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Books and music

Ciprian Voicilă

What I can definitely say about the music of the '90s is that it was different than that of the '80s. My mother's idols were Angelea Similea, Mihaela Runcanu, Dan Spătaru, Șeicaru, Hrușcă, certain singers adopting a style I could define as sentimentalist-romantic. Since I had no cassettes to record on- the first ones I laid my hands on were Raks- driven by the innocence of the age, I recorded the songs of the new Gods over those of the respective great artists. At the beginning, my ears were listening to a sort of melange: Doctor Alban with *No Hash, Hash, No Heroin*, M.C. Hammer, Gypsy Kings, Enigma, Depeche Mode, Roxette, Milli Vanilli, New Kids on the Block, Madonna. The walls in my room quickly got covered by posters from *Salut* magazine, the first teenager magazine edited by the actor George Mihăiță.

There was some guy Ștefănuș living in the neighbourhood who was Michael Jackson's replica. He had a real sanctuary dedicated to Michael in his bedroom. He had posters with him including on the ceiling. He was able to perfectly imitate that crawfish walking specific to all Michael's fans. There were fights in the city between rock and Depeche fans. For Jackson's fans, the moment of epiphany was his coming to Bucharest for the *Dangerous* concert. The *Black and White* video clip was projected on screens. Michael was walking in a white shirt, surrounded

by some brutes.

Around the eighth grade, Bebe, a rocker from a neighbouring block initiated me into the Metallica spirit. It was from him that I recorded *Kill 'Em All* and *And Justice for All*. Those songs had something romantic in them. I liked their vocal, James Hatfield, because he emanated virility. At that time I would have liked to wear a T-shirt with skeletons. It would have been cool to display a skeleton through the wreath produced by the Kim cigarettes, stolen from my mother or through the Monte Carlo wreath. I wore it only too late, when I couldn't look at the world through Gun Slash's locks, the Guns guitarist... On the late T-shirt I imprinted Guns'n'Roses and a skeleton with a rose in its mouth. Guns' songs were even more romantic and we usually picked up girls while listening to them. You used to take the girl and walk her through the rainfall of the *November Rain*. I usually got my information concerning the mythical lives of the rock bands from *Rock* and *Heavy Metal* magazines. I really enjoyed Laurențiu Lenți Chiriac's chronicles. Late in the night, Petre Magdin was presenting old bands on TV.

I equally liked the Romanian bands. 'Sarmalele reci' with *She is Doing Tantra Yoga* and 'Timpuri Noi' with *Running, Running through the Cornfield* and *My Name is Luca*. I used to kneel for years in front of those from *The Doors*.

The leader of the band, Jim Morrison, seemed to me the most metaphysical vocal. I borrowed the lyrics anthology *An American Prayer* from my friend Iuxel. I read it as if the fifth gospel. My fascination grew bigger when I found out that Jim Morrison had been irrevocably marked by Nietzsche and Rimbaud.

When I started asking myself why Nirvana Fans were hanging around with their boots unlaced and why at the middle of the night, during the 'trash hour' the rockers were hitting each other as if in a savage dancing I felt that I was contemplating new horizons.

That was around 1993 and I was fifteen. I was in search for myself. I firstly found myself in Sven Hassel's books, a Danish who ended up in a Nazi marching regiment, in the 27 shellproof machines regiment. His books were published one after another at Nemira publishing house: *Liquidate Paris*, *The OGPU Prison*, *Comrades of War*, *Assignment Gestapo*, *Monte Cassino*, *SS General*, *The March Battalion*.

Every two weeks I used to go to the city centre where I knew that the book salesmen were gathering. I used to wait for them shivering, from around six in the morning. I was shyly getting closer and asking if some new books from Sven Hassel were for sale. In the twelfth grade I used to wrap myself in a sheet during summer time. I had the Romanian language and literature commentaries at sight and under the sheet *Monte Cassino*, recently reedited by Nemira. Sven Hassel's books on the war managed to install a durable peace between me and my stepfather, whom I used to pass them on to with enthusiasm.

In some afternoon I watched a movie with two old men on TV. One of them was dead funny. Completely bald, baby-faced, he was sitting on one side of a bed, talking. He was soliloquising. Delivering a speech about some authors I had never heard about: Platon, Kant, Eliade, Nae Ionescu. His liveliness was contrasting with the shabby, kind of dead room he was in. The second old man had a deep-wrinkled rebellious

face, and ruffled hair. He was stammering. The two used to be very good friends when they were young and they were complimenting each other. The former was saying that the latter was the most lucid man he had ever met and that he was hoping to make peace with Apostle Pavel till the end of his life because he had made him wrong in one of his writings (*The Temptation of Being*). The latter was saying that the former was the only true genius he had ever met. The first one was Petre Țuțea and the second Emil Cioran. The film on the two of them was called *Admiration Exercise* and had been produced by Gabriel Liiceanu.

A little while after watching the movie I found *Between God and My People* (1992) at a stall, a book containing some of Petre Țuțea's interviews and writings, edited by Sorin Dumitrescu at Anastasia Publishing House. That used to cost one hundred lei, quite a lot for my school-boy pocket. In order to get the money, I sold my Sven Hassel collection to Bogdan, a 'bookseller', one living on the selling of books. And I bought *Between God and My People*. I was especially fascinated by the photo on the cover. Țuțea's eyes were shining and he was holding a finger up, towards God.

There had followed six years when I devoured all inter-war writers' books. A particular category was represented by the books that subconsciously created me a level of aspiration which I was going to become conscious of only later. Eliade's *The Shortsighted Teenager's Novel*, *The Conversations with Cioran*, Liiceanu's *Păltiniș Diary* and H.R Patapievic's *Flight Within Arrowshot*. Eliade, 'The Shortsighted Teenager', proved fascinating to me due to the exercises for educating the will he used to practise on him, due to the conscience of a mission, to an amor fati. A tension of virility, a teenage energy in search for its manifestations was especially vibrant in the novels *The Return from Heavens*, *The Hooligans*, *The Valentine Night* and in his essays from *Oceanography*. Liiceanu's *Păltiniș Diary* (first edition 1983, reed-

ited in 1991) was describing an autonomous Castalia where a master wasn't teaching his students some kind of meta-language like in *The Game with the Glass Beads*, but the idioms of pure philosophy. The master was Constantin Noica, who between 1949 and 1958 had been submitted to house arrest in Câmpulung-Muscel, while being a political prisoner between 1958-1964.

Since I had no money to buy it, during a summer vacation, I transcribed half of the volume of *Conversations with Cioran* on a Mathematics notebook, using a lead pencil. Cioran was gathering proselytes by means of his outspoken nihilism. He was promoting the suicide, declaring that in Rășinari village, where he was born, his model had been the village drunkard who had inherited a fortune and he was drinking like a fish, hanging around with a fiddler while in the afternoon running into the thrifty peasants who were going to work their land. Finally, *Flight Within Arrowshot* (Humanitas, 1995) was putting together the biography of a young self-taught intellectual who had discovered on his own account a technique of survival during communism: 'I don't know how others managed to preserve their integrity during communism, but I was redeemed due to my friends (...) friends of ideas. I saw culture as alchemy, and the most difficult philosophy (Hegel, for example) was perceived by all of us, full of emotion and enthusiasm, as initiation in a model of human being closer to the perfection we all aimed at from our neophyte position.' (H.R. Patapievici- *Flight Within Arrowshot*, Humanitas, Buc., 1995, 5-6)

I have asked myself two questions. First: why are the authors I have already mentioned so popular among young readers, especially among adolescents? Because they manage to give sense to their lives. Precisely at the age when tormented by the fear of what is going to be, Eliade is urging you to create your own destiny because you have a mission to accomplish. Noica is tempting you towards the philosophy-knots (the greatest achievement of the human spirit). Cio-

ran is telling you that there is no sense in life, that everything is meaningless, everything is pure fiction. In order for you to get away, you have to appeal to curses or to writing, the only ones granting you catharsis. The second question: how can one explain the huge success registered by the interwar authors' books after December 1989?

After the '90s, the former Political Publishing House turned into Humanitas Publishing House, run by one of Constantine Noica's disciples, Gabriel Liiceanu. This is where many of the authors prohibited by the communist regime started being published. Everything forbidden by the communist regime had a particular charm, reminding you of a forgotten normality, had the perfume of a beautiful coat recovered from some wardrobe. This publishing house published within the *Totalitarianism and the Literature of the East* series the books which emphasised the terror of communism (Vasili Grossman – *Panta Rhei*, Aleksandr Soljenitiĭn- *A Day of Ivan Denisovici's Life*, Virgil Ierunca- *The Pitești Phenomenon*, Constantin Noica – *Pray for Brother Alexander*, Paul Goma- *Rainbow Colours* and *Gherla*, Monica Lovinescu's *Short Waves* volumes.) they also published author series – Nae Ionescu, Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Eugene Ionesco, Constantin Noica, Lucian Blaga. Mircea Ciobanu's conversations with King Michael I of Romania (1992). Mircea Vulcănescu (1904-1952, the philosopher, economist, member of the Dimitrie Gusti Sociological School) is rediscovered. Because he used to be an under-secretary within the Ministry of Finance (January-August 1944), part of Marshal Antonescu's government, he was sentenced to eight difficult years in prison. He died in Aiud jail, trying to save a young man with whom he had been locked up in the insulator.

Other publishing houses publish poetry written in the communist prisons by Radu Gyr, alongside with the memories of the theologian Nichifor Crainic (*White Days, Black Days, Gândirea Publishing House, 1991*). Dacia

Publishing House publishes Nicolae Steinhardt's *The Happiness Diary* (1991), a vivid description of the common life in the communist prisons (Gherla, Aiud) and Alexandr Zinoviev's *Homo Sovieticus* (1991). The tendency is hence towards the complete recovery of the inter-war political memory.

Steinhardt, a close friend of the philosopher Constantin Noica, is sentenced to 13 years of hard labour because he refused to be a witness of the prosecution in the trial against Noica. On 15th March 1960, in Jilava prison, Steinhardt the Jew, turns to the Orthodox religion. *The Happiness Diary* opens with a question: how can you evade a self-centred universe? One of the solutions would be mystical, being the solution of faith, as Steinhardt states it. When you lack faith you still have three other valid options.

The solution of the living dead. Before the investigation, you try to convince yourself that 'I will die this very moment'; 'if the individual strongly believes it, he is saved. Nothing else can touch him anymore. There is no other thing he could be threatened, blackmailed, tempted or enchanted with.'

The solution of the riotous fellow. 'The solution resides in the total maladjustment to the system. (...) the riotous fellow has no fix home, no papers, he is not employed, he is a loafer, a parasite, a ragamuffin and a moocher.'

'to sum it up: when faced with tyranny, exploitation, misery, adversities, disasters, banes, dangers, not only will you not give yourself up

but, on the contrary, you will juice all these feelings out of the crazy craving for living and fighting.'

Ioan Ioanid's *Our Every-day Prison* is published, a sort of Romanian *Gulag Archipelago*. The writings of the theologian Dumitru Stăniloae are also rediscovered. The painter Sorin Dumitrescu publishes *Seven Mornings with Dumitru Stăniloae* (1992) at Anastasia Publishing House, a book containing conversations with the Romanian theologian. The same publishing house publishes books written by Vladimir Losski (*The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*-1992) – a Russian theologian, expelled in 1992 by the Soviet government; by Vladimir Volkoff (*The Evil's Trinity. Indictment during the Posthumous Trial of Lenin, Troțki and Stalin*-1996; *About the King*-1992); by Paul Evdokimov (*God's Crazy Love*, 1993)- also a Russian theologian who emigrated to Paris; *The Saint Angels* (1992) by Ileana Princess of Romania.

The *Bachic and Political Ideas* (Victor Frunz? Publishing House, 1996) written by the writer of epigrams P?storel Teodoreanu (Al. O. Teodoreanu) are also published. P?storel had been sentenced to prison because he had disturbed the regime by writing epigrams of the kind: 'I bemoan Stalin, and I'll pass / To you my little secrecy / I fear that will kiss the arse / Of the entire committee.'

Translated by Raluca Vîjăac

