that audition from Biermann, was asked by the County Party Committee to give up such an idea. Wolf Biermann’s songs were played, eventually, after the literary session, in a small circle. Three months later, the *Securitatea* used this incident as a pretext to make searches in the homes of Horst Samson and William Totok. The purpose of the searches was actually to seize Totok’s notebooks, where he described his prison experiences from 1975 to 1976. The *Securitatea* had heard about these notebooks from the source “Voicu” – the code name of Franz Thomas Schleich, an editor of the *Neue Banater Zeitung*. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of May 1982, Totok’s manuscript *A project for an intellectual extermination* is seized by *Securitate* from Horst Samson, to whom it had been lodged in the meanwhile, (of course, after the denunciation of “Voicu”). In the following weeks, William Totok and Horst Samson will be questioned by *Securitate*, with no further detention penalties.

This is, in broad lines, the context in which the Stasi informant reaches Timisoara. He will succeed, among other things, to attend a meeting in a small circle, where he will

hold contradictory talks with Horst Samson. About all this, he will write a detailed report submitted to his liaison officer, Peter Trost. At the meeting in question, informant “Voicu” (Franz Thomas Schleich) will also be present, and he will also prepare a report for his liaison officer, Lt. Col. Nicolae Pădurariu. The two reports (to the Stasi and to the *Securitatea*), written unaware of each other, will coincide here and there... basically, nonetheless they will have some divergent sequences. Significantly: in his report, “Voicu” will include as a character ... Erich Kriemer (“Buche”) as well. In fact, the controversy between Horst Samson and Erich Kriemer is recorded in “Voicu” report. Involuntarily, therefore, the *Securitate* informant gives a notice (also) about the Stasi informant... And, likewise involuntarily, we may remember the famous *Las Meninas* by Velázquez. The story in detail is told in the article “A double surveillance. German Writers from Romania in the documents of Stasi and *Securitate*” by Georg Herbstritt and William Totok<sup>1</sup>. Significant is also the fact that William Totok, a key player in the events narrated, could have at that time, in AD 1982, only a fragmentary view of what was really happening. He had no way of knowing, for instance, that Schleich was the one who photocopied the manuscript (when he volunteered to carry it from Tomnatic, where Totok had been a teacher, to Timisoara) and gave over the photocopies to the *Securitate* (and, based on *this*, the search had been ordered), as there was no way for him to know about that double surveillance conducted on the group of German writers from Romania. To a greater extent than the *Securitate* informant, Stasi informant is startled to see “the spaces of ideological and spiritual freedom that could not be put in agreement with the official political line of the GDR” (Herbstritt, Totok, art.cit., p.183), from the perspective of a Romania where the situation seemed to get out of control. About all these and many others, the authors of that article could learn (and thus round off their insights into their own experience) only when they had access to the CNSAS archives (CNSAS – The National Council for the Study of the *Securitate* Archives).

I would make use of these events as a “synecdoche” of a much wider phenomenon, in order to make a challenge (and an invitation): the opportunity to write the history of postwar Romanian literature, having as a documentary launching pad the *Securitate* archives. In other words, the development of another kind of “shadow” raised by the writer and his work, unlike the one Gaëtan Picon speaks about, specific for the Romanian literature (as for the other literatures from Eastern Europe as well) after the Second World War. This “slope” of the literary phenomenon under study can be explored via the main documentary holdings of the CNSAS archives. Let us start with their brief description:

# *The documentary holding*: it includes documents of historical interest (the issue of historical parties, the resistance movement, labor camps and colonies, the *Securitate* working means and methods, the issue of the press, cults – sects, etc.). Worth mentioning now are the so-called *Problem Files* or *Objective Files* containing documents that record the entire information-operational activity carried out by *Securitate* bodies inside a certain objective (institutions, enterprises, schools, parties, associations, etc.) or regarding certain problem of interest for the *Securitate*. Categories of documents: data

characterizing the objective, data sheets on the persons watched by *Securitate*, data on the informants who worked for that objective or problem, informative materials, analysis reports, action plans, etc.

For the demarche I mentioned above, perhaps the most important one is the “Art – Culture” File, D.117 (10 volumes), D.118 (27 volumes), D.120 (12 volumes). Mention should be made that D.118 contains documents about the Writers’ Union of Romania, between 1980 and 1988.

# *The Informative Holding*: contains files on informative clearance actions or on the informative surveillance of the persons under *Securitate* attention. The (individual or group) *Informative Tracking Files* contain: investigations, card checking, stakeout notes, operative technique, interception of correspondence, informative materials, analysis reports, action plans, etc.

# *The Network Fund*: includes personal records of informants, staff, residents, support people and also candidates for recruitment. *Network Files* contain: the written commitment of the recruited persons, investigation notes or reports, liaison officers’ analysis notes on informants’ activity, notes by other informants on the file holder etc., and, in particular, the *appendix – file* containing informative notes provided by the informant.

# *The Criminal Fund*: contains the records of political trials handled by military courts: arrest warrants, detention orders, search orders, documents/texts confiscated, minutes of questioning, court sentences, prison dossiers, annulment appeals, etc.

# *The SIE Holding*: informative tracking files, network files, problem files about the Romanian communities abroad, etc., made by the foreign intelligence organs of the (MI) Ministry of the Interior.

# *Operational Correspondence Holding*: centralizes the correspondence between the MI units, the *Securitate* and the PCR, etc.

# *The “Manuscripts” Holding*: documents, notes, books, journals, correspondence, seized by the *Securitate* (the NCSSA archives holds 105 manuscripts).

# *The “Library” Holding*: contains books, papers and publications (some published in exile) used by The *Securitatea* as documentation for self-improvement.

# *The M.A.N.P. Holding*: files on the line of military counterintelligence.

# *The Interviews Holding*.

# *The Oral History Center*.<sup>2</sup>

The investigations into these holdings brought about aplenty and ... huge revelations. Under close scrutiny came the relations between writers and Power in the various subsequences of postwar history, the criteria for “selection” the *Securitate* worked with, in triggering the political trials against the writers, and also how it sometimes intervened abruptly in the work of book publishers or magazine editors to censor or ban unwanted texts, the tensions between different groups within the writers’ guild (such as between “synchronists” and “protochronists”), the monitoring of the relations of the Romanian writers with “the reactionary emigration in the West” and especially with the Free Europe radio station, and last but not least, the analyzes *Securitate* made on different literary or philosophical works (the so-called “hermeneutics” of the *Securitate* I had the opportunity to examine in a previous paper), etc., etc.

It suffices to open *The White Paper of the Securitate. Literary and artistic histories (1969-1989)* (Romanian Press Publishing House, 1996), which – not without a certain biased –subjective amalgamation of the selected documents – goes through the SRI (Romanian Intelligence Service) Holding (prior to the establishment of the CNSAS) to witness the show (“carnival”?) of the literary life in postwar Romania, be it about individual destinies or – especially – about “group photos”, environment diagnoses, of course made by a sick doctor (the political police). Naturally, these documents should be read with special lenses, denying them right-away the presumption of objectivity, to later on shed light – by collation with other categories of documents – on any possible truth “interstices”. Before telling us anything about the phenomenon followed, mirrored, they do tell us much about the oppressive Institution. However, the respective phenomenon is unfortunately determined, even by ricochet, by the oppressive “underground” Institution, which influences by means of invisible, perverse threads the visible surface. Interesting to see how tensions between groups of writers (aestheticizers/ party liners, synchronistists/ protochronists, nonconformists/Power affiliates, etc.) increases, is simmering around or during various national conferences of the Writers’ Union. For lack of time, I will quote only one (such) letter to Major General Aron Bordea, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1981:

*Department of State Securitate  
Strictly classified*

UM 0544

*the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1981*

*To U.M.0610 Bucharest*

*To Comrade Major General Bordea Aron*

*We have information that among the writers in Bucharest, who got the right to participate as delegates in the upcoming National Conference, there is a huge concern for the conduct of its proceedings and the concrete results to be obtained. Thus, some writers, including Mihai Ungheanu and Dan Fruntelată, are manifestly very discouraged*

and depressed, because, in the struggle for the organization and orientation of the Writers’ National Conference, the Group from Paris, the Free Europe and their hirelings form the Writers’ Union at home have made their point and managed, by open or subtle influences and manoeuvres, to determine the approval of those measures most suitable to them. The two, like other writers, literary and art critics at home and abroad (Eugen Barbu, Paul Anghel, Ion Lăncrăjan, etc.), believe that the coming National Conference will decide the writers’ final and open scission in opposite camps and that, in this climate, the political and cultural dissent against the future leadership of the Writers’ Union can gain momentum and lead to unpredictable events, anyway with negative effects, that is, as the hostile circles abroad expected.

One of the measures sharply criticized with regard to the forthcoming Writers’ National Conference is that the conference would have a delegated participation and instead of working as a general assembly, that would give the possibility to each and every writer to take part in the election of leading bodies and in taking decisions about the life and the literary work in Romania. ... the solution to the conference, suggested so diplomatically by George Macovescu as a democratic decision by the Writers’ Union Bureau and adopted by the executive bodies without discernment, and by applying the most subtle electoral maneuvering methods and means, totally undemocratic in their essentials, it led to the serious unprecedented situation that great writers, critics and magazines, which always followed the party’s cultural policy line and have always been a constant target of criticism from the Group in Paris and the Free Europe radio station, should not be delegated to the conference. We have in view Eugen Barbu, Paul Anghel, Dan Frunțelată, Mihai Ungheanu Pompiliu Marcea and many others.

*Head of Unit*

*Unreadable.*<sup>3</sup>

Let us say that steps toward outlining such an “underground” history have already been made and I would like to mention here three components of such an outline.

First and foremost, the dissemination of researches in the CNSAS archives by publishing volumes of documents, accompanied by a substantial critical apparatus: *The Securitate Archives* (Nemira publishing House, 2005), *Romanian intellectuals in communist archives* (Nemira, 2006), Marius Oprea, *The banality of evil. A History of the Securitate documents. 1948-1989* (Polirom Publishing House, 2002), Stelian Tanase, *Cioran and the Securitate* (Polirom, 2010), Stelian Tanase, *The Romanian Avant-garde in the Securitate archives* (Polirom, 2008), *N. Steinhardt in the Securitate files* (documents selected by Clara Cosmineanu and Silviu B. Moldovan, Nemira, 2005), *The persecution. Documents about the trial of Constantin Noica, Constantin Pillat* (Vremea Publishing House, 1996), *Nae Ionescu and his disciples in the Securitate archives*, Vol. I-IV (Vol. I: *Nae Ionescu*, vol. II: *Mircea Eliade*, vol. III: *Octav Onicescu*, vol. IV: *Noica*) (text selection, presentation and editing by Dora Mezdrea, Mica

Wallachia and MNLR Publishing Houses, 2008, 2009, 2010), *Constantin Noica in the Securitate archives* (text selection, presentation and editing by Dora Mezdrea, Humanitas Publishing House, 2009), Mihai Pelin, "Artur", *Ion Caraion file* (Publiferom Publishing House, 2008), *The "Arthur" case and Romanian exile. Ion Caraion in the CNSAS archive documents* (edited by Delia Roxana Cornea and Dumitru Dobre, Prohistoria Publishing House, 2006) etc. Worth mentioning are also the volumes of documents commented and edited by the file holder, Paul Goma: *The colour of the rainbow 77. Code "the bearded man"* (Polirom, 2005), Dorin Tudoran, *I, their son. The Securitate file* (edited and prefaced by Radu Ioanid, Polirom, 2010), Stelian Tanase, *At home, we speak in whispers. The file and diary in the late years of dictatorship* (Compania Publishing House, 2002) etc. There are books that foray into the most important documentary holdings mentioned above: informative, criminal, network-related, SIE and last but not least, the interwar *Siguranța* holdings (taken over by the *Securitate*). I was overwhelmed to see that the *Siguranța* documents showed many *patterns* later on taken over by the *Securitate*: informative notes, analysis reports, stakeout notes, interception of letters and phone calls, notes analyzing texts written by the authors under surveillance (Nae Ionescu, Mircea Eliade, the Avant-Garde writers), etc. At least the volume *The Romanian Avant-Garde in the Securitate archives*, edited and prefaced by Stelian Tanase, is so genuinely insightful not only into how the Avant-Garde insurgency was seen in the interwar period, but mainly into the ideological affiliations of the Romanian Avant-Gardists with the communist left, into the not only aesthetic but also ideological relations with the French surrealism, into the relations with the Comintern, etc. It is extremely interesting to see how the dissensions, adhesions, separations, retreats from inside the Romanian Avant-Garde reproduced like in an image-mirror the French *pattern*.

Secondly, it is worth mentioning the volumes on the *Securitate* files by authors who go beyond the phase of documentary anthology and insert the documents into analytical texts, in a narrative scenario submitted to comments and also in a mosaic of texts from outside the files: Stelian Tanase, *The anatomy of mystification* (Humanitas, 1997/2003/2009), Clara Mares, *The glass wall. Ion D. Sârbu in the Securitate archives* (Curtea Veche Publishing House, 2011), Marius Oprea, *The real voyage of Zahei. V. Voiculescu and the mystery of the burning bush* (Humanitas, 2008), Gabriel Andreeșcu, *Scholars, opponents and documents. The Manipulation of the Securitate Archives* (Polirom, 2013), Ioana Diaconescu, *Writers in the CNSAS archives* (Academia Civica Foundation, 2012), Iulia Vladimirov, *Monica Lovinescu in the Securitate documents (1949-1959)* etc.

Thirdly, the monographs on postwar authors, many of them – originally doctoral theses. With no exaggeration, I think there has been a certain *trend* in writing monographs recently, consisting in attaching the documentation corpora identified in the CNSAS archives and the analyses of such corpora to the "classic" corpus of the monographic study. In my opinion, it leads to a *reconfiguration* of the concept of monograph (I am not aware now if the phenomenon is specific for the academic research in other former communist countries too). Some monographs devote special

chapters to the *Securitate* files (be it about tracking files, network files or files on political trials), somehow juxtaposed on other text sequences, others, aside such chapters, use the documents in question as a platform, as an “underground” pervading the entire study. Again some examples: Carmen Bragaru, *Dinu Pillat. A fulfilled destiny* (DU STYLE Publishing House, 2000), Tudorel Urian, *The lives of Alexandru Paleologu* (Vremea, 2010), George Neagoe, *The ace of spades: Stefan Augustin Doinaș* (Cartea Romaneasca Publishing House, 2013) etc. and the last on the list, George Ardeleanu, *N. Steinhardt and the paradoxes of freedom* (Humanitas, 2009). And the process continues... For instance, the author of the monograph on Dinu Pillat forayed into the “Noica – Pillat” trial (File no 118988) of the SRI archives (before the establishment of the CNSAS), in almost heroic conditions, as he could not photocopy documents, therefore he read them recording them on a tape recorder. He managed thus to reconstruct the causes (invoked by *Securitate*) which led to the famous trial of the intellectuals in 1960, the data related to the main charges, the case of the novel *Waiting for the day after*, the interrogation minutes, the sentencing, the prison file, etc. In his turn, George Neagoe uses the files from the three holdings (I 2627, I 2628, I 2629, P 423, R 874) almost in every sequence of his work, clarifying with the help of files (both from the *Siguranță* and the *Securitate*), key moments, some unknown until now, from the biography and bibliography of Stephen Augustin Doinaș (journals to which the writer contributed in the ‘40s, aliases during the banning period, texts seized, etc.). Moving into the labyrinth of files, he managed to reconstruct also the movements of the ‘character’ in the thicket of identities: Stefan Augustin Doinaș, Stefan Popa, Ion Motoarcă, “Andrei Golfin”, “Gogu Ivan”... and his work influenced *volens nolens* by such a (contradictory, tense) identity multiplicity.

Let us not forget that such documentary corpora will find also room in a “mainstream” history like Nicolae Manolescu’s *Critical History of Romanian literature* (Paralela ‘45 Publishing House, 2008). For instance, in the chapter on N. Steinhardt (pp. 1426-1429), consistent with his second degree critical system, N. Manolescu examines a review on *The diary of happiness*, made by the *Securitate* (the most relevant one of the three existing in DUI 207) during the second seizure (1984) of the manuscript, and he even ascribes it a certain... hermeneutic expertise (comparable to the prosecutor who made the indictment in the trial of Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal*, an indictment “which proved far more accurate than Sainte-Beuve’s critical report!”).

I shall conclude by drawing (only) the attention to this very spectacular and twisted part of the relationship between the political police and literature/culture. The *Securitate* officers and collaborators worked hard not only to ban, censor or seize texts, but also to become in some cases ... more or less skilled, more or less insidious “hermeneuts” ... than in the proper literary field itself. I will not dwell on it further on, as I have already published a study in this regard (“«The Hermeneuts» of the the *Securitate* [a tragicomic fable]”) in the *IICCR Yearbook*, Volume IV/2009, Polirom, 2009, pp. 107-121. I will only remind now the fact that the *Securitate* used sometimes the reading “between the lines” not for *discovering* meanings, but for *inventing* meanings, and in the case of

recruited hermeneuts from the space of literary criticism it triggered a transfer of skills and... style: from informative notes to books and vice versa.

How could be used today, when the time of double language (in life and in literature) and of double reading succumbed, such “exercises” in interpretation, aside from the purely scientific research of a phenomenon? Let us give the floor to a critic from the new generation: “Certainly, as it moves away more and more from the year 1989, the readers recover less and less the contextual inner threads of poetry. At times, it may happen that the denouncers in the *Securitate* files turn into indispensible assistants. For instance, the skills of an informant «Gabriel Seranin» make possible the detection of anti-system mines planted in *The tribe of Laocoön*. However, any accusation or interpretation he makes must be taken with caution<sup>4</sup>”. Of course, the detailed (sometimes insidious) commentary made by “Gabriel Seranin” betrays a certain professionalism; it is not the case of the commentary on the poem “The Silver-Tusked Boar” made by “Popovici Octavian”, where the caution warnings are... futile: “The prince is the Legionnaire who sees the wild boar as an ideal and in whose search he calls his brave-hearted men to go through the untrdden woods, imprisonment, persecution. Furthermore, we can see in the poem how the prince’s servants do not want to follow him, feeling it to be too hard a task and not believing in the wild boar, but still the prince calls them. The servants are ordinary people, comfortable and without an ideal and a faith, so at the end when the prince is broken down by the ideal (by the boar) the servants laugh at him<sup>5</sup>. Everything that has been said so far and many others constitute, therefore, the other “shadow” of the writer, unlike that one Gaëtan Picon theorized about.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> CNSAS Notebooks, Year II, no 1(3)/2009, pp. 179-196.

<sup>2</sup> The description of these holdings was based on an in-house Material on archive holdings available to CNSAS researchers and drafted by the *The Educational Programme Service/The Research Division. Exhibitions. Publications of the CNSAS*.

<sup>3</sup> A.S.R.I., Holding „D”, file no 10966, vol. 3, f. 74, apud *The White Book of the Securitate. Literary and Artistic Histories (1969-1989)*, Presa Românească, 1996, p. 212.

<sup>4</sup> George Neagoe, *The ace of spades: Ștefan Augustin Doinaș*, Cartea Românească, Bucharest, 2013, p. 222.  
<sup>5</sup> Apud *Ibidem*, p. 246.