The Aesthetic Subversion of Dream in the Romanian Literature

Alina Ioana Bako

Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

Abstract

The dream imaginary has been explained starting from the classical definitions in order to put the concept in a larger context. This imaginary is conceived by the poets who wrote between 1964 – 1974, and who called themselves ”The Oniric Group”. It is a literary movement which appeared despite the socialist realism which had imposed itself in the Romanian literature of the epoch. This article attempts to critically broach and examines such group.

Key Words: dream, imaginary, real, image, politic.
With a start under the sign of uncertainty, “The Oniric Group” was an attempt to outline a world that gets rid of the laws imposed by the political and the social, through a recreation of similar realities. The members of the group, very important personalities, have evolved differently maintaining the influence of the dream. The year when the term “onirism” appeared is 1959, and in 1965 the members of the Group were Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Ţepeneag, Virgil Mazilescu, Vintilă Ivnăceanu, Iulian Neacșu, Sânziana Pop. In 1966, Miron Radu Paraschivescu provided them an editorial space in the magazine "Branches" (in the supplement called "The story of the word" that appeared for only 9 months and wanted to gather works of old and new surrealism) and Daniel Turcea, Florin Gabrea and Emil Brumaru joined the Group. In 1968, they have attempted to create a magazine of their own,"Spyglass" but political censorship banned it at the last moment. A single article: An artistic way. A Roundtable Discussion with Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Ţepeneag, Daniel Turcea, Laurenţiu Ulici was published, in the "Amphitheatre" magazine no. 36 in November 1968. Later, the writers Sorin Titel and Virgil Tănase joined the Group. As the political climate was inimical, the oniric poets tried to assert themselves "drifting the inland of aesthetics"\(^1\). The spirit of "eminently cultural"\(^2\) determines a stance towards the regime attitudes, that makes Laurenţiu Ulici to consider onirism as "(...) the first notable literary dissident in full expansion during the Ceauşescu Regime"\(^3\).

Onirism literature was, to a certain extent, a political act of rebelliousness against the regime, as it is analysed by Catherine Durandin in *Romanian history*. Political persecution went up to ban even the word "oniric". Dumitru Ţepeneag testified for Europa Liberă radio station that The Oniric Group was a real challenge: “And until then we were a group, but never recognized as a group. After this statement on the radio, after the Roundtable from «Amphitheatre» and, especially, after the attacks from «Scânteia» and «Contemporanul» newspaper, we became a group and we had some political importance. For a while even the word “oniric” was banned!”\(^4\)


The political climate in which onirism emerged took shape through the implementation of two key axes: the ideological influence and the influence of a political factor. Romanian literary landscape has undergone major transformations, based on three aspects: Stalinist period (1948-1964), the relative liberalisation stage (1964-1971) and the nationalist communism stage (1971-1989).

In the first stage the artist, the writer did not create an aesthetic work, but one that would become the ideology of power. One had to immortalize through one’s writings the great achievements of human society, of the worker who was undertaken on the path of scientific and technical progress, because “the Romanian Writers' Society, through ons’s new agents, embarks on the path of renewal. Without having to abdicate the artistic credo, the Romanian writer understands that s/he has to leave isolationism and become a social fighter,

a lamp, a guiding principle of the nation, gaining in this manner his/her place in the new organization of the world. This mission can be carried out only within the ideas of freedom of the Great Russian Democrats who have given all the possibilities of intellectual workers to live with dignity and to manifest as leaders of the people. The intellectuals were reeducated and guided by the party and the cultural activists. Literature or so-called literature was characterized by the imposition of writers and literary critics, favourable to the regime and ideology promoted.

The power imitated the aesthetic liberties, which in fact were just a lot of compromises by the writers who had to get in the game of power to resist. Many writers were removed from circulation; reprinting was selective, and the meaning of it was garbled, using dogmatic criteria. The topics addressed were pro-soviets; the "new men" who builds a "new world".

This literary climate, closely related to political ideology, did not allow the emergence of the current escapers, which were not anchored in reality. Ion Simuţ, in "The literary communist Canon"5 listed the monsters of the inter-war literature, in the dogmatic vision of proletcultist: Avangarde, Modernism and Eastern Orthodoxy.

In April 1964, a changing of the policy was announced by a start of a literature without ideology. That time was propitious for the poets who were able to publish texts with unusual creative visions that finally appeared. The focus could shift, to a certain extent, to the ideological message on literarity. We keep in mind important aspects such as the access to special funds and documentary books, Western radio stations with Romanian language programmes were no longer jammed. Between 1965 and 1971, in Romania, it was not possible to publish various works, if "the drawers of the writers wouldn't have been nearly empty, as it happened in 1990."

A few groups had an important contribution, among which should be mentioned the one led by the poet Miron Radu Paraschivescu in the Journal "Luceafarul" where some of the their publication of Dream Group was made in the magazine "Steaua" edited by the same M.P. Paraschivescu (as a supplement of the magazine "Branches" of Craiova) and then, in "Equinox".

In 1967, 60 000 copies of the Anthology of modern poetry written by Nicolae Manolescu were drawn off, because he had introduced certain poets into the circuit: Radu Gyr and Crainic. It was the beginning of censorship practiced by Ceauşescu regime that interfered fully in their rights; that was a new sort of dogmatism of Romanian literature. The so-called forbidden words were words such as "dark", "cold", "hungry", "old man," "old lady", "death", "cross", "priest", "fear", "orange", "banana", "coffee", "dream" and also "oniric". The Orinism was considered as "decadent, depicting the decay of bourgeois art and literature", promoted by the ruling classes of the bourgeois state, aided by the growing influence of a decadent literature felt in the West". Promoting the dream, so out of reality, the onirics were doomed. The dream was a deviation from the order. It could not be controlled and censored, so it had to be stigmatized.

---

5 Ion Simuţ, Canonul literar proletcultist, in „România literară”, nr.28, 18 iulie 2008.
In Onirismul – between the literary history and the political history, Laura Pavel speaks about the ethical and the political that are mixed within this concept so, "(...) a motivation and a goal mainly ethical, but which are political". We cannot entirely agree with the statements presented, precisely because of the poetical ideas, especially in the poetry of Dimov. We observe the absence of a political factor. Thus onirism owes less to politics, though sometimes one can be deceived to believe otherwise. In an interview with Ion Simuț, Dumitru Țepeneag reminds us of the political aspect, but also the idea of a Dimov politically uninterested and by the Țepeneag model that he retrieves from the work of Breton:

"Theorizing our own literature was, therefore, an excellent idea. More questionable is the other point of my strategy and the oniric group: the political protest. Dimov did not agree. But he was opposed even to the establishment of the group. He liked to be surrounded by young people who read verses and drink at the same time, but the idea of the group did not interested him, I do not know why. (...) My model, in terms of political challenge, was the Breton's surrealist work that Dimov did not like. He argued that the socio-political situations were not the same but I liked the risk, I loved the challenge. If I look back, I don't know if I was right."

Rising from surrealism, as a sequel to it in terms of processing the dream, these writers confess with the superiority that they come from "the monkey of the Surrealism". Although they write, they opt for surreal painting, because "a surrealist Painter, unlike the surrealist poet, describes his dream, he does not become the slave of hallucinations, but, using the laws of the dream, he creates a lucid work of art". The "Hard core" of the Oniric Group, who have laid the groundwork, Dimov and Țepeneag present their conceptions referring to the French surrealism. From the desire to reconcile Breton and Valéry, they build a literary concept applicable by taking on the traits of both romantic onirism and surrealist simultaneity and the structure theorised by Valéry. This oniric is the denial of the Breton concept, "le surréalisme c'est l'écriture niée", which denies the structure. There is, in this sense, a clear delimitation in which the focus moves from romantic expression, having the inspiration in the center and from surrealism that focuses on automatic writing and production – to Oniric that occurs through an objectified hazard.

We are dealing with a clear setting of writing, for which the world is a text which produces and being produced, but which is not enough. We can consider this as an extension of the bretonian psychic; also meaning essential guidelines for a creative original way. Aliasing of the dream is an attitude of self to self. Overcoming the art critic, trying to escape domineering of the tutelage of the subconscious is accomplished in two ways: by a secret word, that demands the lecturer a hermeneutics and intense effort or by the simplest word, that inhales a detail, a gesture, a look that contains the whole life.

Becoming a form of subversion aesthetics, the oniric group represents a niche in the development of Romanian literature. An outbreak has not fundamentally changed its course,

---

6 Laura Pavel, Dumitru Țepeneag și canonul literaturii alternative, Cluj, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2007, p.56.
7 Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, Onirismul estetic. Antologie de texte teoretice, interpretări critice și prefăță de Marian Victor Buciu (Theoretical texts, interpretations and critical preface by Marian Victor Buciu), Bucharest, Curtea Veche, 2007, p.75
8 Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, op. cit., p.67.
but that meant a poetic heterogeneous cohesive work. The text is organized as a contrivance; it is verbalized by the refinement and the craft of the word. Considering the European avant-garde cultural imagination which was delimited by the previous literary movements, the Oniric Group was interested in breaking the patterns into reality in a world that sorts after the dismissal laws. The limits of language are forced by the contexts in which words are used or even by itself to create words. The effect obtained is a playful, nice poetry: reflexivity lost in calligraphy. The oniric poets rebuild the world, introducing in the text new spaces: streets, ships, kitchens. The verses are subject to formal rules that ensure the musicality, except those of Virgil Mazilescu, by giving up the rhymes and the balance in order to come out with disparate images. Sentimentality is hidden under the guise of clowns, particularly in the work of Leonid Dimov. Oniric literature is in opposition to the verseal, the need for space and by giving up the metaphor, as an abstraction of the meaning. From this point of view, it is one of the concret large spaces in which time is abolished. Not only is it in opposition with the verseal, but also with the metaphoric and "the epic based on the law of causality" because it tries to propose a parallel world, other than the real one.

The Oniric Group keeps multiple aspects of surrealism, including the contact with surreal paintings, opposed in their conception, to the surreal poetry. Țepeneag himself acknowledged that they were known as :"(...) some Surrealists." By analyzing some texts, we have shown some similarities with surrealism, especially the works of Virgil Mazilescu. But the others have links only with the surrealist painting, rejecting the automatic, because beyond the images created, it preserves their most important aspect: structure. It is the structure that they want to use in their texts. In this sense, painting, as a representation, approached most of the method sought to transpose reality into text, the realm of imagination and pictorial technique, the fact of clarity without which the work of art, literary and pictorial of the dream, cannot exist.

The openings that have initiated these writers, proximity to postmodernism, were discussed by Țepeneag: "Postmodernism denies formal criteria that just helped the birth of modernism in romanticism: the new criterion. It is a forced denial, imposed by a relative depletion of forms, on the one hand, and the refusal of the general public to follow the innovators on the other."

But the emphasis is on representation, they are closer to modernism through vision and real approach as a way of creation, even if they were subjects to the laws of the dream.

Leonid Dimov's work is distinguished by spontaneity, hybridity, objects of aesthetic point of view, as well as " some construction with Mosaic extracted from quarries of memory", mastering both the form and content of the texts as being representative of the verse of the oniric group. Other poetic works of Emil Brumaru, Virgil Mazilescu, Daniel Turcea, and Vintilă Ivânceanu are meteoric appearances that have revolved around the theory of onirism, at bigger or smaller distances.

The oniric group was formed, innovated in different meanings, by persons who, through literary aesthetic formulas, have broken templates, producing poetry. The poets have

---

9 Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, op. cit., p.317.
10 Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, op. cit., p.318.
innovated, however like ephemeral illuminations. It is symptomatic of their obsession of dreaming and sumptuous decor, all great subjects but in a playful manner.

In the editorial published in the first number of the magazine "Cahiers de l'Est" in 1975, Dumitru Țepeneag wrote about aesthetic criteria that should provide the basis for judgment issued for any work of literature, whether it comes from the literature of the East or the West. The innovative way of writing of the onirics, concretized in an expression less frequented in Romanian literature, brought a new spirit, breaking the patterns, but it was not recognized as such.

Dumitru Țepeneag delimits the sphere concept in order to determine the poles of the concept of the oniric moves (oniric literature) in the understanding of the group. Etymologically, "oneiros" means "dream" and it represents just a superficial aspect, which explains not only the name of the movement. "Oniric literature will be considered as an attempt of synthesis between traditional fantastic of Romantic and Surrealistc type", that means, creating an "autonomous territory" between the two, which are oniric. Fantastic romantic literature would imply the existence of reason, from the point of view of the speaker, as in the prose of Poe, populated by nocturnal silhouettes, a place of shadow, and of pure fantastic. The dream does not require more than a geographical plan narrated as a way of explanation of the phenomenon or the lecturer is under the empire of an uncertain decision. The other pole is surrealism, as testified to the primary source for oniric literature. In this sense, the article of Țepeneag In search of a definition, refers to the oniric ideas: "I suggest two categories, according to which to be determined the scope of the notion of using fantastic literature and surreal poetry. In the perspective of literary history, oniric literature will be considered as an attempt of synthesis between traditional fantastic of Romantic and Surrealistc type".11 We understand from the stated above that the oniric literature is created by taking elements from both Fantastic and Surrealism.

However, at the end of this article, after debating many issues related to the oniric literature, from its imagination and poetics, Țepeneag asserts: "In opposition to surrealism, onirism (aesthetic) rejects the automatic, subconscious and bondage of incoherence, cultivating ambiguity, however, consciously and rigorously calculated." The theory must be checked, but Țepeneag writes that: "Oniric literature is an ambition to achieve a double denial: the denial of the essential method of realism, and formal, but no less impressive, fantastic." At this level, there is a contradiction regarding the role played by the fantastic elements in the genesis of dream, but we observe that according to the method explained from the perspective of literary history there are some approaches of the fantastic, and by the point of view of the formal; the oniric denies the fantastic.

Dan Gulea studied the phenomenon of Romanian avant-garde and noted two trends, one negative, for the deconstruction and the second, for the building tradition. Unlike the other writers from other countries, "Romanian Avanguarde was a closed process, in this case, the crossing by a group of several literary political spectra, an avangard or another of the

11 Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, *op. cit.* p.78
same group, turning on, over time, depending on the literal, political or social circumstances”.

Aesthetics is rehabilitated; poetic self disappears, leaving only metaphor, a deep thirst of the nomination of things. Dimov wrote in 1968: "the world of the object that involves art removes the limits between antagonistic oniric phenomena, the values include metamorphosis as art objects and the suburbs, the Court and the terraces of the great palaces of second empire, sees the social realist frescoes as stories with fairies."\(^{13}\) It is about establishing the scope from which the poet extracts his material. He brings on the same plane Centre, represented by the so-called noble subjects, but also the suburbs, as the periphery of social subjects of "pimples, molds and mud" after the expression of Tudor Arghezi. However, it remains the subject of dream that is the reality, but by bringing "(...) the signs of another world".

The theoretical foundation of the "aesthetically dream literature" (as it was called by Dumitru Țepeneag) is achieved by reporting to the European literary ideas. Art functions are identified by the instruments that dissect the real, looking for a formula in which one can insert the bookmarks of another world"\(^{14}\) (Leonid Dimov), the oniric world. It is an analysis of the art object from the point of view of the delirious, one of the many possible.

In the discussion led by Paul Cornel Chitic in November 1968, Țepeneag talks about a dialectic spiral which would contain three types of literary "sentence (Romanticism), antithesis (Surrealism) and their synthesis of today (Oniric Literature)". From the outset, we intrigue why this group is considered to be the antithesis of surrealism and romanticism, as long as surrealism has some roots in romanticism. For example, the phrase Țepeneag quoted on a page in 10 august 1974: "On peux très légitimement discerner d'emblée dans le prolongement du surréalisme a romantisme, d'un romantisme qui avait pas donné toute sa mesure en France au XIX ème siècle, d'un «romantisme des profondeurs» or, in another text from 1990: "for example, now I remember that the «round table» of «Amphitheatre» was otherwise expressed: had onirism as thesis and surrealism as anti-thesis. Now I feel surrealism as a last avatar of romanticism".\(^{14}\)

It is a question of parentage that is born as a reaction to something, but, in the end, retains some of the tradition that, in principle, has denied it. The movement contains in itself a message, like any literary movement and literary tradition, classic, romantic and surreal.

\(^{12}\) Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, \textit{op. cit.}, p.80
\(^{13}\) Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, \textit{op. cit.}, p.103
\(^{14}\) Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, \textit{op. cit.}, p.145
References


-Dimov, Leonid, Țepeneag, Dumitru, *Onirismul estetic*. Antologie de texte teoretice, interpretați critice și prefață de Marian Victor Buciu (Theoretical texts, interpretations and critical preface by Marian Victor Buciu), Bucharest, Curtea Veche, 2007, p.75


- Țepeneag, Dumitru, *Visul ca paradigmă* în „Literatorul”, nr. 16-17, 1996.


