

AUGUSTIN BUZURA'S *ORGOLII*: ON THE "FACES" OF ROMANIAN COMMUNISM

Ana-Maria BĂNICĂ

"G. Călinescu" Institute of Literary History and Theory
Romanian Academy, Bucharest
anamariabanica90@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study aims to demonstrate that Romanian novelists of the 1960s unveil both the terror of the Dej regime and the more sophisticated methods of torture employed under Ceaușescu. Augustin Buzura's *Orgolii* exemplifies this dual exposure, structured across two temporal planes: the 1950s and the 1970s. The link between these eras is embodied by Dr. Ion Cristian, a character caught in the relentless machinery of history during both periods. Notably, the novel introduces a unique typology of the informer – an agent of the Securitate – who records in a private journal (embedded by Buzura in 10 of the novel's 24 chapters) the conversations and experiences of those under surveillance, adding his own interpretations. The result is a biting comic effect, both situational and linguistic, which conceals a harsh truth: even in the Ceaușescu era, the individual remains a victim of the oppressive practices wielded by those in power.

Keywords

Pride, tyrannology, "obsessive decade", Ceaușescu regime, informer.

In a debate hosted by *Luceafărul* magazine, titled *Romanul actualității: roman al complexității umane și al conștiinței politice* ('The Novel of the Present: A Novel of Human Complexity and Political Consciousness'), Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu argues that most 1960s novelists focus solely on the "obsessive decade", neglecting – whether out of conformity or cowardice – the shortcomings of the Ceaușescu era, despite the General Secretary himself acknowledging certain deficiencies in socialism that require reform:

"What I would reproach some political novels for, including Galeria cu viață sălbatică, is a certain veiled form of idealism. Certainly, compared to earlier, formulaic literature, these books offer a more honest and truthful testimony of the era. Yet many set their action in the 1950s. The negative phenomena they depict were indeed harshly criticised by the Party and measures were taken to

eradicate them. The structure of many novels suggests that from a certain point onward, everything runs smoothly. Unfortunately, even today there are many aspects of social life that deserve criticism, and the first to courageously point them out is the General Secretary himself... I do not see many novels daring to expose the difficulties, inertia and condemnable practices still present today.”¹

Crohmălniceanu’s critique proves unfounded, as there are novels from the period that capture the societal shifts accompanying the transition from Gheorghiu-Dej’s regime to that of Nicolae Ceaușescu. One such work is Augustin Buzura’s *Orgolii* (‘Vanities’) (1977). Its protagonist, Ion Cristian, is a renowned physician, university professor, academician and distinguished researcher, author of numerous scientific studies and treatises. He is the father of Andrei Cristian, to whom he wishes to pass on his passion for medicine, and he grieves deeply after the death of his wife, Stela, from cancer. Feeling he has failed both as a husband and as a doctor, he obsessively searches for a cure to the merciless disease. His solitude in the laboratory – surrounded by dogs, test tubes, chemicals, and guarded by his loyal assistant Anania – is shattered by the shadows of the past (the 1950s) and the intrigues of the present, unfolding within the academic world.

The novel operates on two temporal levels: one set in the 1950s, the other in the 1970s. In both, Buzura suggests, the individual who refuses to submit to imposed ideology must fight to preserve inner freedom against the aggression, envy and cynicism of unscrupulous characters. Though the methods of oppression evolve, the goal remains unchanged: the neutralisation of genuine values and the promotion of imposture and mediocrity as societal norms. The catalyst for revisiting the past is the arrival of Constantin Redman, a former friend of Cristian, who seeks hospitalisation at his clinic, suspecting he has cancer. Cristian’s cold and ironic behaviour puzzles his son, Andrei, who seeks out Redman to uncover details about his father’s past. Pressured by his son’s doubts about his integrity, Ion Cristian is forced to confront the ghosts he had hoped to erase. He confesses to Andrei the harsh experiences of the 1950s, and the young man listens to the confessions of both rivals. A pivotal moment occurs in a meeting between Cristian and Redman, where

¹ Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, 1977, “Colecțiile Luceafărului”. *Romanul actualității: roman al complexității umane și al conștiinței politice*, with contributions by Nicolae Ciobanu, Eugen Simion, M. Ungheanu, V.F. Mihăescu, in “Luceafărul”, no. 49, 3 December, p. 7.

only the doctor is honest; Redman, cowardly and envious, fails to admit his resentment. He eventually does so in a letter discovered by Andrei in his father's room, confirming Cristian's innocence.

The present-day narrative, set in the 1970s, centres on the struggle for the position of university rector following the retirement of the academician Coja-Dorneşti. Codreanu, a representative of the younger generation, aspires to the role. His demagoguery and social climbing evoke Nae Gheorghidiu from Camil Petrescu's *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* ('The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War') and *Patul lui Procust* ('The Bed of Procrustes'), though with a key distinction: Gheorghidiu is a product of interwar capitalism, while Codreanu is a creation of 1970s socialist communism. Like Gheorghidiu, Codreanu marries the daughter of a former dean for personal gain and the position of lecturer as a wedding gift. He has two influential godfathers: one a rector, the other a mayor. The former ensures his promotion by blocking other candidates from the exam, while the latter gifts him a state-owned villa. Codreanu identifies two rivals in his quest for power: Ion Cristian, whose scientific achievements are either admired or envied, and Professor Crețu, a capable administrator lacking scholarly credibility.

Exploiting favourable historical moments, Codreanu orchestrates behind-the-scenes manoeuvres to secure his dominance in academia. Though he respects Cristian's professional stature and initially tries to persuade him to run for rector, he soon realises Cristian is a perfectionist unwilling to compromise. Codreanu then seeks to neutralise both rivals by inciting conflict between them, while he remains in the shadows, posing as a progressive socialist. Buzura uses Codreanu's intrigues to expose the persistence of opportunism and careerism under Ceaușescu's regime, further amplified by the journal entries of a lab assistant and informer who despises Cristian and spies on him and his associates.

Upon the novel's release, some critics argued that the two narrative threads are disconnected and that Ion Cristian is idealised, rendering him a one-dimensional and implausible character. *Orgolii* has been compared to Buzura's earlier novels *Absenții* ('Absentees') and *Fețele tăcerii* ('The Faces of Silence'), as well as to G. Călinescu's *Bielul Ioanide* ('Poor Ioanide'), given that both protagonists, Ioanide and Cristian, encounter corruption and envy within the academic sphere.

According to Nicolae Manolescu², *Orgolii* resembles *Fețele tăcerii* in structure, though it is more overtly *demonstrative*. Beginning with an exploration of a personal crisis, the novel evolves into a social critique, in which Buzura dissects a corrupt environment. While *Orgolii* presents multiple perspectives, it focuses primarily on Dr. Cristian, whereas *Fețele tăcerii* features three distinct characters:

*“While Redman is minimised, Cristian is idealised. The entire investigation from the 1950s, conducted by the repugnant Varlaam, seems designed to validate the doctor’s heroism. And it is anything but subtle: between the interrogator and the interrogated, a direct, overt and naively simplistic relationship is established. Rather than complementing each other, the two narrative versions cancel each other out. What gave *Fețele tăcerii* its merit was precisely the unresolved tension between Radu and Carol Măgureanu, the impossibility of reaching a definitive conclusion. Neither character possessed the full truth, unlike the current situation, where (in a thankless role!) Dr. Cristian is portrayed as its sole bearer.”³*

Manolescu contends that *Orgolii* risks falling into schematic representation, as the author tends to classify characters as either righteous or unjust, subordinating psychological depth to ethical judgment. The novel unfolds along two distinct lines: one serious, reflecting the moral and intellectual crisis of Dr. Cristian; the other caricatural, emblematic of social opportunism. Particularly noteworthy to the critic is the grotesque dimension of the novel, through which Buzura stages “a grotesque spectacle of corruption, aggressive stupidity and petty villainy. It is a bestiary. Augustin Buzura shows the makings of a satirical prose writer.”

Virgil Ardeleanu⁴ identifies two distinct novels within *Orgolii*: the first centres on the confrontation between Dr. Ion Cristian and his “friend” Redman; the second focuses on the informers targeting the scientist. The first part bears Buzura’s signature style, marked by “intellectual phrasing” in the portrayal of Cristian. The second part, however, is unexpectedly vibrant:

² Nicolae Manolescu, 1977, *Romanul de moravuri*, in: “România literară”, no. 19, Thursday 12 May, p. 7.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Virgil Ardeleanu, 1977, *Augustin Buzura: Orgolii*, (“Cronica literară”), in: “Steaua”, no. 6, June, p. 35.

*“I never suspected that the author of *Absenții* harboured a desire for subtextual expression, for dismantling irony, for tonic laughter and absurd comedy. [...] Such breath, derived from mimicking blindness adorned with vulgarity and treachery, is something I haven’t encountered in contemporary prose for a long time.”*⁵

Cornel Regman⁶ argues that *Orgolii* resembles Buzura’s debut novel *Absenții* more than *Feelele tăcerii*, due to its focus on the medical world. In *Feelele tăcerii*, the present is crucial for the characters, as it allows them to recall past experiences in the presence of a witness. In *Orgolii*, however, the present is “too vivid and overwhelming for the past insertions – often arbitrarily induced – to appear as anything other than *sensationalist* supplements.” For Regman, the present-day narrative is more compelling than the past, which he finds artificially constructed. The protagonist appears split into two distinct entities with no real connection, and the temporal gap between the two periods is too wide. The antagonist’s continued efforts to harm Cristian in the present bring this part of the novel closer to “the realm of satanic productions.” More interesting to the critic is the “vanity fair” staged in the provincial academic-medical setting:

*“Here, petty intrigue triumphs over darker plots, as Buzura’s originality emerges most clearly in the presence of satirical and even caricatural elements. As is often the case in satire, the focal moment is the anticipation of an election – in this case, the agitation and manoeuvring surrounding the election of a new rector at the medical institute.”*⁷

Victor Atanasiu⁸ draws parallels between *Orgolii* and G. Călinescu’s *Bielul Ioanide*, noting similarities in the academic setting. In *Orgolii*, Dr. Ion Cristian is envied and attacked through intrigue by his colleagues, much like Călinescu’s protagonist:

“All characters evoke the bizarre and ridiculous intellectual fauna of Călinescu’s novel: Hagieniș, Suflețel, etc.; Dr. Codreanu, always cheerful, always adaptable, quick to seize a suggestion and

⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁶ Cornel Regman, 1977, *Augustin Buzura: Orgolii* (“Cronica literară”), in: “Scânteia”, no. 10851, Saturday 9 July, p. 4.

⁷ *Ibidem.*

⁸ Victor Atanasiu, 1977, *Augustin Buzura: Orgolii*, (Cultură), in: “Scânteia tineretului”, no. 8754, 14 July, p. 4.

adept at pouring fuel on the fire to serve his own interests; [...] Ottescu, arrogant, gossipy, insecure, unable to compete with Cristian scientifically and thus striving to eliminate him.”⁹

Atanasiu finds the journal entries of the uncultured lab assistant particularly intriguing. The assistant harbours hatred for Cristian and accuses him of reprehensible acts. However, Atanasiu notes that these accusations have no real consequences, remaining confined to the journal:

“Consequently, the attack is never direct; the individual merely pours his venom into the journal and occasionally resorts to exposing Cristian through timid, clumsy and overly complicated manoeuvres that ultimately prove useless.”¹⁰

Despite its strengths, Atanasiu also highlights certain flaws in the novel, one being the weak construction of the protagonist. Like Ioanide, Cristian is idealised – consistently inflexible and *irresistible*. He rejects compromise, despises cowardice and always emerges victorious. Another shortcoming lies in the novel’s composition: “awkward phrasing, sluggish rhythm and structural flaws that occasionally make for a tedious reading experience.”¹¹

Eugenia Tudor Anton¹² views Augustin Buzura as a novelist who favours direct communication, deliberately avoiding “the facile metaphors that envelop the reader to the point of dizziness.” A proponent of polemical realism, Buzura is primarily concerned with uncovering the truth about the human condition, revealed through brutal confrontations or through “lengthy and tormenting” debates. In *Orgolii*, as in *Fețele tăcerii*, the author employs monologue and dialogue, but introduces a new element – sketch and sarcasm. Irony is present in *Fețele tăcerii* as well (for instance, during journalist Toma’s visit to a friend in a provincial town, where he attends a party in a corrupt environment). However, “what was marginal there becomes central in *Orgolii*, as the denunciatory letters of the anonymous lab assistant, a semi-educated, inferior individual, constitute a significant portion of the novel, a third narrative mode through which the world is depicted.”¹³ The reviewer

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² Eugenia Tudor Anton, 1977, *Romanul unei dezbatere morale*, (Cărți-Oameni-Fapte), in “Viața Românească”, no. 8, August, pp. 56-58.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

also identifies a weakness in the protagonist, stemming from his “unyielding hardness” and “endless strength”. Initially, it seems that Stela, his wife, and Andrei, his son, soften the cold soul of the hero. But Cristian’s vulnerability proves illusory, as his love for Stela resembles veneration of an icon rather than affection for a “living” woman.

Mircea Tomuș¹⁴ identifies three “layers” in *Orgolii*: one ideological, one typological and thematic, and one stylistic or narrative. The ideological message conveyed by Buzura is “a resolute condemnation of all forms of exacerbated terror, a stance of solid human dignity”¹⁵. In the second layer, focused on human typologies, Tomuș sketches a portrait of Dr. Cristian that aligns with the expectations of official doctrine, transforming the protagonist into a model communist:

“Augustin Buzura’s main character is a spirit haunted by the fever of creation, a fighter on the barricades of both collective and personal justice, a man of great merit and considerable experience, though ultimately not of the highest vitality.”

C. Ungureanu’s literary review¹⁶ of *Orgolii* is largely favourable, though his laudatory remarks risk turning the novel into a thesis-driven work. He describes Dr. Cristian as “a rare man, extraordinary in every attitude, validated by history as an exceptional individual”, and asserts that “the righteous triumph, as we can infer even from the pages in which they endure particularly painful trials”.

As seen in the aforementioned literary critiques, reviewers appreciate the narrative style typical of the 1970s, particularly the confessions of the informer-lab assistant. However, they avoid directly acknowledging the subversive critique of the Ceaușescu regime embedded in the novel. Instead, they resort to suggestive concepts to characterise the corrupt environment: novel of manners or *bestiary* (Nicolae Manolescu), “vanity fair” (Cornel Regman).

¹⁴ Mircea Tomuș, 1977, *Augustin Buzura. Orgolii*, (“Cronica literară”), in: “Transilvania”, nr. 9, September, p. 43

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ C. Ungureanu, 1977, *Orgolii de Augustin Buzura*, in: „Orizont”, nr. 39, September, p. 2.

Between vanities and cowardice

In *Orgolii*, Augustin Buzura is not concerned with action or suspenseful confrontations typical of narrative fiction. Rather, he reflects on the causes of terror and abuse in society, and on the tools dictators use to eliminate their adversaries. Through Varlaam and Dr. Ion Cristian, Buzura presents two typologies: the brutish egotist and the intellectual egotist. Both characters are driven by vanity, by the desire to be right and to assert their superiority over the other. Mediating between these two consciences is the opportunistic coward, Redman, who feels diminished in the presence of their moral strength. harbouring resentment toward his friend, he allies with Varlaam and, through false testimony, secures the position of city prosecutor. The confrontation between Cristian and Varlaam takes place in the 1950s, during the heyday of brutes, “soldiers with three boots: two on their feet and one up their backside”, who terrorise those blacklisted by the Party with violence and aggression.

A former butcher’s assistant and amateur boxer, Varlaam becomes useful to the regime during the “obsessive decade”: he helps capture class enemies and extracts compromising confessions from suspects, especially bourgeois or liberal individuals. During one interrogation, he beats a colonel so severely that the man dies. A formal investigation follows, and three doctors are appointed to the case: Crețu, Vasiliu and Ion Cristian. While the first two comply, claiming the death was due to a heart attack, Cristian refuses to compromise and tells the truth. From that moment, Varlaam sets out to destroy him. He befriends Redman, who denounces Cristian for allegedly providing medical aid to a suspicious individual who arrived at his home at midnight. Imprisoned, Cristian discovers the true nature of his friend Redman and proves to himself the strength he possesses to remain steadfast in defending his truth:

“The weakest willpower will give in, and I know that a brute’s repertoire is limitless, but my body defends itself in its own way: I become dizzy from the first blows. Varlaam knows he’s committed abuse, which is why he presses harder; if he fails to prove my guilt by extracting a confession, he loses. Even if it’s later shown that I had no involvement in Sterian’s plot – or whatever it was – Varlaam is justified, absolved, if I admit to something untrue. He even becomes the victim, claiming I deceived him, right? No

*matter the risk, I cannot. I would be disgusted with myself for the rest of my life.*¹⁷

Dr. Ion Cristian analyses his adversary and identifies his weaknesses in order to strike effectively. Lacking education, Varlaam despises intellectuals and loses his composure when the doctor uses irony to highlight the cultural gap between them. Gradually, the proud brute and the proud intellectual grow accustomed to one another, and in his confrontation with Varlaam, Cristian senses his dominance over an opponent who relies solely on brute force, not intelligence:

“Varlaam was not as cunning as he tried to appear; he relied on strength, intimidating more through the setting and the position from which he spoke than through intelligence or knowledge. We had grown used to each other over time, and once I understood the parameters within which he operated, I was certain that if I could endure physically, he would not be able to defeat me. I relied heavily on surprise in our dialogues: I attacked directly, harshly, when he least expected it, doing everything to maintain my confidence and superiority, but that came at a cost. Deprived of a comeback or suddenly pulled out of his familiar universe, Varlaam was thrown off; I was amused by his small eyes, hidden beneath thick, hairy brows, how they relaxed into a sincere, childlike astonishment that could instantly turn into rage.”¹⁸

Between these two adversaries, a pale yet destructive shadow emerges: Redman, a cowardly and opportunistic intellectual who borrows his principles from men of iron will. For a time, he is fascinated by the ideas of Aurel Șoimescu, lawyer and father-in-law to Ion Cristian, later becoming the doctor's confidant, only to ultimately carry out Varlaam's orders. He is rewarded for his submission: in addition to being appointed city prosecutor, he secures a teaching position at the Faculty of Law after falsely denouncing Professor Hileanu, who is arrested, allowing Redman to take his place.

Redman and Cristian first meet during university: Redman was the top law student, Cristian the top medical student. They reunite during postgraduate studies in Paris, where Redman stops Cristian from striking a Nazi propagandist. In his confession to Andrei, Redman projects his own

¹⁷ Augustin Buzura, 2016, *Orgolii*, definitive edition edited by Angela Martin, Editura Rao, București, pp. 160-161.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 296-297.

flaws – opportunism, ambition without effort – onto Cristian. Yet he also has moments of clarity, recognising his friend's strengths and weaknesses. Redman is overwhelmed by Cristian's willpower, his passion for research and his magnetic personality. Focused solely on his own projects, Cristian rarely listens to others, speaking mostly about himself. This leads him to trust Redman's honesty, despite considering him "fragile".

Among dictators or a course in tyrannology

Gifted with lucidity, Ion Cristian, as a student, observes the grotesque spectacle staged across Europe by fascist leaders in the 1930s, whose hate-filled speeches crush the will of millions, captivated by the machinery of propaganda. Confident in his physical and intellectual strength, Cristian does not hesitate to confront fascist representatives – verbally or through articles published in obscure provincial journals. He collects news and photographs of dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini, intending to write a book on the subject:

"Idiots and History, or The History of Global Stupidity, or a Course in Tyrannology. What must a tyrant do to become laughable to the world? *Of course, others have done it better and more thoroughly, but instead of collecting stamps or diplomas, I'll write it too, with the same effect.*"¹⁹

The doctor is interested in all historical periods – Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the modern era – because he observes that regardless of the era, dictators share similar oppressive practices: physical elimination of opponents, suppression of free will and the imposition of a standardised linguistic code designed to stupefy the human being and flatter the tyrant's inflated ego:

*"I have always hated the mass of fascist brutes with brainwashed minds, the unconscious mob ready to tear apart anyone at the first signal – a world ruled by vanity, ignorance, deceit and terror. Criminals who had no need for culture, only for a set of loud words meant to impress the uninformed. Should I say I don't believe in what I believe? We don't share the same vocabulary, we don't speak the same language, how can we communicate?"*²⁰

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 149.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 160.

At a reception hosted by the German Embassy in Bucharest, Cristian, disturbed by a counsellor's admiration for the Führer's politics, erupts, declaring his hatred for dictators and their armies of sycophants and assassins. For his excessive honesty, Cristian is imprisoned at Jilava, then sent to the Târgu Jiu internment camp. There, he meets his future father-in-law, Aurel řoimescu, a lawyer and Peasant Party deputy, himself imprisoned for refusing to wear a swastika badge:

*[...] he simply stomped it underfoot. 'I couldn't stand the coercion,' he boasted. 'I've always been anti – under Carol II, under the Legionnaires, under Antonescu... I feel truly free after serving my prison sentence. I can't tolerate a foreign soldier's boot on our soil, nor any form of tyranny.'*²¹

Haunted by the thought that “brutes in green shirts” might rule the world through marches, songs, terror and hollow speeches, Ion Cristian decides to join the War of Liberation, even at the risk of losing his life. Yet the reality of the front, where confrontation with death is constant and the human being is reduced to mere survival instinct, repulses him. Upon returning from the war, the doctor seeks to recover lost time in research and devotes himself to scientific study, distancing himself from politics. He places his trust in the democratic ideals promoted by members of the Communist Party and joins the party. He participates in conferences held in workers' clubs and rural communities, convinced that totalitarian regimes like fascism can no longer emerge. However, this trust is shattered when he is arrested by Varlaam. Though Cristian's discourse remains allusive, the reader perceives the subversive critique of the communist regime, which has managed to perpetuate and refine its methods of oppression over time:

*"Hitler with Eva Braun, Mussolini with Clara Petacci seemed like ham actors in a play written by an idiot. You didn't know whether to laugh or vomit. [...] I'll never forget the documents and photographs. I was certain such a regime couldn't last. But, you see, history is cruel: sometimes it rushes forward so fast you can't keep up with the pace of events, other times it stretches its monotony over decades, leaving people in bizarre, anachronistic situations, as if to issue a warning."*²²

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 151.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 303.

Love between vanity ad emotional blockage

In the literary reviews published upon the release of *Orgolii*, some critics argued that Ion Cristian is idealised, with Buzura crafting a perfect but one-dimensional figure. Yet Cristian is a complex character, endowed with exceptional inner strength, but also with limitations, most notably, emotional sterility, which he himself acknowledges. The harsh experiences he endures alienate him from others; he retreats into himself like a shell, refusing to communicate, especially with his son, Andrei. After his wife's death, Cristian fails to connect with Andrei, despite being deeply concerned about his future. He remains cold and rigid, and their conversations are limited to banalities or topics related to medicine, as Andrei has followed in his father's professional footsteps. Cristian avoids sharing his past, fearing that doing so might influence his son's development by transferring his own anxieties and obsessions:

“— Father, Andrei interrupted, we haven’t spoken this sincerely in a long time. Maybe never. I’m glad, though I think you regret it. — No, Andrei, I don’t regret it, but too many years separate us, and it seems words mean different things to each of us... — All the more reason not to limit ourselves to just this conversation, Andrei added. — Though perhaps it would’ve been better without it; I’d be more at peace. I’m afraid of influencing you, of indirectly transferring my anxieties, the trivialities that belong to the man in me. I might disturb your life, your ideas. I’ve tried to make you see me as a researcher — honest and fair.”²³

After hearing a distorted version of the truth from Redman, Andrei begins to doubt the scientist's integrity and investigates on his own to confirm his father's innocence.

In his relationships with women, Dr. Ion Cristian is proud, reminiscent of Camil Petrescu's protagonists (Ştefan Gheorghidiu, Fred Vasilescu). During his student years, he falls passionately in love with Cristina Fărcaşu, a young woman from a peasant family with a strong personality. It is the only time he loses his lucidity, surrendering to passion and indulging her every whim. Enchanted by the luxurious life offered by another man from a wealthy family, Cristina leaves him. This is Cristian's first emotional defeat, and he feels deeply humiliated. From that moment on, his relationships with women become fleeting and superficial:

²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 96-97.

“Women no longer interested me in any particular way. Everything was reduced to physiological needs, so I chose them by colour, country, region of France, arrondissement, and then forgot their names and faces.”²⁴

Cristina’s betrayal prevents Cristian from ever truly falling in love again, a fact reflected in how he chooses his future wife. He marries Stela, despite being drawn to the stronger personality of her sister, Elvira. Andrei’s mother is a gentle, quiet woman who allows herself to be depersonalised by her husband’s iron will. She lives in his shadow, rejoices in his professional success and suppresses her own feelings so as not to disturb him. Her death destabilises the scientist, who realises their marriage was conventional and regrets not having given her more attention.

The Vatican mouthpiece, a novel typology

The informant-laboratory assistant, referred to by some characters as Canaris or The Vatican Mouthpiece²⁵, belongs to the extended Caragialean family of petty gossips and streetwise meddlers, reminiscent of the *pastramagii* and *mahalagii* from the comedy *O noapte furtunoasă* (‘A Stormy Night’). The difference lies in their ideological formation: while Jupân Dumitache is a product of late 19th-century liberal clichés, Canaris is shaped by the Marxist-Leninist school, having absorbed the necessary slogans to become an exemplary citizen, proud of the social progress achieved through the working class. He is convinced he lives in a superior world, with educational methods far removed from those of the old bourgeoisie, when people were “kept in darkness and social backwardness”. Every situation that deviates from official theories and practices becomes, in the informant’s eyes, suspicious, being denounced and judged through the ideological lens of the

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

²⁵ “Comrade Dr. Iorga told me there are too many fools with itchy tongues and that the professor doesn’t want to compete with them. Those who fail academically just talk nonsense, and there are fools who listen to mouthpieces instead of learning something.” (p. 133) “Yesterday, the professor was visited in the lab by Comrade Vera Panaitescu [...] And when he saw me in the corridor holding a lunchbox, he mocked me [...] ‘What’s Radio Vatican saying these days? Whose soup are you seasoning now?’” (p. 203) “Today I met Comrade Professor Cristian in the corridor, and when he saw me, he rushed at me in front of everyone [...] ‘Listen, Canaris,’ he said, ‘if I catch you overstepping your duties again, you won’t live to see Easter in my clinic.’” (p. 262)

system. Upon hearing Dr. Ion Cristian and Cristina Fărcaşu speaking in French, the mouthpiece declares:

“He spoke to an older comrade in a language I didn’t understand, and at the end he said something in Italian or French, I couldn’t hear clearly: noblesoblij or something like that – and that’s proof of his cosmopolitan attitude, his subversion of language, secrecy, and disregard for younger colleagues. We must find out who this comrade is and what she does in her private life.”²⁶

Just as the proud brutes of the 1950s enjoyed their moments of glory through physical and psychological abuse of “class enemies”, so too does the Vatican Mouthpiece, this new Ceauşist typology, step into the spotlight. However, he adapts his tools to the spirit of the age: he practises surveillance and produces reports for the “Vatican” (a euphemism for the Securitate). Blows are replaced by pen and paper, but these seemingly innocuous practices are equally harmful to humanity. The informer neglects his actual duties; his unofficial job description no longer involves patient care but rather monitoring clinic staff and recording his findings in a journal, which he claims he would use against Dr. Cristian only if necessary. Most clinic employees are aware of his role and either ignore or mock him:

“Comrade Dr. Iorga told me there are too many fools with itchy tongues and that the professor doesn’t want to compete with them. Those who fail academically just talk nonsense, and there are fools who listen to mouthpieces instead of learning something. [...] Comrade Cristian is a good speaker and draws all sorts of wide-eyed listeners. He plays the master. Unfortunately, I couldn’t attend because he saw me in the corridor this morning and said, ‘Hey, Canaris, come here a moment.’ I didn’t understand why he called me that – who is this Canaris, or did he mistake me for someone else? [...] And when he saw me in the corridor holding a lunchbox, he mocked me in the crudest way, making me look ridiculous, and said, quoting Comrade Dr. Savu: ‘What’s Radio Vatican saying these days? Whose soup are you seasoning now?’”²⁷

Upon learning that Dr. Iorga, Cristian’s friend, has gone mad, Canaris visits the psychiatric clinic to investigate the cause. He is disturbed by the patients’ freedom of expression and recommends, in his notes, that the authorities intervene against the “conspirators”: “There was an old man

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 100-101.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p.s., p. 133; 201; 207.

buzzing like a motor, claiming he came from another planet and his name was Ilie. But none of them seemed mad for serious reasons, so I think other organs should take over and re-educate them in meetings, because the doctors are too lenient. I haven't seen anyone convincing them otherwise, although surely there are some doctors who should take a stand. A young man proclaimed himself a philosopher right in front of me, but I didn't have the patience to listen. He has his own philosophy – let him be. Another kept crying, saying he was persecuted. Why were they allowed to end up like this? How can someone be persecuted today? It's an unacceptable mess.”²⁸

The compromising materials collected by the informant against Dr. Cristian are deployed when Party protégés request them. Discovering Constantin Redman's hatred for the professor, Canaris persuades the former prosecutor to submit a false testimony, claiming Cristian demanded money to perform surgery. Learning about his father's past from Redman's perspective, Andrei, after drinking, seeks the services of a sex worker and ends up in conflict with her pimp. The man confiscates Andrei's clothes and goes to the clinic intending to blackmail Dr. Cristian. However, the informant intercepts him first, purchasing the garments and securing a promise that, for another fee, the pimp will testify that Andrei raped his niece: “[...] to my surprise, I found the evidence that will bring them to their knees: his son's socks, underwear and shirt – proof that he's following the natural path of promiscuity and moral decay. As I leave the clinic, I see an old bald man at the gate with a package under his arm asking for the professor. I told him he was busy [...]. The man's name is Neacșu, and he said he's ready to be my witness if I want to 'fix' the professor a bit. He doesn't care where the money comes from, only that it comes.”²⁹ During the staged meeting orchestrated by Codreanu and his allies to discredit Ion Cristian before the medical staff, two photocopies circulate through the room: “one was Redman's statement alleging Cristian asked for money, and the other was from an anonymous source claiming Andrei raped his niece.”³⁰ From this, it becomes clear that the informer's journal entries were used to discredit others and eliminate rivals in the struggle for power. Lacking professional ethics, Cristian's colleagues accuse him of plagiarism and scientific fraud. The scientist feels that these offenses are more painful than the physical blows once dealt by Varlaam:

²⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 310-311.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 171-172.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 414.

“With all that, he still couldn’t bring himself to step away from the door. He was exhausted, as if at the end of a long and tormenting journey, where even standing required careful rationing of his energy. [...] ‘Lately, I’ve wanted to discover myself through my own actions, I needed that mirror, I wanted to know who I am... And now, invented authors! Not even Varlaam seemed harsher.’ [...] He felt the urge to enter and, before he could decide, he heard the faint voice of Professor Negru: ‘Not all of us can be equally gifted,’ he said. ‘Between wanting and being able, there lies, for some of us, an unbridgeable chasm, one that many try to cover with envy and malice, believing that this will bring them closer to their goal. I find it bizarre that Professor Cristian’s scientific work, of indisputable value, is being so vilely denied by another professor. [...] Cristian never climbed on anyone’s back; he walked alone, under harsh conditions.’”³¹

Just like Jupân Dumitrache, the informant-laboratory assistant clings to the honour of being a family man and strives to educate his household in the spirit of official doctrine. He reads to his children from magazines that glorify Marxist-Leninist principles and is scandalised by his mother-in-law’s mysticism, which he sees as a negative influence on her grandchildren. Lacking critical thinking, the Vatican Mouthpiece does not hesitate to denounce even his own family members (his mother-in-law) when they refuse to shape their lives according to the Party’s directives. Yet the old woman is not intimidated by her son-in-law’s ideological zeal; she insults and physically confronts him, much to his despair:

“Today I had to make a self-criticism before the whole family because lately I’ve neglected our educational and cultural-recreational activities. So I read the newspaper, commented on current events and then we listened together to a few records from our wonderful folk heritage. After that, I had a dispute with my mother-in-law, who shows belief in supernatural forces. [...] Given the old woman’s behaviour, I criticised her harshly, but she didn’t stop at insults [...] she went out into the yard and, in front of the whole block, called me a pagan, a fool, a nonbeliever, an ass and other such insults, influencing some sentimental and curious neighbours negatively. [...] I, however, acted with restraint, even though the old woman came to my table and shamelessly spat in my beans and hurled more insults in front of the entire family.”³²

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 415-416.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 267.

Uneducated and lacking any nuanced understanding of life, the informant-lab assistant is not just a ridiculous and harmless spy, as Victor Atanasiu suggests. On the contrary: his intrigues, conspiracies and false testimonies, whether offered or extracted from others, lead, just as in the “obsessive decade”, to the physical or moral annihilation of individuals whose only fault is being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or daring to preserve their inner freedom without adhering to the prevailing ideology.

Through *Orgolii*, Augustin Buzura proves that he is not merely a novelist of the “obsessive decade”, exposing the errors committed by the regime’s brutes, but also a keen observer of the informants under Ceaușescu’s rule. Canaris, or the Vatican Mouthpiece, is a remarkable character, distinguished by his language and entrusted by his superiors with a new task in his unofficial job description: to prevent the emergence of hostile elements through surveillance and denunciation.

Bibliography

a. In volumes

BUZURA, Augustin, 2016, *Orgolii*, ediție definitivă îngrijită de Angela Martin, pref. de Alex Goldiș, Editura Rao, București.

SIMION, Eugen (coordonator general), CHIȘU, Lucian (coordonator redacțional); APOSTU, Andreea; BĂNICĂ, Ana-Maria; BRĂGARU, Carmen; COFAN, Alunița; DEUTSCH, Cristina; DUMITRIU, Alexandru; DRAGOMAN, Ștefania; IFRIM, Nicolaeta; MILCA Andrei; ZURKA, Nenadić Marija; TELIBAN, Andreea, *Cronologia vieții literare românești. Perioada postbelică*, vol. XXIII A-B, 1977, București: Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2020.

*** *Dicționarul general al literaturii române*, vol. I: A/B, 2016, coord. gen.: Simion, Eugen, coord. și revizie de Danțiș, Gabriela; Drăgoi, Hanganu, Laurențiu; Iovănel, Mihai; Zăstroiu, Remus, ediția a II-a revizuită, adăugită și adusă la zi, Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, București.

b. In periodicals

ANTON TUDOR, Eugenia, 1977, „Romanul unei dezbatere morale”, (Cărți-Oameni-Fapte), in: *Viața Românească*, nr. 8, august, p. 56-58.

ARDELEANU, Virgil, 1977, „Augustin Buzura: Orgolii”, („Cronica literară”), in: *Steaua*, nr. 6, iunie, p. 35.

ATANASIU, Victor 1977, „Augustin Buzura: Orgolii, (Cultură)”, in: *Scânteia tineretului*, nr. 8754, 14 iulie, p. 4.

CIOBANU, Nicolae; CROHMĂLNICEANU, Ov. S.; MIHĂESCU, F.V.; SIMION, Eugen; UNGHEANU, M., 1977, „Colocviile *Luceafărului* Romanul actualității: roman al complexității umane și al conștiinței politice”, in: *Luceafărul*, nr. 49, 3 decembrie, pp. 6-7.

MANOLESCU, Nicolae, 1977, „Romanul de moravuri”, in: *România literară*, nr. 19, joi 12 mai, p. 7.

REGMAN, Cornel, 1977, „Augustin Buzura: *Orgolii* (Cronica literară)”, in: *Scânteia*, nr. 10851, sâmbătă 9 iulie, p. 4.

TOMUȘ, Mircea, 1977, „Augustin Buzura, *Orgolii* (Cronica literară)”, in: *Transilvania*, nr. 9, septembrie, p. 43.

UNGUREANU, C., 1977, „*Orgolii*, de Augustin Buzura”, in: *Orizont*, nr. 39, septembrie, p. 2.