

# MARIN SORESCU TOUCHED BY THE WING OF DESTINY

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## **Abstract:**

This study explores a series of previously unexamined aspects concerning the reception of Marin Sorescu’s poetry during his early literary debut. It also delves into literary history as a reflection of the reverence the poet extends to the eminent cultural figure G. Călinescu, in gratitude for having his verses commented upon in the latter’s renowned column in *Contemporanul*.

We are not, strictly speaking, dealing with a correspondence, but rather with a brief epistolary moment in Sorescu’s life. The two letters sent to G. Călinescu during the final months of his life received no reply. Yet they reveal Marin Sorescu’s “monologue” on his own lyrical universe, through which Călinescu gains insight into the young poet’s views on the role of poetry, interwoven with examples from his own work. This unveiling of a creative programme unfolds in the form of a confession, one that does not shy away from acknowledging certain (literary) transgressions.

The “meanings” conveyed by G. Călinescu in his laudatory article *Un tânăr poet* (‘A Young Poet’) represent the final evaluative text in his long career and acquire the significance of a message to posterity. Călinescu’s critical intuition proved accurate regarding the literary future of the one who would become, as poet, playwright, literary critic and essayist, one of Romania’s most important writers. In conclusion, it may be said that the great Romanian critic stamped his authoritative seal upon the auspicious destiny of the young debutant in Romanian culture and literature.

Lastly, the handwriting of the two letters invites nuanced interpretations regarding the way this native possessor of the “simple perfect” tense wrote and thought.

## **Keywords:**

Epistolary, original, poetry, debut, Marin Sorescu, G. Călinescu.

## **1. Destiny as Challenge**

This article aims to investigate the literary beginnings of Marin Sorescu (1936-1996), a poet whose remarkable oeuvre has illuminated the firmament of Romanian and world literature for several decades. His early literary steps reveal a constellation of elements that affirm his exceptional destiny, suggesting that from birth, fate had bestowed upon Sorescu “gifts” that endured through his formative years and were later confirmed by his mature artistic achievements.

The first sign of this destiny is found in the date of his birth: 29 February 1936, a day that recurs only once every four years. This calendrical rarity inaugurates a series of paradoxes that marked his biography, with the physical man and his spiritual double continuously interweaving life and work throughout the years.

The second sign is the intervention of the “divine critic”, who spots Sorescu’s latent, unmanifested talent. G. Călinescu lifts the veil from a debut rich in promise, becoming the first to accelerate the poet’s recognition and validate his worth. Călinescu’s two interventions in *Contemporanul* overnight transformed Marin Sorescu’s artistic status – from a promising verse writer to a celebrated poet.

The third sign in this play of chance is the *sui generis* nature of Sorescu’s artistic endowments, profusely highlighted by Călinescu. Over time, the “poet’s planet” generously and deservedly granted to him becomes a halo of fame: Marin Sorescu’s works are translated into widely circulated languages and his oeuvre remained for years in the antechamber of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Focusing on this phase of existence, we offer several fragments from the puzzle of this Romanian Don Quixote’s “youth”.

## **2. Marin Sorescu Writing to G. Călinescu**

This subtitle is deliberately chosen, as the gerund form of the verb suggests a continuous, durative action, immediately dispelling the assumption that we are dealing with a reciprocal exchange of letters. The epistles discussed in this article were not answered through postal correspondence. The poet could not have expected a similar gesture from the great scholar. All plausible hypotheses confirm, beyond doubt, that G. Călinescu was unable to

respond to the young Sorescu's letters. We shall return to this point.

Nevertheless, an interaction between the two does occur, albeit in an atypical manner, via different "channels". This deviation from the norm becomes, in this case, the exception that proves the rule. The messages contained in the poet's letters, forming what might be termed an "interpersonal" format<sup>1</sup>, receive a response through mass media, a social channel with far greater reach and visibility. This method reconstructs the sender-message-receiver schema, completing the communicative paradigm at both ends.

Beyond the factual details of their correspondence, the "film" of this literary debut must be expanded from three to seven episodes, allowing for a reconfiguration of the whole along a temporal axis.

### **3. The Film / Thread of Events**

1. On the occasion of the launch of the poetry volume *Lauda Lucrurilor* (1963)<sup>2</sup>, from among the crowd of admirers present in the bookstore, a very shy young man gathers his courage and asks G. Călinescu for a dedication in the newly released book. Following a brief dialogue, consisting of questions about the stranger's name and interests, G. Călinescu writes on the front page: "To Marin Sorescu, to whom I wish to become a Morning Star". The dedication leaves a deep impression on him.

2. Less than a year later, in March 1964, Marin Sorescu makes his editorial debut with the small volume *Singur printre poeți. Parodii*<sup>3</sup> ('Alone

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<sup>1</sup> In this case, the *sender-receiver* relationship (or *emitter-receiver*, in communication theory) is deprived of its second term and, consequently, fails to satisfy the paradigm of communication.

<sup>2</sup> *Lauda Lucrurilor*, Editura pentru Literatură, București, 1963, comprises poems written between 1937 and 1963. The volume was reviewed, in chronological order of publication, by Șerban Cioculescu ("Gazeta literară", 22 August 1963), Radu Enescu ("Tribuna", no. 39/26 September 1963), Eugen Simion ("Gazeta literară", no. 44/ 31 October 1963), Mihail Petroveanu ("Secolul 20", no. 11, 1963), Silvian Iosifescu ("Flacăra" (25 January 1964) and Savin Bratu ("Luceafărul", no. 4, 15 February 1964).

<sup>3</sup> Marin Sorescu, *Singur printre poeți*, Editura pentru Literatură (1964), with a *Foreword* by Marcel Breslașu. The volume was reviewed by: G. Dimisianu ("Gazeta literară", 5 March 1964), Eugen Simion, ("Gazeta literară", 19 March 1964), Mircea Anghelescu ("România liberă", 25 March 1964), Ion Dodu Bălan ("Luceafărul", 11 April 1964), Ion Lungu ("Tribuna", 16 April 1964), Nicolae Dragoș ("Scânteia tineretului", 25 May 1964), Sanda Radian ("Viața Românească", no. 7/July 1964). G. Călinescu welcomed the appearance of the *Parodies* in a sentence from his article *Muzica ușoară*, published in his column *Cronica*

Among Poets. Parodies’). Known and appreciated in literary circles – as evidenced by the seven reviews dedicated to the author, as well as the provocative title, rich in layered meanings that many tried to decipher<sup>4</sup> – Sorescu was, at the time, among the young authors eager to assert themselves, highly active in the field of literary journalism.

The parodies reach – certainly not through Marin Sorescu himself – the eyes of the critic, who mentions them in a digression published in *Contemporanul*, no. 40 / 20 September. Without suspecting for a moment that the poet named in the review *Muzica ușoară* (‘Light Music’) was the same unknown youth who had once requested an autograph, G. Călinescu writes: “A young poet, Marin Sorescu, of rare critical intelligence, which belongs to the realm of creative imagination (*Singur printre poeți*), leads me to suspect that he will succeed in serious poetry. He has written a number of parodies...”<sup>5</sup>.

4. A few days later, or very shortly thereafter, Marin Sorescu places a letter of thanks into the post-box of the residence on Vlădescu Street no. 53, accompanied by 21 poems already published in the magazine *Luceafărul*. The reaction to the thanks is one of Călinescu’s characteristic pride<sup>6</sup>, yet the verses arouse his interest to the highest degree. At the same time, the lines received allow him to identify the author as the same person to whom he had once offered a more-than-flattering dedication.

5. Three weeks later, in *Contemporanul*, no. 43 / 9 October, G. Călinescu signs the article *Un tânăr poet* (‘A Young Poet’), this time dedicated to the poems that Marin Sorescu had placed in his post-box. The idea, common in the biographies of both men, that G. Călinescu had praised

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*optimistului* (‘The Optimist’s Review’), in “*Contemporanul*”, no. 40/20 September 1964). *Singur printre poeți* would go on to have three editions. The volume, republished by Editura Junimea, Iași, 1972, includes two additional chapters (*Postume* and *Meridiane*). The third edition, revised and expanded by the author, was published in 1990, by InterCONTEMPPress.

<sup>4</sup> Mircea Anghelescu, *Singur printre poeți*, in “*România liberă*”, no. 6046, 25 March 1964, was the first to draw attention to the symbolic references in the title.

<sup>5</sup> The record could be interpreted, with justified goodwill, as a continuation of the dedication, had *Singur printre poeți* appeared a year earlier.

<sup>6</sup> “I am flint when it comes to praise and generally suspicious *en diable*, so my young friend should be assured that I will be incorruptible, like the jury in Tokyo”. That year, the Olympic Games had taken place in Tokyo.

a debut volume takes on new meaning: the digression<sup>7</sup> through which he had greeted the poet did not refer to his editorial debut, but rather represents a premonition, a gesture *avant la lettre* pointing towards the future of Marin Sorescu's creative work. It is the "literary sign" through which destiny marks the encounter between these two personalities.

6. On 9 November 1964, Marin Sorescu sends, this time by post, a second letter. Only in the content of this letter does a dialogue begin to take shape – atypical, yet in the true sense of the word. The newspaper clippings containing the poems sent to G. Călinescu include, in addition to those from *Luceafărul*, poems published in the magazine *Viața Românească*.

7. Three weeks after receiving Sorescu's final epistle, more precisely on 24 November, gravely ill, G. Călinescu is admitted to the sanatorium led by Ana Aslan in Otopeni, where he passes away on 12 March 1965.

#### **4. From the Biography of Beginnings to the Biography of Endings**

Marin Sorescu's editorial beginnings occur within the historical-literary circumstances surrounding the death of the great scholar. The well-known biographer of the critic, Ion Bălu, records this fact in his monograph *Viața lui G. Călinescu*<sup>8</sup> ('The Life of G. Călinescu'): "In literary circles, it was known that G. Călinescu was gravely ill". Recently appointed deputy editor-in-chief of the magazine *Amfiteatru*, Fănuș Neagu signed the column *Eram bărbatul care...*<sup>9</sup> ('I Was the Man Who...'). Invoking the title of a poem by Călinescu, the author recounts in his unmistakable style, full of stylistic exaggerations, that "he had sat several times, at night, on the vacant lot at the end of the street, as if patiently waiting for tram no. 5, watching the 'house guarded by dragons'. When the curtain swayed at the window, threatening to reveal my shadow, I would retreat, carrying within me *the fascination*

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<sup>7</sup> Review *Muzica ușoară*, in: "Contemporanul", no. 40/ 20 September.

<sup>8</sup> Ion Bălu, *Viața lui G. Călinescu*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1981, pp. 424 - 429, *passim*. The text written by Ion Bălu, highly condensed, contains a series of brief references to articles, notes and recollections from the press of the time, brought as additional arguments: Fănuș Neagu, *Eram bărbatul care...*, in "Amfiteatru", no. 1, 1966, p. 1; Ion Bălu, G. Călinescu, *Biobibliografie*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1975.

<sup>9</sup> Fănuș Neagu, *Eram bărbatul care...*, in "Amfiteatru", no. 1, 1966, p. 1.

of a unique moment, the one in which I might have truly glimpsed his leonine brow”<sup>10</sup>.

Concern for the health of the man who, from the heights of the literary empyrean, had become attached to new social values<sup>11</sup>, was widespread. This is evident in the fifteen lines from the final part of Ion Bălu’s monograph. Of particular note is the mention of Marin Sorescu: “Others were bolder”, writes the biographer, adding: “Encouraged by the laudatory mention in an ‘optimist’s review’, Marin Sorescu clipped and sent all his published poems to him. The verses pleased the recipient.” Ion Bălu summarises the episode of reading the poems, also drawing on other sources: “Dinu Pillat found him in the upstairs bedroom ‘delighted’.”

The portrait written by Dinu Pillat<sup>12</sup> three years after the critic’s death is also explicit: “The last time I visited him, shortly after his admission to the sanatorium in Otopeni, he was lying in the upstairs bedroom, with his eyes on a page from an issue of *Luceafărul*, containing some poems by Marin Sorescu. He read me a few of them (*Dansează, Shakespeare, Trebuiau să*

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<sup>10</sup> We quote from the opening verses: “*Eram bărbatul care-n singurătăți petrece, / Ca vulturul pleșuv pitit în stânca rece./ Nesuferind câmpia fugeam de cei de jos,/ Băteam din aripi iute spre muntele sticlos, / Și peste creste ninse făcând ochiuri rare/ Granitul mohorât îl apucam în gheare/ Să scriu pe cer eclipse eu mă credeam ales. Pe sus scoteam un țipăt de nimeni înțeles.*” (which roughly translates as: ‘I was the man who dwelled in solitude, / Like the bald eagle hidden in the cold rock. / Not bearing the plain, I fled from those below, / Beating my wings swiftly toward the glassy mountain, / And over snowy peaks, circling rarely, / I seized the grim granite in my claws / To write eclipses on the sky – I believed myself chosen. / Above, I let out a cry no one understood.’).

<sup>11</sup> Hinting at the importance of the “lyre” in new times, G. Călinescu made subtle allusions to the social role of the creator: “*Cântam. Dar prea departe de ei ședeam în șa,/ Din gura mea un murmur nedeslușit ieșea./ Descălecai. Le-am zis: - În obște mă prenumăr,/ Lăsați-mi bușteanul să-l țin și eu pe umăr./ Din moară să scot sacii, albit tot de făină,/ Să trag cu voi din baltă de pește plasa plină./ Veghea-voi turma noastră-n ocolul de nuiiele,/ Cu plumb și cu mistrie urca-mă-voi pe schele./ Frățește mi-au strâns mâna: - Tovarăș fii cu noi,/ Un fluier simplu taie-ți și fă-ne cânturi noi*”. (i.e. I sang, But too far from them I sat in the saddle, / From my mouth a murmur indistinctly emerged. / I dismounted. I said: ‘Count me among the commune, / Let me carry the log on my shoulder, / From the mill let me haul the sacks, whitened with flour, / Let me help you draw the net full of fish from the pond. / I shall watch our flock in the wicker pen, / With lead and trowel I shall climb the scaffolding. / They clasped my hand brotherly: ‘Be our comrade, / Carve yourself a simple flute and make us new songs.’).

<sup>12</sup> Dinu Pillat, *Mozaic istorico-literar. Secolul XX*, EPL, București, 1969, pp. 171-180. Dinu Pillat, *Mozaic istorico-literar*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1971, pp. 254-256.; Dinu Pillat, *Mozaic istorico-literar. Secolul XX*, Humanitas, București, 2013, pp. 222-230.

*poarte un nume*), confessing that he wished he could be a poet like Marin Sorescu.” Confronted with the up-until-now novel letters, Dinu Pillat’s account must be amended: it is likely that the former assistant of G. Călinescu mistook the clippings from *Luceafărul* for the publication itself.<sup>13</sup>

However, the information “that G. Călinescu wished to be a poet like Marin Sorescu” sheds clarifying light on the affinities of their artistic substance and the communion of two spirits, both immortalised through their membership in the Romanian Academy. In his evocation *G. Călinescu*, Dinu Pillat also presents the concerns of the researchers from the institute that would bear the name of the great departed. The inevitable biographical end is described as follows: “... In his final days, visited at the Otopeni Sanatorium by someone who hesitated at the door before entering, he was overheard saying aloud to himself: ‘There is nothing more to be done.’ This detail seems to me the most tragic in the story of G. Călinescu’s end.”

Equally moving, in its tragic dimension, was the death of Marin Sorescu. For the poet, who departed from his contemporaries at only 61 years of age, “there was nothing more to be done”.<sup>14</sup>

## **5. The Letter of Gratitude Prompted by the First Article by Călinescu**

In the review titled *Muzica ușoară*, published in *Contemporanul* no. 40 / 20 September, in fact a digression, G. Călinescu writes the brief sentence already quoted above. Deeply moved by the mention of his name, the young poet places a letter of

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<sup>13</sup> We must fulfil our duty to note that among the poems sent by Marin Sorescu, the poem *Trebuiau să poarte un nume* (‘They Had to Have a Name’) (noted in the correspondence under the title *Eminescu*) is not found or was not preserved/attached to the letters.

<sup>14</sup> Although it may seem unrelated to Marin Sorescu’s literary beginnings, the ending brings them together once again. With a lucidity that many lose in the face of death, Marin Sorescu wrote a series of 47 poems titled *Ultimele* (‘The Last Ones’). Here is an excerpt from *Scară la cer* (‘Ladder to Heaven’): “*Un fir de păianjen/ Atârnă de tavan,/ Exact deasupra patului meu./ În fiecare zi observ/Cum se lasă tot mai jos./ Mi se trimite și/Scara la cer – zic,/Mi se aruncă de sus!/Deși am slăbit îngrozitor de mult,/Sunt doar fantoma celui ce am fost./Mă gândesc că trupul meu/Este totuși prea greu/ Pentru scara asta delicată.// – Suflăte, ia-o tu înainte, Pâș! Pâș!*” (roughly ‘*A spider’s thread / Hangs from the ceiling, / Right above my bed. / Each day I notice / It droops lower and lower. / I say to myself: / A ladder to heaven is being sent to me, / It’s being thrown down from above! / Though I’ve grown terribly thin, / I am but the ghost of who I once was. / I think my body / Is still too heavy / For this delicate ladder. // – Soul, you go ahead, Tiptoe!*’)

gratitude into the post-box of G. Călinescu's residence, accompanied by poems clipped from the magazine where he had recently been employed<sup>15</sup>. The salutation (*Mult stimată domnule profesor*, 'Most esteemed Professor') indicates deference towards the most prestigious social position, one denied to G. Călinescu following his removal from the university chair in 1947, under circumstances that have been documented<sup>16</sup>. The sender gives voice to the emotions stirred by reading the article: "On Friday morning, picking up *Contemporanul*, and first reading *Cronica optimismului*, I felt a great emotion upon seeing my modest name brought to your attention."

The young Sorescu gives the two lines written by G. Călinescu the dimension of an *astral moment*: "*Your words of warm appreciation were a happy surprise for me, for which I thank you and am deeply grateful.*" He adds, equally respectfully, that the praise came from his great cultural "model": "*I grew up in the magnetic field of your writings. A presence like that of Călinescu in a culture makes one optimistic, makes one think that even from this earth one can touch the celestial vault with one's brow.*" He then explains why he did not send his debut book to the critic, thus revealing his timidity, which acted as a barrier between his desire for recognition and the respect he felt was due: "*I did not dare to send you the book upon its release. It would have been as if I had placed in an envelope, addressed to Eminescu, some random poetic attempts. For no one, I believe, since Eminescu, has attained the prestige you enjoy, and which is destined to grow unceasingly in the consciousness of this people.*"

Seeing in G. Călinescu the most representative figure of literary criticism in Romanian history, Marin Sorescu considers him akin to Eminescu in the realm of poetry. Although in the field of historical-literary research and analysis rankings are out of place, the idea of primacy remains admissible, and the young poet's assertion continues to be supported by arguments even today.

The letter contains a postscript of inner satisfaction: he reminds the critic of the dedication he received: "On your volume of poetry you wrote: 'To Marin Sorescu, to whom I wish to become a Morning Star.'" By reproducing it, Marin Sorescu implies that it was "the hand of destiny." After which the hesitant, withdrawn young man instantly becomes doubtful: "Oh, if only I could hurl myself

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<sup>15</sup> We list the titles: *Reminiscență, Pașaport, Melcul, Fuga, Viziune, Leda, Moartea Ceasului, Rame, Shakespeare, Don Quijote și Sancho Panza, Vis, Tatăl nostru, Soarele, Galileo Galilei, Bătrânul fără mare, Dansează, Vibrații, Ceramică, Printr-un ochi de sticlă, Muzeul satului, Imn, Pornire, Laocoon, Marii bărbai, Horoscop, Am legat, Viscol, Totul, De două ori, Șah, Focul sacru, Poveste, Munții*. The poem *Trebuiau să poarte un nume* is missing from the recorded series.

<sup>16</sup> Al. Piru, 1992, pp. 139-142.



into that wish, like Don Quixote into the plains of Spain!”<sup>17</sup> The image of the knight of the woeful countenance would haunt him obsessively over the years. For instance, the programmatic article written by Marin Sorescu for the launch of the new series of *Literatorul* (September 1991) was titled *Cu avânt pe apa Sâmbetei* and was accompanied by Pablo Picasso’s famous sketch (1955) depicting the dreaming hidalgo and his companion, Sancho Panza.

Under these auspices, Marin Sorescu confided in his first letter, not sent by post, but slipped, after long hesitation<sup>18</sup>, together with the group of poems clipped from *Luceafărul*, into the slot of the post-box on the street where G. Călinescu lived.

## **6. A Young Poet**

Under the circumstances described above, the magazine *Contemporanul*, no. 43, dated 9 October 1964, in the column maintained by G. Călinescu, an extension of the series once titled *Cronicile mizantropului* (‘The Misanthrope’s Reviews’), which had since evolved into the ideologically necessary *Cronicile optimistului* (‘The Optimist’s Reviews’), published the article *Un tânăr poet*<sup>19</sup> (‘A Young Poet’), entirely focused on the poems sent to him by Marin Sorescu.

Several aspects emerge from the article.

The first concerns the verbatim repetition of the brief appreciation from the previous article: “In my review of *Muzica ușoară*, I quoted a parody by Marin Sorescu, highlighting *his rare critical intelligence, which I placed within the realm of creative fantasy, suspecting that the young man ‘will succeed in serious poetry.’*”

In the second, the critic recalls the letter and the poems received, admitting that, through a twist of fate, he had met the young Sorescu nearly a

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<sup>17</sup> The one who had already written several poems dedicated to “Don Quixote’s youth” would obsessively preserve the image throughout his entire career. For instance, the programmatic article in *Literatorul*, new series, 1991–1996, was titled *Cu avânt pe apa Sâmbetei* and was accompanied by Pablo Picasso’s famous sketch (1955) depicting the Spanish literary hero and his companion, Sancho Panza.

<sup>18</sup> “I realised once again how many readers you have and what your word means to them. I was so moved that I was almost sad. I had regrets after sending you those poems (I carried the envelope in my briefcase for several days, one day I went to the post office and sent it registered, only to return half an hour later, desperate to retrieve it. When I set out for your residence, the subconscious reasoning that almost drove me was that the road being very long – I walked – I would change my mind).”

<sup>19</sup> The article was republished in G. Călinescu, *Literatura nouă*, 1972, pp. 211–216, and later in G. Călinescu, *Opere*, vol. XI *Publicistică* (1963–1965). *Conferințe*, pp. 464–469.

year earlier: “The poet sent me clippings from *Luceafărul* and a few kind lines from which it appears that I met him not long ago.” His penetrating gaze misses no defining detail: “I now perfectly recall the words exchanged and *the sudden timidity of the young man.*”

After a *captatio benevolentiae* (“In recent times, a few young poets have emerged with an undeniably novel style”), G. Călinescu moves into an *exordium ex abrupto*. The abstract noun “fundamental” is followed by the phrase “exceptional capacity”, and then by a series of qualities we extract: “the fantastic of humble things”, “the immense dimension of common themes”, “enthusiastic and intoxicated by the universe”, “childlike, sensitive and full of thoughts to the edge of fear of the novelty of existence”, “a cry of admiration before sublimity”, “the *witz*, the malice, fantastic as well”.

Drawing attention to the shift of metaphor towards paradox (“the method floats in the air throughout universal poetry and produces, without departing from intelligible language, considerable effects”), the critic concludes: “Marin Sorescu, in the 21 poems he sent me, uses a simple technique, which is permitted only to spontaneous talent. He finds a point of view that has occurred to no one else, places the egg like Columbus, breaking the shell at the spherical end, and then, finding stability, speaks in the simplest manner.”

G. Călinescu quotes and extensively comments on the poems *Capriciu*, *Shakespeare*, *Galileo Galilei*, *Eminescu* [*Trebuie să poarte un nume*], extending his appreciation to the whole. He also defines Sorescu’s lyrical portrait, distancing him from the parodic tradition of G. Topârceanu, in order to confer upon him a new artistic status: “Marin Sorescu is already a lyric poet full of originality. [...] I can now say only this: that ‘parodist’ in the usual sense of the word, even in the sense of G. Topârceanu, he is not, but, if you will, a fantasist.”

## **7. The Second Letter**

Retracing a path that resembles walking on air, shortly after the publication of *Un tânăr poet*, Marin Sorescu sends, this time by post, a second letter. As in the previous case, the salutation is “Most esteemed Professor” and contains the same ebb and flow of emotions. Overcoming the complexes caused by the great intellectual disparity in this dialogue that unites an

academician with a young editor from *Viața studentască* (by then transferred to *Luceafărul*), he confides to the critic that, after long hesitation stemming from the considerations above, he decided to write because “I had to thank you. For everything you have done for me”. The same kind of indecision clarifies how his first letter reached G. Călinescu: “I had regrets after sending you those poems (I carried the envelope in my briefcase for several days, one day I went to the post office and sent it registered, only to return half an hour later, desperate to retrieve it. When I set out for your residence, the subconscious reasoning that almost drove me was that the road being very long – I walked – I would change my mind).”

He then returns, allusively, to the magnetic effect of Călinescu’s personality<sup>20</sup>, now reflected upon himself: “For several days, a vast telephone network was in operation, I received congratulations from all sides and felt something of the love that surrounds you directed toward me. I realised once again how many readers you have and what your word means to them.”

Finally, after these introductory passages, wearing his modesty like a cloak weighed down by inevitable obligations, Sorescu confesses: “I *must* tell you that I never wrote a poem with the intention of publishing it (that would inhibit me), but rather with the desire to throw it out the window.” This paradoxical statement is justified as follows: “I can do whatever I want with my thoughts and I can think everything for myself, with an absolute sincerity – that seems to me a formidable human trait.”

After this true confession, not lacking in paradox, Marin Sorescu responds to Călinescu’s comments, revealing the types of emotions and feelings experienced while writing the poems: “The emotional states in the poems I sent you are real. I wrote the poem about *Eminescu* while crying, thinking that any one of us could be *Eminescu, just as great and just as unhappy*. With *Shakespeare* I was cheerful until almost the end, then a great sadness overcame me. Once I felt a lot of electricity in me, I wanted to discharge it by reading the verses I had written to someone, and after walking a lot through the streets, I returned home with the sensation of a vast emptiness around me. *Capriciu* is indeed, as you observed, a poem of fear.”

Redefining himself as a poet and assuming the value already conferred by the great critic, Sorescu explains: “This is why your review had such a powerful effect on me. Thanks to you, my world suddenly filled with people – on every empty chair, a person, serious, joyful, troubled, happy, unhappy, as each happens to be –

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<sup>20</sup> “I grew up in the magnetic field of your writings.”

and I felt richer. I thank you once again for the optimism your words have instilled in me.”

It is worth recalling and commenting on a brief passage in which G. Călinescu writes: “He is enthusiastic and intoxicated by the universe, childlike, sensitive and *full of thoughts to the edge of fear of the novelty of existence, romantic in the broad sense of the word.*” Considering that the great critic was referring to “the verses dedicated to Eminescu” [*Trebuiau să parte un nume*], we propose the hypothesis that the scholar had premeditated this in the spirit of ideas suggested by Titu Maiorescu nearly a century earlier. At the level of ideas, the quote almost rhymes with Maiorescu’s portrayal<sup>21</sup> of the young Eminescu, the very poet about whom Marin Sorescu wrote the poem so highly praised by G. Călinescu: “The surprising and moving poem is the one dedicated to Eminescu. The idea is simple: Eminescu has become a myth, his work presenting a familiar universe to us [...] It is the most beautiful thing written recently, and without cliché, about the great poet.”

Renouncing, one might say, all the accolades and praises received as if they were decorations, orders and medals (“the fantastic of humble things”, “the immense dimension of common themes”, “a cry of admiration before sublimity”, “the *witz*, the malice, fantastic as well”), Sorescu points to the most precious: “You called me ‘my young friend’ – it is the most beautiful compliment I could have aspired to.” Thus ends Sorescu’s *Second Epistle*<sup>22</sup>, with the affirmation of the thought that he might one day stand at the critic’s right hand – a thought that, slowly but surely, came to pass over the decades.

## **8. Temperaments and Performances of Personality**

*Est modus in rebus*, it is said. In the case of great authors, native temperament and the mysteries of writing lend a particular turn to personality, forming in the readers’ minds an aura that pulses or grows in the name of their

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<sup>21</sup> “*Entirely distinct in his manner, a man of the modern age, for now jaded in thought, fond of somewhat exaggerated antitheses, reflective beyond the permissible bounds, so far scarcely formed (...) but in the end a poet, a poet in the full sense of the word is Mr. Mihai Eminescu.*” (Titu Maiorescu, *Diracția nouă în poezia și proza românească*, 1872).

<sup>22</sup> The new letter is accompanied by a new “batch” of poems, clipped from the first issue of *Viața Românească* from 1965, during the period when G. Călinescu was in the Otopeni sanatorium. His increasingly fragile health would not have allowed him to comment on them. However, of heightened importance is the content of this epistle, much more extensive than the previous one, through which, as we have already stated, one may accept the idea that a dialogue existed between the two, stimulated by each other’s affirmations.

unconditional admiration for their favourite writers.

Among all possible variables, those that separate G. Călinescu from Marin Sorescu stand out, i.e. those that mark the difference between the expansive and the taciturn.

In the foreground of cultural history and literary memory, the dazzling fireworks of G. Călinescu's ideas and writing persist, ever vivid, his brilliant speeches delivered in a vibrant voice, unmistakable in their musical pronunciation, cantabile in tones now high, now low. Numerous examples preserved in film and audio archives testify to the extraordinary performance of personality created around him by the great man of culture.

Opposite to this, though not inferior in talent or other human and artistic qualities, stands the "performance" of the taciturn. Those close to Marin Sorescu and readers who had the chance to be near him, even once, saw in his person (not his personality) the image of an extremely withdrawn, modest and quiet man, with rare verbal interventions, below the natural acoustic threshold. If, temperamentally, G. Călinescu's belonging to the first category is indisputable, Marin Sorescu was, just as indisputably, an opaque mineral. G. Călinescu perceives and publicly acknowledges this<sup>23</sup>. Metaphorically speaking, he polishes the facets, giving brilliance to the carats in the pulley of the work. How could the continuous performance of personality produced by the great critic be harmonised with the faint impression left by the timid, then-anonymous poet, with his halting speech, his slow, almost retracted manner, his laboured repetition of words and his attitude of one who feels comfortable only within the shell of his own thoughts? His personality "comes from within" and the observation belongs to the critic.

To the poet's "external" silence – he was considered more or less mute – G. Călinescu reveals, in the most laudatory terms, the inner spectacle of the work, a true gala performance.

The critic had intuited from the first reading what seemed difficult to discern in the concrete being: the performance of personality was located within, in his ideas so provocative and their therapeutic humour, in the ineffable horizon opened by his poems, in the adrenaline of the *perfect simplu* (i.e. the perfect simple tense) flowing through his Oltenian blood, not in the

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<sup>23</sup> "... I now perfectly recall the words we exchanged and the young man's sudden timidity".

uncommunicative poet (in society), always defensive, seated in the back seat even in the car driven by his wife!

## **9. From Calligraphy to the Wings of Imagination**

Călinescu's manuscripts bear the calligraphy of the century in which he was formed – orderly, slightly slanted, flowing – allowing ideas to unravel the skein of thought quickly and efficiently. Among the recollections of G. Călinescu's wife, Alice Vera Călinescu, is a testimony to his writing habits: he worked for hours in absolute silence, laying down lines at first hesitantly, after which the stream of ideas seemed unstoppable, growing continuously as drops of sweat fell from his brow onto the written page.

Marin Sorescu's manuscripts reveal a constant state of urgency in writing, with significant graphic ablations (barely sketched, unfinished words), directly illustrating the whirlwinds of ideas in his mind and imagination. This exercise in extreme concentration of writing... of thought had atrophied in Marin Sorescu, if not the organ of speech, then at least the habit of public expression. Faced with other burdens of existence, especially social ones, writing had become a priority for Marin Sorescu.

However, the two letters sent to G. Călinescu were written with much greater care. Alongside the effort to write complete words, the disorder of the handwriting in these two letters reveals the immense emotional tension in which they were conceived.

## **10. Meridians of the Romanian Language**

If G. Călinescu foresaw a special place for Marin Sorescu in national literature, it becomes particularly interesting to consider the perspective from which the critic's visionary ideas and commentaries – and in some cases, even the poems he discussed – reappear in the later assessments and visions of translators and preface writers of Sorescu's work. His oeuvre, now comprising over one hundred books published in French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, English, German, Hungarian, Serbian, Polish, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Dutch, Swedish and many other languages, confirms the enduring

relevance of his literary output.<sup>24</sup>

The column that Marin Sorescu established in *Literatorul* under the title *Meridianele limbii române* ('Meridians of the Romanian Language') was undoubtedly inspired by the global presence of his work.

It is certain that the vast majority of editors, preface authors and commentators on Marin Sorescu's work were unaware of the details revealed in the two unpublished letters, and almost certainly of G. Călinescu's assessments published in *Contemporanul*. Moreover, Sorescu's translators did not have access to the volume *Universul poeziei* ('The Universe of Poetry') (1947), with its delightful studies on poetry, a book reissued under the title *Universurile poeziei* ('The Universes of Poetry') (2023), nearly three times more extensive. The editors of the new edition, Nicolae Mecu and Ileana Mihăilă, offer specialists a scholarly portrait of G. Călinescu's views on poetry, noting that the new book "contains not only a series of additional theoretical reflections, but also numerous examples drawn from a significantly broader range of literatures (Romanian, French, Italian, German, Latin, English, American, Russian, Spanish), presented more extensively than in the previously known version, often in the original language, and selected from a truly impressive number of poets, some well-known and others quite obscure, quoted at length either in the original or translated by Călinescu himself."<sup>25</sup> To force a tautology, *Universurile poeziei* also refers to the *universality of poetry*, which G. Călinescu knew intimately. This fact becomes the missing demonstration needed to fully understand the spiritual kinship between G. Călinescu and the literatures of the world, connections that extend beyond time.

This explains the exceptional role G. Călinescu played in establishing the equally exceptional talent of Marin Sorescu. Among other reasons, because G. Călinescu was perfectly informed about the domain in which he placed Sorescu. Regarding the "shift of metaphor toward paradox" in Sorescu's poetry, Călinescu noted that "the method floats in the air

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<sup>24</sup> He was one of the most widely translated Romanian poets of all time. According to the Wikipedia entry, there are 97 published volumes of his work in various languages.

<sup>25</sup> G. Călinescu, *Universurile poeziei*, Editura Cetatea de Scaun, Târgoviște, 2023, 382 pages. Edited by Ileana Mihăilă and Nicolae Mecu. This manuscript contains the primary version (nearly three times more extensive) of the text published during G. Călinescu's lifetime, in 1947.

throughout universal poetry and produces, without departing from intelligible language, considerable effects.” In other words, he immediately included Sorescu in the family of universal poetic spirits of the time – and soon, confirmations followed in succession.

Roy MacGregor-Hastie likened Marin Sorescu’s vision to that of Dylan Thomas, an opinion shared by Norman Simms (*New Zealand Monthly Review*, May 1973), who added: “I believe that in Sorescu’s poetry there are also echoes of Donne and the English metaphysical poets<sup>26</sup>, noticeable in the alternation of tones (from solemnity and incantation to colloquial speech) and in the juxtaposition of cosmic imagery with concrete details of the domestic universe.”

Referring to the bilingual anthology *Rame/Frames*, Norman Simms observed that “the Romanian poet reconstructs the coherence of the world in his work”, through “the opening of a spiritual perspective and a sense of meaningful continuity between man and cosmos, or even a moral value inherent in the structure of the universe.”

Stravros Deligiorgis, a Romanian poet of Greek origin, translated *Tinerețea lui Don Quijote/Don Quixote’s Tender Years* in 1979 in Iowa City, a work that had once been under the “critical” gaze of G. Călinescu at the beginning of Marin Sorescu’s literary career.

A few years later, publications such as *El País*, *Die Zeit*, *London Magazine*, *Le Courier* (Belgium) and *Il Tempo* placed the Romanian poet at the centre of universal attention: “It is useless to compare Marin Sorescu with anyone else. He represents an entirely new voice”, wrote *Le Courier* (1981, Belgium).

In 1982, *Il Tempo* headlined: *Vivere a Bucharest e interrogasi sul mondo*, which included the information that Marin Sorescu was among the candidates for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The Spanish newspaper *ABC* referred to him as *Un poeta rumano en la antesala del Nobel*.

In the preface to the volume *Selected Poems*, Bloodaxe Books,

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<sup>26</sup> Norman Simms, in the same commentary, does not overlook the poet’s compatriots: “Sorescu belongs to that tradition of Romanian letters which gave us Tristan Tzara and Eugène Ionescu: the tradition of spiritual verve, of the grotesque and the absurd.”



Newcastle upon Tyne, England, 1983, Michael Hamburger noted: “Sorescu’s verse parables approach human realities through the means of fantasy and irony. But not to liberate his own consciousness or that of others, but to reach the truths of human existence situated at the level of consciousness. The interweaving of fantasy and irony places Sorescu’s work equidistant from surrealism and mimetic photographic realism. Yet his self-reflective, generous irony above all – generous because it spares not even his own seriousness, aspirations or sensitivity – strikes me as a national trait. This irony may be considered deeply and authentically egalitarian in spirit. Sorescu’s parables ironize the human condition by including themselves within it; and they do so with such impartiality, with a minimum of bias.”

William Scammell (*The Times*, 15 July 1984) titled his profile *A Generous Irony*.

In the preface to the volume *El huracán de papel / The Paper Hurricane*, Mexico, 1985, Marco Antonio Campos wrote: “The man recounts things as if they were banal and which suddenly, especially at the end, take a surprising turn that paralyses and takes one’s breath away. Bites, blows, lashes, slaps. Verses with sap or bitter grass. There is almost always a dark background in play. A poet who, as Stevenson demanded and Borges repeated, possesses the most precious gift: he enchants.”

The poet Jon Silkin, who wrote the preface to the volume *Let’s Talk About the Weather* (translators Andreea Deletant and Brenda Walker), associates the Romanian writer with the tradition of wit, characterised by the verse becoming a spark of intellect, a reflection fixed within a framework whose core is the opposition between the concrete term and the concept. Jon Silkin considers that “such wit is also found in Marin Sorescu’s poems, and it is this that gives them most of their qualities”. Exactly two decades earlier, G. Călinescu had written: “Some poems are merely a cry of admiration before sublimity; in others, *witz*, malice, fantastic as well, slip in.”

Irish poet John F. Dean writes in the preface to *The Youth of Don Quixote*: “The strength of Marin Sorescu’s work lies in the novel blend of elements, a dark humour and deep intelligence, sharp irony and total compassion, an awareness of absurdity and the soul’s unfulfilled desires.”

Alan Bold (*The Scotsman*, 13 May 1987) believes that “The laconic manner and the finesse of touch create a delicate balance between delight and

despair, a balance that tilts toward the former. Sorescu is a declared enemy of gravity, urging his reader to receive the beauty of the world as a blessing.”

In a profile published in *Sunday Tribune* (31 March 1987), Fintan O'Toole asserts that Romania has established itself in the European cultural avant-garde through creators such as Brâncuși, Tzara and Ionescu, and considers Marin Sorescu's work “the most recent contribution of Romania to European culture”.

A unique experience was represented by the volume *The Biggest Egg in the World*, published in 1987 by Bloodaxe Books. Conceived as a tribute to the Romanian writer by eight renowned poets from the Anglophone world, the book offered a remarkable exercise in the art of translation, with many poems appearing in two versions, each rendered by a different translator. These included: Seamus Heaney, Ted Hughes, David Constantine, D. J. Enright, Michael Hamburger, Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon and William Scammell.

As can easily be seen, G. Călinescu's ideas about Marin Sorescu's poetry, and about poetry in general, float weightlessly through the writings of foreign translators and commentators on Sorescu's work.

## **11. Total Writers**

The final characteristic, with a conclusive significance, of the G. Călinescu-Marin Sorescu tandem, one not yet brought into the equation, is the scope of their creative output, as total writers.

G. Călinescu's literary originality is easily detectable in all the texts written by the great scholar. Even his celebrated *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* ('History of Romanian Literature from Its Origins to the Present') can be read not only as a scholarly literary history, but also as an adventure novel or an essay brimming with aphorisms. G. Călinescu asserts himself in literary life through the positions of the humanist scholar, through the “wise man's quarrel with the world”<sup>27</sup> (as Geo Șerban aptly titled

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<sup>27</sup> G. Călinescu. *Gâlceava înțeleptului cu lumea*, edited by Geo Șerban. Editura Minerva, 2 vol., București, 1973–1974. “In light of this affinity with the philosopher prince, affirmed by the literary historian and confirmed by the publicist, it seems to us that G. Călinescu is best understood, as a personality, through the portrait of a Renaissance humanist with a resilient soul, yet with an intellect tempted by melancholy and scepticism, if not by a serene form of misanthropy, remaining always tonic in the Stoic sense, expressing himself in a language always doubled by a vivid irony, as defined by Schlegel to characterise the Romantic spirit:

his two-volume collection of texts published by Editura Minerva, 1973-1974), through the logic of his judgements, even when literary in nature, through his intellectual fervour and the pantheistic delight of his humanist certainties.

As with the life and work of G. Călinescu, Sorescu's creation undergoes similar transformations: the poet becomes a prose writer, playwright, literary critic and historian, essayist – “all” inhabiting the same frail physical body, bearing the same name under the sign of exception: Marin Sorescu.

Unlike the concentration of literary works into ideas and concepts or the precipitates of critical wisdom that characterise the intuition of Călinescu's judgements, in Marin Sorescu we find “the wise man's quarrel with himself” compensated by and drawn from the realm of artistic competence and appreciation. Marin Sorescu himself would, years later, affirm this belief: “The function of poetry is rather one of knowledge. It must include philosophy. A poet is either a thinker or he is nothing. [...] His thoughts, his fears are transformed into instruments of inquiry. [...] I believe that a genius poet can, through poetic intuition alone, discover a new star, which may later be confirmed by scientists through parametric calculations. That is what poetry can offer.”<sup>28</sup> I link this situation – Marin Sorescu as a total writer – to the existence of a superordinate element, which is not strictly style (as this varies from genre to genre), but rather, in the case of this visionary, a consciousness that becomes an instrument of inquiry.

The entire oeuvre of Marin Sorescu is imbued with this subtle inclination towards paradox, which gradually, imperceptibly, transforms into duration. And the one who first revealed it was G. Călinescu.

## **12. Instead of Conclusions**

To tie together the threads of this unusual correspondence – atypical, as we have repeatedly noted – it is necessary to project and interpret the

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*as detachment, as nourishing doubt, as a ‘form of paradox’, while simultaneously adopting the naivety of the child's first gaze upon the world, promoted by Schiller as an ancient source of the genuine inspiration of the Romantic genius.”* (Dana Shishmanian, *Călinescu și Cantemir sau gâlceava înțelepților cu lumea*, in RITL).

<sup>28</sup> Sorescu's statement intersects the meeting point of the sciences and the arts, at the confluence of imagination, the first and perhaps greatest virtue of the human spirit. Before the poet from Bulzești, it was celebrated by Leonardo da Vinci, Jules Verne, and Eminescu.

information within a broader framework, one that unites, in the spirit of *coincidentia oppositorum*, the two personalities who are not merely different, but profoundly different in the general sense. Not so much through events relatively close to the period in question, but through the revelation of the uniqueness of these opposing personalities, drawing on data and commentary of a more general nature.

If we accept that the temperament and public image of each, G. Călinescu and Marin Sorescu, were situated at 180 degrees from one another, the question remains: how did the miracle occur? What mysterious forces lay behind the so-called “theory of spheres of influence”?

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Mult stimată domnule  
profesor,

Vinutri dimineața, luând  
„Contemporanul” și citind, ea  
de obicei, în primul rând „Cronica  
optimismului” am încreștat o  
mare emoție, văzând modestul  
meu nume trecut în atenția  
domniei voastre. Am fost pentru  
mine o fericită surpriză  
cuvintele de o caldă apreciere,  
pentru care vă mulțumesc și  
vă mulțumesc din adâncul sufletului  
recunoscător.

Eu mi-am îndrăgostit să  
vă trimis cartea la apăsare.  
Grație ei s-a putut să fie pus în  
plie, pe adresa lui Buiucescu,  
unde încredințăm poezia noastră.  
Căci unii, cred, nu a știu,  
de la Buiucescu încoace,  
proștăciul de care vă bucurați

si eore e merit să prească, în  
constituția acestui popor, necontenit.  
'Și' am prezent în cîmpul  
magnetic al scrierilor dumne  
voastre. O prezentă eo aceea a  
lui Calinescu într-o cultură  
te face optimist, te face să te  
gîndesti că ti de pe acest  
pîmînt se poate atinge cu fructa  
balta corească.

Vă rog să mă iertați că am  
devenit liric. Romanticii au  
făcut atîta caz de emoție, ~~tot~~  
încît au devalorizat-o pe citra  
tecole înaintate. Și de aceea totu  
vîoto noi facem eforturi disperate  
de a ne ne emotiona, de a ne  
fi lirici. Tatăl, 'întîi' că nu ne  
putem deghiza totdeauna perfect,  
că din eiud în eiud ni se vede  
și suflul, ea tristetea la clovi.

Poate că sînt lucruri foarte  
bunele cele pe care vi le-am  
spus acum. Dacă-i așa,

atunci lui pun toată speranța  
în bunul și salvatorul  
principiu: senzorile plictoare  
nu se cîterse pînă la capăt.

Cu deosebită  
stimă,

Mariu Sorisen

3543

P.S.

Pe volumul dumneavoastră de  
virsuri am-ati scris: "Lui Mariu  
Sorisen căruia îi urez să devină  
un luceafăr." O, de-ar putea să  
m-avînt în această urare, ea  
său împlinire în cîmpurile spației!





Mult stimule domnule  
profesor,

Au ezitat mult pînă să mă  
hotărîsc a vă răpi timpul cu  
o scrisoare. Există o uie de  
feluri de a fi interpretat un  
ostacol de gest și n-ai fi vrut  
să vă supărați, dînd importanță unui  
tînuș care cîntă cu orice pret  
protecție. Totuși trebuia să vă  
multumesc. Pentru tot ce ați  
făcut pentru mine.

3542  
Aprecierile domniei voastre atît  
de generoase despre versurile unui  
tînuș necunoscut au creat în  
sînul meu o adunătură de întrebări  
cu care mă erou învîrt. Cîtuș  
pîle a funcționat un  
vost sistem de telefonia, sau  
primul felicitări din toate  
fîrtele și au simțit îndreptădindu-se