

VIRGIL IERUNCA – A PRESTIGIOUS VOICE OF THE (LITERARY) ROMANIAN EXILE

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Introduction: the Romanian (Cultural and Anticommunist) Exile

After 1945 and particularly after 1947, a small part of the Romanian intellectuals managed to run away from the country invaded by the Soviet troupes and succeeded in finding a place of safety in different other spaces of Europe (France, Spain, Germany, Italy etc) or of the American continent (USA, Brazil, Canada etc.). Some of them – such as Mircea Eliade or Stefan Baciuc and C. V. Gheorghiu - were in a diplomatic mission in Europe; others, like Monica Lovinescu or Virgil Ierunca received scholarship from the French government. Most of them preferred France as a refuge especially due to the traditional (cultural) connections with this state and, of course, to the language. One of the most active and preeminent persona from the Romanian exile, Octavian Vuia, once explained their option (including the foundation of the *Romanian Research Center* (*Centrul Roman de Cercetari* in Paris), saying that France always has been for Romanians like “the second country”. On the other side, he said, Paris is “the unique capital where the most generous ideas and positions meet” ... spreading and shining over five continents.”/ “capitala unică unde se întâlnesc ideile și pozițiile cele mai generoase ... pentru a se răspândi după aceea și străluci peste cinci continente” (Vuia 125).

Living already in the free world, they decided not to come back to the country where freedom became just a simple word and the entire situation was terrible. They knew that in Romania the destruction was almost total; the governments led by Moscow generated big actions in order to exterminate the intellectuals, for a distortion of the consciousness and of the national identity. It was a big and very consistent action of a collective brainwash; important writers were outlawed or censured, cultural institutions were prohibited and replaced with others being in the servitude of the Soviet invader. That is why, in exile, being free, the intellectuals assumed the important role of continuation the national values, most of them kept on writing in Romanian.

Therefore, the immigrants created “a new country” in exile and started to establish publishing houses where they made available uncensored works of classicist writers or printed new books for the first time;

furthermore, they found different organizations having two main aims - to clear up to the Western leaders the tragic condition of their country and to hasten its liberation.

Concerning their activity we have to underline that they did not limit themselves to setting up cultural and political organizations or foundations, they did not limit themselves to writing and publishing books, but one of their major concerns was to edit newspapers and literary magazines in Romanian. This was a certain method of continuation of the press tradition from the interwar epoch, but also a way to maintain the Romanian language and identity taking into consideration the larger dissemination of a periodical.

1. Virgil Ierunca: landmarks in a biography

Nevertheless, in France, besides Monica Lovinescu, a great contribution in the cultural activity of the Romanian exile had Virgil Ierunca. Both became the best known voices of the Romanian anticommunist exile, because of their permanent connection with all the events in Romania, and, of course, because of *Free Europe* microphone.

Basic information regarding Ierunca's life could be obtained from various official biographies, electronic or conventional, such as Wikipedia or the complex dictionary of the Romanian exile by Florin Manolescu, where we can learn that Virgil Ierunca (the pen name of Virgil Untaru, born in August 16, 1920, in Ladesti, Valcea, and deceased in September 28, 2006) was a Romanian literary critic, a publicist and a poet. He graduated "Spiru Haret" High School, and Faculty of Letters and Philosophy in Bucharest.

His debut in journalism was in 1939, at *Timpul*, one of the most important dailies in that time. Between 1940-1944, he cooperated with articles at the main literary magazines such as *Jurnalul literar*, *Kalende*, *Universul literar*, *Fapta*, *Lumea*, *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*, *Viața Românească*, *Vremea*; in the last one, in the column "French cahiers", he used to present the French writers who opposed resistance to the German troupes. Besides his contribution to the different Romanian periodicals where he published book reviews or essays, Ierunca was also one of the founders of the free spirit magazines *Albatros* and *Agora*.

Receiving a scholarship from the French Institute in 1947, Ierunca left Romania and settled in Paris. There he worked for Radio France as an editor of political and cultural broadcasts (1952-1975) and also as a researcher for the National Research Center. Since 1975, Virgil Ierunca became a very active voice at the *Free Europe* radio.

Besides this "oral" activity, he was very dynamic in other different cultural branches. He founded or contributed to edit many literary

magazines, wrote articles, essays, poetry, books, wrote prefaces or chapters in French Encyclopedia regarding the history of the Romanian literature.

2. Virgil Ierunca – an active founder of literary magazines

We can assert that in the history of the journalism it is very rare that a person who had a vocation as a founder of literary publications managed to edit them as Virgil Ierunca did.

As I mentioned before, since his student days (1942), he contributed to setting up *Albatros* magazine, in cooperation with Geo Dumitrescu. But, because of its vanguard orientation, the publication was closed down soon. Other periodical, *Agora*, founded with Ion Caraion, in 1946, had the same destiny (this time - only one issue could be materialized).

Ever since he established in Paris, from the very beginning, Virgil Ierunca got involved in the cultural life of the Romanian community and became one of the principal founders of the first literary magazine in exile, *Luceafarul*, with Mircea Eliade and N. I. Herescu.

In a dialogue (published in *Jurnalul literar*, 1998) with Ileana Corbea, the writer confessed that they considered this kind of activity (writing and editing magazines) as a moral duty (“we had a duty”) especially because they were free and could communicate the authentic situation: “We could not write better than in Romania, but we could write more independent. So ... we had a duty.”/ „Nu puteam scrie mai bine decât în România, ci mai liber. Aveam deci ... o datorie” (Corbea 12). In the same interview, Ierunca modestly avoided to give the entire list of the publications where he contributed as a founder, as an editor, as a consultant or simply as a writer, since the list could be “too long.”

In *Luceafarul*, because of political circumstances, he used a nickname (Alexandru Andronic, borrowed from a character of Mircea Eliade’s literature); starting with *Caete de dor* (1951), he will sign Virgil Ierunca.

Caete de dor had 13 issues and appeared till 1960. In the above mentioned interview, the editor considered the magazine “a document of the Romanian obsession”/ „un document al obsesiei românești”, and also “a very important bibliographic source today”/ “o importantă sursă bibliografică”, because here Eliade firstly published some fragments of his Diary and the Journal of the novel *Noaptea de Sinziene*, and here he explained, in another article, “the co-existence, sometimes in a conflicting manner of the writer with the scholar, both in his life and literary work.”/ “Mircea Eliade s-a străduit să explice și să-și explice coexistența, deseori conflictuală, în opera și existența sa, a scriitorului cu savantul.” In *Caete de dor*, Mircea Vulcanescu’s, Ion Barbu’s, Lovinescu’s unpublished texts could also be read for the first time. Another document that was very important and can give

the real dimension of the magazine was the primary translation into Romanian of Heidegger's text "What is metaphysics" by Walter Biemel.

Moreover, in 1963, Ierunca edited *Ființa Românească*, a publication considered today "one of the best cultural magazine in exile" (Corbea 12). The magazine had many contributors and its summary included various cultural themes and domains. In its *Foreward (Cuvânt înainte)* the editors stated their connection with the "brothers from the country home"/ "frații de acasă", calling euphemistically this publication "The Country in exile"/ "Țara în exil".

In 1969, together with Nicolae Petra, Virgil Ierunca managed to create other cultural magazine – *Limite*. Here, the main columns were „Pagini inedite”, „Masa umbrelor”, „Confluente”, the editors keeping also „Antologia rușinii” that was started in *România Muncitoare*. In that periodical, the publishers wrote down that "as in a mirror of abasement, the column will contain some fragments from those writers' work that lost not only their consciousness, but also the measure."/ „Ca într-un fel de oglindă a degradării, vor figura aici cei care și-au pierdut nu numai conștiința, dar și măsura.” In 1973, a new cultural publication (*Ethos*) was founded by Ierunca and Ioan Cușa. The editors' reason was the fact that "it was the moment of a new exile". The main columns of this magazine were „Roza vânturilor”, „Zodia Cancerului”, „Românii deplasați” (about those obedient intellectuals to the communist regime), *Antologia rușinii*, etc.

At the time, Ierunca edited and also contributed articles or poetry to other magazines, such as *Prodromos*, *America*, *Românul*, *Drum*, *Revista Scriitorilor Români*, *Dialog*, *Mele*, *Contrapunct*, *Agora*, *Lupta*, etc.

3. Virgil Ierunca – a gifted writer

Besides his activity as a founder of periodicals, Ierunca was a writer, a polemicist, a tough voice fighting against communism and a promoter of the authentic literature from Romania and from the exile as well. Today we can state that the well-known radio voice was a gifted writer and a literary critic with a real talent in the art of portrait, in the art of finding the most appropriate word which could express a fact, an idea or a feeling.

Even though his literary work is not too vast, we can determine his favorite genres. They were philosophical essay, portrait, pamphlet, literary criticism and memoirs as well. In many Romanian periodicals (not only in France) he also published poetry. Firstly, we will refer to the portrait as a preferred genre, many pages signed by Virgil Ierunca being dedicated to some important Romanian cultural personalities.

3.1. Portraits as “intellectual biographies”

We could entitle this subchapter “A Book with Friends”, because the portraits sketched by Ierunca are “discourses in love”, homage and the real proof of his noble cult of friendship. Yet – who are Ierunca’s friends? Their names are Vasile Voiculescu, Constantin Noica, Dinu Pillat, Mircea Eliade, Lucian Bădescu, Mihail Fărcășanu, Mihai Cismărescu, G. M. Cantacuzino, Alexandru Busuioceanu, Mircea Popescu, Ioan Cușa, and many others, the majority sharing with him the painful and also laborious experience of exile. Regrettably, until today, many of them do not have a real significance for the Romanians because their literary work remained almost unacknowledged.

Paradoxically, some of them (such as Al. Ciorănescu, George Uscătescu, Busuioceanu, N. I. Herescu, Ștefan Băciu, Octavian Vuia) were perceived as prestigious personalities not only among the Romanian exile, but also in the countries where they lived and produced their literary or scientific creation. Therefore, it could be a real duty to bring “home” their work and their names as well. We will give only two examples – a writer and a scholar (both Ierunca’s good friends) who are almost unknown in Romania, having a certain prestige in other literatures or academic fields.

First of all, with no terms of evaluation, in an arbitrary order, we would like to center the readers’ attention – using (perhaps) Ierunca’s preferences – to Alexandru Busuioceanu’s image.

In two books (printed in Romania after 1989), *Subiect și predicat* and *Românește*, the essayist dedicated a special chapter to him.

In *Românește*, the memoirist creates a portrait of his friend focusing particularly on the circumstances they met – “a series of spiritual coincidences” – using a physical and moral description of the man/ “an existence threatened with ethos”/ „o existență amenințată de ethos” (Ierunca 31); in *Subiect și predicat* this description is completed with literary reflections on Busuioceanu’s poetry. Considering him “an authentic poet” and deploring that “till 1945 in Romania, nobody observed this, while in exile only a few”, Ierunca situated Busuioceanu’s poetry “between Blaga and Voiculescu” (Ierunca 25) and pointed out his uniqueness. After giving – as examples – some of his poetical themes, he emphasized the experience of exile, considering it “not a theme, but an obsession.” After this remark, a short paragraph is focused on the exile as “a brutal way of knowledge”, the poet “suffering the pain of being far away”/ “a suferi suferința depărțării” (Ierunca, 1993: 31).

Another portrait (in *Subiect și predicat*), “an intellectual biography”, as Ierunca considered it, is dedicated to his former teacher in Vâlcea, the man who became in France one of his best friends, Lucian Bădescu. In the new country, Bădescu turned into being famous, “a name now”, but “a name for the history of the French literature”, becoming a professor and teaching

French literature at Sorbonne. His doctoral thesis, Ierunca informs us, had 1400 pages; however, “paradoxically, you can read it as a novel, a novel of a generation who assures the translation from a favorable moment of the earlier period to a more favorable one of the future.”/ “Situatie paradoxală, lucrarea aceasta savantă... se citește totuși ca un roman. Romanul unei generații asigurând trecerea dintre un moment fast al trecutului și un moment și mai fast al viitorului...” (Ierunca 51).

Then, the individuality of the scholar is supplemented with his uniqueness as a human being (“who did not have the vanity of the etiquette, or of the social and scientific ascent”/ “era cu totul și cu totul lipsit de orgoliul etichetei, al ascensiunii sociale sau științifice” (Ierunca 47) and with his distinctiveness as a very gifted professor.

Reading all the portraits Ierunca proposed us, we have to emphasize his talent in catching the main characteristics of the man in a metaphorical phrase, or sometimes in very few words. Thus, Dinu Pillat, for example, “is not a professional critic, he is a love critic”/ “nu este un critic profesionist, este un critic de dragoste.” (Ierunca 55); about Mircea Popescu, Ierunca said that “his humanity and his humor belong to his bibliography”/ “La Mircea Popescu, omenia și umorul fac parte din bibliografie” (Ierunca 57). Mircea Eliade is considered the supreme example of “how you could not be anything else than Romanian”/ Mircea Eliade: sau cum nu poți să nu fii român” (Ierunca 41).

Of course, we cannot cite all Ierunca’s words about his friends portrayed in his books. As an evidence of his cult of friendship, we’ll give only some more examples. Sometimes, a single phrase could be put up as a model. For instance, respecting Mihail Farcasanu, Ierunca remembered those “moments that transformed a *meeting* in a sign, a joy of dialogue or a memory”/ “o seamă de clipe ce fac din *întâlnire* un semn, o bucurie a dialogului sau o memorie” (Ierunca 73). As for Mihai Cismarescu, the former political editor at *Free Europe*, Ierunca said he was „a technician of truth”/ „un tehnician al adevarului”(Ierunca: 67). Regarding the main political personalities in exile, “the active trinity”– Radescu-Gafencu-Farcasanu, Ierunca expressed also his entire esteem -“with no shadows”/ „stima mea pentru trinitatea activă (Rădescu-Gafencu-Fărcășanu) era fără umbre” (Ierunca 77).

3.2. Satire and Polemic - a way of opposition

Yet, Ierunca’s many pages are documents about the political and cultural condition in Europe and in Romania as well. His clear point of view regarding the bad situation in our country after the Soviet invasion, his permanent connection with everything that happened in Romania and especially his total anticommunist position are revealed in his books.

In his short analysis regarding the Romanian exile, Mircea Anghelescu emphasizes that for the majority of the thinkers living outside Romania, *exile had an imperative responsibility in the assertion of an impossible (political and cultural) opposition in the country* (Anghelescu 101).

Everywhere in Ierunca's *literary statements*, the reader can read his firm belief regarding the important duty of the free intellectuals – to speak in the name of those who lost their freedom: “being silent here, we profane the liberty that we gained for pronouncing in the name of those who lost it”/ „tăcând aici, necinstim libertatea ce ni s-a dat pentru a mărturisi în numele celor care au pierdut-o”), wrote Ierunca in an article having a significant title *If we can speak .../Dacă putem vorbi...* (Ierunca, 1991: 85).

Whoever wants to examine Virgil Ierunca's literary activity and particularly the way he reflected his epoch and the Romanian literature (including the authors' attitude) will observe a constant nonconformist attitude (in his early youth, in Romania) and a fervent anticommunist one during the exile period. In France, in his radio broadcasts and also in the literary articles, Ierunca expressed a polemical position against the “Sovietization” of our country, against the totalitarian regime in Romania, against the intellectuals who – because of different reasons – transformed themselves in zealous promoters of the new ideology.

Concerning his position, the reader will not be surprised by the title of one of his books - *Dimpotrivă/ On the Contrary* (this is also the title of a chapter in *Românește*). The title of the first article used a stanza from Eminescu's prohibited poem *Doina*, “Tot românul plânsu-mi-s-a”. The author's indignation is straightened against the “under-developed *intelighentia*”/ “intelighenția subdezvoltată”), against those who celebrated Eminescu after they dared a massive censorship of his literary work.

As in the *Forward (Cuvânt înainte)* of the first literary magazine in exile, *Luceafărul*, in the chapter *Geography*, which opens with “Romania in the mountains”/ *România în munți*, the author pointed out those “moments” when his country was occupied by “the barbarians of the ideology”/ “barbarii ideologiei”, being not satisfied in subduing it, trying especially “to kill our people's soul”, “to kill the substance of the Romanian spirituality.”/ „Ei nu se mulțumesc să prade țarina, ci merg mai departe, în culele adânci și tainice ale neamului, pentru ca să-i degradeze conștiința, să-i ucidă sufletul” (Ierunca 64).

As we already know, in the Stalinist epoch, the only acceptable literature was that of propaganda. Unfortunately, a fraction of the Romanian writers was rapidly willing to help the regime and Virgil Ierunca, side by side with Monica Lovinescu, became the voice who constantly unmasked them. Ierunca proposed also “a map of the engineers of the dead soul”/ „o hartă a inginerilor sufletelor moarte ...” (Ierunca 86). In 1949, Virgil

Ierunca, as many other lucid minds, clearly understood that in Romania “the limits between hope and despair are darker than formerly were.”/ “limitele între speranță și disperare sunt mai întunecate ca altădată” (Ierunca 64).

As a good polemist, in a free country, when Ierunca wanted to denounce and to accuse the communist government, he did not avoid the rough words. Thus, in his indictment against the totalitarianism, he became a merciless pamphleteer. His indignation hinted at the “moldy dream” of the “plague of the world”, against the “ignominious zodiacal constellation” when his generation was condemned to live. (In original: „visul rânced al ciumei în lume”, „zodia de rușine sub care trăim”). His sharp polemic refers to the new masters of his country as “termites” and “necrophores”/ “termitele”, “necroforii” (Ierunca 72). In a chapter called “Moscova”, the writer saw the communism “after a forty years error” as “a real orthodoxy of human decadence.”/ „Comunismul a devenit, după o rătăcire de patruzeci de ani într-un pustiu fals revoluționar, o adevărată ortodoxie a degradării omenești” (Ierunca 76).

As a presumptive Eminescu’s attitude (hypothetically coming in Republica Populara Romana!), the polemist considered that “any course” could be insufficient to blame the new leaders. (“Uluirea lui ar fi atât de mare, încât orice apostrofă, orice blestem, orice afurisire i s-ar părea neîncăpătoare” (Ierunca: 83). Anyway, describing Romania’s reality, Ierunca expressed the tragedy of his country borrowing some Eminescu’s syntagmas or using his own satirical words. Therefore, he revealed that degradation of the consciousness of some writers (“turcirea conștiințelor”) using a pejorative connotation coming from the historical time of Turkish domination, writing in a very satirical manner about “the army of the authorities”, that “impure army” of those who show a total obedience towards the new regime.

Sadly, starting from Bernanos’ firm belief that “nobody could take the writers at least the right to be silent”/ „nimeni nu va putea lua scriitorilor cel puțin libertatea de a tăcea” (Ierunca 91), the author wrote also about “the assassination of the silence” in a country “convicted to a endless feast”. He also divided the Romanian writers in a few categories, giving examples as “the dead souls”/ „suflete moarte” - Mihai Ralea and Demostene Botez or “the soul that is getting ready to die” – George Călinescu.

Ierunca used the same tough terminology when he referred to the passive position of the Occidental governments and intellectuals regarding the Soviet Union’s politics in the Eastern part of Europe and in Romania as well, our country being “forgotten at the same time by God, justice and luck”. Consequently, he wrote about “the gentle cowardice” of the Occident, about the “sleep and hesitation of the Occident” that could consider “the black as white”/ „lașitatea delicată a Apusului, somnul și șovăielile lui” (Ierunca 71).

4. Virgil Ierunca – a Moral Instance

We cannot uphold this assertion concerning (perhaps) Ierunca's the most important quality without Monica Lovinescu's words about him: "I didn't meet other significant man competent to take action firstly for others till his own negation"/ „N-am întâlnit vreun alt om de valoare în stare să lucreze mai întâi pentru alții până la negarea de sine" (Lovinescu 294).

Beyond all doubt, Monica Lovinescu's and Virgil Ierunca's role as cultural and moral landmarks is well-known and unanimous accepted. For many years they both helped us to defend against the imposture promoted by the communist regime. Other immigrant, Sanda Stolojan, emphasizes that Ierunca's book *Românește* expresses a "total passion and a certain lucidity"/ „pasiune totală și o luciditate fără greș." In her opinion, for the writer, the attribute „românește" can be perceived as "a notion carrying moral values"/ „calificativul românește înțeles ca o noțiune purtătoare de valori morale." During time, Sanda Stolojan continued, by his written words and by his activity, using his entire energy, culture and talent, Virgil Ierunca contributed to preserve – in exile – the confidence in existence of a Romanian *ethos*"/ „Prin cuvântul său scris și prin acțiunea sa, Virgil Ierunca a contribuit neabătut, de-a lungul anilor, cu toată energia, cultura și talentul său, la păstrarea, în exil, a încrederii în existența unui ethos românesc" (Stolojan 7).

Moreover, in exile, as many other immigrants, Ierunca discovered the special beauty of Romanian language, in exile he learned to love it and this love, he confessed, "forbid the extempore speech, haste, and mutilation by contamination"/ „îmi interzice improvizația, graba, pocirea prin contaminare" (Ierunca, 2000: 310).

Conclusions

Overall, knowing Ierunca's rich cultural activity and his permanent anticommunist fight in exile, we can assert that he was not only a very complex personality, but also a certain moral instance. His articles were spread almost in all literary Romanian periodicals in France and other European or American countries, he wrote books of essays and poetry, by his voice was known the true literary and ethical values.

Moreover, each page proves his extraordinary (yet insufficient promoted) talent and sense of language. His words praised or satirized, emphasized the moral beauty of his friends or sentenced the "dead souls" of those writers who accepted honors from the communist regime.

Generally speaking, we can affirm that never in his activity in exile, Ierunca gave up his principles of fighting against communism and promoting the authentic moral and artistic values as well or, as Vladimir Tismăneanu

concluded, “with elegance but with no useless timidity, He uttered indispensable truths for the honor of Romanian culture”/ „Cu eleganță, dar fără inutilă timiditate, Domnia Sa a spus adevăruri indispensabile pentru onoarea culturii românești.” (Tismaneanu: *Evenimentul Zilei*, <http://www.presa-zilei.ro/stire/4578/virgil-ierunca.html>).

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