

“THE CASE” OF POOR IOANIDE, OR ON CRITICAL RECEPTION IN DIFFERENT STAGES OF POST-WAR ROMANIAN LITERARY HISTORY

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Abstract

This article aims to present some aspects regarding the critical reception of the novel *Bietul Ioanide*, whose subject is set in the post-war period. After circulating in typescript for a while, the publication of the novel (Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, 674 pages, 1953) sparked a wave of critical reactions among the adherents of socialist realism, followed by a veritable campaign of denigration. After the appearance of the second edition of the novel in 1965, a necessary revision of the reception of *Bietul Ioanide* took place, with various interpretative keys of a literary and ideological nature contributing decisively to illustrating the subtle game instituted by the novelist in a letter addressed in 1950 to Al. Piru, in which the writer asserts that in the mentioned novel, eros, not politics, is dominant. *Bietul Ioanide* is a problematising novel, in which G. Călinescu – starting from a historical event, namely the evolution of the Legionary Movement in Romania, in the years 1938-1941 – questions the credibility of official ideologies. Their representatives gain unlimited power by resorting to crimes and atrocities committed against humanity. At the same time, G. Călinescu abandons the prejudice regarding the intimate journal, considered by the writer to be an effeminate and egocentric creation.

Keywords

Socialist realism, history, revision, problematising novel, intimate journal.

The third novel by G. Călinescu, *Bietul Ioanide* (‘Poor Ioanide’), is not only an exceptional literary creation due to its problematic content or the mastery demonstrated by the writer in using narrative techniques, but it also stands out in the history of Romanian literature through its various critical receptions, influenced by the “spirit of the times.” Published in 1953, during the heyday of socialist realism, the book was eradicated by Marxist critics. It

would take some time until the critical revision of the novel by the critics of the 1960s, notably marked by the interventions of Nicolae Manolescu and Eugen Simion.

1. *Bietul Ioanide* and the samizdat circuit

Vlaicu Bârna¹ and Pavel Țugui² provide details about the samizdat circuit of the novel *Bietul Ioanide* before its publication by E.S.P.L.A. Publishing House in December 1953. Vlaicu Bârna recounts that in the autumn of 1948, he was hired as an editor at the Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă (E.S.P.L.A.), where he met G. Călinescu. At one of the “bi-monthly meetings” organised by Rosetti, the writer invited him to his home to offer him his new novel. The meeting between the two took place – according to the editor’s testimony – on 20 December 1948, when he received the novel *Bietul Ioanide*, typed by Al. Piru. Enthusiastic about the book, the author of the volume *Între Capșa și Corso* (‘Between Capșa and Corso’) drafted a positive seven-page report which he presented to Al. Rosetti, the director of the publishing house. Since another report was needed, the latter decided to address another person, “a man of power.”³

Three weeks later, G. Călinescu asked Vlaicu Bârna to return the novel. The mystery of the request was dispelled by the secretary Frenkel, who offered Vlaicu Bârna and Al. Rosetti the second report of the novel, received from the Romanian Academy and drafted by Eugen Schileru. Vlaicu Bârna visited G. Călinescu again and asked him to leave the manuscript at the publishing house to be typed in multiple copies, facilitating readers’ access to the novel:

“The man agreed with my proposals and thus the content of the three notebooks was multiplied, the five or six copies from the publishing house in turn produced offspring outside, circulating at the Central Committee, the Academy and the University, through editorial offices, in Cluj, Iași, and other cities in the country. The entire intellectual world was now talking about Călinescu’s new novel. [...] I visited Călinescu every week or two, finding

¹ Vlaicu Bârna, 2005, *Între Capșa și Corso*, București, Editura Albatros.

² Pavel Țugui, 1998, *Amurgul demiurgilor: Arghezi, Blaga, Călinescu (Dosare literare)*, București: Editura Floarea Darurilor.

³ Vlaicu Bârna, *op. cit.*, p. 336-342.

him delighted by the samizdat echoes that *Bietul Ioanide* was stirring everywhere.”⁴

Another important confession in retracing the path of the manuscript of the novel *Bietul Ioanide* to print is provided by Pavel Țugui in *Amurgul demiurgilor: Arghezi, Blaga, Călinescu* (‘The Twilight of the Demigods: Arghezi, Blaga, Călinescu’). The information found in the mentioned study is important – Nicolae Mecu asserts – because: “*In the years 1948 (more precisely from December 1947) – 1952, Pavel Țugui worked within the Propaganda and Agitation Section of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers’ Party, led by Leonte Răutu and his deputies M. Roller (for science and education) and Ofelia Manole (for art and literature). At the beginning of 1953, with the establishment of the Literature and Art Section of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers’ Party, Constanța Crăciun was appointed as its head, with Pavel Țugui as her deputy.*”⁵

In December 1952, Pavel Țugui recalls, the General Directorate of Publishing Houses sent a report on the books scheduled for publication in 1953 to the Literature Section of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers’ Party. Among these was *Bietul Ioanide*. Noticing that the novel’s publication was being delayed, G. Călinescu filed a complaint with the head of the section, and Pavel Țugui was sent with two “decisions” to the director of the Publishing House, A. Toma: “*to expedite the sending of the text of Bietul Ioanide to the printing house; to convey to the poet G. Bacovia the request to allow the Publishing House to prepare an edition of his works.*”⁶

Pavel Țugui believes that the expedited publication of the novel *Bietul Ioanide* was favoured by an event that occurred in August 1953. The Literature and Art Section of the Central Committee of the Romanian Workers’ Party was tasked by the higher leadership to form a Romanian cultural delegation, composed of writers, scientists and artists, to represent Romania in the People’s Republic of China. For the organisation of the event, the head of the section consulted with G. Călinescu, and the novelist requested support for the publication of the novel. Thus, *Bietul Ioanide* – Pavel Țugui

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 345.

⁵ Nicoleta Mecu, 2018, *Note. Comentarii. Variante*, in G. Călinescu, *Opere*, vol. II. *Bietul Ioanide*, București, Editura Fundației Naționale pentru Știință și Artă, p. 756.

⁶ Pavel Țugui, 1998, *Amurgul demiurgilor: Arghezi, Blaga, Călinescu (Dosare literare)*, București, Editura Floarea Darurilor, pp. 190-191.

notes – was published at the end of December 1953, with illustrations by Corneliu Baba, in 20,200 copies, totalling 674 pages⁷.

2. *Bietul Ioanide* and the Marxist Procrustean bed

Given the difficulties G. Călinescu faced in publishing his novel, it is no surprise that the book and its author were attacked by representatives of the official power. It should be noted that the dismantling of Călinescu's work – on the grounds that it did not adhere to the ideology of the time – was carried out gradually, through an accumulation of negative arguments, despite the efforts of some literary critics to advocate for the novel.

A veiled defender of the book *Bietul Ioanide* was Silvian Iosifescu, joined by G. Mărgărit. Although the latter also pointed out the “flaws” of the novel, his verdict placed Călinescu's work among the masterpieces of Romanian literature. Vera Călin's review contained an ideologized discourse, insisting on the novel's shortcomings that did not adhere to the creative line imposed by the aesthetics of Marxism-Leninism. However, in the case of the author of the study *Romantismul* ('Romanticism'), her philological training was evident, as she reformulated the principles of socialist realism in her own style.

The attacks on G. Călinescu were initiated by I. Mitran⁸, seconded by S. Levin⁹, both preparing the ground – through accusations brought by N. Doreanu¹⁰, the President of the Committee for Art (with the rank of minister) at that time. The consequence was the withdrawal of the novel *Bietul Ioanide* from bookstores and its placement on the list of books banned by censorship.

Silvian Iosifescu¹¹ resorted to an insinuating discourse, with arguments that absolved G. Călinescu of accusations of apoliticism or individualism, formulated by the adherents of socialist realism. Through *Ioanide*, the novelist presented a genius creator, incompatible with bourgeois

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 191-192.

⁸ Ion Mitran (student at the Faculty of Journalism in Bucharest), 1954, „Scrisoare către redacție. Unele probleme ale romanului «Bietul Ioanide»”, in: *Scânteia tineretului*, București, X, Issue 1524, 20 March, p. 2.

⁹ S. Levin, 1954, „Un roman despre intelectuali”, in: *Scrisul bănățean*, Timișoara, Issue 2, June, pp. 87-93.

¹⁰ N. Doreanu, 1955, „Despre romanul «Bietul Ioanide»”, in: “Viața Românească”, Iași, Year X, Issue 2, February, pp. 272-292.

¹¹ Silvian Iosifescu, 1953, „Cronică literară. G. Călinescu: «Bietul Ioanide»”, in: *Contemporanul*, București, Year 52, 25 December, pp. 2-3.

society, but also “the tragic consequences of maintaining such a creator in isolation and apoliticism.” Interaction only with certain social categories – the group of university professors – limited the protagonist’s vision of life, Silvian Iosifescu argued. G. Călinescu presented the architect’s point of view on events, hence the impression of incompleteness of the political picture from 1938-1940, the critic being convinced that:

*“[...] one cannot speak of an identification of the novelist with Ioanide. Some of the author’s comments, some notes at the bottom of the pages even serve to underline the separation between the character’s perspective and the author’s view – critical of the character.”*¹²

Unlike Silvian Iosifescu, G. Mărgărit¹³ mentioned that G. Călinescu did not adhere to the grid of socialist realism, a fact proven by the existence of “flaws”: “shifting the conflict by relocating the Legionary Movement to the family level,” “Ioanide’s apolitical existence,” the *paradoxical* life of Tudorel, the architect’s son. Nevertheless – G. Mărgărit argued – the book is grandiose, G. Călinescu proving to be an “unsurpassed painter of manners”:

*“The manners of the old intelligentsia are seen from the precise angle of satirical observation. [...] The attention to detail, to tone, characteristic of Călinescu’s portraiture is exemplary. [...] The artistic means are sophisticated and complex, and the reader must note that the writer’s erudition is not a pedantic display, but a sure guide in the investigation of types and characters.”*¹⁴

In Vera Călin’s opinion¹⁵, *Bietul Ioanide* does not represent a novelty in Romanian literature, as novels about intellectuals were also written during the interwar period. What is missing from the Romanian literary tableau, according to the author of the study, is a book with a positive hero, that is, “a man of cerebral labour.” Călinescu presents only the group of intellectuals in Manigomian’s salon, individuals lacking backbone, “odious creatures par excellence,” who opportunistically adhere to the fascist movement.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 2.

¹³ G. Mărgărit, 1954, „Cronica literară - «Bietul Ioanide» de G. Călinescu”, in: *Iașul nou*, Iași, Year VI, Issue 1, March, pp. 75-84.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 83.

¹⁵ Vera Călin, 1954, „Cronica literară. G. Călinescu: «Bietul Ioanide»”, Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, in: *România liberă*, București, Year XII, Issue 2910, 10 February, pp. 2-3.

A dilemmatic point of the novel is the journal of Tudorel, Ioanide's son, as well as the architect's hesitant attitude when reading his son's notes. For Vera Călin, the mentioned diary text signifies "a profession of cultural hooliganism, made with the arguments of a disciple of Nae Ionescu or Cioran."¹⁶ Nevertheless, Ioanide is unable to reject the ideology of fascism with firm arguments, his intervention being limited to exclamations. Nor does the novelist – Vera Călin asserts – give the impression of understanding political events, the novel lacking "a deep critique of Legionaryism, a lucid interpretation of the true significance of fascism."¹⁷

G. Călinescu creates in the novel a "gallery of fascist monsters," who left a "sinister" stain in the history of the Romanian people. Among them stand out Hangerliu, a descendant of a noble family, the actor Carababă and Tudorel, who wants to be the theoretician of fascism. They are joined by Gavrilcea, the "éminence grise" of the group, who orchestrates the misdeeds from the shadows without directly participating. This character – Vera Călin believes – could have represented "the most odious type" in the gallery of fascist monsters, but Călinescu fails due to the technique used in presenting the character. The novelist does not depict Gavrilcea from his own perspective but uses reports from two opposing newspapers, "one favourable, the other unfavourable," creating confusion among readers.

In the article *Specificul gândirii artistice în creația literară*¹⁸ ('The Specificity of Artistic Thinking in Literary Creation'), Henri Wald places the novel *Bietul Ioanide* in the Procrustean bed of dialectical materialism and abstract Marxist thought. It is an article in which the actual text of the novel is ignored, the focus being on the recipe imposed on writers by Marxist-Leninist aesthetics, which G. Călinescu does not follow. By giving too much importance to Ioanide's emotional states, "an eccentric character," G. Călinescu ignores the abstract truth of Marxism-Leninism and – Henri Wald believes – does not capture the historical moment near the anti-Soviet war, when "the most reactionary peaks of the international monopolistic bourgeoisie" attack the workers' movement.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹⁸ Henri Wald, 1954, „Specificul gândirii artistice în creația literară”, in: *Gazeta literară*, București, Year I, Issue 8, 6 May, p. 4.

In *Scrisoarea către redacție. Unele probleme ale romanului Bietului Ioanide*¹⁹ ('Letter to the Editor. Some Problems of the Novel *Poor Ioanide*'), Ion Mitran, a student at the Faculty of Journalism in Bucharest, argues that reading the novel *Bietul Ioanide* revealed a series of issues that require clarification from specialists. His opinion is shared by other students, thus positioning himself as the spokesperson for readers. Literary critics – Ion Mitran asserts – do not provide precise answers to the readers' natural questions, and others like Silvian Iosifescu "delicately avoided the 'sensitive points' of the book in their reviews, without expressing a precise opinion."

A first problem highlighted by the journalism student refers to the absence of progressive intellectuals in the novel, with G. Călinescu presenting only the group of corrupted intellectuals and the apolitical Ioanide: "Is it typical for the realities of our country, in the years 1939-1940, to depict only this category of intellectuals?"²⁰ The image of the "Movement", according to Ion Mitran, is presented by G. Călinescu "in a sweetened light," the group being treated with "a certain dose of 'rose water'." The novelist should have exposed the atrocities of the Legionnaires and instilled in the readers' hearts the hatred against those who wanted to destroy the "truly patriotic forces." Another issue of the novel, superficially addressed by literary critics, is the language used by the writer. Besides the fact that the words are "imported" and do not vigorously convey the author's ideas and feelings, the combination of sentences used, characterised by ambiguity, may become – Ion Mitran suggests – a form of subversive discourse against the power²¹. In an imperative tone and quoting from Ion Mitran's article, S. Levin asserts that readers have the right to demand that the writer present the truth about the unfolding of historical events in the years 1939-1940²².

Unlike Henri Wald, Ion Mitran or S. Levin, whose discourses reflect mere scribes subservient to the power of the day, N. Doreanu's discourse reveals the author's observational spirit, the ability to expose subversive

¹⁹ Ion Mitran (student at the Faculty of Journalism in Bucharest), 1954, „Scrisoare către redacție. Unele probleme ale romanului «Bietul Ioanide»”, in: *Scânteia tineretului*, București, Year X, Issue 1524, 20 March, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibidem*.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² S. Levin, 1954, „Un roman despre intelectuali”, in: *Scrisul bănățean*, Timișoara, no. 2, June, p. 90.

attacks against the communist regime. Although he contests G. Călinescu, unlike the mentioned reviewers and even Vera Călin herself, N. Doreanu recognises the mastery of Călinescu's technique, seeing in the writer a strong adversary who tries to deceive the vigilance of censorship: "Here we find ourselves in the writer's house, in his workshop, among the tools of his gift, unseen, sometimes unknown even to himself, with which he chisels, colours people, facts and ideas, giving them harmony or dissonance."²³

What bothers N. Doreanu about the novel *Bietul Ioanide* – among the numerous accusations formulated – is the writer's philosophy of life, reflected in the protagonist's thinking and G. Călinescu's dual personality, split between the voice of the academician and the voice of the writer. If in public speeches the academician G. Călinescu supports Marxism-Leninism, in literary creation, the novelist refuses ideological alignment:

*"It seems, however, that the academician must constantly – surely with bitterness – acknowledge the opposition of one of them, namely the writer, his congenital namesake, so to speak. Rebellious, the writer refuses to sign the aesthetic conception of the academician in the novel."*²⁴

In *Bietul Ioanide*, Doreanu discovers "three philosophical schools," in fact, distinct ways of perceiving existence. The first belongs to Butoiescu, Ioanide's assistant, who argues that history is repetitive, and man should keep his composure in the face of adversity. Another "philosophy" is presented by the Armenian merchant, Saferian Manigomian, who adapts according to market demand and supply, considering the course of history. For Saferian, as well as for the other intellectuals, except Ioanide, it does not matter who is in power (Hitlerites or royalists), what matters is profit. The only active philosophy in the novel is that of Tudorel Ioanide. He rejects values and proclaims the present as the only "concrete element of life." For Tudorel, the present means "Hitler, war and the Legionnaires [...] the dagger and the pistol, and the rest is metaphysics."²⁵

Above all – N. Doreanu observes with sarcasm – is the Olympian Ioanide, "the thoroughbred intellectual," who "considers himself above the

²³ N. Doreanu, 1955, „Despre romanul «Bietul Ioanide»”, in: *Viața Românească*, Iași, Year X, Issue 2, February, p. 285.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 284.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 273-274.

turmoil of life even when it is related to war, freedom or slavery.” (p. 274) Ioanide is scandalised by his son’s ideology when he reads his journal, but he remains passive, his revolt limited to a few words and exclamations – “madmen,” “paranoids,” “fools,” a total of 28, according to the minister’s count. But, Doreanu asserts, it is not enough. The novel needs an active voice of a communist, a fighter for the liberation of the Romanian people from the communist yoke:

“Attracting emancipated peasants and progressive intellectuals alongside the working class, the communist party fights with blood sacrifice, leading the people against the war of plunder and oppression and the national disaster, prepared together and provoked through betrayal by the ruling classes and their imperialist patrons.”²⁶

While Silvian Iosifescu argues that the novelist is not responsible for the actions and thoughts of the characters created, Doreanu is vehement and sees Călinescu’s heroes as his “spiritual sons”. The writer is indulgent with Ioanide’s “phantasmagorical” ideas and, in some scenes, even shows admiration for his hero. The atmosphere created by G. Călinescu in *Bietul Ioanide* is specific to the “vitiated, retrograde bourgeois ideology,” and the novel does not adhere to the tasks found in the agenda of the time, when “the progressive ideology of the world fiercely fights to overcome the criminal ideology of war and slavery.” It follows that “from the ideological content perspective, the work of the writer G. Călinescu constitutes a mistake.”²⁷

3. *Bietul Ioanide*, an aesthetic revision

The revision of the book *Bietul Ioanide* began with the publication of the second edition of the novel at the Editura pentru Literatură, in 1975, a moment favoured, among other things, by the rise to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu. The truly interesting discussions for the fate of the novel were initiated by the publication by Al. Piru of G. Călinescu’s letter sent to him in 1950. In the letter, the novelist refers to Al. Piru’s observations about the content of the novel *Bietul Ioanide*, which Piru read in manuscript, being the first reader of the book. In Al. Piru’s opinion, *Bietul Ioanide* represents “the most successful novel reconstructing the years 1938-1941,” in which

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 273.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 278-279.

political life is caricatured and the intellectuals of the time are presented with sarcasm²⁸.

The remarks are unfavourable for G. Călinescu, considering the social context in which the novel is published. Therefore, the writer tries to create a diversion around the book, shifting the focus from the political dimension to the erotic one:

“I excluded the idea of writing a novel about political life from the very beginning. [...] In *Enigma Otiliei*, the erotic dominates (as in *Cartea nunții*), love and decrepitude being the terms between which life was contemplated. [...] But the underlying essence of *Bietul Ioanide* is the same.”²⁹

Comparing some characters from *Bietul Ioanide* with others from *Enigma Otiliei*, G. Călinescu argues that Ioanide is a subtle understander of love, having a temperament similar to that of Pascalopol. However, the architect has a broader conception of femininity than the landowner, which he does not fix in a single woman but in several. The novelist confesses that in *Bietul Ioanide* he was only interested in character analysis, the historical time being chosen randomly to avoid “the dullness of writings purged of history and geography.” Ioanide is not interested in Tudorel’s politics but in his relationship with his son; Pomponescu is a fascinating character not for his political actions but for his relationship with the three women: Maman, Mamy and Indolenta, and Tudorel’s journal is “a document of juvenile psychoses,” which is not limited to immediate reality, despite the fact that the clichés of the time are reflected in it.

Following G. Călinescu, wanting to aesthetically rehabilitate the novel *Bietul Ioanide*, Nicolae Manolescu continues the allusive game instituted by the novelist and publishes the article *Ioanide și eroziunea timpului*³⁰ (‘Ioanide and the Erosion of Time’) in “Astra”. The critic asserts that *Bietul Ioanide* is not a political novel but one of ideas, in which the theme of creation and of the creator is in the foreground:

²⁸ Al. Piru, 1966, „Mărturisiri despre «Bietul Ioanide»”, in: *Gazeta literară*, București, Year XIII, Issue 11, 17 March, p. 6.

²⁹ G. Călinescu, *Scrisoare către Al. Piru (18 februarie 1950)*, in *art. cit.*

³⁰ Nicolae Manolescu, 1968, „Ioanide și eroziunea timpului”, in: *Astra*, Brașov, Year III, Issue 2, February, pp. 8-9.

“[...] a kind of conte philosophique in which there are no characters with complex souls, but purely moral or spiritual hypostases, in which the only true plan is that of the idea. The deep content of the novel is one of ideas. The heroes, the circumstances, their relationships do not exist but illustrate, the reality of the book is interior and abstract, projected in the Chinese shadows of a great spectacle.”³¹

Ioanide is not concerned with the everyday, he meditates on the unfortunate events caused by the death of the two children and realises that he can only achieve eternity through his work. The university professors in the group of intellectuals – Hagienuş, Sufleţel – are erudite, but they do not live the ideas, they collect them, and gradually, surrounded only by object-ideas, they depersonalise, having a mechanical existence. Unlike the group of intellectuals, Gavrilcea and Tudorel, “symbols of the idea of spiritual living,” renounce intellectual sterility and value action. The two are fanatics of ideas, which they live intensely, and reject the past, glorifying only the present. Therefore, Nicolae Manolescu observes, their actions are subject to erosion, uselessness in the plan of creation. The one who overcomes nothingness, through his work, is the creator:

“[...] death is terrible as the absence of man, of his creative power. However, when man does not use his genius to transform the knowledge of the universe into possession, but lets himself be possessed by the universe, he is annulled as a man. Creation means discovering a human meaning even in death.”³²

In *Scriitorul și timpul istoric*³³ (‘The Writer and Historical Time’), George Ivașcu offers Nicolae Manolescu a sharp reply and confesses that he is interested in the article because the author of the text is the writer of the column at *Contemporanul* and the creation discussed belongs to G. Călinescu. Nicolae Manolescu’s demonstration is reductionist and contradicts –George Ivașcu asserts – both G. Călinescu’s artistic creed, which during the communist years manifested through the moral profile of the creator-citizen, and Marxist-Leninist criticism. Moreover, Manolescu presents Tudorel and Gavrilcea, the very representatives of Nae Ionescu’s existentialism, in a favourable light. However, Ivașcu remarks with irony, Manolescu’s article,

³¹ *Ibidem.*

³² *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³³ George Ivașcu, 1968, „Scriitorul și timpul istoric”, in: *Contemporanul*, București, Issue 20, 17 May, p. 1; 9.

published in the Braşov magazine, is a singular case, “the exception that... confirms the rule,” because at *Contemporanul* the critic exercises his activity with lucidity and professional integrity³⁴.

George Ivaşcu proposes another interpretation of the novel *Bietul Ioanide* by which – ignoring the textual evidence – he situates Călinescu’s novelistic discourse within the grid of socialist realism. According to the editor-in-chief of *Contemporanul*, G. Călinescu “vibrated to the imperatives of historical time,” an attitude present both in the writer’s public activity and literary creation. The years of the fifth decade represent for G. Călinescu a decisive social moment which he eternalises in the novel *Bietul Ioanide*. George Ivaşcu considers that the accusations brought against the novel at its appearance are unjust. In fact, *Ioanide* pretends to be indifferent to the world, “him being, however, a *man of the present*, putting his entire existence in the service of creation. [...] By the nature of things, *Ioanide* has a permanent vision of the future, but he builds his *future through the present*.”³⁵ Moreover, the architect despises the far-right forces active in Romania in the years 1935-1940, and in Gavrilcea, the Legionary leader, he sees “a monster of sub-humanity.”

Al. Oprea is also dissatisfied with Nicolae Manolescu’s intervention. In his article *Formule ale exclusivismului în critica literară*³⁶ (‘Formulas of Exclusivism in Literary Criticism’), he refers to the trends manifested in literary criticism. In recent years (1964-1968), there had been a rejection of creative *uniformity*, with a search for novelty and new aesthetic horizons. However, Al. Oprea observes that some young critics, including Nicolae Manolescu, misinterpret the Party’s nobility and understanding, and absolutize their opinions, even if they are not in line with reality. A “valuable young critic,” Nicolae Manolescu becomes a victim of exclusivist ambition and distorts the content of the novel *Bietul Ioanide* through the interpretative scenario he proposes. It is true – Al. Oprea asserts – that initially G. Călinescu’s book was analysed using “narrow sociological” methods, but Manolescu falls into the opposite extreme, idealising certain facets of the

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Al. Oprea, 1968, „Formule ale exclusivismului în critica literară”, in: *Scântea*, Year XXXVII, Bucureşti, Issue 7661, 2 April, p. 4.

novel, which he labels as a *conte philosophique*, and: “Things become quite evident – even taking on annoying forms – when the critic characterises Gavrilcea and Tudorel.”³⁷

Besides the mentioned polemic Nicolae Manolescu vs. George Ivaşcu & co., other articles from the period also aim to aesthetically revise the novel *Bietul Ioanide*. Some reviewers refer to the geometric construction of characters and the epic discourse (Voicu Bugariu³⁸), others analyse the *Centurion Movement* (Mihai Coman³⁹) or the condition of genius in the Romanian topos represented by the Olympian Ioanide (Constantin Sorescu)⁴⁰. There are also critics who initiate series in various publications and propose more or less viable interpretative scenarios. Among them are Petre-Mihai Gorcea, Eugen Simion and Ion Lotreanu⁴¹.

Petru Mihai Gorcea⁴² proposes a thematic analysis, identifying two themes of the novel: death and the social theme. The demonstration by which the author shows how the characters’ destinies confront death is interesting. In other words, Petre Mihai Gorcea transforms G. Călinescu’s novel into one of death, where the struggle between body and soul, matter and spirit, is observed. At the same time, the characters can be classified according to how they understand “existence beyond death,” although none of Călinescu’s heroes meditate on the “religious immortality of the soul, none project their being into the transcendent.” The young people in the Movement group stand

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ Voicu Bugariu, 1973, „O utopie a romanului”, in: *Luceafărul*, Bucureşti, Year XVIII, Issue 34, 25 August, p. 6.

³⁹ Mihai Coman, 1977, „Demistificarea centurionilor”, in: *Luceafărul*, Bucureşti, Year XX, Issue 28, 9 July, p. 1; 7.

⁴⁰ Constantin Sorescu, 1976, „Creatorul în faţa istoriei”, in: *Luceafărul*, Bucureşti, Year XIX, Issue 12, 20 March, p. 1; 6.

⁴¹ Ion Lotreanu signs the following articles in 1979 in: *Săptămâna culturală a capitalei*, Bucureşti,: *Romanul între idealitate şi realitate*, Issue 442, 25 May, p.3; *Eroi călinescieni*, Issue 444, 8 June, p. 3; *Eroi călinescieni*, Issue 445, 15 June 1979, p.3; *Eroi călinescieni*, Issue 446, 22 June 1979, p. 3; *Eroi călinescieni*, Issue 447, 29 June 1979, p. 3; *Concluzia lui Ioanide*, Issue 448, 6 July 1979, p. 3;

⁴² The series was published by Petru Mihai Gorcea in the *Argeş* magazine and spanned three years; There are some differences in the way the author signs: Petru Mihai Gorcea, 1973, *Bietul Ioanide – structuri şi sensuri (I)*, *Argeş*, Piteşti, Year VIII, Issue 11, November, p. 12; Petru Mihai Gorcea, 1973, *Bietul Ioanide – structuri şi sensuri (II)*, in *Argeş*, Issue 12, December, p. 5; Petre-Mihai Gorcea, “*Bietul Ioanide*” – *intelectuali contemplativi*, 1974, in: *Argeş*, Piteşti, Year IX, Issue 5, July, pp. 5; 14; Petru Mihai Gorcea, 1975, “*Bietul Ioanide*” – *atitudinea faţă de cultură*, in *Argeş*, Piteşti, Year X, Issue 1, March, p. 7.

out, with Cioarec being “at the lowest point” because “he does not have the temptation of permanence in time.” Another group is that of intellectuals, who adhere to “the simple and material idea of biological perpetuation.” The “champion of the group” – according to the reviewer – is Gonzalv Ionescu, the father of three children, procreated with three wives. Pomponescu regrets not having children and understands that the created work is perishable. Above all, even if he does not reach “the ultimate level of complete realisation in all senses,” is Ioanide: “In him, the idea of biological perpetuation and that of spiritual inheritance are present, the latter being assimilated to artistic creation.”⁴³

By far, the most balanced analysis of the novel *Bietul Ioanide*, reflecting a vigilant critical spirit, unwilling to fall into the glorifications specific to the golden age, is carried out by Eugen Simion. His measured judgement is complemented by the critic’s refined style, presenting subtle and fair observations in an elegant, natural form, free from stylistic pedantry. The problem of creation as a mode of existence occupies the foreground of the novel, but – Eugen Simion observes – although G. Călinescu himself makes references to the ballad *Meșterul Manole* (‘Master Manole’), the comparison between the two creations should not be exaggerated:

*“Sacrifice in the ballad is a voluntary act, a cruel covenant with destiny; in Bietul Ioanide, the loss of the children is more of a penalisation act by history, the consequence of determinism: because he ignores the event, the accidental, living in the illusion of absolute creation, the architect loses interest in his children’s education and literally loses them in some dark circumstances. The myth, if it exists, has a primarily moral implication in the novel.”*⁴⁴

Pica and Tudorel, Ioanide’s children, join a right-wing political movement, which leads to their death. Ioanide faces a harsh reality for the first time, especially since he, in the creator’s guise, did not think it appropriate “to walk with a rod in hand and admonish his children’s deviations at every step.”⁴⁵ The tragedy does not change the architect’s spirit, who finds refuge in creation. In the church he builds, he feels as if he were

⁴³ Petru Mihai Gorcea, 1973, „Bietul Ioanide – structuri și sensuri (I)”, in: *Argeș*, Pitești, Year VIII, Issue 11, November, p. 12.

⁴⁴ Eugen Simion, 1975, „G. Călinescu”, the column *Fragmente critice*, in: *Luceafărul*, București, Year XVIII, Issue 25, 21 June, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Eugen Simion, 1975, „Ioanide, curtizanesc și patern (II)”, the column *Fragmente critice*, in: *Luceafărul*, București, Year XVIII, Issue 29, 19 July, p. 6.

immuring the shadow of his two children. However, the sacred dimension of creation is profaned by historical circumstances unfavourable to art. The church becomes a place of worship for the centurions, who mourn their dead, and later it is transformed into the personal foundation of Princess Hangerliu. Nevertheless, Eugen Simion adds: “It could be said that Ioanide fails even in this regard [...], if we did not know that the work remains regardless of degrading circumstances, that the sacred subsists in the profane.”⁴⁶

Besides the theme of creation, the protagonist is also defined by eros, but love does not have a *mystical* nature as G. Călinescu claims; rather – Eugen Simion says – it has a courtly and paternal accent. Ioanide’s relationships with women are worldly and aim to flatter the virile vanity of the artist, whose gaze is constantly drawn to novelty. For Ioanide, Erminia, his wife, is a sanctuary and embodies Juno, the goddess of the family. Explaining his theory of the wife’s sacredness to Erminia, she understands that “the most precious mission of a woman is to respect and stimulate the meritorious man without terrorising him with her obsessions.”⁴⁷ Like G. Călinescu, Eugen Simion treats the architect’s amorous adventures indulgently, because – he asserts – the man’s need to seek “something else” does not affect the family as a traditional institution:

*“These distinctions around eros should not be taken too seriously, I believe, their role in the novel is rather to justify the worldly side of the creator, almost austere otherwise, if we judge the facts morally. [...] His infidelities are games without serious consequences; compared to Balzacian novels, where devastating loves disregard any norm, Bietul Ioanide is an almost chaste novel.”*⁴⁸

The “political reality of the time” is also present in the novel. Although apolitical, Ioanide suffers the disastrous consequences of political fanaticism through the death of his two children. By means of the father and son, G. Călinescu exposes – Eugen Simion observes – two different ways of understanding life. While the architect “builds with the feeling that the work confronts nothingness, the other wants to destroy everything, hastening the

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁷ Eugen Simion, 1975, „Ioanide, curtizanesec și patern (I)”, the column *Fragmente critice*, in: *Luceafărul*, București, Year XVIII, Issue 27, 5 July, p. 6.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem.*

work of nothingness.”⁴⁹ Referring to Tudorel’s existential theory, Eugen Simion contradicts the ideas expressed by Nicolae Manolescu in the article *Ioanide și eroziunea timpului istoric*, but without naming his opponent. Moreover, the critic rejects the accusations made at the novel’s appearance that G. Călinescu sympathises with the architect’s son:

“To associate Tudorel’s revolt with the spirit of the existentialist rebel (an operation that has been done in criticism) seems to me to contradict the real meaning of the book. It is doubtful, for example, that G. Călinescu intended to suggest, through the centurions’ adventure, the idea of spiritual living. [...] Gavrilcea, a ‘fanatic of the idea,’ ‘philosopher of existential anxiety,’ as it has been said again? Hard to imagine. The centurions’ leader represents, through the elementary nature of his intellect, a primary negation of the spirit. [...] Tudorel indicates another nuance, his spirit is closer to meditation, but the horror of culture and political fanaticism make him a criminal similar to Carababă and Gavrilcea.”⁵⁰

In the series published by the journal *Săptămâna culturală a capitalei*, Ion Lotreanu does not exceed the level of a didactic commentary. The reviewer “shows” that he read the novel *Bietul Ioanide*, but the details provided are unnecessary in the textual corpus. At the forefront of the demonstration is the architect Ioanide, through whom G. Călinescu – according to Ion Lotreanu – represented the image of genius, but “a humanised one, not at all stiff, a democratic genius.”⁵¹

Some critics (Ion Lotreanu, Petre Mihai Gorcea) identify in *Bietul Ioanide* a series of taxonomies based on various principles (the heroes’ relationship with death, culture etc.), concluding that above all is the Olympian Ioanide, the genius, the cultured one. In fact, through their discourse, they position themselves at the opposite extreme compared to Marxist critics. For the latter, Ioanide is a disgusting bourgeois, while Ion Lotreanu and Petre Mihai Gorcea idealise the architect and, in some cases (George Ivașcu), even consider him an exemplary representative of socialism. The interventions of Nicolae Manolescu and Eugen Simion remain a

⁴⁹ Eugen Simion, 1975, „Negația creatorului”, rubrica „Fragmente critice”, in: *Luceafărul*, București, Year XVIII, Issue 33, 16 August, p. 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ Ion Lotreanu, 1979, „Eroi călinescieni”, in: *Săptămâna culturală a capitalei*, București, Issue 444, 8 June, p. 3.

reference point in the history of the reception of Călinescu's novel. One is insinuating through the wordplay used in defining the novel, stirring a wave of discontent around it, while the other is meticulous and objective, avoiding emotional implications.

4. *Bietul Ioanide*, a problematising novel

In *Bietul Ioanide*, through the issues exposed – the devastating effects of ideological delirium – G. Călinescu anticipates the novelistic discourse found in post-war novelists like Marin Preda, Augustin Buzura, Alexandru Ivăsiuc, Constantin Țoiu – all interested in the individual's relationship with history. The facts and events found in the novel provide an opportunity for reflection for heroes endowed with a contemplative spirit, with two reflector-characters in the novel: the architect Ioanide and his son, Tudorel, who records his experiences in an intimate journal.

While Ioanide aspires to build eternal monuments, living the process of creation to the point of self-forgetfulness, his son – influenced by the ideology of the Movement – wants to dominate the world with the sword, with the power of terror and fear. Tudorel is a representative of the interwar existentialist generation, influenced by the political theories of the time. A meditative spirit, lettered, he reads Dostoevsky, Gide or Machiavelli, admires American gangsters and is fascinated by political figures like Napoleon, Attila or Genghis Khan. It is a pride to die – Tudorel claims – in a collective clash of unleashed young forces. Being a mere number within the Movement divided into centuries and decuries does not represent a degradation of humanity; for the architect's son, it is a unique chance to belong to a homogeneous group that applies Alexandru Lăpușneanu's method: "cutting down everything in our path."

Through Tudorel, G. Călinescu shows how the message of a literary creation is distorted by the influence of ideological Manichaeism. In the young man's opinion, political assassination can be justified if executed by a social body. Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky's protagonist, is a criminal – Tudorel says – because he acted *alone* and for personal reasons. If he had been part of a group and killed on the orders of superiors, he would have been a hero. Similarly, Lafcadio, the Gidean character from *The Vatican Cellars*, kills out

of egotism and at random. The Movement rejects such gratuitous acts because there is a risk that one of their comrades might be assassinated:

*“Did Gide not ask himself: ‘What if the victim belongs to our group, sharing the same view of life as us?’ It is as if I were to kill comrade Gavrilcea just to spite the police. The suppression of an individual without the command’s order, without the certainty that we are destroying an inferior element, is horrible. We do not commit murders, only executions, following a motivated decision of our tribunal.”*⁵²

In the discussion with his daughter, Pica, about Gavrilcea, Ioanide, a lucid intellectual, does not accept assassination, even if it is committed in the name of political ideals. For the architect, Gavrilcea is a *bandit*, a *terre-à-terre idealist*, living from a simplified idea. Through his revolt and aggressiveness, he becomes a “storm ferment” for any consolidated institution. Although for his close ones (Pica and Tudorel), Gavrilcea is a hero fighting for the imposition of a new world order, in reality – Ioanide observes – his actions are petty because:

*“The distance between a man of war and a criminal is a millimetre. If you rob a bank and kill a man, you are a gangster; if you attack all authorities and kill a thousand people, you have staged a coup. This millimetre is terribly vast; it is the distance between a prison record and a sad chapter in a history manual.”*⁵³

In Tudorel’s “moral testament,” there are also details about the selection process of young people and their transformation into assassins. During history class, instead of the teacher, a substitute, Gavrilcea, appears, whose uninhibited speech (urging actions to create one’s own history) captures the students’ attention. Although he does not consider him intelligent or cultured, Tudorel allows himself to be shaped by Gavrilcea because he gives him attention and trusts him, unlike Ioanide, who ignores him. To become a member of the Movement, Tudorel goes through several stages: he is part of an external unit of sympathisers, students, coordinated by an instructor where he learns “the voluptuousness of submission,” sings Legionary songs in the choir and participates in marches. The climax of the young people’s dehumanisation and their transformation into assassins occurs

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 298.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, pp. 343-344.

with the simulation of an armed attack on the town hall of a village 5 kilometres from Bucharest. Tudorel and other high school students enter the town hall, threaten the mayor and his assistant with toy pistols, demand the keys to the drawer and then leave the building without causing any human or material damage. This is followed by the staging of Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*, in which Tudorel plays the role of Brutus. The same play is reenacted when they kill Dan Bogdan, the university professor, who had earned the Movement members' antipathy due to unfavourable articles published in the press.

Tudorel and his group are not arrested after committing the murder, although the Security had evidence to convict them. The political interests of the moment – the architect's son observes – are favourable to the Movement, with politicians allowing the “new order” in exchange for material or diplomatic benefits. The situation worsens after the killing of a minister, “shot in broad daylight.” Gavrilcea, the moral author of the assassination, cannot be caught because he is hiding at the German Legation. Old cases are reopened by the Government, and Tudorel, Cioarec and Hangerliu are arrested for the murder of Dan Bogdan. Despite Hangerloaia's intervention with authorities at home and abroad to save her nephew, the three are sentenced to death by shooting.

While awaiting his sentence, Tudorel reflects on his own actions. He realises that, unlike Gavrilcea, he has made unforgivable mistakes: instead of being a leader, he allowed himself to be turned into a political tool. Out of romantic defiance, he participated in the attack against Dan Bogdan and compromised himself. Even if he had not been arrested, his colleagues in the Movement would have later used his direct involvement in the assassination to eliminate him from the race for government positions – in the event of victory. Although intellectually superior to Gavrilcea, Tudorel observes that in politics, to ensure victory and even survival, a duplicitous and cold spirit is necessary. Furthermore, the architect's son is filled with doubts: it is possible that his actions and those of the young people of his generation are banal, repetitive in the course of centuries of history:

“Until now, I was obsessed with the notion of history, my ambition was to rise above the banal and work historically. Now, facing death, I see things biologically. Could it be that I am a victim of the common spirit due to a lack of perspective? At the foot of my bed,

because food scraps drip on the floor, a swarm of ants has gathered. I wonder if, in their internal chronicle, the journey of an ant from one leg of the bed to the other is not equivalent to Columbus's expedition across the Atlantic. [...] If the act of wanting to overthrow an order and conspire is biologically characteristic of the human species, then I am a mere example without any historical significance.”⁵⁴

Through Tudorel's journal, G. Călinescu surpasses the prejudice about the literary value of diary texts. The young man's spiritual contradictions and existential anxieties show that the intimate journal is not just a “somewhat feminine device, [...] of individuals who lick their own fur like cats,”⁵⁵ but can be an authentic document, a witness to human experiences. However, not every diary text – G. Călinescu suggests – has aesthetic value. In the novel, Dr Hergot, brother of Erminia, Ioanide's platonic love, keeps a journal. After Pica is killed in a shootout between Gavrilcea and the Security members, several agents search the house of the two siblings. One of them, carelessly, bumps into the doctor's cello, and “the four strings [...] snapped simultaneously,” to Hergot's despair, who takes the musical instrument in his arms “like a child” and carries it to the consultation room. From the entire tragic experience, the doctor notes a banality:

“For the three dramatic days in which Pica had fled with Gavrilcea and had been shot at the tomb's door, Hergot's journal had only this entry: ‘All the strings of the cello snapped.’”⁵⁶

An enigmatic character in the novel is Gavrilcea, the leader of the Movement, because of whom Pica and Tudorel, the architect's children, lose their lives. The novel lacks his point of view, his personality being reflected – like Otilia's – in parallel mirrors: for Pica, he is a hero; for Hagienuş, a murderer; for Butoiescu, “a sensible man who attracts young people because he speaks nicely to them.” However, from the references provided by the other characters in the book, a biography of Gavrilcea takes shape, with differences in the moral interpretation of his actions. The son of a teacher, orphaned, he ends up living in the house of a wealthy uncle. After a while, he enrolls in a seminary from which he is expelled for not respecting the church

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 584-585.

⁵⁵ G. Călinescu, 2006, Mircea Eliade, „Şantier”, in: *Opere. Publicistică (1933-1935)*, vol. II, Bucureşti, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, p. 1022.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 419.

canon, urging his colleagues to become soldiers of the church and sacrifice themselves for the good of the Romanian people. He does not adapt to the army either: he is accused of hitting a soldier but acquitted due to lack of evidence. The murder of the sub-prefect, opposed to the party led by Gavrilcea and whom he had threatened with death, leads to his arrest.

Interested in finding out why Pica and Tudorel are fascinated by Gavrilcea's personality, Ioanide seeks information from those who know the young man. Hagienuş provides him with materials from Gavrilcea's trial, as they appear in two newspapers: one favourable, the other unfavourable. The novelist combines different literary styles – journalistic style, juridical-administrative style, to which he adds everyday conversation, subjective impressions influenced by the emotional involvement of the witnesses. The result is a relative truth, requiring the reader's lucidity to understand the historical facts. Analysing the testimonies of those involved in the trial, Ioanide finds that not all historians tell the truth, and people should analyse and judge events if they do not want to accept prefabricated truths from fanatics' followers:

“‘What is the truth?’ Ioanide wonders, walking through the office with his hands in his pockets after Botticelli leaves. Pica, Hagienuş, the prosecutor, the lawyer, Butoiescu have all given their opinions about Gavrilcea, and, moreover, Gavrilcea himself defined himself at the trial. Who tells the truth and who lies? In each version, there is something credible; each judges from their own point of view. [...] Gavrilcea, gentle! Yes. Gentleness often goes very well with a sanguinary instinct; southerners have an unctuous calm that charms. Terrorists have illustrated themselves through the most tender family feelings, even through a domestic spirit. [...] The human soul presents the most paradoxical contrasts.”⁵⁷

Marxist critics reproached G. Călinescu for the absence of a communist hero in the novel and for not turning Gavrilcea into a Legionary monster by using a single point of view in his presentation. In fact, through the “deficiencies” noted, the novelist suggests that both the representatives of right-wing ideological delirium and those of the left condemn people to death and destroy lives through terror and injustices committed. In the novel *Bietul Ioanide*, G. Călinescu proves that he is not only a novelist of sentimental intrigues

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 367.

or of the wealthy bourgeoisie but also an impartial analyst of interwar ideologies, of the bloody power struggles that cause mass human losses.

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