

**ENGINEERING THE HUMAN SOUL
SCIENCE FICTION IN COMMUNIST ROMANIA
1955-1989**

By

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I hereby declare that this work is entirely my own, except where otherwise indicated, and that it does not contain materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions.

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I investigate the place of science fiction within Romanian communist literature and its social role during communism. My analysis comprises several layers. First the political, social and ideological transformations of the Romanian communist state represent the necessary background against which science fiction is analyzed. Second, science fiction is placed in the literary dynamic of the Romanian communist period. How science fiction emerged in Romania, what were the institutional structures, who were the persons involved, and how the development of the genre is related with the development of literature in general, mainly as a consequence of the political transformations, are some of the questions that were addressed in this thesis. Moreover, as they are an essential link between the writers and the readers, the system of publications from financing, circulation, print run, and distribution, through censorship, was also tackled. Third, an analysis of the science fiction literary discourse - yet without applying aesthetic criteria - is an important aspect in assessing the social functions of science fiction. The narrative elements and structures so much blamed by mainstream literary critics for their lack of literary merit are nevertheless valuable since they may uncover the type of message delivered by the genre to its readers. Fourth, the science fiction community is also investigated.

A literary genre for children and youth without a significant tradition in Romania before communism, science fiction developed following the Soviet model especially as an active pedagogical and propagandistic instrument meant to build the new communist man. However, during communism it evolved from a didactic medium meant to disseminate scientific knowledge among its readers into a 'catalyst' for 'alternative and rather free' spaces of socialization. Magazines, fanzines, novels, and almanacs constitute the primary sources for the investigation. Moreover, works on literary criticism, social and political articles published in the newspapers and in the literary journals, memoirs, and historical

works are extensively drawn upon for background information. Last but not least, perhaps the most important place in the economy of the sources is granted to oral history investigation.

Existing scholarship has neglected this topic. Literary critics considers science fiction as having a meagre aesthetic value and do not deserve attention while historians have not considered placing the genre in its historical context relevant for the history of communism. Yet, as I demonstrate in my thesis, the analysis of science fiction, both its literature and community, offers important insights into the intellectual, political and social history of this period contributing also to the analysis of youth culture during communism.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CC	Central Committee
CMEA	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CPSF	<i>Colecția Povestiri Științifico-Fantastice</i> (Science Fiction Stories Collection)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
GDR	German Democratic Republic
RCP	Romanian Communist Party (Called the Romanian Workers' Party between February 1948 and July 1965)
ROMCON	Romanian National Science Fiction Convention
RWP	<i>Partidul Muncitoresc Român</i> (PMR) Romanian Workers' Party (1948-1965; thereafter called the Romanian Communist Party- <i>Partidul communist Român</i>)
UASCR	<i>Uniunea Asociațiilor Studențești a Tineretului Communist</i> , (Union of Students' Associations)
UTC	<i>Uniunea Tineretului Communist</i> (Communist Youth Union)

INTRODUCTION

Reading science fiction stories was a favorite pastime for many young people in communist Romania, a taste that was not significantly developed before that. With the advent of the communist regime, science and technology were granted a considerable ideological significance. Accordingly, their literary treatment became part of an active pedagogical and propagandistic process meant to build the new communist man. Science fiction, originally and ostensibly a genre for children and youth, was a part of this effort. However, until now no analysis of the reasons and the effects behind this ‘science fiction propaganda campaign’ has been undertaken. Therefore, the questions that most broadly sum up what I will investigate are the place of science fiction within the Romanian communist literature, and more important, its social functions during communism.

Within this framework, the preliminary hypothesis of this study is that during communism, science fiction evolved from a didactic medium meant to disseminate scientific knowledge among its readers into a ‘catalyst’ for ‘alternative and rather free’¹ spaces of socialization. Thus, in the 1950s and 1960s science fiction contributed to the creation, legitimation, and dissemination of the ‘scientific component’ of the social imaginary advocated by the communist regime. Later, especially after the mid 1970s, when with the advent of national communism the official legitimizing vision of the state became directed toward the past, science fiction not only maintained the dominant political message but it also created alternative social imaginaries to that supported by the Communist Party. These transformations had major consequences on the nature of escapism offered by the genre to its

¹ I use the expression ‘alternative and rather free’ to refer to the science fiction community especially in the 1980s, which although seemed a totally free space in fact it was financed by the state and closely supervised, and therefore controlled, by the state institutions.

readers and more importantly on the mode of socialization inside the science fiction community. The reconstruction and the analysis of this dynamic are the main objects of this research. To achieve this goal I investigate Romanian science fiction through its political and social context, its place in the dynamic of Romanian literature, as well as through the content of the genre's literary publications.

The period covered by this dissertation (1955-1989) encompasses the entire existence of science fiction in communist Romania. Far from being an autochthonous initiative and without a substantial tradition in the Romanian literature, science fiction emerged as an emulation of the Soviet model and in its first years was related to socialist realism. In 1955, under the label *literatură științifico-fantastică* (scientific-fantastic literature), appeared the bimonthly magazine *Colecția Povestiri Științifico-Fantastice* (The Collection of Science Fiction Stories - hereinafter referred to as *CPSF*), the only regular science fiction publication at that time. In 1974 *CPSF* was suppressed and the genre subsisted only within science fiction literary clubs that increased in number. There were a few books published but not any regular publication dedicated to the genre. However, science fiction was resuscitated in the 1980s under a different name, *literatură de anticipație* (anticipation literature) when the annual *Almanah Anticipația* (Anticipation Almanac) started publication. These science fiction publications, along with testimonies of science fiction writers, literary critics, editors and fans, as well as Communist Party documents reflecting communist policies on cultural issues in Romania are the main sources for this study. However, when appropriate, I shall refer both to Soviet science fiction, which was the initial model for the Romanian writers, and to the development of the genre in the West.

The small number of studies on Romanian science fiction has tended to scrutinize the genre using the methods of literary criticism, which explore the field and its dynamic from

within, usually in search of aesthetic values, rather than drawing on its historical and social context. However, in this dissertation indebted to historical and sociological methods, I argue that science fiction, simultaneously a literary and social phenomenon, is a fruitful and valuable documentary source for analyzing Romanian communist society.

Analytical Framework

My research focuses on four main areas that I consider particularly illuminating for understanding the social functions of science fiction. First, the political, social and ideological transformations of the Romanian communist state are the necessary background against which science fiction is analyzed. The emergence of the genre and eventually its popularity are explained within the context of the extensive propaganda campaign for science and technology launched by the communist regime in its first decade. The aim of this action was not only to increase the supply of scientific personnel for industry and to spread knowledge of science among the population, but also to permeate the ‘social imaginary,’ a concept that will be further explained, with a new ‘legitimizing’ vision ‘of scientific atheism’ that would lead to the promised communist utopia. An important element of this process was the 1948 reform of education that almost completely changed the Romanian schooling system by orienting it towards technical and vocational training.² Moreover, the new range of publications, from books of science popularization to magazines, such as *Știință și Tehnică* (Science and Technology) or those dedicated especially to children such as *Cravata Roșie* (The Red Tie) or *Luminița* (The Little Spark), are part of the same campaign. Therefore, it would be not inappropriate to claim that for

² For a very good survey on this transformation, see Randolph L. Braham, *Education in the Romania People's Republic* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963).

many people deeply socialized in an environment full of scientific references, this genre provided the easiest access they had to literature.

Nevertheless, the ideological significance that was granted to science and technology in the first two decades of communism considerably decreased in the 1970s. The ‘July Theses’³ in 1971, and three years later the new program of the Romanian Communist Party, are important documents that outline this major change. From then on, with the advent of national communism and ‘protochronism,’⁴ imagining the future became a rather ‘subversive’ practice and, consequently, science fiction writers were ‘informed’ that the genre should be “a truthful mirror of the present society.”⁵ Within this context, I analyze to what extent the social role of the genre was (re)shaped by the interplay between these two conceptions, or rather mutually exclusive ‘regimes of historicity’ that have characterized the last two decades of the Romanian communist history. As they had a certain impact on the Romanian cultural public debates, I pay attention to some theories that emerged in the early 1970s, speculating about a possible promising future of humanity, on the one hand based on the scientific and technological development and on the other, on a rapprochement between the capitalist and communist bloc. The ‘end of ideologies’⁶ or the theory of the ‘convergence of systems’⁷ stimulated ruminations about the future inside the emerging Romanian science fiction community, in a moment when the Romanian national communist legitimizing discourse moved toward the past.

³ “Propunerile de măsuri prezentate de tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu Comitetului Executiv al CC al PCR, pentru îmbunătățirea activității politico-ideologice, de educare marxist-leninistă a membrilor de partid a tuturor oamenilor muncii,” *Scînteia*, July 7, 1971, 1-2.

⁴ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁵ Mircea Șerbănescu, “În căutarea propriei vocații,” *CPSF* 427 (1974): 31-32.

⁶ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁷ George R. Urban, Michael Glenny, eds. *Can We Survive Our Future? A Symposium* (London: Bodley Head, 1971).

Second, science fiction should be placed in the literary dynamic of the Romanian communist period. How science fiction emerged in Romania, which were the institutional structures, who were the persons involved, and how the development of the new genre is related with the development of literature in general, mainly as a consequence of the political transformations, are some of the questions that will be addressed. A literary genre initially meant to develop among its readers “the love for science and the courage requested for any great achievement,”⁸ science fiction is first investigated in the context of socialist realism, imported from the Soviet Union. Within this context, some literary genres without a real tradition in Romania, such as the literature for children and youth (including science fiction) appeared. In time, they developed a distinctive identity, and attracted an increasingly large reading audience. In addition, I explore the profiles of the writers. Moreover, as they are an essential link between the writers and the readers, the systems of publications from financing, circulation, print run, and distribution, through censorship, is also tackled. All these variables represent what I would call the literary space⁹ and are crucial in this analysis.

Third, an analysis of the science fiction literary discourse - yet without applying aesthetic criteria - is an important aspect in assessing the social functions of science fiction. The narrative elements and structures so much blamed by mainstream literary critics for their lack of literary merit are nevertheless valuable since they may uncover the type of message delivered by the genre to its readers. For instance, the analysis of escapism, a communicative function of science fiction as Stableford puts it,¹⁰ namely the ‘release’ from confrontation with reality that the genre usually offers to its readers is an important issue in my investigation. Literary critics have usually emphasized in a derogatory way this

⁸ *CPSF* 1 (1955): 2.

⁹ I use this concept to refer not only to literature as a text but also to its institutional context and to the people acting in this domain. My intention was to find a neutral term different from the “literary field” proposed by Bourdieu, and without the ideological implications of Bourdieu’s concept.

¹⁰ Brian Stableford, *The Sociology of Science Fiction* (San Bernardino: Borgo Press, 1987).

communicative function of science fiction. However, the ‘strategies’ of escape are of considerable sociological and historical interest if one takes into account that science fiction served initially as a propaganda instrument for science and technology, and then had to adjust to the predicaments of national communism. Although necessary, one might argue that a straightforward analysis of the content is not sufficient to reveal the social functions of science fiction. It could, nevertheless, help to illuminate propaganda strategies embedded within literary plots and to formulate hypotheses regarding their impact on the readers, or conversely to disclose alternative narrative messages and images to those sustained by the Party.

Fourth, the science fiction community that I would generically label ‘fandom’ is also investigated in the thesis. The term ‘fandom’ designates that part of the science fiction’s reading audience organized into fan clubs, literary clubs or similar associations. In the Romanian case, their activities included club meetings where members read and commented on each others’ writings, regional and national science fiction conventions, participation and organization of lectures delivered by science fiction writers and critics, and occasionally fanzine publishing. Through an oral history approach I reconstruct the social experience inside the fandom, searching for values, hierarchies, collective representations and expectations. My analysis uses several conceptual and analytical tools that are further explained.

Drawing on Bronislaw Baczko, a major concept around which I intend to organize my dissertation is that of the social imaginary. Although the concept arguably is too broad, it serves as an excellent frame for my analysis, providing a means for placing science fiction in its historical and social context. According to Baczko, ‘social imaginary’ refers to the collective representations of social reality found in every society. Its functions are numerous:

through social imaginary, collectivities shape their identity by creating self-representations; they distribute social roles and positions, mould and impose certain common beliefs, usually by disseminating ideal social models. This identity shaping is accompanied by the establishment of particular relations with ‘others,’ through the creation of images about the characteristics of enemies and friends, of rivals and allies. In addition the social imaginary conserves and shapes the memories of the past as well as projects into the future the present fears and hopes.¹¹ Despite its arguable imprecision, the notion is a useful tool to uncover social phenomena otherwise not very easy to grasp. For instance, in a recent work Charles Taylor argues that Western modernity differs from other paths of modernization mainly due to a “new conception of the moral order of society.”¹² Taylor builds his argument around the concept of ‘social imaginary.’ For him, the conception of moral order of society, central to Western modernity, was “at first just an ‘idea’ in the minds of few thinkers, but it later came to shape [the whole] social imaginary.”¹³ Refining Baczko’s ideas, he argues that the social imaginary is that set of representations through which people imagine their social existence, the expectations that “are normally met and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations.”¹⁴

A particularly important aspect for my approach is the relationship between social imaginary and political power. As Baczko argues, attempts at controlling the social imaginary (its features, production, reproduction and diffusion) could become effective strategies used by the political elites for self-legitimization and achieve a total control of the society. In this last case would reside the essence for totalitarian states, metaphorically defined by Baczko as those who acquire “not only the monopoly of power, but also the

¹¹ Bronislaw Baczko, *Les Imaginaires Sociaux* (Paris: Payot, 1984), 32.

¹² Charles Taylor, *On Social Imaginary* available at <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/calhoun/Theory/Taylor-on-si.htm>, Internet accessed on March 2, 2004.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

monopoly of meaning.”¹⁵ For holding the reins of social imaginary, and therefore molding the collective representations of the past, present and even future according to the state ideology, the control of the mass media, the active role of propaganda and censorship are important and efficient mechanisms. Thus, it could be argued that the ability of the totalitarian systems to censor the individual and collective social imaginary is one of the keys for their stability.¹⁶ Within this framework, the production and proliferation of alternative social imaginaries are, according to Baczko, signs of crisis in a totalitarian regime.

Science fiction is an important concept that needs to be discussed. What Romanian communist science fiction was can hardly be answered, either concisely or unambiguously. The many literary theoretical disputes about defining science fiction, done mainly by Western scholars, could not be connected to communist literature, yet this scholarship represent an important referential frame and might be used as a Weberian “ideal type” to better understand the particularities of this literary genre during communism. The term “science fiction” as such was used for the first time in 1851, the year of the Great Exhibition, in William Wilson’s short novel *Earnest Book upon a Great Old Subject*.¹⁷ The term was eventually put in circulation at the beginning of the 20th century in the United States by Hugo Gernsback, who published the first science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*. Gernsback, who is considered by many theorists the founding father of science fiction, defined the genre as “a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision, in the sense in which writers such as Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe

¹⁵ Baczko, *Les Imaginaires Sociaux*, 38.

¹⁶ Sorin Antohi, *Imaginaire Culturel et Réalité Politique dans la Roumanie Moderne: le Stigmate et L'Utopie* (Paris: L' Harmattan, 1999), 74.

¹⁷ J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 791.

had written their stories.”¹⁸ Gernsback’s approach to science fiction, where the plots of the novels were considered a sort of “sugar coating” to make the science and the technological speculations more accessible to the readers largely resembles the didactic role assigned to science fiction during communism.

Gernsback’s arguments put forward at the beginning of the 20th century represent a good articulation of didactic science fiction:

It must be remembered that we live in an entirely new world. Two hundred years ago, stories of this kind were not possible. Science, through its various branches of mechanics, electricity, astronomy etc., enters so intimately into all our lives today, and we are so much immersed in this science, that we have become rather prone to take new inventions and discoveries for granted. Our mode of living has changed with the present progress, and it is little wonder, therefore, that many fantastic situations – impossible 100 years ago – are brought about today. It is in these situations the new romancers find their great inspiration. Not only do these amazing tales make tremendously interesting reading – they are always instructive. They supply knowledge that we might not otherwise obtain – and they supply it in a very palatable form. For the best of these modern writers of *scientification* have the knack of imparting knowledge, and even inspiration, without once making us aware that we are being taught.¹⁹

There were many other attempts to define science fiction in order to create an identity for the literary new genre. Ironically enough, some theorists discovered that science fiction was not quite a new genre and in this respect notable predecessors of modern science fiction were found in the Middle Ages and even in Antiquity. Some theorists quoted for instance Lucien as the founder of science fiction, or an Egyptian scribe from the period of Ptolemy the 2nd, while others named Mary Shelley or Jules Verne. This hunt for very remote origins, as it is shown in the works of some theorists such as Jacques van Herp and Pierre Versins,

¹⁸ Florin Manolescu, *Literatura S.F.* (Bucharest: Univers, 1985), 29.

¹⁹ H Gernsback, “Editorial,” *Amazing Stories* (April 1926) quoted in Brian Stableford, *The Sociology of Science Fiction* (San Bernardino: Borgo Press, 1987), 49.

reflects a complex typical for new fields without a history, and these attempts have not escaped ridicule.²⁰

Besides finding remote origins, another important theoretical effort has been concerned with the very essence of science fiction, namely its narrative structure and thematic features. This attempt is related with the issue of placing science fiction within the general realm of literature. In this respect, Florin Manolescu notes that science fiction constitutes a parallel literature with its own genres and species rather than a specific literary genre.²¹ There are many definitions of the concept.

One of these is provided by Kingsley Amis. He points out that “science fiction literature is that class of prose narrative treating of a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesized on the basis of some innovation in science or technology, or pseudo-technology, whether human or extra-terrestrial in origin.”²² Sam Moskowitz defines science fiction as a branch of fantasy identifiable by the fact that it eases the “willing suspension of disbelief” on the part of its readers by utilizing an atmosphere of scientific credibility for its imaginative speculations in physical science, space, time, social science, and philosophy.²³ Darko Suvin came with two important features in defining science fiction, namely the notion of estrangement and cognition. According to him, “science fiction is a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment”²⁴ These two

²⁰ Sorin Antohi, *Utopica: Studii asupra imaginarului social* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1991), 15.

²¹ Florin Manolescu, *Literatura S.F.*, 32.

²² Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell* (London: New English library, 1960), 18.

²³ Sam Moskowitz, *Explorers of the Infinite; Shapers of Science Fiction* (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1974), 11.

²⁴ Darko Suvin, “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre,” in *Science Fiction; A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Mark Rose (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 61.

important elements are meant to give the genre an independent status. While estrangement differentiates science fiction from the realist mainstream literature, cognition differentiates it from the myth but also from the folk fairy tale and from fantasy.

For the Romanian case it could be claimed, according to one or other definition of the science fiction, that some isolated writings from the inter-war period such as H. Stahl's, *A Romanian on the Moon* (Un român în Lună) or Felix Aderca's, *The Drowned Towns* (Orașele Înecate) might be regarded as science fiction. Some translations from Western literature could be also mentioned for the same period but these are exceptional examples, which do not develop a particular tradition. As Florin Manolescu argues, the name and, more than that, the specific means of spreading the genre, such as the magazine or the fanzine, grant science fiction its legitimacy as a definite genre.²⁵ In communist Romania this stage was achieved in 1955 when a special science fiction publication was issued. Yet, science fiction had various understandings depending mainly on the political evolution in communist Romania. From this reason a conceptual discussion will be included in every chapter.

Ideology is another unavoidable concept, although it could be argued that it is simply too ambiguous and controversial to be a useful analytical tool. In this study the term will not be used normatively (i.e., to describe the ideas or beliefs that are wrong or misleading) but rather in a descriptive manner to refer to a system of thought and belief, in this case communism, that animates social, cultural and political action.

Current State of the Research

As part of the larger category of literature for children and youth, whose main function would be the popularization of science and technology, Romanian science fiction

²⁵ Florin Manolescu, *Literatura S.F.*, 24.

during communism was exclusively the field of inquiry of literary critics who customarily regarded it as a minor literary genre. Most critics devote no more than a few pages to science fiction, usually included in studies about Romanian communist literature and many reject it as being so inept in style and plots that it hardly merits any attention. However, there are also less harsh critics who demonstrate (some of them quite pertinently) that aesthetically valuable literary pieces have been written within this genre, while others behave rather extravagantly by claiming, for instance, that science fiction is, in its essence, nothing but “the art of the sublime.”²⁶ Therefore, the few existing analyses that touch upon the topic are concerned with aesthetic judgments, while its ‘hinterland’ (e.g., the fandom, the reading audience and the whole institutional structure around the genre) or its treatment in a social and political context are seldom taken into account.

The ‘scholarship’ of Romanian science fiction started in the 1950s with studies that were nothing more than programmatic manifestos clearly shaped by the ideological demands of the period. Within the framework of the *Revoluție Culturală*, (Cultural Revolution)²⁷ promoted in the 1950s, science fiction was assigned the mission “to train people to develop the trust in the creative forces of man.”²⁸ Thus, ‘early’ science fiction ‘scholars’ explained to the writers, for instance, that they “are not allowed to contradict the truths established by science such as to imagine breaking the speed of light.”²⁹ The relevance of these studies does not go beyond the level of mere sources for a literary history. By telling what science fiction should be or by criticizing some authors for not obeying the rules of socialist realism, these

²⁶ Cornel Robu, “Milestones of Postwar Romanian Science Fiction,” *Foundation* 49 (Summer 1990): 14.

²⁷ *Revoluție culturală* was the term used in Communist Romania at that time and should not be related with the debates in the Soviet studies especially connected with the work of Sheila Fitzpatrick. See, Ștefan Bălan, ed. *Momente ale revoluției culturale din România* (Bucharest: Ed. Științifică, 1964).

²⁸ Ion Roman, “Știința și Fantezia,” *Contemporanul*, 4 March 1960, 3.

²⁹ I.M. Ștefan, “Cu privire la literatura științifico-fantastică,” *Scînteia Tineretului*, 16 June 1957, 2.

literary critics put forward the nature and social role assigned to the genre. However, the political liberalization that occurred from mid-1960s in Romania shifted the research agenda towards literary criticism based on aesthetic value judgments. In addition, studies that dealt with the exploration of the precursors of science fiction in Romania, like Ion Hobana's book,³⁰ or attempts at integrating the discussion about science fiction into the broader field of literature, such as Florin Manolescu's analysis of the genre's themes and narrative elements,³¹ began to be published.

An excellent critical analysis of these debates and trends is made by Mircea Opriță, who has written the most comprehensive literary examination of Romanian science fiction.³² Although Opriță's approach is directed towards value judgment based on aesthetic criteria, his synthesis indirectly tackles a set of issues that are valuable for my research. Thus, for explaining literary thematic trends, Opriță uses a set of variables such as writers' training, the generational change, the political context, and the social experience inside the fandom.

Another valuable synthesis, however on a different scale, is provided by Cornel Robu, in his concise article published in the magazine *Foundation*.³³ In his survey, Robu divides the evolution of Romanian science fiction into three main phases that reflect the political changes occurring in communist Romania. The political context, the profile of the authors, namely "humanistic formation" versus "scientific and technological education," are important explanatory categories that could stand for the dominant thematic trends inside the genre. Nevertheless, Robu's analysis is again directed primarily toward revealing the esthetic value of science fiction. A further contextual analysis, whose aim is to present the evolution of science fiction in relation with the political context and that tries to uncover its social

³⁰ Ion Hobana, *Vârsta de aur a anticipației românești* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1969).

³¹ Florin Manolescu, *Literatura S.F.* (Bucharest: Univers, 1980).

³² Mircea Opriță, *Anticipația Românească* (Bucharest: Viitorul Românesc, 2003).

³³ Cornel Robu, "Milestones of Postwar Romanian Science Fiction," *Foundation* 49 (Summer 1990): 5-22.

dimension (as it emerged inside a highly centralized socialist state) is made by Elaine Kleiner.³⁴ She makes interesting observations pertaining to the place and social role of science fiction, namely to inculcate the readers a set of values reflecting communist ideology. However, the study, a broad overview, suffers from a misunderstanding of the sources and conceptual confusion.

From the large scholarship dedicated to Romanian communist literature, significant for my research are those works that place literature within its political and social context. To date, valuable investigations have been undertaken by Anneli Ute Gabanyi, Dennis Deletant and Marian Popa.³⁵ Although the space they grant to science fiction does not exceed a few pages, these critical explorations offer important insights into the way communist literary institutions functioned and the policies undertaken by the state to control the cultural space.

The study of science fiction as a community, in which alternative imaginaries to those promoted by the Communist Party were created, requires an understanding of the main function assigned to literature during communism. As Eugen Negrici argues,³⁶ despite some periods of relative liberty and openness, Romanian literature during communism was always an instrument controlled by the Party, which should be analyzed within the confines of what he calls the “totalitarian aesthetic.” As he puts it, forms of ideological propaganda and control should be the focus of research when analyzing such literature. How this applies to

³⁴ Elaine L. Kleiner, “Romanian ‘Science Fantasy’ in the Cold War Era,” *Science Fiction Studies* 19 part 1 (1992): 59-65.

³⁵ Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *Literatura și politica în România după 1945* (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Română, 2001); Dennis Deletant, “Literature and Society in Romania Since 1948,” in *Perspectives on Literature and Society in Eastern and Western Europe*, ed. Geoffrey A. Hosking and George F. Cushing (London: Macmillan, 1989); Marian Popa, *Istoria literaturii române de azi pe mâine* (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Luceafărul, 2001).

³⁶ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației PRO, 2002).

science fiction is put forward in a short chapter Negrici devotes to the genre.³⁷ He considers the initial thematic of science fiction, namely the orientation toward the future, as promoting what the founders of Marxism had already written (i.e., belief in the myth of continuous scientific progress). Moreover, in an insightful way, Negrici argues that the Communist Party's hidden agenda to mobilize and then manipulate the creative energies of science fiction fans and writers organized in literary clubs (the fandom), explain the "official" revival of the genre in the 1980s. Unfortunately, Negrici does not elaborate on the social implication of these strategies.

In the most recent synthesis and analysis of Romanian literature, written by Nicolae Manolescu,³⁸ the evolution of science fiction in Romania is presented in a distorted way. Manolescu is one of the most important Romanian mainstream literary critics. Yet, in his synthesis he states that before 1965 except one novel written by Felix Aderca there were no science fiction publications. His analysis reflect the attitude of most mainstream literary critics towards this genre, considered without literary value and therefore not worth being taken into account. However, in my thesis I do not intend to demonstrate the value of Romanian science fiction and devise an axiological classification of Romanian science fiction but rather to explore the functions of this literature during communism.

Besides the above mentioned scholarship concerning Romanian literature during communism, an inspiring source for my approach is provided by the literature dealing with science fiction in the Soviet Union and Western states. Since science fiction appeared in Romania as an emulation of the Soviet model, the studies dedicated to this case are valuable sources to understand especially the ideological and esthetical aspects of the socialist realist science fiction produced in the 1950s and early 1960s. Although the generalizations and

³⁷ Ibid., 144-146.

³⁸ Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române* (Bucharest: Ed. Paralela 45, 2008).

opinions pertaining to Soviet science fiction could not be fully transferred to the Romanian space, they can at least be tested. In many studies, it is often claimed that the genre had a subversive character in comparison to the mainstream literature. Thus, integrating science fiction inside the general realm of Soviet literature, in his seminal book³⁹ Leonid Heller makes the case that it was a powerful opposition force to socialist realism and Marxist dogma, due to the narrative presentation of the unknown and alternative worlds. At the same line, Jacqueline Lahana considers Soviet science fiction utopias as being subversive to official communist ideology.⁴⁰

In other studies, the relationship between science fiction and communist power is traced from a different perspective than that of purely theoretical literary arguments. For instance, Rafail Nudelman argues that the increasing popularity of the genre among the Soviet readership was determined by the socio-ideological role it played. In other words, science fiction offered an easily decipherable interpretation of reality and its possible extensions. As Nudelman puts it, this type of literature supplied readers with a “method and a model for comprehending history.”⁴¹

From the large body of Western critical literature about science fiction, studies relating the genre to the international political development could also shed a light about the message delivered by the literature written in the communist countries. For instance, in his excellent book that covers the period from 1945 up to the Star Wars debate of the 1980s, David Seed⁴² tackles the close correlation between science fiction and the Cold War

³⁹ Leonid Heller, *De la Science-Fiction Soviétique. Par delà le Dogme, un Univers* (Lausanne: L'Age de L'Homme, 1979).

⁴⁰ Jacqueline Lahana, *Les Mondes Paralleles de la Science-Fiction Soviétique* (Lausanne: L'Age de L'Homme, 1979).

⁴¹ Rafail Nudelman, “Soviet Science Fiction and the Ideology of Soviet Society,” *Science Fiction Studies* 16 (1989): 49.

⁴² David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Fiction and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

tensions. The general argument is that science fiction was politically engaged in speculations on potential near-future developments in United States society and the world's state of affairs.

Science fiction has also been analyzed using the methods of sociology of literature and in this respect its ideological commitment was stressed. For Williams Bainbridge science fiction is a popular cultural movement that develops and disseminates potentially influential ideologies.⁴³ Brian Stableford applies to science fiction the three socio-literary categories devised by Hugh Dalziel Duncan, namely 'maintenance', 'restorative' or 'escapist' and 'directive.' Stableford considers science fiction to be a poor anticipator of social events and thus not likely to prepare the reader for change.⁴⁴ However, the communicative functions of science fiction as a conceptual tool are central when analyzing the reception of the genre.

Sources and methodology

Magazines, fanzines, novels, and almanacs constitute the primary sources for the reconstruction of the thematic evolution of the science fiction, a broad range of literary texts that will be examined qualitatively and contextually. Moreover, works on literary criticism, social and political articles published in the newspapers and in the literary journals, memoirs, and historical works are extensively drawn upon for background information. In addition I also pay attention to some Communist Party documents meant to shape and direct cultural policies, such as the 1971 July Theses and the legislative acts related to cultural issues, such

⁴³ Williams S. Bainbridge, *Dimensions of Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 5.

⁴⁴ Brian Stableford, *The Sociology of Science Fiction* (San Bernardino: Borgo Press, 1987).

as the Press Law enacted in 1974. Last but not least, perhaps the most important place in the economy of the sources is granted to oral history investigation.

For the period 1955-1974, the main source is the magazine *CPSF*, a literary supplement of the magazine *Știință și Tehnică pentru Tineret* (Science and Technique for the Youth). *CPSF* comprised 32 pages in A5 format and had a regular circulation of 35,000 copies. Over its 20-years history, *CPSF* published 466 issues. The centrality of this magazine as a source for my study is clear, mainly because *CPSF* was the only science fiction magazine published in Romania during this period. Moreover, the books that appeared in the 1960s and 1970s are largely reprints of the titles already published in *CPSF*. The magazine is a valuable source not only for providing literary texts but also through the biographical files of its authors that were published together with the science fiction stories. In addition, letters sent by readers to the editor, excerpts from which were published in issues of *CPSF*, constitute an important source for evaluating the features of the reading audience and the social impact of the genre. Additionally, from the 1960s on, *CPSF* provides an excellent, although ‘mediated,’ image of the emerging fandom that certifies the rapid and even large popularity of the genre, mainly among the youth.

After the banning of *CPSF* in 1974 and until the early 1980s, excepting the few fanzines issued by science fiction fan clubs around the country and the small number of novels published mainly by the *Albatros Publishing House*, science fiction publications almost ceased to exist. In the 1980s, when the genre was officially renamed *literatură de anticipație* (anticipation literature), the main source is *Almanah Anticipația* (Anticipation Almanac).

Also, in order to “transform the private equation of themes and stylistic means into social equations,”⁴⁵ oral history methods are employed. For reconstructing the social history of science fiction, I have undertaken focused and, where possible, repeated interviews with writers, publishers, science fiction fans, journalists and other persons involved in the science fiction movement. The main features uncovered from these interviews are the social experiences inside the fandom, the values promoted inside this social community, the formal and informal hierarchies within the fandom organizations, and an image of the collective representations and expectations from which an alternative social imaginary has emerged.

⁴⁵ Leo Lowenthal, *Literature, Popular Culture, and Society* (Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1961), xiv.

CHAPTER 1

SCIENCE FICTION: A NEW GENRE IN ROMANIAN LITERATURE

On the 22nd of October 1944, shortly after the 23rd of August 1944, the moment when Romania joined the Soviet army in the Second World War against Germany, *Scântea* (The Spark), the daily newspaper of the Romanian Communist Party, published the article, “*Cerem suprimarea revistei Universul Copiilor*” (We demand the suppression of the magazine Children’s Universe). The reasons behind this demand were clearly put forward. First of all, according to the article, the children’s magazine was indicted for instigating hate, crime and robbery. As an example, the heroes of the magazine stories, Tudorică and Andrei, were presented by the journalist as brave fighters against the Soviet barbarians. Taking into account the new political context, such plots were considered unacceptable and harmful for the education of children.

The rhetoric in the stories to refer to the Soviet Union used terms borrowed from the religious sphere such as ‘the sacred war,’ ‘the crusade against Bolshevik hell,’ which were noticed and condemned. The author of the article was concerned to what extent such images had already influenced children’s perception by developing a negative attitude towards the Soviet Union. The attempt to challenge such literary images and eventuality to reverse their potentially harmful influence upon children consisted in devising the general lines of the message that children literature should deliver. More precisely it was stated that children must be properly informed about the Soviet people as brave and the “most developed,” and they should be aware the happiest children in the world were in the Soviet Union. The article

was accompanied by a picture representing eleven children running and jumping full of joy. The picture caption was: “children are the main concern of the Soviet Union.”¹

As part of this concern, the literature for children and youth and the specialized publications that were published in Romania during communism played an essential role. At the crossroad of psychology and pedagogy, the literature for children and youth had always been considered by the communist regime as one of the ways through which the youth had to acquire appropriate attitudes, values and beliefs about the political system, about enemies and friends in the world, and the conflicts that were dividing it; during the second World War it was communism vs. fascism, replaced afterwards by the struggles of the cold war between imperialism and communism. Besides school and family, literature was primarily seen as a tool for political socialization meant to educate and to channel the behavior of the young generation into politically and socially acceptable forms.

In this chapter I discuss the emergence of science fiction genre in communist Romania together with the institutional structure imported from the Soviet Union, (literary institutions, socialism realism and the new educational system) that offered the proper framework for such literary creations meant to train the young readership scientifically and ideologically and at the same time provide political socialization. As a literary genre, science fiction did not have a tradition in Romania before communism. Within the new ideological context instituted in Romania after the Second World War, the genre was included in the category of literature for children and youth and was assigned a clear didactic and ideological function, namely to prepare young people for the future communist society. As Catriona Kelly puts it referring to the Soviet Union, but her observation applies to Communist Romania as well, the aim was to make the masses cultured and to turn them

¹ “Cerem suprimarea revistei Universul Copiilor,” *Scînteia*, October 22, 1948, 8.

“into the efficient and docile workforce required by the accelerated modernization that was the target of the regime.”²

A new literary landscape - institutional and ideological context in the 1950s

Shortly after the Second World War, as a new communist country, Romania followed the Soviet political model. The sovietization presupposed the adoption of the Soviet political system, institutions, legislative system and way of life. According to A. Rees the sovietization process “involved a radical reconceptualization of the past, the present and the future. It was related to a strategy of indoctrination, which aspired to make the official ideology an integral part of the life of the individual, through the transformation of all aspects of human experience and the fundamental refounding of cultural life.”³ As for literature, Soviet literary institutions and socialist realism were imported. Socialist realist Soviet programmatic texts were translated and disseminated in Romania. Within this context, the category of literature for children and youth was given a special importance since it had a crucial role in the formation of the two future communist “totemic figures,”⁴ the new men and women.

For instance, in his report about magazines, *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*, Andrei Zhdanov referred explicitly to the literature for children and youth and its capacity of molding young persons according to the communist ideological requirements. As Andrei Zhdanov stated: “Due to the exposure of the youth to the Soviet literature written in the spirit of courage and

² Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 244.

³ Balázs Apór, Péter Apór, E. A. Rees, eds. *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*, (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 1.

⁴ Lynne Atwood, Catriona Kelly, “Programmes for Identity: The ‘New Man’ and ‘The New Woman,’” in *Russian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1998), 256.

trust, we managed to overcome some of the highest difficulties in the process of building socialism and we also obtained victories against the German and the Japanese armies.”⁵ Although an overstatement about the social impact of such literature, Andrei Zhdanov’s words could nevertheless be interpreted as an indication of the importance accorded by communist ideologues to the literature for children and youth.

With the advent of the communist regime, Romanian cultural life was dramatically changed. Literature was considered a useful tool in achieving the communists’ goal which was, as Mikhail Heller put it, not simply to seize power but, “to create an ideal society, a political, economic and social system new to mankind.”⁶ Catriona Kelly has written about the “socialization of children” in the Soviet Union through reading, an effort undertaken by both parents and especially by state institutions (such as publishing houses and the libraries) that regulated the production and circulation of children’s literature and oversaw the act of reading, making sure the books were read in the right, desired manner.⁷

It was not only the communists who sought to use literature to support political goals. The role of literature in the creation of a society compliant to a political system was demonstrated by Jost Herman in analyzing the role of popular literature in Germany at the beginning of National Socialist regime. According to him, literary visions, utopias and especially fictional portrayals of the future “played a major role in the genesis and development of a nationalist consciousness that managed to stir the broad masses of the German people and thus was partially responsible for the chauvinistic yearnings that led, in

⁵ A. Zhdanov, *Raport asupra revistelor Zvezda și Leningrad* (Bucharest: Ed. PCR, 1948), 20. I use the Romanian translation of Zhdanov’s report that was published in 1948. His ideas were used as an ideological reference by Romanian communists in the early 1950s.

⁶ Mikhail Heller, *Cogs in the Wheel: The Formation of the Soviet Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopp, 1988), 3.

⁷ Catriona Kelly, ““Thank-You for the Wonderful Book”: Soviet Child Readers and the Management of Children’s Reading, 1950-1975,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6 (2005): 717-753.

the years after 1933, to reckless and bestial exaggerations of older German nationalist ideas.”⁸

Also, literary fiction played an important role in the communist social engineering process. Trofim Lysenko, the Soviet agronomist who claimed to have developed an agricultural technique named *vernalization*, which used humidity and low temperatures to make wheat grow in spring, defined the whole process in a technical scientific way: “in our Soviet Union people are not born. What are born are organisms. We turn them into people – tractors drivers, engine drivers, academicians, scholars and so forth.”⁹ Within this framework, literature was supposed to provide the models to be followed by ordinary people and a blueprint of the future communist society. Important institutional changes and reconfigurations were undertaken in the Soviet Union and the model was adopted in the satellite countries, including Romania. Political control, the nationalization of printing houses, the creation of a Writers’ Union based on the Soviet model, a new literary method, socialist realism, were the main features of this process generally referred as the Sovietization of Romanian literary space.

Writers’ Union

After the Second World War, the Communist Party had very few adherents in Romania. According to Vladimir Tismăneanu, in August 1944 there were only 80 members of the RCP (Romanian Communist Party) in Bucharest and less than 1000 all over the country.¹⁰ In order to increase its popularity, to achieve legitimacy and the support of the population, the RCP was fully aware of the importance of writers and intellectuals in

⁸ Jost Hermand, *Old Dreams of a New Reich: Volkish Utopias and National Socialism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 14.

⁹ Trofim Lysenko quoted in Mikhail Heller, *Cogs in the Wheel*, 8.

¹⁰ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: a Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 87.

disseminating and inculcating to the masses the new communist ideology. Consequently, the reorganization of the literary space was a priority for the new regime.

A Society of Romanian Writers had been established in Bucharest in 1908.¹¹ However, shortly after the Second World War, this institution had to confront the pressures put by the communists who aimed at controlling it and therefore had to face some important internal changes. In September 1944, the Society of Romanian Writers had a general meeting in order to elect its new president. The new president, Victor Eftimiu, and the elected managing committee, Cezar Petrescu, Alexandru Cazaban, Mihail Celarianu, Zaharia Stancu, Mihai Beniuc, Lucia Demetrius, Radu Boureanu, Cicerone Teodorescu, Eugen Jebeleanu and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu were intellectuals with a clear leftist political orientation.¹² In a programmatic speech the new president put forward some of the objectives of the Society of Writers, namely: “1. to eliminate from the Society the fascist elements and those that have compromised its prestige. 2. to realize the sindicalization of the Society through the accomplishment of a free and dignified life for all writers. To achieve this, the Soviet example has to be followed.”¹³

In fact, the Soviet example became the rule. The Society of Romanian Writers managed to survive between August 1944 and March 1949 when it was replaced with a new institution, the Writers’ Union. A key figure in this reorganization was the poet Mihai Beniuc who in 1948 returned from Moscow and in December the same year started working “in order to create a Writers’ Union of a new type that would be closer to socialism.”¹⁴

¹¹ Teodor Vârgolici, “Din istoricul Societății Scriitorilor Români,” *Adevărul literar și artistic* 59-83, (1999): 7.

¹² Lucia Dragomir, *L’Union des Écrivains. Une institution transnationale à l’Est* (Paris: Belin 2007), 37.

¹³ “Adunarea generală a Societății Scriitorilor Români,” *Ultima oră*, September 26, 1944, quoted in Ana Selejan, *România în timpul primului război cultural* (Sibiu: Transpres, 1993), 39.

¹⁴ Between 1946-1948 Mihai Beniuc has been a counselor at the Romanian Embassy in Moscow. Mihai Beniuc, *Sub patru dictaturi: memorii, 1940-1975* (Bucharest: Editura Ion Cristoiu), 101-118.

Therefore, with the support offered by the RWP (Romanian Workers' Party)¹⁵ and with the contribution of many writers, the Society of Romanian Writers was replaced with the Writers' Union, "the sole organization of Romanian writers,"¹⁶ which was set up following the Writers' Conference from the Romanian People's Republic held in Bucharest between 25 - 27 March 1949.¹⁷

At the Writers' Conference, the new Writers' Union was greeted by the general secretary of the RWP, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, with the following words: "[the Writers' Union] should be at the core of the fight against the cosmopolitan servitude, against the capitalist culture and against various orientations of the bourgeois literature, that have as main aims to isolate the writers that depict the reality and to create a rupture between the author and people." Moreover, the writers should follow the model "of the Soviet socialist realist literature."¹⁸

At the same time, in the speeches delivered at the conference, many writers referred to the important mission the new institution should have. For instance, according to Mihai Beniuc, "(...) through the new organization a new époque will start. We clearly know that the role of the writer is today totally different compared to what was in the past and that the writer should be an important factor in the educational process of the masses. We know that the writers could accomplish this task within a professional organization of a new type."¹⁹

Two main ideas were put forward by the participants namely, the role of the writer – who should fight for the proletarian cause – and the features the new literature should have.

¹⁵ The Romanian Communist Party between 1948-1965.

¹⁶ Ion Ianoși, "Uniunea Scriitorilor în sistemul culturii socialiste și segmentul literar în tranziția românească," in *Instituții în tranziție*, ed. Adrian Miroiu (Bucharest: Paideia, 2003), 276-277.

¹⁷ The conference is reported in *Scînteia* 1384-1387 (25-29 March 1949), the magazines *Contemporanul* 128-131 (18 March - 6 April 1949), and *Viața Românească* 3-4 (March-April, 1949).

¹⁸ Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, "Salutul CC al PMR adresat Conferinței scriitorilor din RPR," *Scînteia*, March 26, 1949, 1.

¹⁹ Mihai Beniuc, "Societatea Scriitorilor Români din RPR pe un drum nou," *Scînteia*, March 27, 1949, 3.

In this respect, the negative influences of the Western literature, considered decadent and formalist, had to be avoided.²⁰ The “art for art’s sake” artistic conception was officially condemned during this conference. As Zaharia Stancu, an important writer of the new regime, mentioned before the conference: “there is no neutral work of art. Art for art’s sake is a formula that refers to those writers that lack the courage to recognize directly that they support the class of exploiters. By saying that there is a neutral art they serve a minority of lazy people against the interests of the masses, against the working class.”²¹

Also during the first Writers’ Union conference the management structure was adopted. Thus, the new Romanian institution which copied the Soviet Writers’ Union was managed by a Committee that had to elect a Directive Bureau which in its turn had to elect the president, vice-presidents and secretaries. The Union had to organize national conferences or a congress every three or four years. The Union was divided into five sections for literary creation (prose, poetry, drama, literary criticism, literature for children and youth) and a section for translations. It is for the first time when literature for children is recognized as a fully fledged literary category and therefore given a particular status within the Writers’ Union, a fact that reflect the importance assigned to it by the communist regime.

In the same year as the setting up of the Writers’ Union censorship was officially instituted and it would greatly influence literature during communism in Romania. Following the decree no.218/1949 *Direcția Generală pentru Presa și Tipărituri* (The General Direction for Press and Printing) was instituted as an organization subordinated to the Ministry of Arts, whose main mission was censorship. Some of the tasks of the new directions were “to authorize the printing, the distribution i.e., import export of newspapers,

²⁰ The speeches of Alexandru Toma, Zaharia Stancu, Maria Bănuș, are summarized by Mihail Neamțu and Petru Vintilă in “Conferința scriitorilor din RPR.” *Contemporanul* 130-131 (6 April 1949): 2.

²¹ Zaharia Stancu, “Spre un nou avânt al creației literare,” *Scînteia*, December 12, 1948.

books, arts objects, to supervise the bookstores, the libraries, and books deposits and to supervise the censorship offices from the capital city and the country.”²² In the 1950s the main targets of censorship were ‘the cosmopolitanism and the cosmopolites’ that were considered “the agents of the fiercest enemies of science and culture – American and British imperialism.”²³

Socialist realism

Socialist realism is considered the method of Soviet literature. Legend has it that the term ‘socialist realism’ had been coined by Stalin himself. However, the canonical sources for defining socialist realism are considered two keynote addresses to the First Congress of the Soviet Writers’ Union held in 1934 delivered by Gorky and Andrei Zhdanov, the chief representative of the Communist Party’s Central Committee.²⁴ As a literary method, socialist realism presented several main attributes. As Herman Ermolaev put it,

“in accordance with Marxism, literature was viewed primarily as an ideological phenomenon, a superstructure erected over, and determined by, an economic basis. Above all literature was to serve as an instrument for the education of the masses in the spirit of socialism. In this capacity it constituted an integral part of a vast plan for creating a specifically proletarian culture. This culture was to be characterized by the qualities believed to be inherent in the proletariat: spirit of collectivism, apotheosis of labor, hatred of exploitation, revolutionary ardor, struggle for communism on a global scale, and belief in Communist millennium.”²⁵

The adoption of socialist realism in Romania was an important element of the sovietization process. In its first years the Writers’ Union was the main promoter of socialist realism in Romania. The first article of the statute of the Romanian Writers’ Union

²² Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, Cristian Vasile, eds., *Comisia Prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România: Raport final* (Bucharest: Humanitas 2007), 313.

²³ *Ascuțirea luptei de clasă în țara noastră în perioadă actuală* (Bucharest: Editura PMR, 1951), 30.

²⁴ Katerina Clark, “Socialist Realism in Soviet Literature,” in *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, ed. Neil Cornwell (New York: Routledge, 2001), 174.

²⁵ Herman Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories 1917–1934, the Genesis of Socialist Realism* (New York: Octagon Books, 1963), 2.

proclaimed socialist realism as the method to be followed together with the “active participation of writers to the fight for building socialism.”²⁶ This provision of the Romanian Writers’ Union was inspired from the statute of the Union of Soviet Writers from 1934 in which it was stated that socialist realism was the sole literary method.

In order to implant this literary method, the canonical theoretical texts of socialist realism as well as the most representative pieces of Soviet socialist realist literature were translated into Romanian. Beside Gorky²⁷ and Zhdanov, Lenin’s well-known article “Party organization and party literature,” written in 1905 and published in the magazine *The New Life*, was translated into Romanian in the 1950s, commented upon and praised by many literary critics. For instance, Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, acknowledged the role of Lenin’s ideas in the development of socialist realism and Soviet literature.²⁸ According to the socialist realist theoretical texts, literature was considered a practical and useful product in shaping the new communist man. In his booklet “About the literary work,” translated into Romanian in 1961, Alexei Tolstoi enumerates the main functions of literature, namely that literature should enter mass psychology in order to instill in the readers the features of the new and should create typical characters. More importantly, as Tolstoy put it, “literature goes beyond real life and is able to predict the future.”²⁹ Literature had to be optimistic, promote confidence in future and depict the victory of the good against the evil. Literature was considered a precious aid effecting a psychological transformation in the masses that ultimately would promote a new socialist form of mentality and behavior. Writers were not to be appreciated by the aesthetic value of their works but rather by the social transformative role of their writings. According to the introduction of a Romanian literature textbook from

²⁶ Marian Popa, *Istoria Literaturii Române de azi pe mâine* (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Luceafărul 2001), 38.

²⁷ Maxim Gorki, *Despre literatură* (Bucharest: ESPLA, 1955).

²⁸ Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, *Pentru realismul socialist* (Bucharest: ESPLA, 1950).

²⁹ Alexei Tolstoi, *Despre Munca Literară* (Bucharest: ESPLA, 1961), 72.

the period, literature was considered a mere “social phenomena that help us to know life in the same way as science does.”³⁰

Writers were not allowed to imagine and create new worlds, but rather explore, analyze and render the features of the real life. Their artistic activity was supposed to have a clear social function. They were “engineers of the human soul” as Stalin defined the profession. The social function of literature was clearly put forward by the Romanian communist political leaders. For instance, in a 1957 speech addressed to the Writers’ Union, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej mentions that, “during this historical period in the development of our society, literature has the mission to shape and develop the socialist conscience of the new man, to create the socialist morality and a new attitude towards work and society. Moreover, literature should remove from people’s conscience the influences of bourgeois education and ideology. (...) The principles of socialist realism constitute the sole guide available to writers in their creative activity.”³¹

Socialist realist literature contributed to the transformation of the social imaginary by promoting a new set of values and a new sense of identity different from what it was in the interwar period. As Kelly notes referring to the transformative role of the socialist realist novels they “were in fact the expressions of powerful myths of self-transformation and loyalty which helped to hold the edgy and unstable new nation of the Soviet Union together.”³²

³⁰ George Călinescu, Ion Vitner, Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, *Istoria Literaturii Române pentru clasa a VIII-a* (Bucharest: Editura de Stat Didactică și Pedagogică, 1953), 3.

³¹ “Cuvîntarea tovărășului Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej la conferința pe țară a scriitorilor,” *Luceafărul*, February 1, 1957, 1.

³² Catriona Kelly, *Russian Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 90.

The Soviet masterpieces of socialist realism, such as Gorky's *Mother*³³ and Sholokhov's *Virgin soil upturned*,³⁴ were translated and followed by Romanian contributions of which *Mitrea Cocor* written by Mihai Sadoveanu is the most representative. Interestingly enough, as will be further analyzed, Mihail Sadoveanu, a well-known Romanian writer who adopted the socialist realism shortly after the emergence of the communist regime, was also one of the most important mainstream Romanian writers to publish a story as science fiction, although his literary interests were not at all related with this new genre or with the category of literature for children and youth of which science fiction was a part. However, during communism, literature for children and youth was given a special importance since it was considered an important ingredient in the proper education of the future communist citizens.

Literature for Children and Youth

Prior to the creation within the Writers' Union of a special section dedicated to the literature for children and youth, it is difficult to identify a solid tradition and institutionalization of literature for children and youth in Romania. This label is officially used only after the reorganization of the Writers' Union in 1949. However, this literature existed in Romania before communism. Although literary critics were preoccupied in discovering aesthetic valuable writings and less interested in literature for children considered too didactic for a literary analysis, starting from the end of the 19th century until the Second World War, Romanian literature for children acquired some particular features and an identity. At that time, this literature was to foster the formation of the Romanian

³³ Maxim Gorki, *Mama* (Bucharest: ARLUS, 1952).

³⁴ Mihail Solohov, *Pamînt destelenit* (Bucharest: ESPLA, 1949).

national character by inculcating national values in the youth and by offering them a proper moral education based especially on Christian religious principles.

At the end of the 19th century, in a review of a translated story book for children, A. D. Xenopol, the well-known Romanian historian and philosopher, took the opportunity to put forward a proper theory of literature for children. According to him such literary works had to be first and foremost “national in inspiration,” and as he put it “only such literature would foster the creation of a national character and consciousness.”³⁵ These principles were established and consolidated at the beginning of the 20th century by writers such as G. Pleșoianu, M. Râureanu and Vasile Belinescu.³⁶ In the interwar period the symbiosis between the national values and the normative function represented by religion were the main features of literature for children and youth. Besides Romanian writings, translations from the international literature for children were also published, such as *Couore* by Edmondo de Amicis, Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travells*, or Jules Verne’s novels. However, during this period there were only a few magazines specialized in literature for children. They had a low circulation and such titles as *Fluierașul*, *Dimineața copiilor*, *Lumea copiilor* and *Ziarul copiilor* did not succeed on the market.

With the advent of the communist regime literature for children and youth was fully reconsidered as an important tool in shaping the character of the young generation and the formation of the new communist men and women. In a 1963 study dedicated to this literature, Ilie Stanciu explains the complexity of such creations, which should not be regarded condescendingly by literary critics as without value since besides literary complexity, literature for children impacts “the formation and education of the young

³⁵ A.D. Xenopol, “Povești pentru copii traduse în Românește,” *Convorbiri Literare* 8 (February 1, 1974): 429-31.

³⁶ For a comprehensive history of the evolution of literature for children and youth before communism see Eugen Campus, *Literatura pentru Copii* (Bucharest: Editura Librăriei Principele Mircea, 1939).

generation, implying also psychology, pedagogy and sociology.³⁷ Stanciu emphasizes the fictionalization of scientific subjects: like science, literature was regarded as suitable to find and disseminate truths except that the methods of literature were considered to be different. Unlike science, which aimed at finding rules and generalizations, “literary plots start from individual characters and actions.”³⁸

In 1949, with the advent of the communism regime, specialized publications for children and youth were set up. In its first years the new magazine *Licurici* published mainly translations from Soviet writers such as Maxim Gorky, A.P. Gaidar, V. Kataev, Lev Kassil. From 1953 the magazine was re-branded *Cravata Roșie*. Romanian writers for children and youth such as Radu Tudoran, Octav Pancu-Iași, Costache Anton, Mircea Sîntimbreanu and Ion Hobana, who were emulating the Soviet literary model, would get published more often in the magazine. Ion Hobana started his career as a writer in the 1950s and would later become an emblematic figure for Romanian science fiction. In 1967, *Cravata Rosie* was renamed *Cutezătorii*, and the new magazine was continuously published until 1989. As Stanciu explained referring to the features of this publication system for children during its first years, “it was conceived to fight mysticism and superstitions and to promote among children the faith in science and the power of man freed from any exploitation.”³⁹

The dissemination of these publications among children was very efficient, since this literature was meant to represent a method of changing society by fostering the formation of the new men and women. In August 1951, *Consiliul de Miniștri al Republicii Populare Romîne* (Ministers’ Council of the Popular Republic of Romania) took a set of decisions meant to improve the activities of the public libraries. One of these referred to the

³⁷ Ilie Stanciu, *Literatura pentru copii* (Bucharest: Editura didactică și pedagogică, 1963), 2.

³⁸ Ibid., 24.

³⁹ Ibid., 43.

establishment of special sections for children and youth in the regional and raional libraries endowed with appropriate books and furniture. The librarians were put in charge to help children choose the appropriate books for out-of-class readings since “literature for children and youth was a powerful weapon to educate the next generation of communist builders.”⁴⁰ Referring to the Soviet libraries, Catriona Kelly points out their role in molding juvenile tastes,⁴¹ “not just by guiding individual readers but by excluding material that was considered unsuitable.”⁴² But the impact of literature on children and youth in Romania could have not been so strong without a transformation of the entire educational system.

Education in communist Romania

One of the first transformations undertaken by the communist regime in Romania was the 1948 reform of education. Education can be understood in many ways. It includes learning, changing behavior and, as Frank Sorrentino argues, “the imparting and acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes.”⁴³ Education is not limited to what happens in a formal system of education; other agencies such as the family, the church and the media are also involved. Moreover, “to educate” is an ambiguous and largely meaningless concept unless the content or the purposes of education are specified. Whether the schools should or should not inculcate moral values; whether they should place greatest emphasis on the emotional, the social or intellectual development of the child or student; whether they should encourage the student to question or to accept the *status quo* - each of these is a valuable issue on which

⁴⁰ Ibid., 127.

⁴¹ The situation is also valid for communist Romania. I remember in this respect the librarian from my primary school, (it was in the 1980s) that always recommended me books that were part of the out-of-class list of readings and at the same time mentioning that other books I was interested in were for grown-up children.

⁴² Catriona Kelly, *Thank-You for the Wonderful Book*, 723.

⁴³ Frank Sorrentino, Frances R. Curtio, *Soviet Politics and Education* (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 1.

there may be conflicting points of view within a society. The communists had an enormous influence over the way formal education was conducted and its outcome was related to the needs, values and goals of the political system.

Prior to the establishment of communism, public education in Romania developed following the French-German model, consisting of kindergartens, elementary schools, secondary schools, vocational schools and institutions of higher education. The 1948 communist reform reorganized the system along the Soviet lines both quantitatively and qualitatively. Using the Marxist-Leninist principle of education the educational policies were connected with the requirements of the planned economy. In Randolph L. Braham's analysis of this transformation in communist Romania, education involved two main dimensions: on the one hand the transmission of knowledge and skills required to build a new society, and on the other the remolding of character in terms of values consonant with communist ideology.⁴⁴ Accordingly, the three basic principles underlying Romanian school reform from 1948 were: "*curriculum revision*, emphasizing science and Marxism Leninism; *school reorganization*, stressing especially development of vocational and technical education and a *literacy campaign*."⁴⁵ Ideology and economic interest both pointed in the same direction - toward an ambitious program of eliminating illiteracy and building an educated proletariat and peasantry by relating the output of the educational system to the needs of the economy for an educated labor force.

The economic motivation was very important in changing the educational system. First, the communist transformation of the Romanian economy was threatened by the shortage of skilled and politically reliable workers. Therefore, the state was compelled to

⁴⁴ Randolph L. Braham, *Education in the Romania People's Republic* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963), 14.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 14.

develop vocational and technical education and also to transform the higher education system into one focused on technical training. The importance of vocational and technical schools is demonstrated by the growth in the number of pupils enrolled in vocational education, from 61,375 enrolled in 1948-1949 to 102,012 in 1959-1960.⁴⁶

The curriculum was strongly influenced by the political system. In 1951 *Institutul de Științe ale Educației*, (Institute of Pedagogical Sciences) was founded in Bucharest and during the period 1952-1955 the main task of this institution was to implement the Soviet educational model in Romania by creating new curricula and syllabi. From 1955 on, this responsibility was taken over by the newly founded Ministry of Education. What courses were to be taught in schools, what topics were to be included and which were to be excluded were some of the ministry's most important tasks. According to Braham's statistical data, greater emphasis was placed on science and technology and on the teaching of Marxism-Leninism. The Communist Party was also aware that the education of youth in the spirit of communism depended a lot on educators; thus the first profession to be purged after the establishment of communism were teachers, for "past reactionary attitudes" or "political unreliability."⁴⁷ Therefore, to improve teachers' professional as well as ideological qualifications, the *Institutul de Perfecționare a Cadrelor Didactice*, (Institute for Upgrading the Teaching Cadres) was created.

In addition to the school system, other mass organizations and institutions were created to supplement the educational process. In this respect Braham points out the role of various organizations for children, students and youth, which were ostensibly for extracurricular cultural and vocational activities and which as a secondary role carried out

⁴⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 159.

communist political and ideological indoctrination. Thus the “political effectiveness”⁴⁸ of the new education system was ensured by the *Organizația Pionerilor din România* (Romanian Pioneer's Organization) established in April 1949, having a well-defined objective “to be the principal help to the school and family for the moral education of children, for developing in pioneers those characteristics that distinguish the new man: courage, honesty, deep and active love of our Fatherland, of the Romanian Workers Party, of the great Soviet Union.”⁴⁹

Overall, the educational reform brought about a system of universal education with the goal of mass literacy. Scientific and technological education was given priority at all education levels, while the classics and the law, formerly major feature of elite education, declined sharply. Technological training received great emphasis and the social recruitment of students was broadened. This transformation had major consequences. Politechnization and the stress on vocational training led to the appearance of a new social and professional category consisting of engineers, economists, technicians, managers, qualified workers, and functionaries. In a 1959 political speech, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, the RWP prim-secretary, proudly stressed this achievement: “Today the number of engineers in our economy is 59,000 compared with 9,000 in 1938, and the number of specialists with secondary school education is over 22,000 persons. Almost three-quarters of our workers are qualified.”⁵⁰ This political declaration is very important for emphasizing one of the main features of the new educational system, namely the creation of a new professional category formed of engineers and technical professionals.

The year 1938, the point of comparison, is an emblematic one since it is considered to be the peak of Romanian economic development during the interwar period. At that time,

⁴⁸ Lynne Atwood, Catriona Kelly, “Programmes for Identity,” 258.

⁴⁹ Randolph L. Braham, *Education in the Romania People's Republic*, 181.

⁵⁰ Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, *Articole, Cuvântari decembrie 1955 - iulie 1959* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1959), 181.

the number of students was relatively small while the main fields in which they were enrolled were law, letters and philosophy. According to data provided by Braham, during the academic year 1938-1939 only 26,489 students were enrolled in institution of higher education compared with 48,676 in 1948-1949 or with the year 1956-1957, when the number of students enrolled was 81,206.⁵¹ The engineer was an emblematic social and professional category for the communist system, since communism was considered a quasi-scientific historical process governed by rigorous scientific laws. According to official statistics, in the 1960s the proportion of Romanian university graduates with technological training (engineers) was 68% compared to 7% in the United States,⁵² and for this new professional category new cultural products were required.

Fictionalization of science and technology

The changing of the educational system towards vocational training and the vast propaganda campaign for science and technology initiated by the Romanian communist regime in the 1950s led to some important transformations of the social imaginary. Before communism, scientific and technological education was rather underdeveloped in Romania. Mass mobilization done by political parties was generated by messages rooted in the Romanian historical past and the religious-orthodox morale that were considered the “healthy” direction for a national revival and development. The Iron Guard’s political rhetoric in the 1930s is very conclusive in this respect.⁵³ The few scientific references that could be identified in the collective representations of reality say a lot about the modernization path of Romania in the interwar period. The communist regime that was

⁵¹ Randolph L. Braham, *Education in the Romania People's Republic*, 11.

⁵² Lucian Boia, *Mitologia Științifică a Comunismului* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999), 136.

⁵³ Valentin Săndulescu, “Sacralised Politics in Action: the February 1937 Burial of the Romanian Legionary Leaders Ion Moța and Vasile Marin,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8 (June 2007): 259–269.

imposed in Romania after the Second World War initiated a rapid and forced modernization program with the main focus on industrialization. Within this context, science became the new religion and technological achievements served as irrefutable miracles done by man and the literary treatment of this problematic took the role of prophecies soon to be fulfilled.

The idea of science and technology as the single way to achieve progress permeated the official discourses and once again the Soviet Union was the model. For instance, at the opening of the first session of *Academia Republicii Populare Române* (The Romanian Popular Republic Academy), Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej spoke about the “creation of a new life based on science.” In order to achieve this ideal, the “shining beacon” that should guide the Romanian scientists was considered the Soviet Union, “the country with the most developed science in the world.”⁵⁴

In the same spirit Petre Constantinescu-Iași, the vice-president of *Academia Republicii Populare Române* (The Romanian Popular Republic Academy), enumerates eleven distinctive features of Soviet science that should inspire those responsible with the development of science in Romania. Some of them are simple slogans directed against the western capitalist enemies. Thus, according to Iași Soviet science:

- “has a great force in discovering the truth;
- has the capacity of planning and organizing scientific activity;
- has the possibility to put into practice complex solutions whereas in capitalism such practices could be impeded by particular interests;
- gives a particular importance to the workers that have a technological training; and
- is characterized by the development of mechanization of production processes.
- the ideological direction of science is crucial;
- is revolutionary;
- keeps a close relationship between theory and practice;
- is a science of the people not a science of a privileged class;
- is directed towards raising the living standards of the people.

⁵⁴ Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, *Inaugurarea celei dintâi sesiuni Generale a Academiei RPR din Octombrie 1949* (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei RPR, 1949), 19.

- is the science of peace.”⁵⁵

Simply stated, science constituted a major element of the communist mythology. In this respect Lucian Boia has identified several specific myths related to the communist regimes, i.e. the myths of rationality, unity, determinism, scientific prospecting, progress, the fight with the nature, the transformation of the world and the myth of the new man.⁵⁶ These ideological articulations could be easily identified in communist rhetoric.

Science was connected with the new communist pedagogy which was considered a strictly scientific discipline. The principles of this science were developed in the Soviet Union in a re-education camp by Anton S. Makarenko. Makarenko's writings were translated into Romanian in 1950-1951⁵⁷ and his ideas became guidelines for the new education process adopted in communist Romania. Two main principles define the new pedagogical method: first, heredity does not matter, since people are equal and therefore, only the methods are to be blamed when the expected outcomes are not achieved and second, in order to be efficient any pedagogy should be a communitarian one.

Human personality was considered something that could be molded according to pedagogical scientific laws. The two camps where Makarenko conducted his experiments with great success were the Gorky colony and Dzerjinski commune. “Free education” was deemed as an inefficient process; the transformation of human personality was considered meaningful only when conducted in community. The slogan was “to educate in community,

⁵⁵ Petre Constantinescu-Iași, *Știința sovietică deschizătoare de noi orizonturi pentru știința din R.P.R* (Bucharest: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură Economică și Juridică, 1954), 56-57.

⁵⁶ Lucian Boia, *Mitologia Științifică a Comunismului*, 39-40.

⁵⁷ Anton Semeonovich Makarenko, *Articole, prelegeri, conferințe* (Bucharest: ESPLA, 1951), Anton Semeonovich Makarenko, *Cartea pentru Părinți* (Bucharest: Editura de stat pentru literatură științifică, 1951), Anton Semeonovich Makarenko *Opere pedagogice alese vol 1-3* (Bucharest: ESPLA, 1950).

through the community and for the community.”⁵⁸ The future was an important dimension since the crucial motivation assimilated by people was the shape of the tomorrow. As Makarenko put it, “man cannot live in this world without having an outline of the future.”⁵⁹

The belief in a future based on scientific developments and progress is clearly reflected by the editorial and publishing strategy initiated in Romania with the advent of communism. Shortly after the installation of the communist regime a printing house named *Cartea Rusă* (The Russian Book) was set up in Bucharest in order to promote Soviet literature. Writers such as Maxim Gorky, Fyodor Gladkov and Mihail Sholokhov were translated and their books had huge circulations. According to Eugen Jebeleanu who wrote a report about the activity of the new printing house, by 1953 there were printed 1650 different titles with a total circulation of 22,550,000 copies.⁶⁰ The popularization of science and technology became an important editorial domain in the 1950s. The printing house *Cartea Rusă* initiated the book collection *Știința pentru toți* (The Science for Everyone) and Tineretului printing house the collection *Știința Învinge* (Science wins).⁶¹ Most of the books were translations from Russian, were printed in many copies and had a very good distribution in the country. Magazines for science popularization were also set up, the most important being *Știință și Tehnică pentru Tineret* (Science and Technology for Youth) that replaced from June 1949 the magazine *Ziarul Științelor* (The Newspaper of Sciences). As it was specified in the first issue, the rationale of the magazine was given by the interest and the demand of youth for science and technology:

“the capitalist system keeps the youth in ignorance and illiteracy but now the situation has changed. The Central Committee of the Union of the Working Youth decided upon the publication of a magazine for the popularization of science and technology. This magazine would offer to the young people from factories,

⁵⁸ Lucian Boia, *Mitologia Științifică a Comunismului*, 128.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Eugen Jebeleanu, “Cuvinte la sărbătoarea cărții sovietice,” *Contemporanul* 34 (23 October 1953).

⁶¹ Ilie Stanciu, *Literatura pentru copii și îndrumarea lecturii copiilor*, 127.

schools and universities the main scientific and technological problems necessary for broadening their knowledge and at the same time for deepening every person's particular field of interest. In the pages of this magazine one would discover information about the most important problems faced by industry and agriculture (...) we will offer a special attention to popularize the newest achievements of the Soviet science and technology, which is the most developed in the world.”⁶²

In addition to the popularization of science and technology its fictionalization in literary plots was encouraged. Following the Soviet model, scientific artistic literature, later science fiction, was the genre included in the category of literature for children and youth. Literature with a scientific subject matter was, except the translations from Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, rare in Romania before communism. Moreover, the belief in the dynamic potential of science had not stimulated hopes and expectations for social progress and change among the population in spite of some noticeable efforts, especially in the first half of the 20th century, done by the journalist and science popularizer Victor Anestin through an editorial campaign to popularize science. The magazines dedicated to such topics had a low circulation and were read only by the educated strata.

In 1948, the first issue of *Ziarul Științelor Populare* (Journal of Popular Sciences), a publication set up in 1912 by Victor Anestin, published an interesting article, written as an answer to a rhetorical question: “What is the direction of the humankind?”⁶³ The article anticipated a comfortable and rich human life based on future scientific discoveries. A couple of achievements, like helicopters and flying automobiles, would be mass produced and available to ordinary people in a decade or two. Moreover, as an anticipation of how it would be in the near future, two Soviet scientists, who had discovered a serum already tested in Siberia with which human life was prolonged to three hundred years, were presented. With the progress achieved by communists at such a pace, the article concluded that it was a simple matter of time until death would be eliminated. These predictions were not a literary

⁶² *Știință și tehnică pentru tineret* 1 (1 June 1949).

⁶³ “Încotro merge omenirea,” *Ziarul Științelor Populare* 1 (6 January 1948).

or a science fiction convention; rather the future scenarios were presented as certitude legitimized by science.

Science fiction, a genre for children and youth

Soon such scenarios were integrated into science fiction, a new literary genre imported from the Soviet Union and considered as part of literature for children and youth. This genre emerged in Romania after the establishment of the magazine *CPSF* the only regular science fiction publication in communist Romania. Since the model for the Romanian genre was the Soviet one, the features of *CPSF* should be also presented in relationship to the evolution of the genre in the Soviet Union.

CPSF and the emergence of science fiction in Romania

The formula *literatură științifico fantastică* (an approximate translation would be science fiction), a term translating the Russian *naucino fantasticeskaia literatura*, appeared in Romania at the beginning of the 1950s, in the magazine *Știință și Tehnică pentru Tineret* (Science and Technology for Youth), the main publication for science popularization at that time. The first story published in communist Romania that was named ‘science fiction’ was a translation from Russian of Vladimir Nemtov’s novel *Expediție pe Fundul Mării* (Expedition on the Bottom of the Sea), published in 1954 as a feuilleton in *Știință și Tehnică pentru Tineret*.⁶⁴ The new genre became established in 1955, when the *CPSF* magazine was published as a literary supplement of *Știință și Tehnică pentru Tineret*.

⁶⁴ Florin Manolescu, *Literatura S.F.*, (Bucharest: Univers, 1980), 12.

This beginning was accomplished in an official manner. In 1954, the magazine *Știință și Tehnică pentru Tineret* organized a national contest of *literatură științifico-fantastică*, addressed to the writers whether or not they were members of the Writers' Union. The aim of the contest was to stimulate the creation of science fiction, which, as was put in the announcement, "constitutes an important support for youth to achieve new knowledge, develop imagination and love for science and technology."⁶⁵

Out of the 243 submitted pieces, the jury chaired by the writer Cezar Petrescu awarded the first prize to the short-story *Marea experiență* (The Great Experience) by Mircea Naumescu, the second prize to the story *Inimă de Ciută* (Hind Heart) by Adrian Rogoz and Cristian Ghenea and the third to *Poveste fără aventuri* (Story without Adventures) by G. Ivanciu. Because of the large number of stories that was received, several were published in a literary supplement of *Știință și Tehnică* that was transformed into a regular science fiction magazine. Thus, in October 1955 *CPSF* was published.

CPSF was a bimonthly publication, had a general circulation of 35,000 copies and was published for the period 1955-1974. Its national distribution was very efficient. The centralized system of press delivery, the subscription system, as well as the distribution of the magazine to school and public libraries made it widespread and accessible to a large and diverse public audience. One could buy *CPSF* from any newspaper boutique and even from cigarette stores around the country. Moreover, the price of one issue was only "1 leu" (see appendix) and this cheap, and in a way symbolic, price was maintained for the entire period the magazine was published. Anybody could afford to buy the magazine, yet sometimes it was hard to find a copy to purchase. Due to its popularity, but also because of the large demand, *CPSF* usually sold out almost immediately after appearing.

⁶⁵ "Concursul de schițe, nuvele și povestiri științifico-fantastice," *Știință și Tehnică pentru Tineret*, December 7, 1954, 47.

The first chief editor, in charge of the new magazine was I. Chițu, a person imposed by the RWP, who had nothing in common with literature whatsoever. According to Max Solomon,⁶⁶ Chițu was nearly illiterate, without any training in humanities or science, but he was an old RCP member. Shortly he was replaced with I. Tripșa.⁶⁷ Finally the editor-in-chief became Adrian Rogoz who, with the support of Virgil Ioanid⁶⁸ the editor-in-chief of the magazine *Știință și Tehnică pentru Tineret*, managed to create a very popular publication. Rogoz himself was a science fiction writer, but one without any notable credentials; however, he was rather an interesting poet. Yet, during the two decades of *CPSF*'s appearance, as an editor-in-chief, Rogoz significantly contributed to the development of science fiction in Romania. His relation with the readers of *CPSF*, with the authors and especially his role in recruiting new writers and his struggle to maintain the magazine, made him identify with the publication to the point that his major achievement is often considered to be the complete collection of the 466 issues of the publication.

According to Voicu Bugariu, Rogoz's merits for the development of the genre in Romania were "his attachment and devotion for science fiction, his charisma and his capacity to gather the science fiction community together and to enlarge it."⁶⁹ A translator himself, Adrian Rogoz was also credited with keeping Romanian science fiction in contact with the international developments of the genre. From his translations two famous novels are worth mentioning, *Nebuloasa din Andromeda* (Andromeda Nebula, 1958) by Ivan Yefremov and Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1974). Their publication in Romania in *CPSF*,

⁶⁶ Max Solomon is a science fiction writer (now he is 87 years old and lives in the United States). He published in *CPSF* in the 1950s, and thus is familiar with the early history of the magazine. This information is based on an e-mail sent to me by Max Solomon on 17 January 2003.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Aurel Cărășel "Courte Histoire de la Revue de S F. Roumaine Colecția de Povestiri Științifico Fantastice" available at <http://www.oeldusphinx.com/transylvanian-3.html> (accessed May 15 2006).

⁶⁹ Voicu Bugariu, *Literați și Sefiști – o confruntare de mentalități* (Brașov: Editura Universității Transilvania, 2007), 27.

almost two decades apart, indicates two different stages in the evolution of Romanian science fiction.

However, in its first years the literature published in *CPSF* was related to Stalinist science fiction. When the magazine *CPSF* was released in 1955, the editors did not provide the reader with a conceptual definition of the science fiction (comparable with the theoretical assessment made for instance in the West). Thus, on the second cover of the first issue of *CPSF*, the mission of the new magazine was stated in a few sentences. Imagined as an instrument of education, this new kind of literature was meant to develop among its readers “the love for science and the courage requested for any great achievement.”⁷⁰ Theoretical articles in other literary publications explaining the guidelines for writing a science fiction story, intended for those willing to become science fiction writers, soon overcame this shortcoming.

For instance, in 1957, I. M. Ștefan refers to science fiction by acknowledging that “writers are not allowed to contradict the truths established by science such as to imagine breaking the speed of light.”⁷¹ Another theorist, Ion Roman, stated that “as long as the contemporary researchers stated that without any doubt there are no living conditions on the Moon, it is forbidden for science fiction literature to imagine that there are any.”⁷² Moreover, the same critic stated the purpose of this literary genre: “The mission of science fiction literature is to train people to develop the trust in the creative forces of man (...) rather than anticipating the 40th century, a story on a near future is more educative and instructive.”⁷³ What can be noticed in these theoretical attempts is mainly the ideological dimension.

⁷⁰ *CPSF* 1 (1955): 2.

⁷¹ I.M. Ștefan, “Cu privire la literatura științifico fantastică,” *Scînteia Tineretului*, June 16, 1957, 2.

⁷² Ion Roman, “Știința și Fantezia,” *Contemporanul*, March 4, 1960, 3.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Science fiction was intended to train, to educate, to instruct, to develop the imagination, yet the imagination had to be censored.

The Soviet model of science fiction

The first years of *CPSF* could be considered as the first stage of the science fiction genre in Romania, reflecting the characteristics of the Stalinist socialist realist period. The process of imitation placed the imitator a few steps behind the model. Soon after Stalin's death, the literary dogmatism of socialist realism was challenged in many articles published in the Soviet Union, while in Romania this process was slower to develop. Rafail Nudelman set forth a chronological periodization of Soviet science fiction that provides the context for understanding why the middle of the 1950s is the moment of the appearance of science fiction literature in Romania. According to Nudelman, the 1950s renewal of the genre in the Soviet Union could be chiefly interpreted from a new ideological perspective adopted after Stalin's death.⁷⁴ Prior to that, the evolution of the Soviet science fiction had a convoluted path. A brief overview of Soviet science fiction prior to the 1953 offers some elements for understanding the political significance science fiction literature during communism.

The first stage of the development of science fiction in the Soviet Union occurred shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution and may be associated with the cultural dynamism of that time. Referring to that period, Nudelman argues that science fiction, represented by works such as Aleksey Tolstoy's *Aelita*, Zamiatin's *We* or Vinnicenko's *The Sun Machine*,

⁷⁴ Rafail Nudelman, "Soviet Science Fiction and the Ideology of Soviet Society," *Science-Fiction Studies* 16 (1989): 40.

was a promising and a qualitative genre even if a communist ideological frameworks dominated the plots.⁷⁵

This situation did not last long. The Stalinist Soviet Union gave up the science fiction experiments, perceived as cosmopolitan and ‘deviationist,’ and replaced them with an officially controlled literary method, i.e. socialist realism. Within this context, socialist realism actually determined the near disappearance of science fiction. According to the new literary method, the narrative space in science fiction plots became identical to the real, and the fantastic element was reduced to a timid time span of several years, in extension of the official five-year plans. Ironically the “the theory of near anticipation”⁷⁶ became a characteristic of Stalinist science fiction. In a theoretical article, “The fantastic and reality”, the Russian literary critic S. Ivanov offered a clear picture of the near anticipation theory imported into Romanian science fiction in the 1950s. After establishing a clear distinction between the science fiction written in the Occident, perceived as a literature without any value, and the Soviet one, Ivanov stressed some ideas about the communist writings by asking a rhetorical question: “Are not the directives given by comrade Stalin referring to the development of our industry in the next few years a topic suitable for a science fiction story?”⁷⁷

These guiding lines transformed the future world depicted by science fiction novels in an expansion of an already existing way of life. For instance, in *The Destroyer Z-3* Alexander Belyaev depicts the exploration of the Arctic Sea shoreline, while Grebnev portrays in *Arktania* the future socialist science power station in the Arctic region.⁷⁸ Other

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ For more details about this period see Leonid Heller, *De la science-fiction Soviétique. Par delà le dogme, un univers* (Lausanne: L’âge de L’homme, 1979).

⁷⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁷⁸ Mentioning these works is important since many of them were translated and published in Romania mainly in the 1950s.

writers avoid even these prognoses: their fantastic hypotheses come down to the depiction of near future improvements on already-existing technical innovation: television sets, destroyers, submarines or excavators. A safe theme without any implications that would affect the writer was a sign of the genre stagnation during Stalin. As Nudelman stated the author was rescued from the danger of “tracing the social-historical consequences of a hypothesis.”⁷⁹

The prologue to the story *Expediție pe Fundul Mării* (Expedition on the Bottom of the Sea) that was translated and published in Romania in 1954 offers a good exemplification for these narrative limitations:

“This summer no interplanetary spaceship left the earth. On the railways of the country there traveled ordinary trains, without nuclear energy. The Antarctic remained cold. Men had not yet learned to control the weather, to get bread from the air, and to live for three hundred years. There were no advertisements for a lunar flight either. All these things did not exist for the sole reason that our story is about the event of the present days, which we like no less than we do the future.”⁸⁰

Romanian Science Fiction Writers

When science fiction appeared as a new Romanian literary genre, the novels of Soviet writers like I. Kalnițki, I. Efermov, A Belyaev, Anatol Dneprov, Ţiolkovski, Alexander Kazanțev, Alexandra Juravlioiva, translated from the soviet magazines *Vokrug sveta*, *Tehnica molodioji*, *Znanie sila*, *Iunosti* and *Nauka i jizn* were those who were published in *CPSF*. The Romanian writers of the genre were missing. The solution was to have the Soviet model copied and those capable to achieve this task, beside literary talent, were supposed to have a specific professional profile taking into account that the new genre

⁷⁹ Rafail Nudelman, “Soviet Science Fiction and the Ideology of Soviet Society,” 46.

⁸⁰ Vladimir Nemtsov, *Oskolok Solntsa* (Moscow: Soviety Písatel, 1955), 3. quoted in John J. Pierce, *When World Views Collide; A Study in Imagination and Evolution* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 132.

was meant to train the youth scientifically and to inspire people to embrace technical professions. Therefore, science fiction plots had to be true, popularize real scientific information and extrapolate future scientific and societal developments.

The most qualified Romanians for writing this new type of literature would be the engineers. Yet, how to transform engineers into writers was a major preoccupation. Adrian Rogoz, the chief editor of *CPSF*, encouraged many people with a scientific and technological education to write literature. He would then polish their writings to an appropriate literary content so that they could be published. Within this context, the veridical character of a science fiction story was given first and foremost by the profile of the writer. The engineer was a rather mythological figure⁸¹ during communism and in the first decade of *CPSF* most of the published writers were engineers by training. Their profile was published in the science fiction magazine together with their story. They were not presented only as promising writers but especially as brilliant scientists.

One such writer was Liviu Macoveanu. According to his resume Macoveanu was an engineer by training, born in Bucharest where in 1948 graduated in chemistry and after self taught efforts developed also an expertise in electronics. His profile suits perfect the characteristics of the new communist man: in 1961 he won a prize as a radio-telegraphist and the same year invented an electronic device useful in radio communication. He published several science fiction stories in *CPSF* inspired directly from his professional preoccupations.⁸² Another example is the writer Ion Nicolae Bucur. Born 1921 in the village Braniște, Galați County, he graduated from the Polytechnic Institute in Bucharest as an electro- mechanical engineer. After 1948 he worked for the national railways system and made several contributions related to engines and locomotives construction in Romania. He

⁸¹ Lucian Boia, *Mitologia științifică a comunismului*, 133-136.

⁸² *CPSF* 75 (1958): 2

was also preoccupied with hydro-electricity and made several valuable inventions related to this scientific interest.⁸³ The way in which the authors are presented in *CPSF* by stressing their outstanding technological achievements is somehow a predisposition for writing literature (see appendix). Thus, before putting his plans into practice an engineer tested them in literature and at the same time inspired young people to embrace technical professions. In his story published in *CPSF*, Ion Nicolae Bucur anticipates the evolution of the railway transportation.

During this period another valuable help for those willing to embrace a literary career was the Mihai Eminescu School. This new institution, a school for producing writers, was set up in 1950. Its mission was clearly synthesized by the literary critic Dumitru Micu: “the Party wanted to create and promote writers that would be loyal to its ideology, to create the so called revolutionary literature, inspired from the communist ideology and strictly guided by the Party cadres. It was considered that the cohort of old writers that became communist adherents was not enough. A new generation of writers was needed to directly express the ideology and political orientation of the Party.”⁸⁴ The way to recruit student for this school was simple one: the Party regional committees had to propose “young people up to thirty years working in industry, agriculture and building sites. The selection was made on political criteria.”⁸⁵ Many graduates having a technical training became science fiction writers, or in fact popularizers of science and technology.

However, for those that did not have a technological training it was more difficult to write science fiction, yet not impossible. The scientific and technological data in a science

⁸³ *CPSF* 82 (1959): 2

⁸⁴ Ada Demisgian, “Fabrica de Scriitori,” Liternet, 16.06.2004 available at <http://atelier.liternet.ro/arhiva/1597/Ada-Demisgian/Fabrica-de-scriitori.html> (accessed March 16, 2008).

⁸⁵ Marian Popa, *Istoria literaturii române de azi pe mâine* (Bucharest: Fundația Culturală Luceafărul, 2001), 67.

fiction story published during this period could not be the product of mere imaginations. This aspect was mentioned by Romulus Bărbulescu. He was an exception by training among the science fiction writers, and therefore had to work more than an engineer writer. An actor by training, Bărbulescu wrote a couple of novels together with George Anania. He recollects the process a novel should pass in order to get published: “For the novel *Paralela Enigma* (Parallel Enigma) Edmond Nicolau, a well known specialist in communications, university professor at the Polytechnic Institute was assigned as a scientific reviewer. In case the scientific reviewer did not approve the scientific problematic presented in the story, the book could not be published.”⁸⁶ Romulus Bărbulescu mentions that he had to spend several months in the library in order to get familiar with the scientific problematic that he would develop in a novel. Due to the amount of work required at that time to write an acceptable science fiction book, which besides entertaining had also to popularize science, Romulus Bărbulescu considers that science fiction writers deserve more respect from the literary critics. For Bărbulescu an important element for assessing the value of a literary work was given by the time invested in studying a particular scientific problematic. The literary value was therefore equivalent with the work and effort invested in producing a particular novel. Yet science fiction was considered a genre for children and youth and its writers were members of the department of literature for children and youth within the Writers’ Union, a position perceived by most of them as inappropriate for the type of literature they produced. George Anania considered that “science fiction was not a toy for children, but rather a useful literature for adults.”⁸⁷

Besides science fiction stories, in the *CPSF* there were published theoretical articles signed by engineer-writers demonstrating that people with technological training were not

⁸⁶ Romulus Bărbulescu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, August 12, 2004.

⁸⁷ George Anania, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, August 15, 2004.

only writers but also theoreticians. However, in the first decade of the *CPSF* the major problem was the lack of trained Romanian writers able to produce science fiction according to the official requirements. While this issue was solved another one was still existent. With the engineers writers the genre could not get proper legitimacy for the readership. As will be analyzed in the next chapter the genre legitimacy for the readership was achieved with the support of some important mainstream writers that published stories labeled as science fiction. Yet, these contributions were rare and the genre needed a new cohort of writers that was basically created from scratch.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the 1950s Romanian obedience towards the Soviet Union was an incontestable reality. Thus, in 1951 Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, referring to the scientific activity carried out in Romania, stated that “the shining beacon that must guide our scientists is the country with the most advanced culture, the Soviet Union,”⁸⁸ a statement that was not contested until the 1960s when Romania started to distance itself from its Eastern neighbor. The transformation, ‘modernization’ of Romania after the communist regime came to power required first of all the adoption of the Soviet model i.e., sovietization, and also the transformation of the social imaginary. Science fiction, as a literary genre for children and youth, meant to contribute to the formation of the future ‘new men,’ was a small but relevant part of this strategy.

This chapter presented the first years of science fiction in Romania. Far from being an autochthonous initiative, science fiction was an imported literary model, and for the first years it was related to Stalinist socialist realism. Imagined as an instrument of education, in

⁸⁸ Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians; A History* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 239.

the context of the transformation (politechnization) of the educational system, this new kind of literature was meant to develop among its readers "the love for science and the courage requested for any great achievement."⁸⁹ In this period, most of the authors were engineers, while the readers were children or were drawn from the technical professionals.

⁸⁹ This theoretical statement was written on the second cover of the first issue of *CPSF* in 1955.

CHAPTER 2

ROMANIAN SF IN THE 1950S: LEGITIMATION AND THEMATIC UNIVERSE

Science fiction in Romania during the 1950s was granted great ideological significance in the process of transformation from socialism to communism due to its scientific content and popular appeal, especially for the young. Its official aims, when adopted in communist Romania, were notably to mobilize the young generations to fight against capitalism, to legitimize communism and to offer an alternative scientific and technological education to its readership. For the new political system a different social imaginary was necessary and science fiction became an important instrument in propagating it, especially among the youth. However, as explained in the first chapter, the first decade of science fiction was heavily dependent upon Soviet translations and editorial improvements to the literary output of scientists and engineers that became the writers of the genre. While science fiction was useful propaganda for political socialization, this new genre without tradition in Romania lacked a proper legitimacy as literature. Therefore, the emergence of science fiction as a critically appreciated and respectable literary genre was aided by the help of some popular writers that became communist supporters after 1948 and published stories under the label science fiction.

This chapter focuses on two main aspects of the new Romanian science fiction of 1950s. First, I analyze the way in which the new science fiction genre was legitimized in communist Romanian with the support of an important mainstream writer, Mihail Sadoveanu. The rather long part dedicated to the novel *Cuibul invaziilor* (The Nest of Invasions) initially written by Sadoveanu in the interwar period and then republished as a science fiction novel in 1955 is not only an analysis about the beginning of science fiction in

Romania and its legitimation but also an episode of Romanian cultural history. The transformation of this novel shows how discourses and debates from the interwar period were taken, recycled and reconfigured during communism in order to serve a new ideological and social project.

In the second part I focus on the genre's thematic universe in its first decade, especially on the fictionalization of the Cold War problematic. The huge popularity of this literature, especially among the youth, made science fiction a perfect instrument used by the Romanian communist regime for political propaganda through which to illustrate from its ideological point of view the confrontation with the capitalist West. The problematic of the Cold War, such as the fight with the imperialists spies, the arms and space race especially with the accent on the attempts to reach the moon, was presented in science fiction in such a way to make the readers of the genre believe that they would live in the best possible society, the communist one.

Legitimation for a new literary genre. Mihail Sadoveanu's case – archaeology of a fake science fiction novel¹

In 1955, *CPSF* published a short novel by the well-known Romanian writer Mihail Sadoveanu entitled *Cuibul Invaziilor* (The Nest of Invasions). The association of Sadoveanu's name with science fiction is unusual in Romanian literature or cultural history as his numerous writings could be classified in any way but science fiction. Even today he is considered a major Romanian writer, a fame coming also with many idolatrous platitudes²

¹ This section is part of the article Eugen Stancu, "Text, Context, Interpretation: From Thomas Atkinson Witlam to Mihail Sadoveanu," *European Review of History*, 16 (2009): 169-181.

² The expression belongs to Alexandru Paleologu who reviewed what has been written by literary critics about Sadoveanu in Alexandru Paleologu, *Treptele lumii sau calea catre sine a lui Mihail Sadoveanu* (Bucharest: Vitruviu, 1997).

such as ‘the sun of our prose,’ ‘singer of the nature’ or ‘poet in prose,’³ attributed to him by literary critics. In fact, Sadoveanu’s recurrent themes include a reverence for nature and a strong interest in the historical past, epitomized by the writer in a series of novels focusing on the historical epics of the Moldavian voivodes. Therefore, his commentators generally consider his message and literary agenda as a rejection of modernity and of the urban civilization permeated by technicism seemingly the very opposite of SF. However, a closer look at the story *The Nest of Invasions* can clarify some problems concerning the role and the image of science and technology in the Romanian literature in general and in science fiction in particular in the 1950s.

Florin Manolescu, one of the few Romanian literary critics who wrote a book on science fiction, explained the presence of Sadoveanu and other established writers in the *CPSF* magazine as an indispensable “authority transfer”⁴ that attracted readership and legitimized a new literary genre. Ion Barbu, Geo Bogza, Horia Lovinescu, Tudor Arghezi, Mihail Sadoveanu and other well-known Romanian authors who were published in the first years of *CPSF* could not be considered science fiction representatives, yet, such intermingling of science fiction and mainstream authors was a characteristic of Romanian science fiction at that time.

The presence of an important mainstream writer, who modifies an already published novel for a science fiction magazine, is indeed an argument, as Manolescu puts it, for legitimizing a new genre. However, the essence of this legitimating process, the idea and the problematic that Sadoveanu develops around science and technology as well as the origins

³ There is a long debate among Romanian literary critics regarding Sadoveanu’s narrative style. Some claim he used the language of the folk, arguing that Sadoveanu’s writings are characterized by simplicity and lack of reflection, which would be an “emanation” of the popular spirit. However, others argue that Sadoveanu employed his own original language which makes his “original and unique” narrative style.

⁴ Florin Manolescu, *Literatura S.F.* (Bucharest: Univers, 1980), 263.

and the evolution of such a preoccupation are questions that need a more careful treatment. It is not only about the analysis of the mechanisms of writing and rewriting used by Sadoveanu but also about the strategies that the writer, an important intellectual figure, had to use in order to comply with the communist regime. With the novel *The Nest of Invasions* (stretched over two *CPSF* issues⁵), Sadoveanu is one of the first Romanian authors published in the *CPSF*, after the winners of the 1954 science fiction contest and some Soviet authors (who were widely translated in the 1950s). The title could easily suggest a science fiction novel. However, this short narrative depicts the Siberian experiences and adventures of two 19th century English voyagers: Thomas Atkinson Witlam and his wife.

The Atkinsons' trip started in 1848 in Moscow, lasted a couple of years and covered most of the southern Siberia and the Altai Mountains (more than 63,000 km). According to Sadoveanu, they were the first westerners who had reached the old route of the legendary Genghis Khan. Interestingly enough, the main character of these extraordinary adventures was Thomas Atkinson himself. He was to fight with wolves during the nights, hunt wild boars and survive a frightening tornado. Yet, Atkinson also met several Central Asian tribes and peoples who had received him well (such as the Kirghiz tribe of the sultan Baspasihan, the tribe of sultan Sabek and even the brigands of Kubaldon in the lands neighboring China), occasions for large description of the customs and traditions of these tribes.⁶

It is useless to search for science fiction elements according to any definition of the genre in Sadoveanu's text. There are none. In Sadoveanu's novel what one could easily

⁵ Mihail Sadoveanu, "Cuibul invaziilor." *CPSF* 17-18 (1955).

⁶ The plot of the novel is a very good illustration for the thematic inconsistency of the Romanian science fiction in the 1950s, and it was not an isolated case. Several issues before Sadoveanu's story, the editors of the *CPSF* chose to publish a sort of travelogue *Indienii* (The Indians) written by the Soviet writer Vitali Trennev. The plot of the novel placed in the colonial period had as main theme the condemnation of the "Western exploiters." A Soviet ship accosted in India, where the crew met a couple of tribes scared by the encounter. The captain however assures the natives that they are from the Soviet Union and will behave well, unlike imperialist American exploiters had done.

identify as the main message is the idealization of nomad and rural civilizations. The presentation of the populations Atkinson met, their customs and traditions, as well as depictions of landscapes make up a great deal of the text. The attraction for the rural world had earlier been one of Sadoveanu's favorite themes. This time, however, the unusual presence of such a subject in a science fiction magazine is at least apparently solved in the foreword by Sadoveanu who mentions the fact that the story had been published 20 years earlier.

The past of a science fiction novel

In 1935, when *The Nest of Invasions* was published for the first time, the novel was part of a larger project that fits Sadoveanu's intellectual career. Born in 1880, Sadoveanu made his literary debut in 1904 with 4 volumes, one of which was granted the award of the Romanian Academy. At that time, following the invitation of the historian and politician Nicolae Iorga, he started to contribute to *Semănătorul* (The Sower). This was the publication of the literary school called *semănătorism*, which urged writers to look for inspiration by exploring the rural origins of the historical past and peasant virtues in a romantic spirit of national inspiration.

Then, in the 1920s, Sadoveanu contributed to *Viața Românească* (Romanian Life), the *poporanist* magazine directed by Garabet Ibrăileanu. Inspired by the Russian *narodnicism*, the *poporanist* literary and political doctrine was formulated in Romania by Constantin Stere (an émigré from Russia) who maintained that capitalist development was an unimportant historical phenomenon that could and should be avoided because the future society would be built on the 'peasant community,' more exactly peasant socialism based on small agricultural property. At that time, however, in Romania the situation of the peasants

was appalling. For the *poporanists*, this misery was caused primarily by the lack of proper education; therefore the main mission of the intellectuals was, as Stere put it, to “turn people to the light.”⁷

Thus, the context in which one should place the discussion and Sadoveanu’s literary creation from the interwar period is the interwar Romanian polemics between traditionalism and modernism. One of the most controversial of these polemics concerned the methods of ‘catching up’ with the West. As almost everywhere in the region⁸ during the 19th and early 20th century, Romania was underdeveloped compared to the western part of Europe. As contacts with the Occident became more frequent, Romanian intellectuals started wondering about the possible development paths the country should follow. In the interwar period the debates concerning the modernization of the state had already crystallized around two opposing positions. As Hitchens puts it, “one drawing upon the Western European experience would lead to industrialization and urbanization and bring radical changes to every facet of Rumanian society; the other was based upon Rumania’s agricultural past and emphasized the preservation of traditional social structures and cultural values.”⁹

The first direction, the modernist one, was represented by intellectuals such as Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943), author of the theory of synchronism or “integral imitation.” Lovinescu argued that the Romanian cultural “substance” was not able to develop properly without borrowing Western forms. According to him, such forms would determine the emergence of a modern and finally original Romanian culture, in synchronism with the more

⁷ Al. Săndulescu, *Dicționar de termeni literari* (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei, 1976), 341.

⁸ About 19th and 20th century debates on modernization in Eastern Europe see Charles and Barbara Jelavitch, *History of the Balkans*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), esp. 42-57, and Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804-1920* (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 1977).

⁹ Keith Hitchens, *Rumania, 1866-1947* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 55.

advanced cultures in the world. On the other side *semănătorism* and *poporanism* constituted a strong reaction to this envisioned process.

Although there are differences between these two ideologies, their emphasis on the people's rural values made them good allies in the debate with the modernists. Moreover, they benefited from the authority of some major intellectuals among whom Sadoveanu occupied an important position. In 1929, he became a member of the Romanian Academy and the speech delivered on this occasion was a panegyric of popular poetry. This was also the time of his greatest literary achievements - the well-known historical novels that for the Romanian literature remain classics of the genre, *Frații Jderi*, *Viața lui Ștefan cel Mare* (The Jderi Brothers, The Life of Stephen the Great, etc.).

The Nest of Invasions represented part of a larger intellectual project emerging at this particular time. The novel's foreword published in 1935 explains it as follows: "In the last 50 years due to the mechanical inventions and the increase of the transportation speed the continents have on the one hand lost their mystery and on the other hand have changed embracing a standardized life by eliminating what they had particular before.. (...) The residues of this vanished way of life of the past rouse in us a real interest; there where life has been transformed the earth seems to have American banality – which means the standard landscape."¹⁰

In this project, Sadoveanu intended primarily to portray all these places before mechanizing civilization irremediably changed them or at least an artistic attempt to save them. *The Nest of Invasions*, dedicated to Siberia and to its peoples, was the first volume from a never finished series that, according to the foreword, would have included a book on

¹⁰ Mihail Sadoveanu, *Cuibul Invaziilor* (Bucharest: Editura Națională Ciornei, 1935), 2.

the Turks before the modernization imposed by Atatürk and several volumes on Africa, Americas and Australia.

A closer look at the quotation above, one would probably not fail to notice that in 1935, Sadoveanu's critical position towards technical civilization was consistent with the stereotypical association of America. He was obviously referring to the United States, where everything was 'standardized, unnatural, modified,' a popular theme as illustrated by Georges Duhamel's¹¹ book *Scènes de la vie future* (Scenes of the Life to Come), a well-known book in the Romanian intellectual milieu. Sadoveanu's foreword is the expression of the *angoisse* provoked by the instauration of a falsifying civilization whose greatest sin is the diminishing and even elimination of the role and therefore dignity of the human beings. This transformation is clearly illustrated, "The world was multiple in its variation and diversity. It has already started to die. The moment we build skyscrapers in Bukhara, it's finished. 50 years ago a European traveler still could see the Mongolians as they were in the year 1000 after JC. Today the nomad peoples are learning how to use a machine gun and to drive a tank. " ¹²

Testimonies (usually diaries and travelogues) of 19th century voyagers are the main source for *The Nest of Invasions* and for the other parts of the 1930s project. More precisely in the case of *The Nest of Invasions* the book by which Sadoveanu was inspired could have been *Oriental and Western Siberia. A Narrative of Seven Years Explorations and Adventures in Siberia, Mongolia, The Kirghis Steppes, Chinese Tartary, and Part of Central Asia* written by Thomas Atkinson Witlam as many passages are reproduced verbatim in *The Nest of Invasions*. Also he might have also used for inspiration the book of Atkinson's wife,

¹¹ Georges Duhamel, *Scènes de la vie future* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1930).

¹² Mihail Sadoveanu, *Cuibul Invaziilor* (Bucharest: Editura Națională Ciornei, 1935), 3.

Recollections of Tartar Steps and their Inhabitants.¹³ *The Nest of Invasions* presents episodes, which are only in Lucy Atkinson's book, such as the account of meetings with survivors of the Decembrist uprising sent to Siberia. Moreover Lucy Atkinson pays more attention to ethnological details than her husband,¹⁴ and this was the primary interest of Sadoveanu's project.

In the two forewords, that of 1935 and that of 1955, Sadoveanu explicitly refer to Atkinson and explains the method for creating the novel: "Our contribution was the presentation [of the sources], the interpretation [of the facts], as well as the additions [to Atkinsons descriptions] for a better comparison of those times with the contemporary situation."¹⁵

In 1935 the comparison with the present is for Sadoveanu a hopeless contemplation. As he wrote in the foreword, "if us, poor inhabitants of our times, were given the chance to live on this Earth, let's abandon the technicist program to its own destruction and look once again with a melancholic eye to the world of yesterday."¹⁶ Sadoveanu's position against anything of a technical nature shows also a political attitude. Thus, one may note, and some commentators of Sadoveanu have already remarked, that his enmity towards the German national-socialism was accompanied by a rejection of technicism - the catalyst of total destruction.¹⁷

The analysis of *The Nest of Invasions* and of its initial publication context illustrates a project with an unambiguous purpose that has no connection with science fiction

¹³ Lucy W. Atkinson, *Recollections of Tartar steppes and their inhabitants* (London: John Murray, 1863).

¹⁴ Anthony Cross, *Anglo-Russica. Aspects of Cultural Relations between Great Britain and Russia in the Eighteen and Early Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 245-255.

¹⁵ Mihail Sadoveanu, *Cuibul Invaziilor*, (Bucharest: Editura Națională Ciornei, 1935), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷ Zigu Ornea, *Anii 30. Extrema dreaptă Românească* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1995).

whatsoever. His aim was the reconstruction of the societies and peoples of Siberia before they were influenced and perverted by the Western technicist civilization. The image of science in this novel and the accompanying message are unambiguous as well: science is considered a threat for the contemporary civilization.¹⁸ Instead of the negative aspects science involved, in the interwar period Sadoveanu would have preferred a natural order of things in which science and technology would complement tradition instead of destroying it. In *The Netherlands* written in 1928 after a three-month study trip,¹⁹ he portrayed feasible modernizing solutions Romania could adopt without endangering the local cultural specificity. A civilized village that maintained its purity and at the same time was improved by the results of scientific and technological development was the essence of the *poporanist* dream, a dream that Sadoveanu cherished and which proved adaptive to the communist project.

An old story with a new meaning

This successful compromise between local specificity and technology might explain how Sadoveanu's short novel *The Nest of Invasions* was republished as a science fiction novel in *CPSF*. The context was indeed new and it is clearly visible in the new foreword that accompanies the story in 1955. "In the former foreword to this novel, 20 years ago, I grieved over the fact that the people from Central Asia, because of the advent of technological progress and general modernization, would finally completely change by entering into the

¹⁸ Ironically enough, Sadoveanu's opinion on science is quite similar to that emerging from the American science fiction productions after the Second World War. At the end of the second World War, the Classical period of western science fiction in which the man helped by machines and having in science a best ally in his way through progress dramatically changed. After the explosion of the atomic bomb, the myth of good science collapsed and the science fiction stories became in many cases pessimistic about the future of humankind, see Jacques Sadoul, *Histoire de la Science Fiction Moderne 1911-1984* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1984).

¹⁹ Mihail Sadoveanu, *Olanda* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1928).

capitalist world. (...) I made a big mistake in the foreword written 20 years ago maintaining the loss of the Mongolian originality as a result of the advent of modern civilization.”²⁰

This radical change from the previous foreword is not totally surprising taking into account Sadoveanu’s political career. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Sadoveanu adhered to the new communist regime, in which he was to receive an important political position (President of the Great National Assembly). Moreover, during the summer of 1945, he had visited Moscow and Leningrad. Several months before, in Bucharest, he had delivered his famous speech “The Light comes from the East.” The title, geographical common knowledge, had a political connotation that at that time was still uncertain. Several years later, it became clear.²¹ Easily adapting himself to the new political and literary context, in 1949 Sadoveanu wrote the paradigmatic novel of the Romanian socialist realism *Mitrea Cocor*,²² the story of a young peasant who becomes a communist activist acting in favor of collectivization.

This new political orientation of Sadoveanu also can be noticed in the new foreword to *The Nest of Invasions*, now sold as science fiction. “Reversing my predictions, the revolution from 1917 brought about a real change, an extraordinary one. The salvation of the Mongol people, its economic and cultural development is today true achievements. (...) In only one generation the great October revolution brought to light a new world, renewed, disciplined by/through socialism.”²³ The keywords and expressions in the new foreword around which the image of science is now articulated are: *revolution, change, salvation, new world* and *disciplining oneself through socialism*.

²⁰ Mihail Sadoveanu, “Cuibul invaziilor.” *CPSF* 17 (1955): 3.

²¹ Adrian Cioroianu, “Lumina vine de la Răsărit,” in *Miturile comunismului Românesc*, ed. Lucian Boia (Bucharest: Nemira, 1998).

²² Mihail Sadoveanu, *Mitrea Cocor* (Bucharest: ESPLA, 1949).

²³ Mihail Sadoveanu, “Cuibul invaziilor.” *CPSF* 17 (1955): 3.

What Sadoveanu did by republishing *The Nest of Invasions* with a new foreword was not only to legitimize a new literary genre (science fiction), one without a real tradition in Romania, but also to characterize science according to the two competing political systems communism and capitalism. Thus, the 1955 foreword also embodies the image of science that would characterize communist science fiction in the 1950s, namely the division between good science (under the political umbrella of socialism) and bad science (the Western, imperialist science). Although Sadoveanu is not a science fiction writer by any definition of the genre, he could be regarded as the author that introduced in the Romanian science fiction this new perspective on science which was imported from the Soviet Union.

Sadoveanu was a clever writer who managed to adjust to the political changes in Romania after the Second World War. The demarcation between a good and a bad science he proposed in his novel was, however, only the first stage in the avatars of the image of science in the Romanian communist science fiction. In its early stages, as Sadoveanu expressed, there was dissociation between the communist and the capitalist sciences. Only after Sadoveanu's *The Nest of Invasions* did other writers start to develop an extensive imagery to express this opposition, the most frequent being the image of the Western scientist (very often a Frankenstein-like figure) always in contradiction with the jovial, friendly communist scientist and the conspiracies of the American-imperialist spies. From this opposition between Soviet and American science to the larger opposition in the Cold War political environment was a small but significant stage in the unfolding of Romanian science fiction in the 1950s, an aspect that will be further analyzed.

Politics and Science Fiction

In 1955 when the magazine *CPSF* was launched, the political and ideological gap between communist and capitalist worlds was obvious. The tense political relationship between the allies shortly after the end of the Second World War let Churchill to affirm in 1946 that an Iron Curtain was to separate Europe in two parts. On his side, Stalin stressed the gap created between the United States and the USSR, in his conclusion that the Second World War was an inevitable consequence of capitalist imperialism, and therefore such an event could have always be possible in the future.²⁴ Science fiction emerged in Romania within this political context, and naturally was not detached from it. Within this powerful ideological confrontation between East and West and the race for military supremacy between the communist and capitalist worlds, science fiction reflected the tensions at a narrative symbolic level. The plots of the science fiction stories published during this period (both translations from the Soviet literature and Romanian writings) are indicators of the genre's social function, namely to inform readers about the international developments and tensions between communism and capitalism.

However, the United States had a small advantage even in this narrative confrontation. After the Second World War, American science fiction became popular in Western Europe. The popularity of the American science fiction could be interpreted as one aspect of the cultural supremacy of the United States after the Second World War. American cultural victory in Europe was more than just a corollary of its economic and political power. According to Edward James this situation was also due to the originality and vigor of the American culture. American science fiction offered to the Europeans a popular literature that was accessible to all. Moreover, this literature was answering some clear needs. First, it was

²⁴ Jean-Francois Soulet, *Istoria comparată a statelor comuniste din 1945 până în zilele noastre* (Bucharest: Polirom, 1998), 26.

dealing with the exploration of the future, the only direction from which a change for the better was expected. Second, it was an accessible literature, without any elitist pretensions and therefore was opposed to the image that literature generally had as being elitist and therefore inaccessible to ordinary people.²⁵

Communist science fiction too would adapt its thematic to be accessible and especially in order to educate and inform ideologically. Tom Shippey, who has tackled this issue for Western science fiction in an article, “The Cold War in Science Fiction 1940-1960,” stresses the relevance of analyzing science fiction from a historical perspective. In this respect he stated that “Fantastic elements of the stories were a cover or a frame for discussion of many real issues which were hardly open to serious consideration in other popular media: issues such as the nature of science, the conflict of business and government the limits of loyalty, the power of social norms to affect individual perceptions.”²⁶ The analysis of communist science fiction is equally relevant from a historical perspective. The fictionalization of some crucial Cold War problems such as the Moon and military race or the spy hysteria, in communist science fiction offered to the science fiction readership, political socialization and also entertainment.

Below I present and analyze several science fiction literary plots that were characteristic for this genre in its first communist decade. They illustrate the preoccupation of the Romanian science fiction writers with the Cold War problematic. There were numerous stories published in the *CPSF* treating this thematic, including many translations from Soviet authors. However in my selection I have chosen stories written by Romanian authors. I have also selected two American stories translated into Romanian during this

²⁵ Edward James, *Science Fiction in the 20th Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 73.

²⁶ T.A. Shippey, “The Cold War in Science Fiction 1940-1960,” in *Science Fiction; a Critical Guide*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Longman, 1979), 107 quoted in Edward James, “The Historian and SF,” *Foundation* 35 (winter 1985/1986):7.

period since they were used by the *CPSF* editors to reinforce among the readers the anti-American sentiments that were promoted by the communist propaganda.

History and Spies

The end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s have been considered by many historians the climax of the Cold War. The political tensions were augmented by the arms race undertaken both by the United States and the Soviet Union, a state of affairs that was also enhanced by ignorance about the actions of the other and by mutual fear. To these, a series of concrete political developments were added that shook the powers equilibrium and could have transformed the “Cold War” into a real one.

Science fiction written and published in Romania at that time informed its readers about these international developments from the communist ideological perspective. Therefore, this genre could be also seen as a mirror that reflected the competition between the two political worlds. In this respect, the topic of many science fiction stories, either translations from Soviet authors or written by Romanian writers and published in *CPSF*, was the conflict between the West and the East, between the world proletariat and the world bourgeoisie, between capitalism and communism. In this battle for hegemony between the ‘communist camp’ and the ‘capitalist one,’ technical innovations had a crucial role and within this confrontation logic the advantages were given by technological achievements and not by the number of soldiers, so that knowing the other’s strong points was essential for properly responding to a potential attack.

Within this context, the main character of science fiction stories having this thematic, the one that unites the two worlds at least symbolically, was the spy. In communist science fiction, the spy was considered the embodiment of evil par excellence since his mission was

to steal information for the imperialist powers. The fight against imperialist spies was one of the very common topics of Romanian science fiction stories in the 1950s and 1960s. In many cases, the plot moves from one enemy action to another, culminating in the final exposure of an entire web of enemy conspirators.

In 1950s Romanian science fiction only the Soviet Union attracted western spies, even when the stories were written by Romanian writers. Mircea Pârjol writes a story about the mining industry at the beginning of the 21st century, imagining future technological development. Geological prospections were to be made through the use of ultrasound and excavations with a new generation of drilling machines invented by a Soviet scientist.²⁷ In the novel *Oțelul Organic* (Organic Steel),²⁸ Aurel Băltărețu tells the story of a discovery undertaken by a team of Soviet researchers, namely the transformation of wood into a new material with amazing properties. All these discoveries are threatened by western spies and these science fiction stories, besides popularizing basic information related to the mining or metallurgic industry had the main narrative tension in the conflict between western capitalist spies and the communists.

Another story published in *CPSF Turneul de primavară* (The Spring Tournament)²⁹ offers information related to the new developments of cybernetics, which was the main objective of the author, a scientist himself. However, the intrigue of the story was represented by the attempts of an imperialist spy team to use the properties of a computer in order to cheat at the world chess tournament in favor of a mediocre player and in this way to stop a famous Soviet chess player from winning. The presence of the western imperialist spy

²⁷ Mircea Pârjol, "Mineritul în anul 2005," *CPSF* 27 (1956).

²⁸ Aurel Băltărețu, "Oțelul Organic," *CPSF* 33 (1956).

²⁹ Horia Matei, "Turneul de primăvară," *CPSF* 45 (1957).

gives dynamism to such stories, transforming the plot from a rather descriptive and informative text into an adventure plot, yet with important ideological implications.

In 1960s Romanian science fiction, western spies become interested in Romania. If western spies were interested in Romania, then the country had sufficiently developed to become an interesting place for the ideological enemy to steal information. Indeed, in the 1960s the situation in Romania was different compared with the previous decade. The industrialization process initiated by the communist regime and the education reform led ultimately to the emergence of new professional categories such as engineers, economists, qualified workers, and managers.³⁰ The number of engineers in 1962 had increased by a factor of six since 1938 and science fiction had to reflect these changes. Moreover, in the 1960s the Romanian communist regime began to further distance from the Soviet Union, a development analyzed in the following chapters.

The scientific and technological achievements presented in the science fiction stories published in Romania during the early Cold War are impressive. Referring to this stage of Romanian science fiction Mircea Oprea uses the word “technicist” to criticize such writings considered without any aesthetical literary value.³¹ Yet, besides informing about existing scientific problems and offering an alternative scientific and technological education, this was not always the only focus. Ironically enough for science fiction, the Romanian historical past was also rewritten, and the new science fiction emplotments moved the ideological confrontation from the present or future to the pre-communist past. For instance, the story *Duelul mut* (The Silent Duel),³² written by D. Szilagy and M. Cîrloană, is a case in point. The main character is a Romanian engineer, Ion Roman, who invented a new type of atomic

³⁰ Stelian Tănase, *Elite și Societate: Guvernarea Gheorghiu Dej, 1948-1965* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1998), 171.

³¹ Mircea Oprea, *Anticipația Românească*, (Bucharest: Viitorul Românesc, 2003), 92.

³² D. Szilagy, M. Cîrloană, “Duelul Mut,” *CPSF* 41-44 (1957).

plane (in the story the authors offer also useful information about planes and aeronautic industry): the plane is named 'Ro-11.' The experimental prototype has excellent results in tests. As a consequence, Western intelligence agencies that hear about the invention decide to send in Romania a spy conventionally named 'Senior' to steal the plans of the new plane. The first action of the spy is to activate an old imperialist agent in Romania, named Mefisto. This is the moment when the enemy moves from outside to inside. Who was Mefisto the spy from within? The spy was a marginal character that could not be integrated in society. His biography was suggestive for an enemy of the communist regime. All the negative traits are present: "Petre Cunea - 65 years old, war crimes (no doubt on the Eastern front), and participation at the massacres during the Iron Guard rebellion."³³ This rhetoric used to refer to a political enemy was not only a science fiction invention but was widespread also in the everyday life of that period. Blaming someone after being stigmatized with labels such as "legionar-fascist" or "fascist-colaborationist" was a widespread practice. In this story these negative characteristics were part of the spy's identity.

However, in *The Silent Duel*, the profile of the spy (bad guy) is constructed concomitantly with the image of the character who is his counterpart (good guy or brave guy). In this case he is captain Duca. He is the one who tests the plane invented by the engineer Roman. His destiny is relevant for a communist new man. "Captain Duca had been taken in the army a couple of years before. Prior to that he was a petro-chemist worker but in 1945 being attracted by flight entered a school to become a pilot. After his studies, he decided to become a real pilot. Yet he had a conflict with a high functionary from that period and was downgraded from his position as a pilot. However, he managed to get a job as test

³³ Ibid., 4.

pilot in order to fly again. Then he was called to the army as a political worker. He looks much younger than in reality.”³⁴

In this case, the capitalist spy and the communist hero that fights against him are incompatible in their past experiences. While Captain Duca faced the past in order to get a proper place in the present society, the spy is still entrenched in past reactionary values. The adventures and the investigations of the spy offer the possibility to reconstruct some particular episodes from the past as subplots, such as the history of the Palace Moruzzi, a famous palace from Bucharest. The source is an old man, former gardener of the Palace Moruzzi. The story of the palace is built around the same type of conflict between reactionary and progressive forces as in the case of the main plot line of the story, only that in that particular moment of the past the ‘positive’ forces represented by a leftist journalist could not be victorious. The story of the Palace Moruzzi is a narrative interlude, a side story meant to rewrite a historical episode, stressing the negative role of the royal family in Romania. Within the main plot line, however, Captain Duca is successful in stopping the western spy who is arrested and condemned while the new Romanian atomic plane proved to be an excellent machine.

The preoccupation to present and condemn the ideological enemy was not the focus of only communist science fiction, as science fiction stories produced in the United States played almost the same role.³⁵ In this respect, it is interesting to mention a comment made by Silvian Iosifescu in 1963 on a statement by Anthony Busher, the editor of an anthology of American science fiction literature in the 1950s. In the foreword of his book, Busher had alleged that American science fiction was the most political ideologically free type of

³⁴ Ibid., 16.

³⁵ David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Fiction and Film*, (Edinburgh University Press and Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999).

literary creation. Iosifescu argues against this by reproaching Western science fiction writers for composing plots like James Bond's adventures in which "red spies are chased by federal agents of the Cosmos."³⁶ Thus, the popularity of spy stories in the first years of the *CPSF* epitomized the ideological differentiation between communism and capitalism but, as is the case with the story *The Silent Duel*, would also shed new light about the Romanian historical past. Thus, science fiction of the period was not only a genre dealing with the future but also one that used the past to clarify and inform about some crucial historical issues.

Who owns the Moon

According to Lucian Boia, human societies rely on imaginary constructions.³⁷ The new communist society that emerged in Romania after the Second World War could not forbid people to dream but rather tried to redirect these dreams towards its mythological space.³⁸ One of these dreams was the conquest of outer space, a dream that was cherished both by the communist and capitalist states. Within this context, the first destination was the moon. However, before reaching this satellite of the Earth, the real action was preceded by imaginary journeys. The space race was an important dimension of the Cold War and became a major topic of the science fiction written during this period. The novels and the articles related to space travel published in the magazine *CPSF* reflect the steps in this direction, presenting the story from the communist perspective in the sense that the Soviet Union would lead in this domain.

³⁶ Silvan Iosifescu, "Posibilitate, Utopie, Mit," in *Viitorul?, Atenție!, Studii și Articole despre literatura științifico fantastică*, ed. Ion Hobana (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1968), 112.

³⁷ Lucian Boia, *Pour une histoire de l'imaginaire* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998).

³⁸ Lucian Boia, *Mitologia științifică a Comunismului* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999), 195.

The first episode of the space race was represented by the *Sputnik* (satellite), launched by the Soviet Union on October 4th, 1957. With this success, the Soviet Union appeared to have surpassed its Cold War rival, the United States, in terms of technological achievements. The Soviet Union was said to have ridded itself of its inferiority complex towards the West, especially since in the same year the launch of the US satellite *Vanguard* failed.³⁹ In an article published in *Pravda* on October 9th the launch of the Soviet satellite was presented in the spirit of the official discourse as a victory of the Soviet man who knows how to move ahead on the road to build the communist society. In the same article it was mentioned that capitalist media has recognized the superiority of the socialist system. Without doubt after these achievements, it seemed that the West began to consider the Soviet Union more seriously. The same *Pravda* article summarized an editorial published in *The New York Times* where U.S. policy was criticized as being unwise for underestimating the possibilities of the Soviet Union.⁴⁰

The first *Sputnik* launch was followed by other Soviet successes. After only a month, the second *Sputnik* was launched with a living being on board, the dog *Laika*, and in the next year the third *Sputnik* started its journey around the earth. On September 14th, 1959, the Soviet Union became the first country to launch the first cosmic rocket LUNA-2 that would reach the Moon. The next step was supposed to be the militarization of space, discussed during a 1960 meeting between Nikita Khrushchev and leaders of the rocket industry.⁴¹

These events enhanced the tension between the two superpowers; the concern of the United States about the Soviet scientific achievements was reflected not only in mass media

³⁹ Constance McLaughlin Green and Milton Lomask, *Project Vanguard: The NASA History*, (Washington: Scientific and Technical Information Division, 1970), available at <http://history.nasa.gov/SP-4202/toc2.html> (accessed May 10, 2010).

⁴⁰ *Pravda*, October 9, 1957, available at <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIAL/cold.war/episodes/08/documents/pravda> (accessed March 23, 2007).

⁴¹ http://www.russianspaceweb.com/chronology_moon_race.html (accessed March 27, 2007)

articles or political speeches but also in concrete actions. Space technology became a particularly important arena of the Cold War conflict, because of both its potential military applications and the morale boosting social benefits. Within this context, communist science fiction presented the actions undertaken by the United States to send a man to the Moon in a predictable way. A case in point was the science fiction story *Omul aruncat în lună* (The man thrown to the Moon), written by Nicolae Minei and published in *CPSF* in 1959.

The action was placed in the United States in 1959, soon after the launch of the LUNA-2 Soviet rocket to the Moon “at 5 pm and 2 minutes, our time, i.e. at 0 and 2 minutes Moscow’s time /.../ September 14, 1959.”⁴² Concerned about the Soviet successes in the exploration of outer space and worried that communists would soon reach the moon, at the request of a congressman, the Americans decide to send a man to the moon in order to gain supremacy. But without having the “advanced Soviet technology” in their “imperialist ambitions,” they deliberately condemned the astronaut, a very capable man, to death. At less than two minutes from the launch, the American rocket built by “former Nazi technician, Otto Kriebel” explodes, and naturally the astronaut dies. It was a common narrative element during this period to associate former Nazi scientists with the capitalist ambitions of world domination.

At the end a postscript states that “any resemblance to people or situations is due only to a pure coincidence,” but the author further states that “without doubt there are political leaders in the capitalist world that are angry with the achievements of Soviet science and technology and would not agree with decrease in tensions of the international relations. These people were the imaginary models for this story.”⁴³ The end result of the moon exploration was totally different from the science fiction stories published in

⁴² Nicolae Minei, “Omul aruncat în Lună,” *CPSF* 97 (1959): 4.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 32.

communist Romania during this period. The launch of the Soviet Soyuz-1 spaceship, which took place on April 23, 1967, had a disastrous ending when astronaut Vladimir Komarov died as a result of a tragic landing, while in 1969 the U.S. Apollo 11 mission marked the first time humans had left the Earth to set foot upon another celestial body.

In the 1960s the peaceful coexistence debate that calmed international relations was also reflected in science fiction plots related to the space race. In early science fiction stories there were only two competitors, the Soviet Union and the United States, fighting for space supremacy. Later, China would enter the race followed by the rest of the socialist countries and even Western ones. In the Soviet case, K.E. Tsiolkovski's 1920 novel *Dincolo de Pământ* (Beyond Planet Earth) is rediscovered and republished in the 1960s. It was translated in all languages of the communist bloc and the author considered an anticipator of modern astronautics. In Tsiolkovski's novel, six scientists who lived in different epochs work together to launch the first spacecraft to the moon. The presence of the six scientists (Newton, Laplace, Galileo, Franklin, Helmholtz and Ivanov) in this joint project is a plea for social progress, peace and friendship between peoples. When reprinted in the 1960s the message of the novel is used as an argument to promote the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence.⁴⁴

Following the Soviet model and the peaceful coexistence idea, Romanian writer Mircea Șerban imagined in *Ghidul din lună* (The Guide from the Moon) the first international team that would explore the moon, being formed by a Soviet, an American, a French, a Chinese and a black person.⁴⁵ The way in which the space race was epitomized in science fiction during this period was a good indicator of the tensions between the communist and capitalist bloc during the Cold War.

⁴⁴ K.E. Tsiolkovski, "Dincolo de pamânt," *CPSF* 127 (1961).

⁴⁵ Mircea Șerban, "Ghidul din Lună," *CPSF* 134 (1961).

Two American Stories

Communist science fiction has been a cultural product in which the image of the enemy (political, biological etc.) was frequently presented according to the ideological commandments. The blame of the political enemy, which was the capitalist West, was a common subject. The same imaginary could be reconstructed also from Western science fiction.

However, western science fiction stories were published also in communist countries including Romania, but the selection and commentaries made in forewords served the communist messages by presenting western science fiction to the readers as critiques of the capitalist system. This process is illustrated by the *CPSF* whose 82nd number has the title *Două Povestiri Americane* (Two American Stories.)⁴⁶ These are the first stories written by American authors translated for *CPSF* in 1958. Previously the image of the United States had been presented from the perspective of Soviet science fiction translations, later imitated by Romanian authors, and it was reduced to a few stereotypical negative images: social inequality, human exploitation and the ambition for world domination. Paradoxically, the same picture would emerge in translation of stories written by well-known American science fiction authors. The first story, *Foster ești mort* (Foster you are dead) written by Philip C. Dick, is taken from the Soviet magazine *Ogoniok*; the second one, *Veghe Îndelungată* (Long wakefulness) written by Robert Heinlein, is also taken from a Soviet magazine *Sila Znanie*. As mentioned by the editor in his rhetorical question from the introduction to the two stories, “what could be more real than a picture of an American adrift, created by American writers?”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ “*Două povestiri americane*,” *CPSF* 82 (1958).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

In the first story, the fear of a possible war with the Soviet Union takes over the whole population of the United States. The phenomenon is seen through the eyes of a child named Mike Foster, who feels marginalized because his father refuses to pay his financial contribution for defense and more than that has not bought an atomic fallout shelter as ordinary people have done. The portrayal of school education, promoting the defense against the communist enemy completes the image of a threatened society. The young boy initially is unable to understand the reasons for such an education but finally is overwhelmed by fear and persuades his father to make serious financial sacrifices in order to buy a fallout shelter and to pay the defense fees.

The second story, *Veghe Îndelungată* (Long wakefulness) also has a strong political message. The action is placed in 2009. Colonel Towers, the commander of the Moon army division, decides to take over the power on Earth. In order to accomplish his plan he tries to convince Commander Dulquist by showing the reasons which have led him to such a decision. "It is dangerous to leave the world leadership in the hands of politicians. Power must belong to an elite group. It should belong to the Moon army."⁴⁸ The reasons behind this plan were well argued: The League of Nations had been dissolved and there was no guarantee that the United Nations would not have the same fate. Dulquist is aware that Colonel Towers' plan is in fact the enforcement of a military dictatorship that could provoke a third world war. These thoughts make Dulquist reject the plan. With the price of his life he saves the world from an imminent military dictatorship.

In the two stories there are two enemies: the enemy from within, which wants to seize power and institute a military dictatorship, and the enemy from outside, the Soviet Union. However, there are no reasons for fear related to the danger represented by the Soviet

⁴⁸ Robert Heinlein, "Veghe îndelungată," *CPSF* 82 (1958): 20.

Union. The fear created by such stories among the population related with an imminent danger represented by the Soviet Union was, according to the *CPSF* editors, propagated from mere economic reasons. The companies specialized in atomic fallout shelters had to sell their products and the pressure and panic determined by the creation of an enemy was a good marketing tool.

According to communist propaganda creating enemies for purely commercial reasons was for capitalist societies a good means to manipulate people to buy products without any real utility like the atomic fallout shelters. As the main character from Philip C. Dick's story mentions, "it is always said that in order to sell one should scare people, should slip into their soul a feeling of insecurity. (...) If you don't buy you are doomed! Is the most convincing argument: Buy or die! - This new currency trade. Install your shelter in the yard, the last model released by the company General Electronics, against the hydrogen bomb, or you are dead!"⁴⁹ The message of the second story is also equally clear. In this plot, the external enemy does not exist and the danger could appear from within.

Moreover, the editors' foreword explains that these constructs are politically anachronistic narratives because the Soviet Union had already begun to promote the policy of peaceful coexistence. When the two American stories were published first in the Soviet Union, then in Romania, Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence was widely publicized. Presenting the Soviet Union as an aggressor, as shown in the first American story, is therefore interpreted as an unfounded theory meant to create fear among the capitalist population. The Soviet threat, which is the narrative core of the first American story, *Foster ești mort* (Foster you are dead), is interpreted by the editors as an anti-Soviet propaganda myth. The two stories suggest that the United States was not fully receptive to

⁴⁹ Philip C. Dick, "Foster ești mort," *CPSF* 82 (1958): 14.

Soviet ideas because economic interests and ambitions of world domination prevailed, a reinforcement of Cold War positions. Therefore, the propagandistic message spread by the genre during this period was that only the communist camp was striving for peace and coexistence while the capitalist west was aiming for world domination.

The synthetic gold

Much has been written about the capacity of science fiction to reflect the present. The simplest way to demonstrate this is by stating that science fiction stories are set in the future. By unpacking this statement, as Kim Stanley Robinson puts it, we get something like the following: “in every science fiction narrative, there is an explicit or implicit fictional history that connects the period depicted to our present moment.”⁵⁰ The plots of the science fiction stories published in the 1950s in the magazine *CPSF* reflect international political events of that time. The ideological modeling, the presentation of the conflict with the ideological enemy i.e., the capitalist system, was from the beginning the leading narrative choice for communist science fiction.

In this respect, Hartmuth Lück distinguishes between the western understanding of the genre named *science fiction* and the Soviet *naucino fantisticeskaia literatura*. In order to point out the opposition between the two concepts, Lück uses for the Soviet case, the abbreviation FS instead of SF. Thus as he argues, the two concepts have nothing in common. As he put it: “while the SF was for decades merely about ‘amazing stories’, thus extraordinary adventures, having as main ingredients the cosmic space and the future, FS had more clearly a social character and presented possible forms of the confrontation with

⁵⁰ Kim Stanley Robinson, “Notes for an Essay on Cecilia Holland,” *Foundation* 40 (summer 1987): 54.

the class enemy.”⁵¹ In the absence of an open conflict with the capitalist system the battle was a discursive one and solved with narrative methods. The example that follows, a science fiction novel inspired by a political speech, succeeded to solve at least symbolically the dispute of communism vs. capitalism.

During the elections for the Romanian Great National Assembly that took place on February 3rd 1957, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, the first secretary of the RWP delivered a speech entitled *Pentru înflorirea patriei, pentru bunăstarea poporului, pentru pace și socialism* (For the flowering of our motherland, the happiness of the people, for peace and socialism).⁵² As expected, the speech had an electoral character. Nevertheless, an electoral talk given by a communist leader in a communist country had a series of particularities. First, because there was no internal political opposition, sustaining political candidates in front of the voters was a rather easy task and was done by invoking the socialist achievements and promises, a certification important enough to counteract the criticism of a potential, yet nonexistent, political adversary. However, on this occasion Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, in addition to reviewing and glorifying Romanian socialist achievements, initiated a virulent attack against the political opposition represented by the external capitalist forces, especially the United States.

In this context, Dej’s talk could be seen as a response to the criticisms made by capitalist propaganda towards the communist systems namely: the lack of a real democracy, the futility of elections in a system dominated by only one party and especially the shortcomings of a nationalized planned economy. In his speech the Romanian leader

⁵¹ Hartmut Lück, “Der ‘Grosse Ring’ der Galaxis: Tendenzen der wissenschaftlich-fantastischen Literatur in der Sowjetunion,” in *Die deformierte Zukunft: Untersuchungen zur Science Fiction*, ed. Reimer Jemlich, Hartmut Luck (München: Goldmann, 1974), 162, quoted in Florin Manolescu, *Literatura S.F.*, 9.

⁵² Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej, *Articole, Cuvîntări decembrie 1955 - iulie 1959* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1959), 244-250.

clarified these aspects by describing “the other” (the capitalist system in the United States) from his ideological perspective. Dej referred not only to the economy but also constructed an image of American political society dominated by inequalities. As he put it, “in fact the entire American economy is dominated by families of ultra billionaires and a few hundred owners of the great capital, headed by people such as Rockefeller, Morgan, Dupont, Mellon; these people decide the fate of governments, appoint and revoke ministers, decide from behind the scenes the internal and international affairs of the state. The political leadership is taken by the industrial class. Or maybe Mrs. Dulles, Humphrey, Weeks, Summerfield would try to argue that the relationships with the industrial trusts are simple inventions of the communist propaganda?”⁵³ After this characterization of American capitalist society, Gheorghiu Dej continued by proclaiming that communist countries do not intend to interfere into other states affairs: “We do not aim to offer to the Western proletariat lessons about how to get rid of capitalist exploitation. This issue belongs to these people and we do not want to interfere with their problems.”⁵⁴ The speech had a remarkable success, judging from the numerous interruptions for applause and the excerpts that were published in most Romanian newspapers.

A few months later the magazine *CPSF* published the short story *Aurul Sintetic*, (The Synthetic Gold) written by Elena and Adrian Niga. Interestingly the image of the United States was outlined with almost the same words as in Dej’s speech. In addition, the authors offer an imaginary “science fiction” resolution to the social problems faced by the United States. The plot unfolds as follows: in an apparently prosperous United States, in the New York center begins the construction of a public toilet; clearly not an ordinary one. Professor Gad (a name close to God), a scientific authority, an atheist, “well known on 5 continents for

⁵³ Ibid., 244.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 248.

his research in the transformation of chemical elements,”⁵⁵ is closely supervising the construction for which 20 tons of gold are necessary together with the latest technology in the field. The plan was to build a toilet made of gold. As the professor, the incarnation of the savior explains,” the man has surpassed God. Elements that were not present before in nature have been created due to the scientific progress. To this chain I’ve added a link, namely to obtain gold in laboratory.”⁵⁶ Gad is a genuine new man who is fully aware of his condition and destiny. His discovery has the power of a revolution since the invention of the formula to make gold by the transformation of lead would destroy the supremacy of the American ruling class, whose authority was based on the power of money. The passage describing the American leadership resembles very well the image offered by Dej in his speech. When hearing the news about producing gold in a laboratory, American political and economic leaders gather in order to liquidate Professor God who through his invention was ready to destroy the symbol of their power.

The image of the gathering is in fact a picture of the dystopian American capitalist society: “the most ugly and disgusting animals, the billionaires sit down at a round table. Richard Bantley, the president of the United States, sits on an imposing armchair. He is 99 years old and looks like a plum soaked with potassium. The rest of the people, 19 billionaires, the youngest is 62 years old, take the rest of the armchairs around the table. For a doctor specialized in internal diseases they represent a collection of the most interesting medical conditions. They are more dead than alive are more ghosts than men.”⁵⁷ Dej's political speech was most probably the inspiration for this science fiction story. As Max Solomon remembers, writers were often advised in the 1950s to reflect in their science

⁵⁵ Elena and Adrian Niga, “Aurul Sintetic,” *CPSF* 51 (1957): 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

fiction stories the current political debates, events and even political speeches.⁵⁸ In this case the authors use a series of images arguably inspired from Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej's speech in order to portray the class enemy according to the official propaganda commandments. How else could those that were against the progress of society be depicted other than as senile old people? In this case overwhelmed by fear the American political leaders decide unanimously to save themselves and to eliminate immediately Professor Gad, who by announcing his discovery became the first enemy of the regime.

The story has an open happy ending. Capitalist society was constructed on a foundation of gold and led by exploiters. The new society had to be based on different values. The end of the story is suggestive. The power of Richard Bantley fades away while on the streets of New York a rain with golden coins suggests the beginning of a new era. The final words of Professor Gad are evocative: "mankind you are free, what I did was only to break the chains."⁵⁹ The action of the story is placed in the near future (1967) and offers the way out for the total dissolution of the ideological enemy of the communist system.

Conclusion

This chapter presented an important characteristic of communist science fiction in its first decade, namely the capacity to reflect present political transformations and evolutions according to the communist ideology. Without a tradition in the Romanian literary landscape the genre had to be legitimized as a valuable one in front of the readership. The story of Mihail Sadoveanu and his novel is a good illustration of this aspect. The communist regime managed to recycle opportunistic intellectuals from the interwar period that although their

⁵⁸ This information is based on an e-mail sent to me by Max Solomon on 17 January 2003.

⁵⁹ Elena and Adrian Niga, "Aurul Sintetic," *CPSF*, 51 (1957): 21.

previous writings had nothing to do with the communist ideology were willing to adapt and republish some of their old writings so as to serve the new regime. The transformation of Mihail Sadoveanu's novel *The Nest of Invasions* from a historical-ethnographic narrative into science fiction is such an example which set the tone for many writers to adopt science fiction and also gave the readers the certitude that the new genre was a valuable one.

At the same time, in the first decade, the narrative agenda of science fiction, besides offering an alternative technical education aiming at inspiring the youth to pursue technical professions, also offered political socialization presenting the confrontation with the political enemy, the capitalist bloc, and the tensions dividing the two ideological worlds, an aspect that was largely analyzed in the second part of the chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THE AGE OF UTOPIA: CHALLENGING SOCIALIST REALIST NORMS IN THE LATE 1950S AND THE 1960S

The late 1950s and the 1960s correspond to a new period in Romanian literary life, characterized by the reorganization of the literary space with more autonomy and liberty granted to the writers. Moreover, socialist realist method that was dominant in the previous decade was criticized and a less dogmatic approach to literary creation was encouraged and promoted. These changes are also evident in science fiction which had become increasingly popular among young readers. Romanian science fiction continued to take inspiration from the Soviet science fiction, a genre that had significantly changed since Stalin's death.

First of all, a cultural relaxation in the Soviet Union showed many signs of a re-evaluation of socialist realism. In 1954, the Soviet literary critic Vladimir Pomeratsev published the essay *On Sincerity in Literature*, in which he characterized Soviet literature produced under Stalin as 'bad' because writers did not reflect reality truly but rather gave a superficial description of it. According to George Gibian, in his article Pomeratsev "was denouncing both the Party for undertaking to guide all literary activities and the writers for proving servile followers."¹ This article was followed in the same year by Ilya Erenburg's *Thaw*, the well-known book that criticized the Stalinist 'freeze' in various domains including literature. The title of this book became the name of the period from the mid 1950s to the early 1960s that was characterized by a general perception that Soviet society was improving through the easing of repression and censorship.

These changes were enhanced by an important political event represented by Khrushchev's secret speech held at the 20th CPSU Congress in February 1956. Khrushchev's

¹ George Gibian, *Interval of Freedom; Soviet Literature during the Thaw 1954-1957* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1960), 7.

speech marked a break with the past, initiating a general re-evaluation of the Stalinist era, while condemning Stalin's personality cult and the abuses. As Vladimir Tismăneanu states, referring to the magnitude of Khrushchev's speech, "Stalin was criticized not only for gross violations of socialist legality, but also for being an adventurer in international affairs and for asphyxiating Marxist thinking in such fields as political economy, historical-materialism, and scientific socialism."²

In evaluating this moment, Darko Suvin asserts that the 20th Congress of the CPSU demolished "the indisputability of Stalinist myths about society and literature."³ As for the implications for the science fiction, these transformations favored a new stage of Soviet science fiction characterized by a regeneration of its utopian thematic that was initially manifested after the Bolshevik Revolution⁴ then discouraged during Stalin period. In fact, utopia as a science fiction subject matter was an important break with the "theory of near anticipation" imposed on science fiction writers during the Stalinist period, and as Leonid Heller demonstrates,⁵ it challenged the rigidity of socialist realism.

These transformations were also favored by a re-evaluation of the role of science in society, first of all because the post Stalinist period was an age of rapid scientific progress. Some important achievements, such as the first Soviet hydrogen bomb, or the launching of the Sputnik in 1957, illustrate this development. These successes were accompanied by a significant development of the scientific labor force and a further growth of popular interest in science. Furthermore, these events widened the subject matter of literature about science,

² Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: a Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 143.

³ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction; On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 265.

⁴ Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dream, Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 167-171.

⁵ Leonid Heller, *De la Science-Fiction Soviétique. Par delà le Dogme, un Univers* (Lausanne: L'Âge de L'Homme, 1979).

ensuring that it was an attractive theme for writers. In the 1960s, the phrase “scientific and technological revolution” was included in the Soviet Communist Party program and was used from that moment on “to denote a fundamental qualitative transformation of science and technology, associated with the transition from capitalism to socialism and communism.”⁶

The new stage of the Soviet science fiction was reflected almost simultaneously in Romania since the most important pieces of Soviet literature were translated and published in *CPSF* magazine. Therefore, it would not be exaggerated to state that in the 1960s, the new wave of Soviet science fiction which is rooted in the Russian utopian tradition was indirectly part of the Romanian genre’s history, at least as an inspirational source for the Romanian writers.

Utopia as a new thematic feature of science fiction is the main topic of this chapter. Literary critics of the period have tried to demonstrate that a communist utopia as a literary subject was much more useful for readers than classical utopias produced in the West. A portrayal of future communist society was expected to affect both people’s expectations about the future and the way they would behave in the present. In the first part of the chapter I analyze the way in which a Soviet political speech is reflected in a science fiction story. Khrushchev’s conception of architecture and urban planning, which was different from his predecessor, would set the tone in the Soviet Union for a new wave of utopian science fiction, whose main representative was Ivan Efremov.

Soviet science fiction novels and stories were translated into Romanian and became the model for Romanian writers. The features of communist utopia as presented in Romanian science fiction are also analyzed in this chapter. The new thematic was primarily

⁶ Rosalind Marsh, *Soviet Fiction since Stalin: Science, Politics and Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 5.

conceived as a literature with intrinsic social functions that would affect the way readers would consider social reality. However, utopia, although a science fiction one, contains also a criticism of the present. Therefore, for the readers who knew how to read ‘between the lines,’ utopian science fiction comprised also critical innuendos of the present shortcomings, an aspect that has contributed to the increasing popularity of the genre. In the last part of the chapter I concentrate on genre’s reception that could be inferred from the letters sent by the readers to the *CPSF* magazine. Also, throughout the chapter I pay attention to the particular political context in Romanian during the late 1950s and the 1960s, a rather favorable period of Romanian communism, with a positive impact on the literary space.

Khrushchev’s architectural utopia

After Stalin’s death a boom of science fiction could be noticed in the Soviet Union, followed at the same time by an increasing popularity of the genre. Soviet major publishing houses formed divisions devoted exclusively to science fiction and the number of science fiction titles significantly increased in order to supply the growing demand. The publishing house *Mir* launched its collection *Library of Modern Science Fiction* in 25 volumes. As for the periodicals market, besides the science journal, *Around the World*, the new magazines *Seeker* and *Fantastika* appeared in the early 1960s.⁷

Referring to the Soviet science fiction readership Darco Suvin states that, “we have no sure statistics on this reading public, but it was probably as large if not at times larger than the American counterpart. It was perhaps unsophisticated, but impatient of the old

⁷ Patrick Major, “Future perfect? Communist Science Fiction in the Cold War,” *Cold War History* 4:1 (2003): 73.

clichés and thirsting after knowledge and imagination.”⁸ According to Rafail Nudelman, the popularity of science fiction in the Soviet Union during this period could be explained by the place of this genre within the new ideological struggle. In contrast with the Stalinist period when the genre was almost destroyed, after Stalin's death within the new political context, literary critics began to consider science fiction a “specific artistic laboratory where various societal and historical models were placed under scrutiny.”⁹ Although a genre supposed to explore the future, science fiction continued to reflect and fictionalize present political developments both on the internal and external level. This characteristic could be demonstrated by many stories, some of them translated from Russian and published in the Romanian *CPSF* magazine.

One such example is the story *În luptă cu timpul* (Fighting with the Time) written by Alexandra Juravliova and published for the first time in the Soviet Union in 1955. The story was shortly translated into Romanian and printed in 1957 in the 54th issue of *CPSF*.¹⁰ Juravliova's story was preceded by a motto written by Maxim Gorky in which the reader was invited to consider that realities depicted in a science fiction plot are not so distant in time. As Gorky wrote, “we live in a period in which the distance between the most fantastic dreams and mere reality is getting shorter.”¹¹ Juravliova's story offered a description of the future Moscow with totally new architectural features different from the well-known socialist realist edifices.

The plot of the story starts with the narrative motif of cryogenic sleep that was often used in communist science fiction. The main character of the novel, savant Sadowski, had leprosy. In a socialist period, (it was the year 1954, presumably the moment when the story

⁸ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, 265.

⁹ Rafail Nudelman, “Soviet Science Fiction and the Ideology of Soviet Society,” *Science Fiction Studies* 16 (1989): 49.

¹⁰ V. Juravliova, “În luptă cu timpul,” *CPSF* 54 (1957).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

was written) comrade Sadovsky, who dedicated his entire life to find a solution against this malady, was without hope, facing a cruel destiny. Nevertheless, Boris Arkadievich Zorin, his savant friend, came with the solution: freeze the sick, until science would discover the antidote for leprosy. After seven years, Sadowsky is woken from his cryogenic sleep, completely cured and in a completely transformed world. Looking around he is not able to recognize anything but his friend: “Yes it is communism - smiled Boris Arkadievich Zorin to him! A lot of things have changed; you won’t be able to recognize anything.”¹²

The features of the future, the contours of the communist utopia, especially the appearance of Moscow, is the main narrative focus of Juravliova’s story since it is the place first visited by savant Sadowsky that, with the help of scientific advancement, gained a new life. Seven years of sleep was enough time for a major transformation of the city landscape. According to Zorin,

“the urbanism of today has different characteristics compared to the previous period. In fact, the whole city has changed. In the last years many blocs of flats were built and now every family has its own apartment. As you can see the streets are covered with a plastic cupola, which does not allow harmful radiation to pass through (...) nowadays the architects, renounced to un-useful ornaments such as statues and columns to decorate the façades of buildings. The aesthetic dimension of the present architecture is given by new materials. Plastic and prefabricated concrete have replaced the old techniques that were not only more expensive but at the same time were not appropriate for the new aesthetic of simplicity practiced today.”¹³

The future Moscow, as seen by Sadowsky, was totally different from what readers knew and might seem at first sight strange although explainable if one takes into account that it is created in a science fiction plot. However, the way in which Moscow was depicted in the science fiction story could be related to the Russian avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s

¹² Ibid., 15.

¹³ Ibid., 17.

or the modernist conception of architecture,¹⁴ rather than to Stalinist socialist realism. However, the explanation for Moscow's new aspect does not reside in the narrative conventions proper to a science fiction story but rather to some developments and transformations related to city planning and architecture undertaken after Stalin's death.

Thus, before Juravliova's story was published, in an interview the chief city planner of Moscow referred to the features of the city in the 21st century almost in the same manner as found in the science fiction plot. The chief city planner described the future architecture of Moscow by emphasizing the cost reduction and the increasing functionality of buildings. According to him the façade of the buildings would be simple and partly hidden by trees and shrubs and would be limited to five stories in order to be easily protected in case of a military attack from the West. He presented modern Moscow districts, Ceremuska and Sil that were built as a result of the demand for new houses. When he speaks about the image of Moscow in the 21st century he says: "Let us enter one of those houses and ask permission to visit an apartment. Brightly lit, air-conditioned rooms with huge windows, radiators have been replaced by heating in the walls and ceiling. This automatically increases the radius of heat while the cost is substantially reduced."¹⁵

The architectural features of future Moscow, as depicted in Juravliova's novel or suggested by the new city planner, could not be related to the Stalinist socialist realist architecture. The emphasis on the functionalist elements in constructions and the reduction of costs by renouncing architectural ornaments was a new conception. In this context it is legitimate to raise the question if Juravliova's novel depicted an alternative conception to the official commandments related to architecture or it was pure fantasy. Is it possible to state

¹⁴ Augustin Ioan, *Celălalt modernism: spații utopice, butaforie și discurs virtual în anii treizeci* (Bucharest: Institutul de Arhitectură "Ion Mincu", 1995).

¹⁵ M. Vasiliev, S. Goushev, *Life in the Twenty-First Century; The Fantastic World of the Immediate Future as Predicted by 29 of Russia's Leading Scientists* (London: Souvenir Press, 1960), 167.

that in this case literature was a medium in which other conceptions of architecture were presented in contrast with the official position of the CPSU? Although it was 1954, only one year after Stalin's death, it could be assumed that the main conception of architectural planning did not change so radically from a socialist realist monumental design to a functionalist and modernist one. From an evolutionary architectural perspective, this change might be impossible, yet for a communist regime such rather radical adjustments were possible and explainable taking into account some developments initiated shortly after Stalin's death.

In 1954 the new 'architect' was Nikita Khrushchev and in this context, the image of Moscow as it was depicted in Juraliova's novel could be connected to his new way of conceiving urban planning. In his memoirs, Khrushchev describes the problems he had faced during the Stalinist period in the modernization of Moscow as first secretary of Moscow City Committee. He described the housing shortage as a "nightmare," and he also mentioned his efforts to support the new politics of urban development. Thus, for example, he set up the first trolley line in Moscow, even though Stalin was convinced that "the trolley cars would overturn on the slope in front of the Telegraph Building."¹⁶ Such experiences gave Khrushchev an expertise in the real social problems faced by Moscow and its inhabitants, and encouraged him to promote a new approach that after 1953 would at the same time contribute to the construction of his political authority. Khrushchev believed that the regime had to rely on positive measures in order to reinforce the popular trust for the Soviet system and its new leader. An attempt to solve the housing problem seemed a good start; thus, before he denounced Stalin's political abuses in 1956, in 1954 Khrushchev denounced his architecture.

¹⁶ Anders Aman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era: an Aspect of Cold War History* (New York: The MIT Press, 1987), 207.

Although Khrushchev's secret speech held at the 20th CPSU Congress in February 1956 is generally recognized as the beginning of the de-Stalinization process, some steps were made earlier. One is the possible source of inspiration for Juravliova's novel, namely the speech, *On wide scale introduction of industrial method, improving the quality and reducing the cost of construction*,¹⁷ delivered by Khrushchev on December 7th 1954 at the All Union of Soviet Architects. This document is important not only for its message related to architectural constructions but also for analyzing the rapid way in which science fiction reflected the new political and ideological transformations in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, science fiction as a popular literary genre was used during communism to inform its readership about present political developments. This was one of its main social functions.

Khrushchev's speech from 1954 could be interpreted as a manifesto of modern architecture. Focusing exclusively on solving the housing shortage, Khrushchev was interested in a quantitative approach to city planning. Thus, the only criterion in judging the new residential buildings was the cost per square meter, a different perspective compared to the Stalinist period where this aspect was not seriously taken into account. As a consequence, the aesthetic dimension was subordinated to the need to reduce the costs and for this reason Khrushchev's arguments against socialist realism were rooted in a modernist rhetoric, reminding of Adolf Loos sintagm, "ornament is a crime."¹⁸

One way to achieve his goal i.e., solve the housing shortage, was to renounce ornamentation and decoration because they meant higher expenditures. Referring to some

¹⁷ Nichita Khrushchev, "On wide scale introduction of industrial method, improving the quality and reducing the cost of construction" in Thomas P. Whitney, ed., *Khrushchev Speaks, Selected Speeches, Articles, and Press Conferences, 1949-1961* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1963), 150-191.

¹⁸ Adolf Loos is considered a modernist theoretician of architecture. See Adolf Loos, *Spoken into the Void: Collected Essays, 1897-1900* (New York: The MIT Press, 1982).

architects with important positions during the Stalinist period, Khrushchev stated rhetorically: “certain architects have been carried away with putting spires on buildings, with the result that such building resemble churches. Do you like the silhouette of a church?”¹⁹ Another case in point, is when Khrushchev refers to architect Zucharov: “Architect Zucharov submitted plans for construction on Bolshaya Street on Moscow of apartment houses which differ little in their outline from churches. He was asked to explain this and answered: We have brought our plans into harmony with the tall building; the silhouette of the building must be clear (...) he needs beautiful silhouettes but the people need apartments. They do not want to admire silhouettes, (...) And all this is called architectural artistic decoration of the building! No, comrades, these are distortions in architecture, these spoil material and causes unnecessary expenditure.”²⁰

The aesthetic dimension proclaimed by Khrushchev was not rooted in ornamentation but in a plainness of surfaces. “We are not against beauty but against superfluities. A building facade should be beautiful and attractive because of the good proportion of the entire building.”²¹ Khrushchev also emphasized norms such as asymmetry, repetition and standardized design to achieve efficiency. According to him: “standardized design calls for many identical sections and identical spans”²² and such methods were useful because “the use of standardized design in buildings will have a tremendous effect on economizing, speeding up and improving construction work.”²³ In contrast with the socialist realist skyscrapers of the Stalin period, Khrushchev pleaded for horizontality due to both economic and security reasons. Blocks of flats with five stories did not need elevators and at the same

¹⁹ Thomas P. Whitney, ed., *Khrushchev Speaks*, 169.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 172.

²² *Ibid.*, 166.

²³ *Ibid.*, 167.

time were easy to evacuate in case of an atomic attack, a major concern also in the Soviet Union in the early Cold War period.

Thus, the similarities between Khrushchev's 1954 speech and the short story suggest that science fiction was used to disseminate this new orientation by presenting its imaginary 'results' on the long term. As Juravlioiva's story demonstrates, political decisions regarding architecture were used by writers at the narrative level. The architecture of the future was imagined by science fiction writers before the utopian communist social landscape would become a science fiction thematic. However, it was only the beginning. Architectural utopia is only a small and one of the first elements reflected in science fiction in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death and that was disseminated in the rest of the countries of the communist bloc, through translations that were later imitated by local writers.

Romania after Stalin's death: politics and culture

The political developments in Romania in the late 1950s and the 1960s and the subsequent cultural changes constitute the necessary context for understanding the features and implications of the communist utopia as a thematic for Romanian science fiction. Stalin's death in 1953 provided a good opportunity for the Romanian communist leadership to distance itself from the Soviet Union yet in the first years Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej regime continued a "Stalinist policy without Stalin."²⁴

A de-Stalinization of Romanian society did not occur like in Hungary or Poland where this process stimulated serious popular upheavals. Nor was Khrushchev's speech held at the 20th PCSU in February 1956 used by the Romanian communist leadership as an

²⁴ Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, Cristian Vasile eds., *Comisia Prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România: Raport final* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 314.

occasion to initiate a real political liberalization but rather the following struggles in the Soviet Union provided good opportunities for Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej to weaken and eliminate his own political rivals.²⁵ Moreover, in the 1960s, Romania planned to increase the pace of industrialization considered the only means to arrive at socialism and later communism. The commitment for a rapid and broad industrialization was put forward in 1955 at the second Romanian Workers' Party (hereafter RWP) Congress and was reinforced in 1960 during the third RWP Congress, when the idea of a Romanian road to socialism and of adapting Marxism to local needs was put forward²⁶ and a program was adopted according to which by 1975 Romania would become an important industrial power.²⁷

Yet, this intention of the Romanian communist regime was soon threatened by the CMEA's (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) plans of which Romania was a member. In 1962 CMEA adopted a document conceived by the Soviet specialist in economic geography, Emil Valev, according to which the socialist countries had to collaborate based on a division of labor between the "industrialized north and the agrarian south."²⁸ This idea was supported mainly by German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia, the most industrialized countries of the communist bloc, and was also endorsed by the Soviet Union. Within this context, Romania would have been assigned the role to supply raw materials to the other industrialized CMEA members and produce especially agricultural goods.

In 1964 Romania rejected the CMEA's idea of organizing the industrial production in the communist countries along lines of economic specializations. This plan was

²⁵ Stephen Fischer-Galați, *The New Rumania: From People's Democracy to Socialist Republic* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1967), 17-78.

²⁶ Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria Românilor de la origini până în zilele noastre* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995), 272.

²⁷ J. F. Brown, *The New Eastern Europe: The Khrushchev Era and After* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), 206.

²⁸ Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, Cristian Vasile eds., *Comisia Prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România*, 120.

considered by Romanian authorities a threat to the country's sovereignty,²⁹ a serious restriction of Romania's international and domestic options. Thus, the rejection of the CMEA plan was identified with defending Romanian national interest. The occasion was used for blending the communists' internationalist discourse with Romanian national values. This ideological shift was considered by Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej to be a good opportunity to increase the regime's legitimacy for the Romanian population who perceived communism a political model imposed from abroad. As Jowitt put it, referring to Romania's attitude vis-à-vis Valev plan, "the direct defense of the industrialization program, (...) mediated a response of increasing opposition to the Soviet Union, and the initiation of a policy stressing the goals of Party and State sovereignty."³⁰

This sovereignty was also reflected by a series of measures affecting the public space and the transformation of some institutions that were interpreted as de-Sovietisation and de-Stalinization measures. Thus, the statue of Stalin was removed from Bucharest and many streets and factories having the name of the Soviet leader were renamed. At the same time, institutions that were active in the sovietization process changed their mission and profile. *Cartea Rusă* printing house became *Editura pentru literatură universală* (The Printing House for Universal Literature) and *Institutul pentru Limba Rusă* (The Institute for Russian Language) became *Institutul pentru Limbi Străine* (The Institute for Foreign Languages).³¹ Starting from the academic year 1963-1964, Russian language study was no longer mandatory for pupils in schools. In December 1963 the book, *Însemnări despre Români*³² (Notes about Romanians), written by Karl Marx was published, where there were many

²⁹ Dennis Deletant, "Cheating the Censor: Romanian Writers under Communism," *Central Europe* 6 (2008): 132.

³⁰ Kenneth Jowitt, *Revolutionary Breakthroughs and National Development. The Case of Romania 1944-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 214.

³¹ Stelian Tănase, *Elite și Societate; Guvernarea Gheorghiu Dej, 1948-1965* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006), 198.

³² Karl Marx, *Însemnări despre români* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.P.R., 1964).

critical views towards tsarist Russia, with clear allusions to the current realities. Moreover, many Romanian official functionaries known for their attachment to the Soviet Union were replaced by new ideological personnel.

These changes that could be interpreted as a defiance of the Soviet Union brought broader popular support to the Romanian communist regime and its leader. In fact, there were a few changes in the life of the population and the people had very little for which to thank the communist regime. But through these measures, Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej succeeded to “satisfy the people’s emotions if not their needs. He responded to one of their strongest sentiments, or prejudices – anti-Russian feeling.”³³

Romania’s attitude towards CMEA’s strategy (Valev’s plan) and the above mentioned de-Sovietization measures were followed in April 1964 by a resolution of the Central Committee of the RWP considered a “declaration of independence.” Tismăneanu characterises the impact of the declaration as “a break with the Soviet idea of socialist internationalism” and an expression of the Romanian communists leaders’ “commitment to the principles of national independence and sovereignty, full equality, noninterference in the domestic affairs of other states and parties, and cooperation based on mutual advantage.”³⁴

The document itself is very relevant in this respect:

Bearing in mind the diversity of the conditions of socialist construction, there are not and there can be no unique patterns and recipes; no one can decide what is and what is not correct for other countries or parties. It is up to every Marxist-Leninist party; it is a sovereign right of each socialist state, to elaborate, choose, or change the forms and methods of socialist construction (...) Each party makes its own contribution to the development of common treasure store of Marxist-Leninist teaching, to enriching the forms and practical methods of revolutionary struggle for winning power and building socialist society.³⁵

³³ J. F. Brown, *The New Eastern Europe*, 208.

³⁴ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons*, 182.

³⁵ Declarație cu privire la poziția Partidului Muncitoresc Român în problemele mișcării comuniste și muncitorești internaționale, adoptată de plenara lărgită a C.C. a P.M.R. din aprilie 1964 (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1964) quoted in Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons*, 182.

Through this insubordinate position in relation to the Soviet Union, as Michael Shafir explains, the Romanian communist leadership decided to “become not only the embodiment of industrial development, but also of national aspirations for independence.”³⁶ Khrushchev could not counter successfully this nationalist reaction and consequently Romania as J F Brown put it, “shaken off her satellite status and become a nation thinking and acting almost completely on the basis of what she considered her interest to be.”³⁷ Consequently, the following period, the first years of Ceaușescu rule, the period between 1965-1971, was probably the best of Romanian communist history and was considered by historians as one of “political autonomy and ideological relaxation”³⁸ or of “relative liberalization.”³⁹ Important achievements were noted in the area of culture that would affect the evolution of science fiction. Socialist realism was criticized and more liberty was granted to the writers, a fact that determined the creation of some valuable literary works.

The break with the socialist realist limitations was realized in 1965 following the conference of Romanian writers organized by the Writers’ Union. The resolution of the conference publicly presented the position of Romanian Writers’ Union relating to the nature of literary creation. It was stated that the writers must improve their artistic procedures, to enrich “the content of literature by use of original artistic means.” Dogmatism was condemned and, at the same time, the resolution encouraged the dialogue on aesthetic

³⁶ Michael Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics, and Society: Political Stagnation and Simulated Change* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1985), 48.

³⁷ J. F. Brown, *The new Eastern Europe*, 192.

³⁸ Dennis Deletant, “Literature and Society in Romania Since 1948,” in *Perspectives on Literature and Society in Eastern and Western Europe*, ed. Geoffrey A. Hosking and George F. Cushing (London: Macmillan, 1989).

³⁹ Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, Cristian Vasile eds., *Comisia Prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România*, 321.

matters within the literary journals and also mentioned “the diversity in styles” that should characterize the literary creations.⁴⁰

It should be also mentioned that censorship was significantly eased. After 1964 the special libraries funds of books became available, western radio broadcasts with programs in Romanian were not jammed. Cultural institutions encouraging national cultural creations and several exiled Romanian writers were published. For instance Eugen Ionescu was introduced in the repertoires of some Romanian theatres.⁴¹ Also, there were more translations from the international literature and Romanian writers and intellectuals in general were allowed to participate in international events. It seemed that Romanian communism had abandoned its isolationism. However, Eugen Negrici interprets the liberties granted to the writers in the first years of Ceaușescu rule as a rather pragmatic measure that would be stopped in the 1970s. The new leader only wanted to destroy the still powerful cult of his predecessor.⁴²

What should be also noted during this period is the great ideological importance assigned to science and technology that was reflected in science fiction. Getting inspiration from the Soviet science fiction of the late 1950s and the 1960s utopia became the main narrative formula for science fiction and gave the impression of detachment from the previous Stalinist socialist realist limitations especially the “theory of near anticipation.” Therefore, within the new political context, the exploration of the ‘expected’ communist society became a fashionable theme for science fiction writers that considerably increased the popularity of the genre in Romania. The relaxation of censorship was evident in science fiction from the thematic diversity, although in many cases the old thematic features

⁴⁰ “Rezoluția Conferinței pe țară a Uniunii Scriitorilor,” *Gazeta literară*, 573 (1965): 1-7.

⁴¹ Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, Cristian Vasile eds., *Comisia Prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România*, 327.

⁴² Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Pro, 2002), 57.

(conflicts with the Western ideological enemy or science popularization) still remained in practice.

Science fiction utopia and communism in the 1960s

It could be said that the appearance of utopian writings in a historical period is a clear sign of a societal crisis. There are many examples in this regard: Plato wrote *The Republic* after a humiliating defeat of Athens by Sparta. Before writing *Utopia*, Thomas More, witnessed the end of the War of the Roses and the subsequent crisis along with the coming to power of Henry the 8th. Moreover, Campanella designed *The City of the Sun* when his country was facing a deep crisis, after a long thriving period. However, as Leonid Heller puts it, this aspect was rarely taken into account in analyzing utopias. Utopia is the sign of a societal crisis but it is also “the first search for a solution.”⁴³ The period after Stalin’s death was a type of societal crises. As a way of increasing popular support for the regime, Communist Party leaders attempted to reawaken enthusiasm for science and technology, and Khrushchev made the optimistic prognosis that the era of ‘full communism’ would be attained by 1981.⁴⁴ But before the realization of this wish, science fiction writers were encouraged to devise utopian scientific projects which could be presented to the readers as true anticipations of the life to come. The temporal limitations imposed on science fiction during the Stalinist era were not any more a constraint since the genre was considered a scientific-technological forecaster.

This time the narrative target was the communist society, a utopia that was promised by the Party leaders to the population. Generally speaking, utopian scenarios written during

⁴³ Leonid Heller, *De la science-fiction sovietique Par dela le dogme, un univers*, 59.

⁴⁴ Jean-Francois Soulet, *Istoria comparată a statelor comuniste din 1945 până în zilele noastre*, (Bucharest: Polirom, 1998), 103.

communism cannot be isolated from the idea of technological developments and progress; scientific and technological achievements were considered crucial for the historical process of reaching communism. First and foremost communist utopia is a technological utopia. The idea of science and technology as a main utopian ingredient is an old one and was further developed during communism. According to Mulford Sibley, utopian scenarios connected with science and technology developed notably in the seventeenth century.⁴⁵ In *New Atlantis* Francis Bacon, somehow in opposition to Thomas More, imagined a utopian society where a group of scientists govern the society assuring its well-being. As Hertzler put it referring to Bacon's utopian writing, "he and his contemporaries felt that all social injuries would be healed by raising human society, by means of scientific advancement of external civilization, beyond all cares and the needs which vex it."⁴⁶ Another important seventeenth century utopist, Tommaso Campanella presented in *The City of the Sun* a perfect society based on scientific progress and education that foreshadowed the communist utopias. The key to his envisaged society was its educational system, where technological training besides philosophy played an important role. Other important features of Campanella's perfect society were the communism of goods and a shorter working day of only four hours. Also human reproduction was imagined to be carried out under the supervision of the *Ministry of Love* and the life span was significantly prolonged with many citizens living 200 years.⁴⁷ Later, the prolongation of life would be a major feature of the communist utopia as well. Scientific and technological elements could also be identified in the 18th century writings of socialist utopists Henry de Saint Simon, Charles Fourier, Etienne Cabet Robert Owen, and

⁴⁵ Mulford Q. Sibley, "Utopian Thought and Technology," *American Journal of Political Science* 17 (1973): 255-281.

⁴⁶ J.O. Hertzler, *History of Utopian Thought*, (New York: Macmillan, 1926), 150-51, quoted in Mulford Q. Sibley, "Utopian Thought and Technology," *American Journal of Political Science* 17 (1973): 262.

⁴⁷ Mulford Q. Sibley, "Utopian Thought and Technology," *American Journal of Political Science* 17 (1973): 262.

Edward Bellamy. In the 19th century this thematic is continued by writers such as Mary Shelley, Samuel Butler, William Morris and later H.G. Wells.⁴⁸

In the Soviet Union shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution science and technology became crucial ingredients in conceiving the communist future and a rich science fiction in the Wellsian tradition⁴⁹ developed. However, during the Stalin era, due also to the socialist realist limitations, this trend was considered cosmopolitan and deviationist and science fiction became a rather dreary genre. After Stalin's death Soviet literature was again permeated with a faith in science which reflected both the transformations of the Party policy and the views of a large part of the population having technical training. Technological Prometheanism,⁵⁰ as Rosalind Marsh calls this discourse, became the conception of choice for Soviet authors, because it corresponded to the Party's desire that the writer should construct optimistic scenarios about future in order to motivate the readership and increase the legitimacy of the communist regime.

In 1957 Soviet science fiction experienced its own "Cold War renaissance,"⁵¹ when Ivan Efremov's published the novel *Andromeda Nebula*. Patrick Major considers that this moment was determined both by the relaxation of socialist realist restrictions put on literature following the 20th CPSU Congress in 1956 and by the great scientific and technological achievements such as the successful launch of the *Sputnik*, on October 4th 1967.⁵² Like in the novel *Red Star* written by Alexander Bogdanov that had imagined at the beginning of the 20th century a communist utopian society on Mars,⁵³ the description of the social and cultural aspects of the future communist society is the gist of Efremov's novel.

⁴⁸ Frank Manuel, Fritzie Prigohzy Manuel, *Utopian thought in the Western world*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1979).

⁴⁹ Rosalind Marsh, *Soviet Fiction since Stalin*, 137.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Patrick Major, "Future Perfect? Communist Science Fiction in the Cold War," 81.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Alexander Bogdanov, *Red star: the first Bolshevik utopia*, edited by Loren R. Graham and Richard Stites, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

The action takes place in the XXX century when the men of the communist future inhabit the whole galaxy. The union of all people from the Earth in a communist society is a standing reality. The features of the utopian future society are impressive. The weather had been tamed, energy shortage is not a problem any more, the life span was significantly prolonged and in the future society work is a central preoccupation of man. The story line of the novel consists in a risky experiment undertaken by the men of the future in order to find out a new way of transportation in space: the passage through the 'zero space' that would give the possibility to travel a very long distance in a very limited period, the blink of an eye. The experiment succeeded only partially and was a matter of time until it would be completed. However, what Efremov intended to suggest through the novel was as Heller explains, the total liberation of man from the limitations imposed by time and space.⁵⁴

Efremov's novel was the most important utopian science fiction written in the Soviet Union shortly after Stalin's death. It benefited from the general atmosphere of political relaxation initiated by Khrushchev and set the model for science fiction writers to further explore the possibilities of the genre by distancing from the socialist realist limitations, although it could not escape the criticism of the dogmatic literary theorists that the plot was placed "too far from our time."⁵⁵ These transformations of the genre in the Soviet Union were also reflected in Romania. If before, as has been presented in the previous chapter, science fiction was mainly concerned to fictionalize the ideological conflict between communism and capitalism and popularize specific scientific data, the appearance of utopia as a narrative structure would change this perspective. The science fiction reader was no longer guided towards the present ideological conflicts disguised in adventure stories but rather was guided to the contemplation of the future communist society that was supposed to

⁵⁴ Leonid Heller, *De la science-fiction sovietique Par dela le dogme, un univers*, 58.

⁵⁵ Rosalind Marsh, *Soviet Fiction since Stalin*, 138.

become reality. Within the new context, the message was ideologically more powerful than the socialist realist science fiction and at the same time more appealing for the readership. It was a period when the popularity of science fiction significantly increased.

Romanian science fiction in the 1960s. Features of science fiction communist utopia

From the beginning of the 1960s, utopia became the new narrative formula in Romanian science fiction in which the new communist man, his psychology and the presentation of the future communist society would be the essence of the plot. The most relevant Romanian science fiction utopia was the 1960 novel written by Sergiu Fărcășan *O iubire din anul 41.042*⁵⁶ (A Love Story of the Year 41,042). Fărcășan's novel was inspired by Efremov's *Andromeda Nebula* and was a major success among readership.⁵⁷ Fărcășan's story was followed by many other science fiction writings in the same spirit by other Romanian authors. The elements of the future communist society as presented in these stories are important for the reevaluation of the genre in the 1960s. In what follows I shall analyze several elements as presented in Romanian science fiction communist utopias published in *CPSF*. Most of the examples are from Fărcășan's novel which is the most representative of the period.

First of all, the citizen of utopia is the 'new communist man.' What does this new man of the communist utopia look like? When describing the man of the year 41,042 the main character of the novel, Sergiu Fărcășan offers the image of physical perfection: "his body was strong; he was still a young man, he was only 233 years old and was in very good

⁵⁶ Sergiu Fărcășan, "O iubire din anul 41.042," *CPSF* 123-128 (1960).

⁵⁷ This success is reflected by the letters from readers published in *CPSF* and also by the critical reception of the novel. The public demand for Fărcășan's novel is also demonstrated by the fact that shortly after the publication in *CPSF*, the novel was published in an individual volume by *Tineretului* Publishing House.

shape; he had long muscles like a swimmer and his eyes were blue. His blond hair and body were wrapped in an elegant texture of blue rays, perfectly tailored by a great scientist, electromagnetician, a good friend of him.”⁵⁸ He is not an exception in Fărcășan’s novel nor in others from the period. When the main character of Ovidiu Rîureanu’s story wakes from his cryogenic sleep meets a man of the future communist world; “he had the physical traits of an athlete (...) with his sun tanned skin his traits were so harmonious and beautiful that he seemed to be a classical statue.”⁵⁹

In communist utopia beauty and physical perfection are intrinsic qualities but what defines the positive hero of the future communist society are his psychology and moral character which are based on two complementary principles: loyalty to the revolutionary idea and the sense of collectivism. The Party, the symbol of the collective force, is the only entity capable to realize the ‘revolutionary idea; and therefore ideological obedience had to be total. In many stories and science fiction novels published during this period there are crucial moments in which a Party assembly collectively judges the personal actions and decisions of a character. In communist utopias, the jurisdiction is provided by the planetary assembly. In *O iubire din anul 41.042*⁶⁰ (A Love Story of the Year 41,042) the decisions are taken after the direct consultation of the whole population. There is no singular power that would supervise the citizens. Everybody supervises, leads and educates everybody. According to this conception of human feelings, nothing should be hidden or dissimulated. The internal world of a character is totally exteriorized. In fact, the individual subject of the communist utopia does not identify with his internal world. His actions are mainly related with the regulations of the external space. As Heller explains, the aim of the communist

⁵⁸ Sergiu Fărcășan, “O iubire din anul 41.042,” *CPSF* 124 (1960): 9.

⁵⁹ Ovidiu Rîureanu, “La steaua de mare,” *CPSF* 143 (1962): 21.

⁶⁰ Sergiu Fărcășan, “O iubire din anul 41.042,” *CPSF* 123-128 (1960).

utopian character is to create for his followers a utopia “more perfect than that in which he lives.”⁶¹

According to the way Fărcășan describes his characters, in communist utopia the lifespan has been significantly prolonged. Soviet savants were the first to consider that the ageing problem has a solution. Romanians took the idea and the biologist Traian Săvulescu, the president of the Romanian Academy, explained in a public lecture that in fact life prolongation is not related to the biological rules but rather to social rules:

“The speed of the aging processes depends largely on external conditions. In the case of animals and plants these processes depend on the physical environment, but for people dependent on social environment. In the capitalist society, the normal life cycle is brutally interrupted. Children and young people are getting older earlier due mainly to deep social diseases, acute economic crises, wars, culture, science, and decadent institutions. All these are signs of aging that inevitably interrupt the lifespan of a person unnaturally. Contrarily in a socialist society, the social factors, the economic structure, the production relations, the superstructure, are stopping premature aging, keeping youth longer.”⁶²

Săvulescu’s idea becomes reality in communist utopia. On the way to communism, as Fărcășan describes in his novel, the lifespan of man has increased and the process was due mainly to social and technological progress. One of his characters with a medium lifespan of 400 years describes the victory against time, “with the elimination of all diseases of poverty and other evils, the lifespan has increased naturally to an average of almost 100 years. The physiological conditions improved on all planets due to the elimination of all forced divisions of labor. Consequently, the average lifespan reached 160 years. Later the limit was prolonged to 400 years.”⁶³

The prolongation of life offered the communist man the chance to experience more from the future. In general the characters of a communist utopia are not interested to explore

⁶¹ Leonid Heller, *De la science-fiction sovietique Par delà le dogme, un univers*, 102.

⁶² Traian Săvulescu, quoted in Lucian Boia, *Mitologia științifică a comunismului*, 150.

⁶³ Sergiu Fărcășan, “O iubire din anul 41.042,” *CPSF* 126 (1960): 21.

what happened in the past. There are no time travel machines because from the perspective of the communist utopia, the events from the past are simply evolutionary stages that have a negative dimension. However, for those that do not respect the rules of communist utopia, experiencing the past was used as a reeducation solution. “The principles of this re-education were simple: in case it is decided that a man is not worthy to live in the planetary era is degraded to live in slavery psychosis, then in Middle Ages and then forced to experience the feeling of working for the profit of the capitalists. All these re-education punishments are carried out at the nervous system level, and only after the respective person proves to be above these tasks is advanced to the new planetary era in its first year. (That was, 1957, October 4, the first step made by man with Sputnik, beyond its planet of origin)”⁶⁴

The role of the family is reconsidered in the communist science fiction utopia, since the main accent is put on the community. If in some science fiction utopias marriage is suppressed in others it is not presented as a firm engagement. Everyone is free to choose anybody with the condition of full respect between the two partners, since the woman is considered equal to the man. Moreover, birth control is one of the main rules of the new society. Children's education has also several unique features. Total belief in the virtues of education is an important characteristic of communist utopias. In Efremov's novel (and the idea would be later taken by many communist science fiction writers including the Romanian author Sergiu Fărcășan), the children are not educated by their parents because, as is explained in *Andromeda Nebula*, “one of the most important victories of the humankind was against the ‘blind maternal instinct’! Nowadays women have realized that only the education of children done by specialists could create real citizens of the modern society.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁵ Ivan Efremov, “Nebuloasa din Andromeda,” *CPSF* 62 (1958): 19.

Education in the communist utopia is characterized by the abandonment of any theology in favor of a positive morale that is the essence of life in society and is supported by the positive achievements of science and technology. If a believer is never sure about satisfying the divinity, the citizen of a communist utopia is sure he has triumphed over nature, has beaten the diseases and even attained immortality.⁶⁶ For instance in the domestic space, the most developed machines make life much easier. According to a science fiction character, domestic future life looks like the following, “the huge energy reserves allow full mechanization of the domestic activity: automatic baking ovens that are programmed to boil the food exactly as much as it is necessary, filters for the sterilization of water and many others.”⁶⁷ Consequently the space of the kitchen is completely depersonalized. Unlike in the classical utopias is impossible to identify scenes of banquets or preparation of such events. The pleasure of gastronomy has disappeared in the imagined future communists societies. The old ritual has been transformed; all that matter is the fulfillment of the basic biological needs. For instance, during the interplanetary travels the aliments invariably are a series of synthesized products or small pills that contains numerous nutrients.

The most important element of the communist utopia is represented by work. Contrary to classical utopias where the reduction of working hours to a few hours a day and long periods of *dolce farniente* in an idyllic landscape was a golden rule, in the communist utopia working is absolutely necessary for human equilibrium. The man is fulfilled only when working, because only so can he become a true creator. Working in communist Utopia is not tiring at all, since man is helped by robots. Moreover, the very purpose of work is different compared to other types of societies. If the ‘old man’ was working both to cover his

⁶⁶ Jean Servier, *Istoria utopiei* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2000), 287.

⁶⁷ Mircea Naumescu, “Marea aventură,” *CPSF* 181 (1964): 8.

needs and to increase the wealth of others i.e., the exploiters, the ‘new man’ is working for the benefit of all and therefore working is a real pleasure.

The citizen of utopia is very pleased with his society. “Living today must be great, said Victor. Indeed it is wonderful. We own everything to those that have understood that science should only serve the man and those who work are entitled to enjoy the fruits of their labor (...) work has ceased to be an obligation. It became only related to the happiness and the multilateral development of the individual and the collective. All these are the results of the new society in which science is at the service of mankind. Science and technology have progressed remarkably. In fact due to science you are alive again.”⁶⁸ Indeed the character that is amazed by the future society was brought back to life with the support of science. An ex test pilot for a U.S. aircraft manufacturer, the character suffered an accident while trying to beat, with a new prototype aircraft, the record speed set by the Soviets. It was 1955, when communists and capitalists were still sharing the Earth. He failed to beat the record because the plane was not good enough. He suffered an accident after which remained paralyzed and in a state of total unconsciousness. Saving the sick would occur over 45 years in 2000 when Kuznețov, a scientist from a Moscow clinic, has discovered vitamin S, used to stimulate biological functions, with the help of which the character is brought back to life in a communist utopia.

This story features one of the most popular characters of the communist utopia, namely the scientist, the inventor, a person that is both a theoretician and a practitioner. Such a character is always on the first plan especially because communist utopia is not only an atheist society but also, as Monica Lovinescu explained, an anti-naturist one. As she put it, “communist utopia is anti-naturist, as natural means the unexpected which would set an

⁶⁸ Mircea Șerban, “*Ghidul din Lună*,” *CPSF* 134 (1961): 31.

incompatible relationship with rationalism and determinism that are the main ideological characteristics in communism.”⁶⁹ Within this context, the mission of the savant is to reconstruct what nature has made wrong, from the most insignificant element to the human nature. Through work nature could be surpassed. As one character, a scientist says, “God does not exist, nor the universal reason. Nature does not have intelligence and is stupid as this empty glass! And yet, nature created life, without a plan conceived by scientists, without processing the data from literature without scientific colloquia and discussions! We are working after a clear plan, we do experiments, read books and scientific articles written by our predecessors and colleagues, we discuss, analyze, and the results should be superior.”⁷⁰

There is a clear difference between the savant as presented in the communist science fiction literature and in the Western one. In most cases, in Western literary productions engineers and savants are depicted as a “species apart.” The weird inventor (eccentric or diabolic) is a source of amusement or fear. In communist science fiction the savants are not presented as strange people but as normal persons, who could be found everywhere. The science fiction utopian landscape is characterized by technicism and such developments and achievements give the meaning of time. There is not an order. “We do not measure the lifespan in years but in inventions and travels.” These are the words of a typical science fiction character.⁷¹ The transformation of the Earth, the new Suns, and the interplanetary ships represent necessary elements that in fact demonstrate the flow of time.⁷² The man of communist utopia lost the real sense of time because with communism, history has ended. However, he knows that time should not stay still so that he moves it by producing objects.

⁶⁹ Monica Lovinescu, *Unde Scurte* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990), 140.

⁷⁰ Anatoli Dneprov, “Factorul Timp,” *CPSF* 171 (1963): 7.

⁷¹ Leonid Heller, *De la science-fiction sovietique Par dela le dogme, un univers*, 84.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 85.

Time is assimilated to the scientific and technological progress and its flow is marked by great achievements.

Mythology is everywhere in communist utopian science fiction. However, such writings were not conceived only to convey ideological values but were seen as having a powerful transforming role upon the readership. By reading Fărcășan's novel *O iubire din anul 41.042* (A Love Story of the Year 41,042) the features of communist utopia become clear. At the time of the narrative, the year 41,042, thousands of billions of people were living under communism. Even though large distances separated them (the future communist world was not limited to the Earth, but it was spread in the whole galaxy) the force and unity of the 'planetary collective' were standing realities. An important scientific success was interplanetary television, which helped to eliminate the distances. Having this technical device, communist society was able to change opinions and, more important, to decide in all the problems collectively. Every decision from the changing of the place of Earth in the universe through insignificant individual problems was taken in common.

The integration of utopia as the narrative formula of Romanian science fiction was followed by some critical assessment meant to clarify its function and to stress the distinctions from Western productions. Thus it is worth mentioning Lucia Olteanu's review of Fărcășan's novel. As she explains,

"in comparison with the bourgeois anticipatory novels, where the future society is depicted as regressive, in which the development of science provokes fear and men are depicted as simple annexes if not victims of machines, Fărcășan's novel offers a poetical image of the communist society of the 42nd millennium. He presents the moral beauty of future mankind, in a future world where wars and diseases have disappeared. (...) *O iubire din anul 41.042*, (A Love Story of the Year 41, 042) is a retort given to bourgeois utopias where the society of the future is depicted as being perfect but missing the real elements of the development. A real ideal will always

necessitate efforts and sacrifices and the continuous fight with the unknown presented in this novel signifies basically the real charm of life.”⁷³

The feeling of being part of such a society gives power not only to its members but also to the reader, because the goal of science fiction was not just to be a transmitter of some possible future achievement, but also to have a transformative role in the present. As Olteanu points out, “for the reader who wants to know what tomorrow will look like, the writer inspires him an unlimited thrust in the forces of science, of the humankind of the communist and socialist society showing that his work is important, useful and constitutes a stage in the efforts to tomorrow.”⁷⁴

Taking into account the Romanian political developments in the 1960s, utopia was not only the sign of the detachment from the socialist realist narrative constraints, but was also perceived as the next to be society and the narrative promise was assimilated by the readers with the distancing actions of the Romanian Communist Party from the Soviet Union in order to find a proper way to reach communism.

Utopian hidden facet

However, utopia as a literary discourse, besides presenting the future communist perfection also offered a critical reading of the present. This characteristic offered those capable of reading “between the lines” a satisfaction that no other genre of popular culture would give during that time. The period of political autonomy and ideological relaxation that was manifested in the 1960s in communist Romania favored this literary development that in fact was a challenge to the previous socialist realist literary norms.

⁷³ Lucia Olteanu, “Un reușit roman științifico fantastic,” *CPSF* 150 (1962): 28-31.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

The communist utopia, as it is illustrated in science fiction literature, has the general meaning of any utopia in the sense that it functions as a mirror of society that is at the same time distorted. Therefore, communist society always maintains a hostile relationship with its reflection and in many utopian science fiction novels one could find hidden criticism of the communist society and its myths. The most common technique is inversion. For instance, Fărcășan's novel *O iubire din anul 41.042*⁷⁵ (A Love Story of the Year 41,042) states that one of the most important achievement in the future communist society is the right to freely travel from one place to another, when it was known how limited the possibilities were for a citizen of communist Romania to travel. Moreover, utopian realities such as the liberty to choose one's working place or the liberty to freely express one's opinion were the reverse in the present.

Even the prototype of the 'new man' of the future had some flaws. A case in point could be Ion Hobana's story *Oameni și Stele* (Humans and Stars).⁷⁶ In a distant communist utopian future, the spaceship *Albatros* began the first Romanian expedition to Mars. Totally unexpected for a brave man, engineer Moroianu, one member of the team tries to sabotage the expedition. All had been explicable if Moroianu would have represented a spy of the imperialist powers, with the goal to thwart communist attempts to conquer outer space. It was not the case; engineer Moroianu, the prototype of the new man, simply became afraid. The trust in science was not working any more. Facing normal human psychological impulses, the character was not acting as a 'new man.' The fear experienced by the character was quickly noticed by the literary critics of that period.

Thus, the story *Oameni și stele* (Humans and Stars) was considered in a critical evaluation, "worthy of being related with the gloomy pessimism of the Western science

⁷⁵ Sergiu Fărcășan, "O iubire din anul 41.042," *CPSF* 123-128 (1960).

⁷⁶ Ion Hobana, "Oameni și Stele," *CPSF* 224 (1965): 25.

fiction (...) unexplainable, illogical and inadequate for a man living in communism.”⁷⁷

According to socialist realism, Florea's observation was legitimate. By constructing an anti-hero such as Moroianu, the author took the plot in a forbidden direction but, by portraying a character with weaknesses, he gave the hero a real psychological dimension.

Such criticisms did not stop the development of the genre. In fact, during this period there were literary critics that took the opportunity to criticize the science fiction that was too “technicist” or “didactic,” and some formerly dogmatic theorist changed their opinion. Thus, Rebegea saw science fiction as a philosophical genre, opposed to any scheme and determinism.⁷⁸ He criticized the productions of the 1950s because of their “technicism,” which, as he claimed, “was limited to describe machines and other technical devices.”⁷⁹ Referring to the same period, Kernbach condemned the engineers that were science fiction writers and in most without any talent for writing literature, which gave science fiction a technicist path.⁸⁰ Miha Dragomir in *Luceafărul* connects explicitly science fiction that had previously an educative and informative role with the characteristics a real literary production should have: “all literary genres are compatible with the so called science fiction, so that we could conclude only that there is not a science fiction literature as such but a science fiction thematic within literature in general (...) the specificity of the genre is the specificity of the respective thematic.”⁸¹ The literary critic Ion Roman changed his idea from the 1950s in an article published in *Contemporanul*. He mentions that it was very important for science fiction to concentrate upon “what constitutes basically the investigation aim of

⁷⁷ Rodica Florea, “Povestirea SF în literatura noastră actuală,” *Studii de cercetări literare și folclor* 3-4 (1963): 634.

⁷⁸ Ana Barbara Rebegea, “Pulsul Nostru Actual. Reflecții pe marginea actualei anticipații românești,” *CPSF* 227 (1965):20.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Victor Kernbach, “Divertisment sau Profeție?,” *CPSF* 254 (1966): 32.

⁸¹ Miha Dragomir, “Actualitatea literaturii despre viitor,” *Luceafărul* 5 (1963): 3.

literature: the life of people, their inner reactions and morality incorporated in every character.”⁸²

Referring to this period, Max Solomon mentions two different and at the same time competing concepts of understanding science fiction in Romania. On the one hand, there was as he puts it ‘the proletcultist version’ that stated that the youth does not need unrealistic fantasies, but a real forecast of the development of technology and science according to Marxist-Leninist principles. On the other hand, he mentions the creative fantasy, which affirmed that a well-structured fantasy could be the starting point for creative inspiration.⁸³ These two theoretical directions, technicism vs. creative fantasy, seemed to be the first serious debate over the appropriate way of writing science fiction. While the first direction expressed a close relation with and subordination to political aims, the second was related to the intrinsic quality that literature must have and as a consequence was less concerned with its envisaged educational function. These theoretical debates encouraged the science fiction writers to express more freely than before. Also, from the end of the 1960s a new generation of science fiction writers with literary training is published, replacing the engineers of the previous decade.⁸⁴

Also in the 1960s the science fiction label was used as a pretext to publish literary works that had nothing to do with the genre. Thus, *CPSF*, besides translations from other communist literatures, especially the Soviet one, important western writers such as Dino Buzzati, Jorge Luis Borges, Fitz James O’Brien and Ambrose Bierce are published (see

⁸² Ion Roman, “Cartea științifico-fantastică,” *Contemporanul* 9 (1960): 5-6.

⁸³ This information is based on an e-mail send to the author by Max Solomon on 17 January 2003.

⁸⁴ Victor Kernbach, *Povestiri ciudate* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1967); Victor Kernbach, *Luntrea sublimă* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1967); Camil Băciu, *Gradina zeilor* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1968); Romulus Bărbulescu, George Anania, *Ferma oamenilor de piatră* (Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1969); Voicu Bugariu, *Vocile vikingilor* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1970); Dorel Dorian, *Ficțiuni pentru revolver și orchestră* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1970); Mircea Opriță, *Argonautica* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1970).

appendix). Normally, such literature would have been considered too decadent and cosmopolitan to pass the censorship but as science fiction it was possible to be published. Moreover, during this period on the back cover of the *CPSF* there were often published advertisements for products such as sweets, furniture or Pepsi-Cola (see appendix).

This re-orientation of the science fiction magazine in terms of publication focus did not in fact completely replace the former type of literature meant to inform and train the youth. If for this case it was about a large audience represented by youth and technical professionals, the new more esthetically oriented line was addressed, as Manolescu points out, to those who perceive the reading act as a selective one, supervised by a personal critical spirit.⁸⁵

Readers' response to science fiction

A conceptual tool that could help in getting an image on the social impact and the social role of science fiction during communism is what Stableford considers the “communicative functions of science fiction” which refer to the patterns of reader demand and reception.⁸⁶ Stableford considers that science fiction has three main communicative functions: directive function, maintenance function and restorative function.

Directive communications are those which have a permanent effect on their recipients, conveying information or resulting in changes of attitude. Maintenance communication functions are those which support and reinforce attitudes values and modes of understanding already held by the recipient. Didactic literature, and Romanian communist science fiction was considered such a genre, is presumably consumed in service of the

⁸⁵ Florin Manolescu, *Literatura S.F.* (Bucharest: Univers, 1980), 262.

⁸⁶ Brian Stableford, *The Sociology of Science Fiction* (San Bernardino, California: Borgo Press, 1987), 17.

maintenance function. The readers recognize in the plot of a story not a revelation and utterly new scientific data but something already familiar. Therefore the satisfaction from its reading is the satisfaction of confirmation. The restorative functions are those which provide the reader with a temporary respite or “escape” from confrontation with his real social situation. Literature having this function is usually described as “escapist.” The term is often used in a derogatory way. For instance Romanian literary critics such as Nicolae Manolescu⁸⁷ and Eugen Negrici⁸⁸ consider science fiction an escapist genre and therefore having a meager aesthetical value. Contrarily the supporters of popular literature, including science fiction, reply with the claim that all reading for pleasure is escapist.

The communicative functions of science fiction as developed by Stableford are conceptual tools used to analyze the genre sociologically. Literary critics, due to the nature of their discipline, are usually preoccupied with identifying and evaluating aesthetically a literary plot. As Stableford explains, “when they analyze texts as communiqués they are primarily concerned with the communicative potential of an ideal reading of the text. Sociologists of literature, because of the nature of their discipline, need not – and should not restrict their attention in the same way. When the sociologist analyses literary texts his primary concern is the communication which ordinarily does take place through the medium of a typical reading of the text.”⁸⁹

In the 1960s science fiction became a very popular literary genre in communist Romania and within this context, an important question that should be asked is what ordinary and habitually readers derived from their readings. Why did people choose to read science fiction and what effects their readings had upon them? Science fiction was a genre of

⁸⁷ Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române* (Bucharest: Ed. Paralela 45, 2008).

⁸⁸ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației PRO, 2002).

⁸⁹ Brian Stableford, *The Sociology of Science Fiction*, 23.

popular literature and in this context a valuable question is what devoted readers got out of it?

In the case of the magazine *CPSF*, this aspect could be reconstructed based on the letters sent to the editorial office by the readers. At the same time I argue that there is an important difference between the act of reading in which a book is read as science fiction and the act of reading in which a book (whatever its content) is read as a mainstream novel. This distinction has to do with an understanding of the term genre. Darko Suvin defines a literary genre as a “collective system of expectations in the readers' minds stemming from their past experience with a certain type of writing, so that even its violations, the innovations by which every genre evolves, can be understood only against the backdrop of such a system.”⁹⁰

At the beginning of the 1960s, *CPSF* used to publish letters sent to the editorial office. The reason for publishing letters was to give readers a sense of participation in the magazine, and to show how science fiction should be read and understood. The first motive responded to readership expectations because for many science fiction fans having a letter published was an important achievement, while the second one was a didactic endeavor.

Science fiction was directed to young readership and this audience profile was demonstrated by a survey made by Florin Manolescu, who analyzed over three thousand letters sent to the editorial office of *CPSF*. According to this analysis over 54% of the readers who sent letters were secondary school and high school pupils; 10% were students, 11% workers, 5.5% technicians and 8.5% teachers. 11% that were not taken into account, since their letters were anonymous.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Darko Suvin, quoted in Brian Stableford, *The Sociology of Science Fiction*, 68-69.

⁹¹ Florin Manolescu, *Literatura S.F.*, 261.

Unfortunately the letters sent to *CPSF* were not archived and are not available for research. The only available letters are those published in the magazine. They could not give a proper answer to the questions mentioned above. They could have been modified or the most suitable ones could have been published. Even in this case, however, they could offer an image on how the genre was supposed to be understood. Therefore, some excerpts from the letters published could offer an image of the desired impact this literature should have upon the readership. The quoted letters are quite typical for those published in *CPSF*.

The following letter was received from a worker.

I work as a typographer in Craiova, I am married and I have a child. I am a new reader of your magazine more precisely from the 166th issue when I read the short story *Experimentul 0 K* (The Experiment 0 K). I was impressed by the quality of this work and I tried immediately to find other older issues. I found some at the second-hand bookshop in my town (...). Finally I would like to express a request. I do not know if comrades Matei and Petrescu are from Bucharest. If yes, I would ask if it is possible for them to visit a printing press factory and afterwards to imagine the future and to write a novel on the typographers of the future.⁹²

Another reader, worker as well, expresses his opinions about the *CPSF* and science fiction literature in general.

“I am an enthusiast reader in general and I especially enjoy the books in which the communist future of the humanity is depicted. You have already published in *CPSF* many stories about the man of tomorrow. I have almost all the issues of the *CPSF*. Besides this in my private library I also have about 600 books, some of them science fiction. (...) After 7 years of publication I will write in this letter my opinion about the publication. The most interesting stories for me were the novels *Nebuloasa din Andromeda* și *O iubire din anul 41.042* where I could see how communism, the ultimate dream of the peace loving mankind, became reality. (...) I am working in the textile industry and for this reason I especially enjoyed the thrilling novel *Secretul Inginerului Mușat* (Engineer Mușat's Secret) written by Sergiu Fărcășan. I would like to read more stories about the future of textile industry. Of course these stories will deal also with chemistry, but that is not a problem. Nowadays we are working with synthetic textile fibers, an extremely enjoyable and pleasant work.”⁹³

⁹² *CPSF* 174 (1963): 31.

⁹³ *CPSF* 178 (1963): 30.

Because of their readings, the two readers started to regard the world in a different way. Thus, one can state from these letters that science fiction fulfilled the aim that was envisaged. The reader has been introduced through science fiction to a vision of the future and is convinced that it is over there that the answer lays.

Angelo Mitchievici notes that under communism, science-fiction tended to be read as truth rather than speculation.⁹⁴ Science fiction offered to its readers as could be inferred from these letters the vision of a perfect future, a distant one, yet always attainable. Therefore, the search for answers in science fiction about the evolution of readers' professions was legitimate since this genre was considered closer to truth than any literature. The sense of "breaking through" to a new way of seeing the world and oneself was in fact the aim of this literature. In the 1960s science fiction offered to its readers the image of the future communist world where they could escape. It was not an alternative world, but one that consolidates their trust in the communist ideology and in its utopian project.

Another letter from a pupil, Vasilescu Doina from Ploiești might seem unusual:

"I'm an old friend of CPSF. Every new issue is for me an interesting and attractive reading. Since I was small I was to be an archaeologist and now I have the feeling that my dream comes true. Among the original stories published in the magazine I especially enjoyed the novels *O iubire din anul 41.042* written by Sergiu Fărcășan, *Sahariana* written by Max Solomon and I.M.Ștefan as well as the story of the Soviet writer I Zabelin, *O tragedie la cercul polar*." The publication is wonderful. However, I would like to read a novel with a topic related with archeology."⁹⁵

The wish of this reader might seem paradoxical for someone reading science fiction. He enjoys the future communist utopias but at the same time asks for something related with archaeology. This might create confusion but in fact what the reader asks for is the illusion of plausibility. He is asking for imaginary worlds in which he could retreat. This characteristic was particularly important. It is a clear example of the restorative function of

⁹⁴ Angelo Mitchievici, Paul Cernat, eds. *Explorări în comunismul românesc* (Iași: Polirom, 2003), 80.

⁹⁵ CPSF 149 (1962): 31.

the genre. Mema Nadia, a pupil, writes to the magazine, “the topics of the stories published in the magazine are thrilling. From these adventures we can learn a lot, and the behavior of the heroes is a real example for us.”⁹⁶

The letters published in the magazine in the 1960s also suggest the beginning of the formation of a science fiction community. Science fiction is not a genre to be read alone. It’s something to be shared and this attitude constituted the beginning of the Romanian science fiction fandom. Excerpts from letters are eloquent. For instance, Titohod Nistor, 7th grade pupil writes, “(...) a couple of months ago I started to lend to my colleagues issues of the magazine. Now almost all my colleagues subscribed to the *CPSF*. With one of them, Postelnicu Radu I have attracted a couple of other friends to subscribe to the *CPSF*.”⁹⁷

An increasing number of children became attracted by science fiction. Taking into account the schooling system focused on scientific and technological curricula science fiction was a literary genre that offered to these people the easiest way to reading and at the same time enjoying it.

Conclusion

The 1960s represented for Romanian a period of political liberalization that was also reflected in the way the science fiction. The most important achievement, that also reflected the evolution of the Soviet science fiction after Stalin’s death, was the appearance of utopia as a new thematic feature. However, while science fiction presented the best of the possible futures - the communist one, Romanian youth dreamt about it. However, what they passionately read about the scientific and technological progresses of the next years,

⁹⁶ *CPSF* 179 (1963): 2.

⁹⁷ *CPSF* 192 (1964): 32.

centuries or millennia was also an active pedagogical and propagandistic instrument meant to build the new communist men and women.

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CHAPTER 4

SCIENCE FICTION AND ROMANIAN NATIONAL COMMUNISM IN THE 1970S

The political autonomy and ideological relaxation manifested in communist Romania in the second part of the 1960s was disrupted in the 1970s. Science fiction, which was a very popular literary genre at that time, had to adjust to a new political context. When it was imported from the Soviet Union in the 1950s, science fiction was conceived, following primarily the socialist realism guidelines, as an alternative way to educate the youth in the spirit of the new communist life to come. In the second half of the 1960s with the coming of Nicolae Ceaușescu as the new leader of the RCP (Romanian Communist Party), and his policy of partial independence from the Soviet Union, writers in general were given more freedom than before and censorship was lessened. Science fiction followed the trend and utopian scenarios replaced the narrative limitations of socialist realism. Moreover, the genre no longer was inspired from communist internationalist values but rather started to have a Romanian thematic, a fact that reflected to some extent the attempts made by the Romanian communist leadership to distance from the Soviet Union and to gain a certain level of independence within the communist bloc.

After Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej's death in 1964 it was thought that Nicolae Ceaușescu, the new RCP leader, would accelerate the program of reforms initiated by his predecessor. Many Western analysts were convinced that an imminent positive change would take place. For instance, in 1966 James F. Brown wrote that in Romania, "relaxation in the cultural and academic fields became more pronounced, and in June 1965, the new

‘socialist’ constitution introduced more safeguards for the liberty of the individual.”¹ The political measures adopted in Romania, along with Ceaușescu’s opposition to the 1968 Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia gave the illusion that a positive change was underway. Yet, retrospectively, Vladimir Tismăneanu has demonstrated that the new path was not a real liberalization but instead nothing more than the beginning of a “national Stalinist”² course. The positive internal and international political measures initiated by the RCP in the 1960s that culminated with the Romanian opposition towards the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 were cut short at the beginning of the 1970s.

The subject of this chapter is the evolution of Romanian science fiction in the 1970s. The national turn initiated by Nicolae Ceaușescu in the 1970s impacted the genre’s evolution. Within the new political and ideological context, science fiction was no longer considered a valuable cultural product for youth that would deliver alternative scientific education, and would be an instrument for political socialization. The Romanian communist propaganda aimed to modify the social imaginary to much indebted to scientific and technological references as the main way leading to the promised communist future, also contain an ethno-national dimension. This transformation became rapidly popular, attracted large masses and brought legitimacy to the Romanian communist regime and to its leader; it was perceived as a manifestation of Romania’s independence from the Soviet Union, considered responsible for the obliteration of the Romanian national values in favor of the internationalist communist discourse.

Within this context, science fiction was no longer considered useful for the education of the youth. Therefore, the magazine *CPSF* was eventually closed down.

¹ J. F. Brown, *The New Eastern Europe: The Khrushchev Era and After* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 71.

² Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: a Political History of Romanian Communism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

However, despite the suppression of the sole Romanian science fiction regular publication, this decade witnessed the appearance of the science fiction fandom. Science fiction fans choose to gather in clubs and share their interests for the genre, forming a community detached from the official ethno-national political discourse. Thus, science fiction started to offer to its fans, some of whom also became literary clubs writers, the possibility to produce and enjoy a literature whose message was different from the official ideological values promoted by the RCP.

The 1971 July Theses and literary space

Despite the promising liberties and rather freer debates that occurred in the 1960s in Romania at least in the literary space, the 1970s constitute a return to the socialist realism promoted in the 1950s, yet, this time augmented with Romanian national values that were absent in the previous two decades mainly for political reasons. The turning point of this process was represented by the *July Theses* from 1971. This political document had a tremendous influence upon the literary space, its impact being considered a “mini-cultural revolution.”³ These measures curbed the relative autonomy of the literary space in the 1960s. The inspiration for the July theses and of the subsequent nationalist turn is considered to be Nicolae Ceaușescu’s 1971 visit to four Asian socialist countries: China, North Korea, Vietnam and Mongolia. As Alexandru Paleologu remembers,⁴ Ceaușescu was fully impressed by the Maoist system and the Chinese Cultural Revolution and wished to replicate it in Romania. The visit was amply commented upon in Romanian mass media of that period, including literary journals, and many cultural personalities expressed their support

³ Daniel N. Nelson, *Romanian Politics in the Ceaușescu Era* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1988), 62.

⁴ Alexandru Paleologu, *Minunatele amintiri ale unui ambasador al golanilor* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991), 143.

for the new ideas of the Romanian communist leader. For instance, the well-known Romanian poet Nichita Stănescu characterized the visit as “an important victory of the wise peace policy undertaken internationally by our country.”⁵

Shortly after his return from Asia, Ceaușescu promulgated the document, *Propunerile de măsuri prezentate de tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu Comitetului Executiv al CC al PCR, pentru îmbunătățirea activității politico-ideologice, de educare marxist leninistă a membrilor de partid a tuturor oamenilor muncii* (Exposition made by comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu to the Executive Comitee of CC of the RCP for the improvement of political-ideological activity, for the Marxist Leninist education of the Party members and of all working people), which are generally known as the July Theses.⁶ The measures were adopted unanimously. Tismăneanu considers the document “a monument of Zhdanovist obscurantism” that resulted in “a radical re-Stalinization and the emergence of an unprecedented cult of personality.”⁷

The document proclaimed that the main preoccupation of the RCP is to “develop the material and spiritual well-being of the masses and also to assure the necessary conditions for the construction of the ‘new man’ fully devoted to socialism and communism. The threats in order to achieve this goal were identified at the political-ideological and cultural-educative levels, and a series of solutions were put forward. The envisaged transformation had to be made through the “continuous growth of the Party's leading role in all domains of political-educational activity.” In what concerned the literary space it was stated that the Party has to take measures “for a better orientation of publishing activity, so that the books should better answer the demands for communist education.” Moreover, it was specified

⁵ Nichita Stănescu, “O existență demnă în lume,” *România Literară*, 27 (1 July 1971): 3.

⁶ “Propunerile de măsuri prezentate de tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu Comitetului Executiv al CC al PCR, pentru îmbunătățirea activității politico-ideologice, de educare marxist leninistă a membrilor de partid a tuturor oamenilor muncii,” *Scînteia* (7 July 1971): 1-2.

⁷ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons*, 206.

that, “a more rigorous control should be instituted so that literary works that do not correspond to the political-educative policy carried out by the Party, books that promote ideas and conceptions harmful to the socialist construction of our country, should not be published.”⁸ With this document it became evident that Ceaușescu initiated a national turn, an ideological shift of Romanian communism, characterized by Trond Gilberg as “a practical version of Marxist Leninism that is both national and idiosyncratic.”⁹

Writers were the principal target of these new political commandments and the new measures were promptly communicated to them. Although not directly connected with science fiction, these ideas are relevant since the ideological framework shaped by the new ideological measures would be crucial for the fate of the genre. On June 9th 1971, in a meeting that preceded the July Theses, Communist Party activists responsible for ideological and cultural educational matters were gathered at the *Comitetul Central al Partidului Comunist Român* (Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party), in the presence of Nicolae Ceaușescu. For this meeting representatives of the Writers’ Union were also invited.¹⁰ In his speech, Ceaușescu urged the artists and writers to take inspiration from the present problems of people and practice a humanist and militant art in order to combat cosmopolitan manifestations and other unconstructive artistic behaviors. He especially insisted that the writers should accomplish the “socialist conscience” and contribute to the “creation of the new man,” a formulation resembling to a great extent the 1950s socialist realist rhetoric. *Luceafărul*, the magazine of the Romanian Writers’ Union, summarized the meeting as follows: “With this occasion writers have understood better than ever, that, as the

⁸ “Propunerile de măsuri prezentate de tovarășul Nicolae Ceaușescu Comitetului Executiv al CC al PCR,” *Scînteia* (7 July 1971): 1-2.

⁹ Trond Gilberg, *Nationalism and communism in Romania: The rise and fall of Ceausescu’s Personal Dictatorship* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), 47.

¹⁰ “La sediul Comitetului Central în prezența tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu a avut loc consfătuirea de lucru a activului de partid din domeniul ideologiei și al activității politice și culturale educative,” *Luceafărul* 28 (1971): 1.

General Secretary of the Party explained, in Romania there could be accepted only art and literature that reflect the position of the working class, an art that serves the people, socialism, our nation.”¹¹

The return to the rhetoric of the 1950s, in which the social role of literature was emphasized in detriment of any “art for art’s sake” tendency, could be also noticed during Ceaușescu’s visit to Neptun, a Black Sea coast resort, at the summer house of the Writers’ Union. The magazine *Luceafărul* presented the visit in detail: “The dialogue between the General Secretary of the Party and the writers showed one more time the huge responsibility that the writer, the poet, the script writer have in our socialist society and also the particular role of literature as an instructive factor, the necessity that the literary work should get inspiration directly from the life of people. Literature should reflect the dynamic process of the continuous transformation of our society, the conscience of the new man of nowadays.”¹²

However, during that meeting there were also dissenting opinions to the new measures advocated by Ceaușescu, i.e. the July Theses, but the magazine *Luceafărul* and the Romanian mass media did not present them. For instance, what happened on that occasion could be retrieved from the recollections of some participants. Literary critic Mircea Martin remembers:

“In August 1971 I was by pure chance at the writers’ house in Neptun when the visit of Ceaușescu and his suite (including his wife at that moment not very important in the Communist Party) took place. The reaction of all writers attending the meeting (except two old political opportunists Mihail Davidoglu and Aurel Mihale) was a rejection of the re-ideologization and of the return to the initial socialist realist dogmatism. Zaharia Stancu and Eugen Jebeleanu were silent but their disagreement was evident. However, the three writers, Alexandru Ivăsiuc, Szasz Janos and Adrian Păunescu, members of the executive bureau of the Writers’ Union, criticized the measures adopted and presented by mass media and television, trying to convince Ceaușescu to abandon his plans. They told him that in 1968 when Romania protested

¹¹ “Prilej de adâncă meditație,” *Luceafărul* 29 (1971): 1.

¹² “Vizita de lucru a tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu în stațiunile din zona Mangalia-Nord,” *Luceafărul* 32 (1971): 2.

against the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the military troops of the Warsaw treaty, writers had a spontaneous attitude supporting the position of the Romanian Communist Party.”¹³

The discussions between Nicolae Ceaușescu and the writers were resumed in the fall. On September 21st, a meeting took place at the *Comitetul Central al Partidului Comunist Român* (Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party), between Nicolae Ceaușescu and several representatives of the Writers’ Union, including participants from the regional sections of the Writers’ Union.¹⁴ Romanian mass media reiterated the decisions that were adopted, such as the necessity to improve the ideological and political activity of the Writers’ Union in the spirit of the July Theses. The articles published during that period reflect the writers’ full compliance with the new political measures. However, Western newspapers such as *Le Monde* and *Corriere della Sera* wrote that during this meeting there was significant resistance against the new ideological and cultural-political line imposed by Ceaușescu,¹⁵ with writers considering the new measures a “return to Stalinism.” Ceaușescu would have rejected such allegations by saying that such measures were necessary since the “anarchy” manifested in Romanian literature was intolerable.¹⁶

In November 1971, Nicolae Ceaușescu proposed another set of measures, this time within the plenary session of the *Comitetul Central al Partidului Comunist Român* (Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party).¹⁷ The document put forward the main

¹³ Mircea Martin, “Cultura română între comunism și naționalism. O altă față a lui Adrian Păunescu,” *Revista* 22 38 (2002): 6.

¹⁴ “Întâlnirea tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu cu membri ai Uniunii Scriitorilor,” *Luceafărul*, 39 (491): 1.

¹⁵ Lucia Dragomir, *L’Union des Écrivains. Une institution transnationale à l’Est* (Paris: Belin 2007), 164.

¹⁶ Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *Literatură și politică în România după 1945* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 2001), 199.

¹⁷ “Expunerea tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu cu privire la Programul PCR pentru îmbunătățirea activității ideologice, ridicarea nivelului general al cunoașterii și educația socialistă a maselor; pentru așezarea relațiilor din societatea noastră pe baza principiilor eticii și echității socialiste și comuniste,” *România literară*, (161): 1-9.

directions for literature and more importantly clarified a couple of concepts such as realism in general, as well as a version of socialist realism that was named socialist humanism. In his speech, Nicolae Ceaușescu repeated the formula “diversity of artistic styles” he had launched in the 1960s, but he insisted more on the idea of getting inspiration from the Romanian socialist reality in order to produce an art addressed to the people, an art that should be realist and totally humanist. As he said, “a literary creation resulting from work and scientific knowledge should enrich the spiritual life of people. Art should be an inspiration for people’s desires. All artistic works, although having various forms and styles should reflect the multiple aspects of the reality in which we live, the life of people.”¹⁸

As in the Stalinist period, the concepts and literary methods were first discussed and decided by Party officials and only then communicated to writers. Ceaușescu attempted to redefine socialist realism from his perspective and tried to convince literary critics to put the issue on their agenda. “We hardly speak about realism today. For some artists socialist realism is synonymous with cliché creation and a unique model for art. I consider this perspective about socialist realism totally wrong [...] We should not speak about socialist realism in such a way but rather make clear its meaning. We should make artists understand that socialist realism is not imposing types and cliché in art but rather represent new possibilities for an open art.”¹⁹

Ceaușescu recognized the exaggerations and abuses from the period of his predecessor. According to him, these facts have somehow discredited realism. What he proposed was a rebranding, a refining of the old concept by proposing a new one, “socialist humanism.” At the same time Ceaușescu offered a definition of the concept “socialist humanism.” His new formula presupposed “a more complex understanding of man in

¹⁸ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹ Ibid.

society; a character should not be seen as an isolated individual, and his individual traits should not be exaggerated; he should be perceived like a social human being that is caught in an intricate relationship with others and with the interests of the people.”²⁰

Moreover, socialist humanism had, according to Nicolae Ceaușescu, “to illustrate the individual well being within the context of the well being of all people.”²¹ Therefore, socialist humanist art had to be dedicated to the masses and “in this case personality is not lost but rather it is reiterated more and more with the articulation of the entire national well being.”²² Another aspect that Ceaușescu aimed to clarify in his speech was related to the role of art. He put forward some general principles such as “by their message art works should raise the morality of every man” or “a work of art should enrich spiritually our people, its education in the spirit of humanism and friendship” but also mentioned some rather restrictive measures related to the circulation of artistic creations. He was against the access in Romania of “the so called works of art with a dangerous content, books, movies or theatre plays that make the apology of crime, promote brutality that poisons the spirits and pollutes the spiritual milieu.”²³

The final part of the speech was direct advice to writers. An internationalist communist thematic was no longer a priority and necessity as was the case in the 1950s. Romanian achievements were considered to be a valuable subject matter for a work of art. Writers were therefore given a direct recommendation:

“Create an art that should depict the magnificent socialist transformations of our country, the active work of millions of people. You should find contradictions and real conflicts and great, thrilling achievements suitable to the man of our days! Depict the beauty of love in its mighty sense! Use the weapon of humor; satirize the imperfections that are present in our society and in people! Make your art a tool able

²⁰ Ibid., 7.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 8.

to improve our society! You have in front of you a large perspective; put your talent and art to the service of socialism and communism in our country.”²⁴

In his speech, Ceaușescu also announced an important administrative change, namely the replacement of the *Comitetul de Stat pentru Cultură și Artă* (State Council for Culture and Art) with a new political organ, *The Council for Culture and Socialist Education*. Subordinated to the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party the role of the new council was to “manage all areas of activity, all cultural and artistic domains.”²⁵ The new institution was not meant to directly censor the content of publications. This was the attribute of *Direcția Generală a Presei și Tipăriturilor* (The General Direction for Press and Printing). However, all editors were supposed to get the approval of the *Council* related to the name, circulation and financing of a publication.²⁶

These transformations and political commandments that began with the July Theses in 1971 created confusion among writers regarding the characteristics literature should have. An expression of this situation was the prizes for literature given by the Writers’ Union for the year 1971. The winners were Constantin Chiriță, the Party secretary of the Writers’ Union, with a novel that was a typical product of socialist realism, and the poet Vasile Nicolescu who was also an official high functionary who was responsible for censorship within the Writers’ Union.²⁷

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 9.

²⁶ Marian Petcu, *Cenzura în spațiul cultural românesc* (Bucharest: Comunicare.ro, 2005), 88.

²⁷ Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *Literatură și politică în România după 1945* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 2001), 205.

The Romanian national turn and science fiction

The July 1971 Theses and the official meetings between RCP officials, including Nicolae Ceaușescu, and writers that followed in the same year, constituted in fact an attempt to return to the socialist realism practiced in the 1950s. The only amendment was an urge addressed to the writers to get inspiration from genuine Romanian values. Therefore, the measures initiated in 1971 with the July Theses could be interpreted as the beginning of a national turn in the history of Romanian communism.

One could argue that there is an obvious incompatibility between the national idea and communism. The sovietization of Romania was essentially a denationalization action that was supported among other things by the implementation of a new educational system based on scientific and technological curricula. The rejection of the Romanian national values that were replaced with an internationalist communist ideology was the main aspect of this social engineering process carried out in the 1950s. Romanian literature for children and youth imported from the Soviet Union, including science fiction, was conceived to serve this aim. However, these values did not offer enough legitimacy to the communist regime since the Soviet Union and its political system was not regarded with sympathy by Romanians. Therefore, the popularity of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej's April 1964 declaration and in 1968 the popular support for Ceaușescu's refusal to participate to the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia demonstrated the huge potential of a 'national turn.'

In the 1970s the national discourse proved to be for the RCP and for its leader the best solution for gaining legitimacy for Romanian population. As Tismăneanu explains, "Ceaușescu's personal tragedy was determined by the tragedy of his party, a political movement totally bereft of historical legitimacy. Romanian communism (and its leaders) was never able to resolve an inferiority complex engendered by the party's marginality in

Romania's political and intellectual life between the two wars.”²⁸ At the beginning the national turn was perceived positively. Martin explains that “the resuming of the debate about the Romanian nation after a long and brutal interruption was felt by everyone in Romania as a relief, as a weakening of the terrible communist revolutionary vigilance even as a liberalization.”²⁹

With this ideological transformation the Romanian communist system rediscovered and resurrected a form the national discourse used for obtaining political legitimacy by various political parties in the interwar period. It was not a new invention but rather a return to previous discursive values. The new national turn was an appealing ideological strategy that increased the popularity and legitimacy of Romanian communism, previously perceived by the population as a foreign political system imposed from above. As Katherine Verdery states, “the national discourse was so powerfully instituted in Romanian cultural and political life that it at length subverted the discourse of Marxism, on which party rule was based.”³⁰

The results of this ideological transformation were reflected also in science fiction. At the end of 1972 an announcement of a new writing competition was advertised in the magazine *CPSF*, addressing all science fiction writers, with a theme closely related to the new politico-cultural program advocated by Ceaușescu one year before:

“Celebrating the 25th anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic, our collection organizes the third science fiction story contest, open to all writers who are not members of the Writers Union. The general subject of the contest is ‘The Future of our Socialist Country’. The contour of tomorrow’s Romania will get thus the emblem of the dreams, wishes and ideas of our contemporary youth (...) for these reasons the

²⁸ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons*, 189.

²⁹ Mircea Martin, “Cultura română între comunism și naționalism,” 8.

³⁰ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 99.

dispatched works will represent an anticipatory survey of the great achievements of tomorrow.”³¹

This contest was an attempt to channel science fiction writers’ towards a national theme. Dan Farcaș, one of the winners of this contest, wrote the story *Preludiul de foc* (Fire Prelude) in which he depicted the Centre for Interplanetary Communication placed in the Făgăraș Mountains in Romania. The huge dimensions of the building and the focus on Romanian technological achievements were meant to point out the worldwide singularity of a centre placed in Romania. Moreover, the feature of the centre would anticipate Ceaușescu’s megalomaniac architectural projects in Bucharest: “the centre resemble a huge letter T, with sides over half a kilometer long, in which more than a thousand people are working.(...) pillars and stairs leading to the sky, huge windows and the lights of computers. Everywhere there are devices through which one could communicate with the computers”³²

In *P.G. luptă contra cronometru* (P.G. 7 Race against Time)³³ by I. M. Ștefan the plot is constructed around the production of a new chemical component that would produce more food for the Earth’s population. The action takes place in 2071, the research centre is placed in Romania on the Ciucaș Mountain and the main character, Radu Soare, is a Romanian engineer. The experiments are threatened by an unfortunate contamination due to an extraterrestrial visit. However, two Romanian researchers manage to solve the problems and the revolutionary alimentary ingredient is produced. In other cases, even if the plots did not have a planetary scale as in the examples mentioned above, they still reflected on a large scale the ongoing projects carried out in Romania. For instance, the action of Eugen Moraru's short story *Surpriza unui accident* (The Surprise of an Accident) is placed in a

³¹ “Concursul național de povestiri științifico-fantastice,” *CPSF* 392 (1972): 34.

³² Dan Farcaș, “Preludiul de foc,” *CPSF* 408 (1973).

³³ I. M. Ștefan, “P. G. Luptă contra cronometru,” *CPSF* 411-413 (1973). This story was not among the ones submitted to the science fiction contest from 1972 but was written according to the guidelines enounced in the contest.

great building site located in Bucharest. The short story reflects the huge architectural project initiated in the Romanian capital city at that time. The narrative conflict opposes those who are fighting for progress based on the new scientific and technological solutions and those that are conservative and prefer to use the means from the past. The resolution is a victory of the new, represented by a Romanian-made solution to problems that previously had been solved through Soviet technological methods.

The new thematic of the genre is followed in the pages of *CPSF* by a theoretical re-evaluation. The social-educative role of science fiction was restated, so that it would meet the new ideological norms. Furthermore, another important re-evaluation referred to the understanding of time in a science fiction story, an aspect which resembled the “theory of near anticipation” practiced in the 1950s. In this respect, after the 1971 July Theses, in an article published in *CPSF*, the literary critic Ilie Șerbănescu alleged that “the vocation of science fiction literature is to be a truthful mirror of the present society.”³⁴ Ironically enough, within the new ideological context, the future was no longer a priority for science fiction.

Besides these theoretical assessments expressing almost full compliance with the new ‘socialist humanist’ guidelines, the effectiveness of implementing these changes was not as successful compared with the achievements in the 1950s, when no dissenting opinion really existed among writers. In the magazine *CPSF* politically docile novels coexisted with valuable literature, especially translations, or with novels that were masked criticisms of the communist system, especially using the ironic register and the parody. It was the “sophisticated instruments of counter-reaction to the communist ideology and its legitimizing rhetoric,”³⁵ as Monica Spiridon names these means of expression through which

³⁴ Mircea Șerbănescu, “În căutarea propriei vocații,” *CPSF* 427 (1974): 31.

³⁵ Monica Spiridon, “On the Borders of Mighty Empires: Bucharest, City of Merging Paradigms,” in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe Junctions and Disjunctions in the 19th and*

writers managed to keep the identity of their writings and at the same time outsmart the censorship. Thus, some communist economical and social realities, such as the inefficient effects of the planned economy, were mocked in many science fiction stories.

In Constantin Cubleșan's story *Săgețile Diane* (Diana's Arrows)³⁶ a workman in a cereal factory from an unspecified future complains to the manager about the work and the attitude of an old man who is not supplying enough sun and rain to fill production quotas. It is possible to see a subtext of resistance to socialist practices, muted but still obvious to readers. Sometimes the writers were making fun of these issues. For instance, *Noi Probleme* (New Problems) signed by Ilie Iosif describes one of the departments of the “Agricultural Center Oltenia 3,” meant to supply with food the city of Craiova and where certain problems encounter one day in the enterprise; as a consequence, the dietician of the city complains: “Comrade Săvescu, you have sent us cucumbers that taste as bananas and bananas that taste as cucumbers, and we prepared salad using bananas and onions and at this moment four thousand persons are complaining about this.”³⁷ One can perceive in this case a send up of the effects of economic centralized economic planning as well as of social uniformity.

In many cases, however, the required political elements and commandments were present in the stories but these narrative elements coexisted with criticisms camouflaged in a metaphoric and allusive style. This “dual language,” such masked critique of the system and its myths, contributed to the increase of the genre’s popularity. As Nudelman argued regarding Soviet literature, a claim that is also valid for the Romanian case, this increasing popularity was supported by the socio-ideological role played by the genre - in the sense that science fiction offered an easily decipherable interpretation of reality and its possible

20th centuries Volume II, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004), 101.

³⁶ Constantin Cubleșan, “Săgețile Diane,” *CPSF* 420 (1973).

³⁷ Ilie Iosif, “Noi Probleme,” *CPSF* 415 (1973): 27.

extensions. In other words, as Nudelman points out, this type of literature supplied readers with a “method and a model for comprehending history.”³⁸ Although initially imagined as a mean of alternative education for the youth, 1970s science fiction turned out to represent and to develop a way of thinking and values that were different from those preached by the RCP.

Moreover, the period of relative autonomy and ideological relaxation from the 1960s had encouraged international contacts between science fiction writers. Therefore, in the late 1960s and early 1970s Romanian science fiction delegations participated in a series of international events, important for establishing contacts mainly with writers from other socialist countries, but also with those from the West. Thus, in August 1970, the first “World Con” meeting of science fiction writers held outside the United States or Great Britain took place in Heidelberg and a Romanian delegation was present.³⁹ But this was not the only event with participants from Romania. Between the 26th and 28th of October 1972, the Committee of Hungarian Science Fiction Writers organized in Budapest the first science fiction conference with participants from all socialist countries. Another important international event in the 1970s where Romanian science fiction was represented was the first European Congress of Science Fiction Literature held in Trieste, attended by over 300 delegates from over 20 countries.⁴⁰ In September 1973, an international meeting of science fiction writers took place in Poznan with participants from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, G.D.R, Hungary and the Soviet Union. The Romanian team attending this meeting was made up of Voicu Bugariu, Vladimir Colin, and Ion Hobana.⁴¹

³⁸ Rafail Nudelman, “Soviet Science Fiction and the Ideology of Soviet Society,” *Science Fiction Studies* 16 (1989): 49.

³⁹ Mircea Oprea, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, May 6, 2004.

⁴⁰ Franz Rottensteiner, “Anticipația europeană este prezentată americanilor,” *CPSF* 392 (1972): 15.

⁴¹ “Întâlnire internațională a scriitorilor SF,” *CPSF* 406 (1973): 23-24.

The mutations of the 1970s

These developments related to Romanian science fictions can not be understood without referring to the internal and international debates and transformations of the 1970s that had a crucial impact on the social imaginary. Referring to this decade, Ralph Dahrendorf sees a deep societal crisis that seriously affected the previous economic, moral and intellectual bases of industrial society.⁴² Within this framework, in the case of Romania, science fiction represented an interesting medium that reflected all these changes because this literary genre, and from the 1970s the science fiction fandom as well, were places where questions about tomorrow, about the fate of Romania and of humankind were addressed and considered of utmost importance.

At the same time, the general ideological features of the Romanian society were changed. A group of young people, passionate about science fiction and having scientific and technological training, began to have access through various sources to the popular culture and literature of the West, especially American science fiction. At the same time, the Romanian communist regime renounced the technological and scientific imaginary that was advocated in the 1950s as an underpinning of the communist ideology and as an argument for the utopian communist life to come, while beginning to face an economic crisis with serious shortages that would become more evident in the 1980s. Within this context, the utopian technological scenarios advocating a communist multi-planetary future were replaced with an official ideological vision directed towards the past that was considered by the RCP leaders a better discursive strategy to maintain and foster the legitimacy of the regime.

⁴² Ralph Dahrendorf, *The Modern Social Conflict: an Essay on the Politics of Liberty* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988).

These ideological transformations in Romania happened in a period when internationally the debates about the future, about the convergence of the communist and the capitalist systems were at their peak. Consequently, within the emerging Romanian science fiction community the resulting debates are an intricate blend of ideas ranging from technological utopian scenarios to visions directed towards the past that could be better seen and understood through analyzing science fiction and more important the community organized around it. Yet, before fandom is explored, an analysis of the political ideological mutations of the 1970s that were crucial for the fate of the genre should be made.

From future to the past

After the July Theses the Romanian communist regime started to move its ideological focus towards the past, placing a strong emphasis on history for constructing the Romanian socialist nation. In this respect, the most important step was to provide official Party guidelines for writing a national history. The new political and ideological direction was enhanced at the 11th Congress of the RCP in 1974 when a new Party program was approved.⁴³ The official report set the guidelines for writing the proper Romanian national history and became the programmatic text of Romanian national communism. The report also offered a blueprint for a Romanian bright rather ‘mystical’ communist future that compared with the previous RCP congresses reports had almost no technological references. The Romanians concise history presented in the report started with the Dacians, the Romanians ancestors, whose historical evolution was stopped by the Roman conquest. After the formation of the Romanian ‘nation,’ from the Middle Aged until the present times, the Romanian people fought various enemies to keep their identity. In his analysis of the

⁴³ *Programul Partidului Comunist Român de făurire a societății multilateral dezvoltate și înaintarea României spre communism* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1975).

congress report Dragoș Petrescu identifies four themes that characterized the national historical discourse devised in 1974: “the ancient roots of the Romanian people, the continuity of the Romanians on the actual territory from the ancient times until present, the unity of the Romanian people throughout its entire history and Romanians’ continuous struggle for independence.”⁴⁴

From this moment on the communist utopian future was no longer a major preoccupation as a discourse meant to legitimize the present but rather the glorious past was used for this purpose. Lacking any other scenario for the future except a promised communist society, turning to the national past for motivation and inspiration for future actions was the new propagandistic ideological discourse. The Soviet models that were the examples to be followed in the previous communist decades were replaced as Monica Spiridon puts it “with an officially displayed complex of cultural superiority, self-titled “protochronism.” This involved the rejection of outside models and forerunners in favor of a boastful emphasis on local anticipations of European cultural phenomena, anticipations allegedly ignored only because of Romania’s marginal status.”⁴⁵ The ‘protochronist’ ideological orientation exploring the past and the present rather than envisaging the future, an aspect that was analyzed and exemplified with case studied by Katherine Verdery,⁴⁶ was the solution Ceaușescu sought to consolidate his regime and provide legitimacy for his rule. In this respect, as Georgescu pointed out, “the secretary general was no longer placed in the

⁴⁴ Dragoș Petrescu, “Can Democracy Work in Southeastern Europe? Ethnic Nationalism vs, Democratic Consolidation in Post-Communist Romania,” in *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Historical Case Studies*, ed. Balázs Trencsényi and others (Budapest: Regio Books, 2001), 283.

⁴⁵ Monica Spiridon, “Models of literary and cultural identity on the margins of (post)modernity: The case of pre-1989 Romania,” in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe Junctions and Disjunctions in the 19th and 20th centuries Volume I*, ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004), 68.

⁴⁶ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

ranks of the heroes of the working class but began to appear at the end of a long line of princes kings and voivodes,”⁴⁷ from the national history.

These ideas permeated almost everything, even science fiction, and were represented by the increased emphasis on national values. More generally this reorientation led to some hilarious situations, out of which some would have been plausible more as plots of science fiction or adventure novels. For instance, in a 1950s science fiction story it was stated that the first human in the world was Syantropus from Peking.⁴⁸ However, in the 1970s, based on professor Mihnea Gheorghiu’s research, the beginning of the world’s anthropogenesis process, i.e. *Australanthropos olteniensis*, was situated in Bugiulești, a village⁴⁹ in Romania near Ceaușescu's birthplace, which thus became the “symbolic” center of the planet.

Future scenarios about the features of a Romanian communist country were no longer used to stimulate and inspire present actions. Rather than the portrait of the ‘new man’ of the future, exemplary models from the past, ‘archetypal heroes’ were used as inspiration. This ideological change, i.e., national communism, did not occur in other countries of the communist bloc. In the 1970s Soviet science fiction was no longer the main model for Romanian writers and Romanian science fiction became detached from the general evolution of the genre in the rest of the communist bloc. A brief overview of science fiction in other communist bloc countries demonstrates this divergence.

In the Soviet Union, the 1970s is considered the period when “the Thaw” science fiction generation matured. It was a whole group of valuable science fiction writers such as the Strugatsky brothers, Sever Gansovsky, Vladimir Savchenko, Olga Larionova, Gennadi Gor, Ilya Varshavsky, Vadim Shefner, Ariadna Gromova, and Kir Bulychiev. Their books

⁴⁷ Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians A History*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 256.

⁴⁸ Adrian Rogoz, G. Ghenea, “Uraniu,” *CPSF* 24 (1956): 17.

⁴⁹ Vlad Georgescu, *Politică și Istorie: Cazul Comuniștilor Români: 1944-1977*, (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991), 69.

were not translated into Romanian as had been the case with most of the Soviet science fiction writers in the previous two decades. However, their literature was appreciated in the West so that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a few publishing houses started extensive projects of publishing the most important Soviet science fiction novels.⁵⁰

The 1970s represents the period when science fiction became one of the most popular genres in Bulgaria. Local science fiction writers such as Pavel Vezinov and Ljuben Dilov contributed to this as well as the many translations from the Western literature.⁵¹ The same phenomenon could be noticed in Hungary. According to John Fekete, the most important writers for this period were Mihály Babits, Frigyes Karinthy, Tibor Déri, Péter Lengyel, Péter Zsoldos, and Dezső Tandori. However, despite the genre's popularity among the readership, especially the youth, it was generally considered a literature with meager aesthetical value.⁵²

In the 1970s science fiction was known in Poland as 'sociological fantasy' (*fantastyka sociologiczna*). The genre was dominated by writers such as Janusz A. Zajdel (*Limes Inferior, Paradyzja*), Edmund Wnuk-Lipiński (*Apostezjon* trilogy), Adam Wiśniewski-Snerg and Marek Oramus.⁵³ During that period, Stanislaw Lem was the most important science fiction writer. His books were translated into 34 languages as Lem himself mentioned⁵⁴ and also he was very popular in his country. The main theme of Polish science fiction during this period was dystopian scenarios, societies dominated by totalitarian governments and their development. Unlike the Romanian writers, Polish science fiction writers had access to

⁵⁰ Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. "Science Fiction and the Thaw," *Science Fiction Studies* 31 (2004): available at <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/abstracts/icr94intro.htm> (accessed May 15, 2009).

⁵¹ John Robert Colombo, "Science Fiction in Bulgaria," *Science Fiction Studies* 8 (1981): 187-190.

⁵² John Fekete, "Science Fiction in Hungary," *Science Fiction Studies* 16 (1989): 178-192.

⁵³ Justyna Rerak, "An Overview of Polish Science Fiction & Fantasy," available at http://elt.britcoun.org.pl/elt/m_overp.htm (accessed May 15, 2009).

⁵⁴ Raymond Federman, "An Interview with Stanislaw Lem," *Science Fiction Studies* 10 (1983) available at <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/interviews/federman29.htm> (accessed May 13 2009).

Western science fiction literature. The popularity of the genre in Poland came from the narrative solutions used by writers only a pretext for analyzing the Polish society with many critical allusions directed towards the present.⁵⁵

In Czechoslovakia as Eva Hauser mentions the political context and the ideological requirements were not encouraging to start a career as a mainstream writer. As she remembers, “the official publishing houses wanted something which was difficult to define or fulfill even if you had the stomach for it: procommunist, but not very much, as that would be ridiculous; positive and optimistic, but only in a limited way, as too much optimism would be suspicious; pretending realism, but in fact describing an alternate world with its own laws, considerably removed from or own. This world was an utterly grey one, and the realistic novels dealing with contemporary society which were published in the 1970s were completely unreadable.”⁵⁶ Within this context, science fiction was for many writers an option to express freely without paying much attention to official political commandments. Eva Hauser’s choice is a case in point: “I turned to science fiction. This genre allowed us not only to speak more openly about our society, but also to extrapolate, to model, to exaggerate, to construct alternative societies with characteristics which interested us.”⁵⁷

Romanian science fiction could not develop as in the rest of the communist countries. According to the new ideological commandments literary creations focused on the future were not considered useful and appropriate for the young readership. In a country where the past became the most important ideological and propagandistic ingredient, a literary genre directed towards the future was considered harmful for the education of the youth.

⁵⁵ Antoni Smuszkiewicz, “Space and Time in Contemporary Polish Science Fiction,” *Science Fiction Studies* 6 (1979): 85-91.

⁵⁶ Eva Hauser, “Science Fiction in the Czech Republic and the Former Czechoslovakia: The Pleasure and the Disappointment of the New Cosmopolitanism,” *Science Fiction Studies* 21 (1994): 133.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

Convergence of Systems and science fiction

An important development in international relations in the 1970s, the convergence of systems theory that was influential both in communist and capitalist countries did affect Romanian science fiction. As I learned from the interviews conducted with Romanian science fiction writers, editors, animators and fans, the debate related to the convergence of systems was a popular topic at that time, within the emerging Romanian science fiction community. The debate started in the 1960s but reached its highest point in the 1970s. The basic idea was that the world's opposed social and economic systems, capitalism and socialism, would somehow converge toward a middle ground. The communist economies would permit some private initiatives in economy, whereas the advanced capitalist economies would develop into ever better welfare states with more planning, intervention, and control from the governments.

Alfred Mayer summarizes the convergence debate in the West by classifying the main theoretical threads: “first, the communist and democratic states are both moving toward a middle ground of democratic socialism and second, both systems are changing in the direction of a bureaucratic policy.”⁵⁸ In the Soviet Union the convergence of systems idea was put forward by nuclear physicist Andrei Sakharov in his 1968 essay, “Reflections on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom” that circulated first as a *samizdat*.

The debate about convergence was closely linked with the hopes for political détente between the two antagonistic political systems, communism and capitalism. With the envisaged diminishing differences between political and economical life in Western

⁵⁸ Alfred Meyer, “Theories of Convergence,” in *Change in Communist Systems*, ed. Chalmers Johnson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), 337.

democracies and communist Europe, détente was seen as possible.⁵⁹ It was a corollary of the convergence theory. A lessening of the international tensions was perceived as very likely and consequently the danger of mutual nuclear annihilation would be removed.⁶⁰ The imminence of a nuclear catastrophe had been a main theme of the early Cold War science fiction literature in the West.⁶¹

The new theories brought new hopes. “World as whole,”⁶² “interdependence” even “globalism” were new concepts developed in the 1970s. In Romania, discussions and researches on the convergence of systems were held at the Ștefan Gheorghiu Party Academy and were mostly polemics with the literature published in the West. In the studies carried out at the Romanian Communist Party Academy it was clearly put forward that socialism was not a historical error as the Western scholarship used to assert. Moreover, often the question was raised about the nature of such a convergence process, the authors trying to clarify how much and what elements capitalist states should borrow from socialist ones.⁶³

The convergence debate fostered a debate about the future not only within the emerging Romanian science fiction community, but as a serious subject on the agenda of economic planning committees. In Romania the debate was coined as *viitorologie* (the concept derives from the Romanian word *viitor* which means future). At the beginning the debate resembled the discipline of management as it was practiced in the West. However, this direction was discouraged by Party officials since, as in the Stalinist period, only the

⁵⁹ Daniel N. Nelson, “Political Convergence, An Empirical Assessment,” *World Politics* 30 (1978): 411-432.

⁶⁰ Jan S. Prybyla, “The Convergence of Western and Communist Economic Systems; A Critical Estimate,” *Russian Review* 23 (1964): 3.

⁶¹ David Seed. *American science fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

⁶² Philippe de Seybes, “Prospects for a Future Whole World,” *International Organization* 26 (1972): 1-17.

⁶³ Academia “Ștefan Gheorghiu” oficiul de documentare și informare științifică, *Teorii cu privire la “convergența” sistemelor social-economice*. Caiet documentar 2/1975.

leader of the Communist Party, Nicolae Ceaușescu, could predict the direction of the future. Therefore the debate and research agenda concentrated on rather minor aspects such as anticipating future trends and developments in various sectors of the economy and society.

One major fascination for researchers dealing with the future was to anticipate the features of the year 2000, which also became a topic for science fiction writers. In the case of *viitorologic* literature, however, the features of the world in the year 2000 were based on scientific (sociological, economic and political) arguments. The well-known Romanian sociologist Pavel Apostol published in 1972 the book, *The Man of the Year 2000*,⁶⁴ which was an enlarged version of his previous booklet published in 1971: *Is it too early or is too late to project the man of the year 2000?*

The book concentrates on education. The author starts with the paradox of education which consists in the fact that education has a rate of development and change lower than the same rate of general social dynamics. This gap between transformation rates results in the paradoxical situation in which retarded educational systems serve a rapidly changing societal environment. Apostol's argument is that the paradox of education must be overcome at the level of qualitative transformation of the educational systems and this development has to be accomplished by the year 2000.

Also, Mircea Malița, the Romanian minister of education for the period 1970-1972, tackled the problem of the third millennium.⁶⁵ His book attempts to depict how people would live in the year 2000. His demonstration resembles science fiction more than writing based on scientific arguments. He describes the developments of industrial automatization, the future houses and the future habitat. Transportation has particular importance. Within the cities peoples would use moving sidewalks and electrical cars would be available; for

⁶⁴ Pavel Apostol, *Omul anului 2000* (Bucharest: Junimea, 1972).

⁶⁵ Mircea Malița, *Cronica anului 2000* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1975).

medium distances individual flying cars with parking spaces on the roof of the houses would be reality. Within this context the streets and highways are simply a waste of space as the author put it. Malița's book is not science fiction either. The author was an important Party official and his ideas were seen as possible future achievements. Such writings about convergence theories and especially a vision about the future related to the year 2000 were very popular according to my interviews among the science fiction readers and influential for the science fiction writers.

Science and technology

The debate about future and the convergence of systems coincided with the 'scientific and technological revolution' advocated by the RCP as a direction to be undertaken for the development of the country. Moreover, in 1974 at the 11th congress of the RCP it was clearly put forward that the next five-year plan should stress the development and affirmation of the scientific and technological revolution in all sectors of Romanian economy with emphasis on national achievements and resources. The plan was envisaged to be carried out mainly through the "national scientific research potential."⁶⁶

Ceaușescu developed further the idea concentrating on Romanian national values. On a different occasion, he put forward that science should play "an increasing role in the revolutionary transformation of society"⁶⁷ and within this framework, Romanian science should have a dominant role. Prior to this moment, as has been shown in the previous chapters when analyzing the image of science in the science fiction, there was a clear

⁶⁶ *Congresul al XI-lea al Partidului Comunist Român: 25-28 noiembrie 1974* (Bucharest: Editura politică, 1975), 52.

⁶⁷ Nicolae Ceaușescu, *Revoluția tehnico-științifică și progresul tehnic* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1980), 21.

delimitation between the “good science” developed in the Soviet Union and the bad science practiced in the capitalist states. Whereas “good science” was serving the development of man and society on its way to communist utopias, “bad science” was an instrument of the capitalist exploiters and directed towards negative ends.

In the 1970s a new category was added to this bipolar classification, namely Romanian science. The relevance of Romanian science for the present and for the future projects was legitimized by stories from its past achievements. As Nicolae Ceaușescu put it: “the creative genius of the Romanian people was manifested since the formation and development of the Romanian medieval states. Extremely valuable scientific and cultural achievements were realized by N. Olahus, Miron Costin, Nicolae Miclesu, Dimitrie Cantemir, and other Romanian medieval scholars who brought original contributions of great value for the progression of Romanian as well as universal science and culture.”⁶⁸ This type of “protocronist” discourse purported to demonstrate the superiority or at least chronological precedence of Romanian scientists and writers in most domains – thus, Romanians conceived (if not invented) things as varied as electricity, the theory of relativity, internal combustion engines, space travel, fountain pens and so on.

Moreover, referring to the technological and scientific revolution, Ceaușescu mentioned also Henri Coandă, the Romanian builder of world's first jet powered aircraft, the Romanian born Nobel laureate in biology Emil Palade and other scientists and intellectuals that contributed to the development of many scientific fields. In a clear national communist and protocronist rhetoric he also stated that “from the Romanian people have appeared persons of great value who have demonstrated to the world that are able to offer solutions

⁶⁸ Ibid., 24

for the most complex scientific and technological problems existent in their period.”⁶⁹ Interestingly enough, the nature of the new discourse about Romanian science, instead of being a projection of the Romanian scientific development in the future, was rather loaded with information and references to past Romanian contributions and achievements. According to the new discourse, although Romanians had been the first in many domains they were not recognized internationally. This aspect would reflect also the inferiority complex of Romanian nationalism, evident in the distorted image it produced of an inquisitive, intelligent nation, unfairly robbed of its achievements by the envious foreigners.

Suppression of the magazine CPSF

The ideological changes of the Romanian communist regime beginning in the 1970s, namely the stronger emphasis put on Romanian national values and on the national historical past, a discourse that was meant to replace the future internationalist communist utopia, eventually came to affect science fiction. The ostensible reason was the enactment in 1974 of the first unitary legislative measure to regulate the mass media in communist Romania. The law basically reinforced the political measures taken by the July Theses and the eleventh RCP Congress, stressing that the media were supposed to carry out “an important educational role in order to develop the socialist conscience of the citizens and to foster the respect for the glorious tradition of the country.”⁷⁰ Moreover, as it was stated in the 7th and 8th article of the law:

“In the Socialist Republic of Romania the press has an active role in presenting to the people the internal and external policy of the RCP. Mass media act for putting into practice the program of creating the multilaterally developed society in Romania.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 26

⁷⁰ “Legea presei din Republica Socialistă România,” *Buletinul Oficial* 48 (1 April 1974) available at http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.http_act?ida=15663 (accessed February 24 2004).

(...) The press contributes to the affirmation of the scientific, materialist dialectical and historical conception of the Party about life and society; also it acts relentlessly against the obscurantist, reactionary and anti-humanist conceptions.”⁷¹

This piece of legislation led to a dramatic transformation of Romanian mass media. Many magazines, including *CPSF*, were suppressed. The “official reason” for the decision in the case of *CPSF*, despite the popularity of the magazine among the readers and its commercial success, was a national campaign of saving paper⁷² or at least this was the main reason the editorial staff was given.

Another reason for the suppression of the only science fiction publication in Romania was revealed in an interview with Tudor Negoită,⁷³ a Romanian science fiction writer known for his Cold War spy type science fiction writings and conspiracy-themed short stories. After a degree in Romanian literature and a professorship assigned him to teach Romanian language and literature in the Hungarian autonomous region, Negoită joined the *Securitate* (Romanian secret police) where he worked for five years in the counterspy department and then in mass media. Tudor Negoită was attracted by science fiction as a teenager after reading the magazine *CPSF*. According to him, it was the most fashionable literature at that time. He won a prize in a short story competition organized by the magazine and later became a writer, encouraged by the editor Adrian Rogoz. He explained the cessation of *CPSF* in 1974 in connection with Elena Ceaușescu, Nicolae Ceaușescu’s wife. According to Negoită, Elena Ceaușescu complained that in many novels published in *CPSF* the plots involved spies, criminals, thieves etc. Since in communist Romania, as Elena Ceaușescu would state, such realities were scarce and not desirable, it was useless and potentially harmful for the young audience to read such writings.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ioan Albescu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, July 26, 2003. Ioan Albescu was the chief editor of the *Almanah Anticipația*. According to him, this reason was just a pretext. Science fiction was no longer considered by the regime a useful literary genre for the education of the youth.

⁷³ Tudor Negoită, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, August 27, 2002.

The reason for the ban on *CPSF* has even more hypotheses. Alexandru Mironov, a well-known science fiction editor, writer and animator, mentioned in an interview⁷⁴ that the decision was taken by Dumitru Popescu, the head of propaganda and the mastermind of Ceaușescu cult. He argued that Popescu might have considered the escapist dimension offered by the genre to its readers as well as the masked criticisms and ironies toward the communist regime as damaging the official ideology. Thus, in the moment when it was extremely popular, the only science fiction publication in Romania was suppressed. The decision turned out to be rather cynical. The genre was not able any longer to serve the purposes for which it was adopted in Romania, namely to offer an appropriate complementary education and political socialization to its readership.

The press law of 1974 and the suppression of the magazine *CPSF* coincided with important international events. After more than 40 years of fascist dictatorship in Portugal the Salazar regime was removed following the carnation revolution that changed the Portuguese regime from an authoritarian dictatorship to a democracy. In the United States, Nixon, the first United States president to visit Romania in 1969, resigned following the Watergate scandal. In Greece following a referendum the people opted for the abolition of monarchy. Within this context, the internal political changes from Romania would get some ironic surrealist undertones from even Salvador Dali.

In 1974 when Ceaușescu was ‘elected’ president, received a scepter from Ștefan Voitec, a prominent Romanian communist, as a sign of this position. On this occasion the Romanian leader received many congratulation letters from personalities such as the Queen of England, Elisabeth II, and the emperor of Japan, Hirohito. All these messages were published in *Scînteia* (The Spark), the daily newspaper of the RCP. The editors did not

⁷⁴ Alexandru Mironov, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, September 7, 2004.

realize that one such message from Salvador Dali, the major exponent of surrealism, was in fact ironic.

He wrote Ceaușescu: “I deeply appreciate your historical act to institute a presidential scepter. Yours, Salvador Dali.” The art critic Radu Varia remembers that “the message fell like a bomb in Bucharest. The editors from *Scînteia* (The Spark) and the people from the *Comitetul Central de Partid* (Party Central Committee) were scared. They did not know whether the letter was a mocking or was a well-intentioned message. Finally the message was published together with the rest of the congratulations received. Lucian Merișca, a founding member of the science fiction literary club from Iași remembers the amusement of reading such a letter in the official communist journal.⁷⁵ Moreover, in the same year Salvador Dali’s irony towards the political situation in Romania could be inferred from another letter send to Ceaușescu in which he asks the Romanian president to organize a big corrida in Constanța near the Black Sea. As the painter put it, the event would have attracted thousands of foreign tourists in Romania for the benefit of the Romanian economy.⁷⁶

CPSF aftermath – beginning of Romanian Fandom

When the magazine *CPSF* was suppressed in 1974, science fiction was a very popular literary genre among the Romanian young readership. Within this context, passionate science fiction readers became eager to meet with others having the same taste for this genre, share books and change ideas. Ultimately they formed a fan community.

⁷⁵ Lucian Merișca, personal interview with the author, Iași, October 23, 2004.

⁷⁶ Christian Levant, “Salvador Dali a dat peste cap propaganda lui Ceaușescu” *Adevărul*, 26 January 2008, available at <http://www.adevarul.ro/articole/salvador-dali-a-dat-pestecap-propaganda-lui-ceausescu.html> (accessed June 6, 2008).

The appearance of the Romanian science fiction fandom resembles to a certain extent the emergence of this social movement in the West. In the United States, for instance, the existence of a specialized science fiction magazine has been the motor for the coming into existence of the science fiction fandom. At the beginning of the 20th century, the development of the science fiction fandom in the United States is related to Hugo Gernsback and his magazine *Amazing Stories*. Science fiction fans wrote comments about the stories to the letter column of the magazine; they also sent their addresses, and Gernsback published them. Soon, the fans began to write letters directly to each other, and to meet in person. In 1934, Gernsback established a correspondence club for fans called the *Science Fiction League*, the first organization that fostered communication among science fiction fans.⁷⁷

Indirectly, Romanian science fiction fandom followed this model. Science fiction fans wrote letters to their favorite magazine, *CPSF*, asking for advice about their literary writings, hoping that they finally would be published. They also asked the editors for missing issues of the *CPSF* and for advice related to the organization of science fiction literary clubs. In the beginning the gathering of science fiction fans and the formation of the first Romanian science fiction literary clubs was encouraged by *CPSF*, by publishing informative articles in which the social organization of fans was presented. In the 1970s, these activities demonstrate the popularity of the genre and the existence of a science fiction community with many young people willing to share their common interest and socialize. Romanian science fiction literary clubs were set up in Bucharest, Timișoara and Craiova, important Romanian cities and university centers. Students, especially coming from science departments, were the majority of the members of such clubs.

⁷⁷ See Sam Moskowitz, *The Immortal Storm: A History of Science Fiction Fandom*, (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1974).

The first science fiction literary club named *Solaris* was set up on July 25th, 1969, at *Casa de Cultură a Studenților "Grigore Preoteasa"* ("Grigore Preoteasa" Students' House of Culture) in Bucharest. The initiative came from the journalist Daniel Cocoru and science fiction writer Lucian Hanu. There were over fifty members that met every Sunday, debated their own science fiction writings or translations and changed ideas about future. As Cristian Lăzărescu remembers his first participation in this science fiction literary club: "I was in the army and sent a short science fiction novel to the radio show hosted by Adrian Rogoz the editor of *CPSF*. I was surprised to hear that he appreciated it. He mentioned that I should join the *Solaris* literary club from Bucharest, which I did when I returned from the army. It was an excellent place. Every Sunday we could read and hear science fiction stories and evade the present."⁷⁸ Among the members of this literary club that would become important figures of the science fiction fandom in the 1980s were Mihai Ionescu, Mihai Grămescu, Radu Pinte, Cristian Dumitrescu, Marian Gogoasă, Carol Czedly, Nina Dăianu, Mihai Corneliu Donici, Monica Mureșan, Daniel Manole, Cătălin Ionescu, Marius Ungureanu, Cornel Mărginean, Dănuț Ungureanu and Cristian Tudor Popescu.

Timișoara was the second important place to have a science fiction literary club. On November 9th, 1969, at the Students' House of Culture was constituted the *H.G. Wells* science fiction literary club. The person in charge with its activity was Valeriu Panasiu, the cultural officer within the Students' Cultural House. Among its most important members were Lia Voinea, Ion Cărțianu, Viorel Coifan, Radu Rusu, Doru Treta, Lucian Ionică and Laurențiu Cernet.⁷⁹ At the first meeting Adrian Rogoz, the chief editor of *CPSF*, was invited. He was impressed by the five stories read and by the lively discussions during the meeting.

⁷⁸ Cristian Lăzărescu, interview with the author, Bucharest, July 23, 2004.

⁷⁹ Dorin Davideanu, "Momente-reper din evoluția Cenaclului H.G. Wells și a fanzinului Paradox," *Paradox* (19): 1997 available at <http://www.hgwells.ro/istorie/momente.htm> (accessed May 15, 2009).

Afterwards, he wrote an article in *CPSF* about this literary club, also enumerating five main rules for the existence of a science fiction literary club. They were the following:

- “1) The best target group for a science fiction literary club is the youth, especially students. Therefore, I consider that in those cities where there exist students such clubs could be successfully organized.
- 2) The director of the Students' House of Culture has an important role in the organization and functioning of such a club – this person could either stimulate or contrarily censor the initiatives and enthusiasm of the youth. In the case of Timișoara, comrade Valeriu Panasiu, the director of the Students' Cultural House proved to be a bright man, a real stimulus for this initiative.
- 3) The functioning of the *H.G. Wells* science fiction literary club demonstrates that the existence of an older mentor is necessary. In this case we have Ovidiu Șurianu who is a medical doctor, therefore a scientist, and a writer. He managed to stimulate and channel the creativity of his younger colleagues. Ovidiu Șurianu is not only the oldest science fiction writer from Timișoara that was published in *CPSF* but also is the first Romanian science fiction writer translated in South America.
- 4) The president or the secretary of the science fiction literary club should have some particular qualities: should have literary talent and also be a graduate from a technical university; should be calm but intransigent and be passionate in what he does. I barely know Doru Treta, the leader of this literary club, but I think he fulfills these requirements.
- 5) An efficient science fiction literary club should have besides the large mass of participants, five-six members extremely active, talented, kind-hearted and above all good friends. They should be reliable, punctual, the real core of the literary club. Such a core group exists in Timișoara.”⁸⁰

The 396th issue of *CPSF* from 1972 was dedicated to the *H.G. Wells* literary club from Timișoara. Science fiction literary club authors such as Micea Șerbănescu, Laurențiu Cerneț, Doru Treta, Traian Ciuguianu, Marcel Luca, Lucian Ionică, Cornel Stanciu were published.

The third important science fiction literary club was set up in Craiova, hosted by *Casa de Cultură* (House of Culture). Aurel Cărășel, Alexandru Mironov, Ion Ilie Iosif, Titus Filipaș, Ștefan Nicolici, Radu Honga, Marius Stătescu, Coco Popescu, Marius Ghergu and

⁸⁰ Adrian Rogoz, “Insomnii Timișorene,” *CPSF* 326 (1969): 2-3.

Viorel Pîrligras were the most important members.⁸¹ In general, these science fiction literary clubs were hosted by the Students Houses of Culture or by the Houses of Culture. During that period these institutions were responsible for the organization of various activities ranging from dance to cinema clubs where young people could participate and spend their spare time.

In the 1970 two more science fiction literary clubs were formed in Bucharest. The initiative to organize such clubs always came from the fans. In a period when the ideological focus of the RCP moved towards the past, they tried to eliminate all the suspicion of the authorities using arguments and justifications consonant with the ideological focus. Therefore, in 1970 according to an article published in *CPSF*, when the Technical Club in Bucharest decided to set up a science fiction literary club, in order to eliminate any possible doubt related to its purpose, the political commitment of its members was very clearly mentioned in the founding statement. Ironically enough, a science fiction club formation was motivated by the celebration of a past event: “Glorifying the 10th Congress of the RCP and celebrating 25 years from the liberation of our country from the fascist yore, the inauguration of the very first Science Fiction Club in the country took place on July 25th at Technical Club.”⁸²

Another important literary club set up in Bucharest in 1970 was the so-called *Cenacul Marțienilor*. The name “Marțieni” was not inspired by the planet Mars and its imaginary inhabitants as the name might suggest but from the week day *Marți* which means Tuesday when the literary club had its meeting. This was an elite science fiction literary club whose members were senior science fiction writers, members of the Writers’ Union, and

⁸¹ Alexandru Mironov, “Henry Coandă și Omicron,” *Cronica Română*, February 22, 2007 available at <http://www.cronicaromana.ro/index.php?art=66387> (accessed June 17, 2009).

⁸² *CPSF*, 355 (1970): 32.

well-known contributors to the magazine *CPSF* such as Sergiu Fărcășan, Adrian Rogoz, Vladimir Colin, Ion Hobana, Victor Bârlădeanu, Viorica Huber-Rogoz, Horia Aramă, Romulus Bărbulescu and George Anania. After the suppression of *CPSF*, this literary club continued its activity. From the middle of the 1970s its members were part of the juries that would evaluate the science fiction writings sent to the annual national science fiction contest.⁸³

The identity of a science fiction club was given first and foremost by its publication, the fanzine. As a term, fanzine refers to a nonprofessional publication produced by the fans of a particular cultural phenomenon. The term as such was coined in the 1940s by Russ Chauvenet and popularized within science fiction fandom.⁸⁴ The first Romanian fanzine was *Solaris* edited by the literary club from Bucharest in 1972, and distributed in 99 copies. The fanzine was presented at the first EUROCON in Trieste, Italy and appreciated.⁸⁵

In the same year, the *H.G. Wells* science fiction literary club from Timișoara published the fanzine *Paradox* with the support of the Students' House of Culture. It was the first printed fanzine in Romania. After the suppression of the magazine *CPSF* these publications with a reduced circulation were the only possibility available for the science fiction club writers to publish. In Craiova, *Henri Coandă* science fiction literary club published the fanzine *Omicron*. *Omicron* had only three issues, 1976, 1977 and 1979.⁸⁶ Alexandru Mironov remembers the difficulties to get the official approvals and resources to publish this fanzine. However, in 1980 *Omicron* received Eurocon's "Premio Europa" as the best European science fiction fanzine, but despite its international success the Romanian

⁸³ Alexandru Mironov, "Cenaclul Martienilor," *Cronica Română*, April 21, 2008 available at <http://www.cronicaromana.ro/cenaclul-martienilor-16.html> (accessed June 21 2009).

⁸⁴ *British Fanzine Bibliography* available at <http://www.fiawol.demon.co.uk/biblio/> (accessed June 23 2009).

⁸⁵ George Ceașu, "Supernovități," *Evenimentul Regional al Moldovei*, February 11, 2001 available at <http://www.evenimentul.ro/articol/supernovitati.html> (accessed June 17 2009).

⁸⁶ Mircea Opriță, *Anticipația Românească*, (Bucharest: Viitorul Românesc, 2003), 589.

communist regime was not willing to finance the publication of a science fiction literary club.⁸⁷

In the 1970s science fiction literary clubs took also the initiative to organize annual national science fiction conventions. The first one was hosted by the *Solaris* science fiction literary club in February 1972. The ROMCONs became a tradition from this year. In 1973 the convention was organized in Timișoara and the next year in Craiova. Starting from 1975, the first year after the suppression of *CPSF*, when the ROMCON was held in Bucharest, a literary science fiction contest was organized every year, where the best stories written by science fiction literary clubs writers would get prizes. After Bucharest in 1975, the following ROMCONs are held in Craiova 1976, Brașov 1977, Tîrgoviște 1978, Oradea 1979 and Timișoara 1980.

In the second part of the 1970s this genre and especially the emerging fandom was regarded with suspicion by the authorities who were concerned with the dissenting potential of the science fiction community. Imagined as a literary genre that would offer political socialization and alternative education for youth, in the 1970s science fiction turned out to encourage and to develop a way of thinking that was different from the one preached by the Party. The fans' organizations played an important role in this context. As Bainbridge pointed out, the ideological impact of science fiction is to be found not merely in the specific opinions it inculcates but also in the resistance to conventional opinions it teaches. According to him "science fiction is a culture of freethinkers rather than of believers."⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Alexandru Mironov, "Henry Coandă și Omicron," *Cronica Română*, February 22, 2007 available at <http://www.cronicaromana.ro/index.php?art=66387> (accessed June 17 2009).

⁸⁸ William S. Bainbridge. *Dimension of Science Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 170.

In the late 1970s, by the forming of the fandom community, Romanian science fiction was redefined. It became a means of alternative socialization to the ways offered to the youth by the Romanian communist regime.

Conclusion

In the 1970s the national communist ideological direction promoted by the new leader of the Romanian Communist Party, Nicolae Ceaușescu was a negative context for the science fiction literature. The national past became the main source for inspiration and for legitimizing the Romanian present political and social projects. Future technological utopia was replaced with an ideological discourse placed in the past. The scientific and technological achievements leading to the promised communist utopia were not regarded as having the same ideological significance as in the previous two decades. Within this framework, science fiction was not considered useful for the youth and *CPSF*, the only regular science fiction publication at that time, was suppressed, following a press law enacted in 1974.

However, even before the *CPSF* magazine has been suppressed, Romanian science fiction readership had begun to organize in science fiction fan clubs and to meet in order to share their passion for the genre, write and discuss science fiction topics. A science fiction community was thus formed. By the end of the 1970s there were already a couple of science fiction literary clubs in the country that started to organize annual conventions where the best science fiction writings were presented and there were awarded prizes for the best of them. Referring to this development Alexandru Mironov considers the growing number of

science fiction clubs in Romania in the 1970 as the beginning of civil society.⁸⁹ These clubs were followed by many others, a fact which had an important say in the social role played by this genre. After the press law from 1974 and the suppression of *CPSF*, the science fiction readership consisting mainly of young people did not disappear. Although national communism would become a successful propaganda strategy, the social imaginary constructed in the first two communist decades and based on scientific and technological references proved to be a resilient one. Within this context, science fiction and especially its discourse became an alternative one to the official values promoted by the RCP. From a literary genre science fiction enlarge to become a social phenomenon.

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⁸⁹ Alexandru Mironov, "Henry Coandă și Omicron," *Cronica Română*, February 22, 2007 available at <http://www.cronicaromana.ro/index.php?art=66387> (accessed June 17 2009).

CHAPTER 5

THE 1980S –ANTICIPAȚIA AND THE ROMANIAN SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM

As it was shown in the previous chapter, in 1974 *CPSF* magazine, the only regular Romanian science fiction publication was suppressed following the new press law enacted in the same year. At the same time, during the 11th Congress of the RCP (Romanian Communist Party), a new political program was issued, that changed the legitimizing discourse of the Romanian communist regime.¹ Ideologically, the past became more important than any reference to the previously envisaged communist future. Consequently, projecting and imagining a future for Romania, enhanced by scientific and technological progress, was no longer a priority for the official propaganda and nor a promise offered by the Communist Party to the population.

Nicolae Ceaușescu, the new RCP leader, started to promote his own brand of “communism of humanity”² and distanced his new era from the period of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej’s regime. Literature became an important instrument to support this strategy, but science fiction, characterized by a discourse on the potentialities of science and technology related to social development and change, was no more considered useful, although the communist propagandistic efforts in the 1950s and the 1960s were related to the transformation of the social imaginary along these lines. The new ethno-nationalist propagandistic discourse initiated in the 1970s was a successful and resilient one but could not fully reshape the social imaginary.

In spite of these ideological propagandistic efforts the socio-economic situation in communist Romania was not at all better. In the 1980s it became obvious even for the

¹ *Programul Partidului Comunist Român de făurire a societății socialiste multilateral dezvoltate și înaintarea României spre comunism* (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1975).

² Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001), 7.

Romanian communist leadership that the promised technological future, the main ingredient of the communist utopia, was an illusion. In the 1980s the massive industrialization program undertaken by the Romanian communist regime in the previous decades proved to be a failure. The data for external trade and industrial production are relevant for this negative trend.³ In this context, the population had to face important shortages of basic products and services ranging from food to heating and electricity. Moreover, in the 1980s Romania had to pay back the international loans contracted in the 1960s and 1970s to serve its huge industrialization program, a debt that totaled approximately ten billion dollars.⁴ Ceaușescu's ambition to rapidly reimburse all these money meant a series of measures that negatively affected the living standard of the population.

A mythology of a “besieged country”⁵ was created by the propaganda in order to justify the situation and legitimize the position of the RCP as fighting alone against various external political and ideological enemies. As was shown in the previous chapters, in the 1950s and the 1960s the social imaginary had been permeated with scientific and technological references which, starting from the late 1970s, have been replaced with a new ingredient, the past. The idealized Romanian historical past was seen as that perfect *illo tempore*⁶ that had to be remembered, praised and taken as a model for the present and future. The past and the national values turned out to be the main discursive concern of the RCP. The utopian communist future was replaced with the story of the Romanian past that unfortunately was not fulfilled due to various enemies that during history had threatened the organic development of the Romanian nation. However, in the 1980s the Romanian

³ Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria Românilor de la origini până în zilele noastre* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995), 305.

⁴ Adrian Cioroianu, *Pe urmele lui Marx: o introducere în istoria comunismului românesc* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2005), 468.

⁵ Eugen Negrici, *Literatura română sub comunism* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Pro, 2002), 67.

⁶ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

communist regime and especially its leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu aimed to recreate and especially continue that development.

A shift to a national ideology that was rooted in the Romanian interwar national discourse was for Ceaușescu the main instrument “for legitimizing its rule with the populace and for keeping the intellectuals co-opted or subservient.”⁷ However, the hope for a better future that could be reached only through scientific and technological progress did not disappear from Romanian society. The science fiction readership, the fans of the genre that started to be organized in literary clubs forming the Romanian science fiction fandom, was an important group that kept this interest alive. After 1974 Romanian science fiction, although without a regular publication, managed to survive through the science fiction literary clubs. With financial and institutional support from the state, especially the Houses of Culture, in the 1980s the numbers of science fiction literary clubs grew all over the country.

When analyzing the Romanian science fiction fandom in the 1980s one should take first into account the internal political situation during this period. The personality cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu, his wife and later his son Nicu, became in the 1980s the main concern of the Romanian communist propagandistic discourse. Their story was always related with the glorious national past. Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu were portrayed by the propaganda as the living heroes of the Romanian nation and Nicu was generally considered the next president who would continue and achieve the political project of his parents. Internationally, Nicolae Ceaușescu often disagreed with the Soviet Union, an attitude that was meant to support his independent position in the communist bloc. However, Ion Mihai Pacepa, Director of the Communist Romanian Foreign Intelligence Service, has spoken about Ceaușescu’s ambiguous relations with Moscow, suggesting that the independence was

⁷ Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 121.

only a façade: “for all his economic bungle, Mr. Ceaușescu, still delivers valuable exports to the Soviet Union and serves as a conduit for the transmission of Western technology to Moscow.”⁸ Referring to this period, Tismăneanu states that “power and ideology were deeply intertwined in the functioning of Ceaușescu’s personal dictatorship. The ideology of the Romanian communist regime commingled nationalist populism, social demagogy, and adamant attachment to basic Stalinist tenets.”⁹

The object of this chapter is to explore the last ten years of science fiction in communist Romania. In a period when the past became the main preoccupation of the Romanian communist propaganda, the science fiction community became a space where the science fiction fans experienced an alternative and rather free social interaction detached from the official ideology and propagandistic strategies of the RCP. What was the role of the official institutions in supporting the initiatives of the fans is an important question to be asked. The setting up of a new regular science fiction publication *Almanah Anticipația* (Anticipation Almanac) with a different name for to the genre *literatură de anticipație* (anticipation literature), the annual ROMCONs organized by UTC (*Uniunea Tineretului Comunist* – Communist Youth Union) offered to the science fiction fans the institutional structure necessary for their activities and for pursuing their interests and at the same time offered to the state the possibility to control the community and prevent actions against the regime. In the last part of the chapter I analyze the so called “warning science fiction” a label used for those novels that were supposed through their message, to warn about imminent perils faced by the humanity. These novels were mostly dystopias and were read during that period as masked criticism of the communist period. To what extent it could be

⁸ Ion Mihai Pacepa, “Ceaușescu: America’s Most Favored Tyrant,” *Wall Street Journal*, 13 January 1986, quoted in Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons*, 221.

⁹ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons*, 221.

said that science fiction community was a dissident one is another important question to be asked.

“Anticipația” the re-branded Romanian science fiction

The strong development and dynamic of the Romanian science fiction fandom in the first years of the 1980s put pressure on the communist authorities for setting up a new Romanian science fiction publication with a national circulation. Party officials were concerned about the negative potential for the regime of the growing science fiction fandom, in spite of the *CPSF* suppression in 1974, and finally were convinced to finance a yearly publication, considering it a good way to keep an eye on the science fiction community. But before presenting the new periodical, the dynamic of the Romanian science fiction community at the beginning of the 1980s should be shortly analyzed.

Fiawol – “Fandom is a way of life”

In an article published in the fanzine *Paradox*¹⁰ edited by the *H. G. Wells* science fiction literary club from Timișoara, Lucian Ionică mentions that in 1981, there were twenty science fiction literary clubs in Romania, including a village science fiction literary club in Guranda, Botoșani County, and their number was growing.

At the beginning, the main institutional structure hosting and supporting these clubs were *Casele de cultură ale sindicatelor* (Houses of Culture of the Labor Unions). As Anne White has demonstrated in a seminal comparative study involving USSR, Poland and Hungary, but her observations are also valid for communist Romania, these institutions had an important function in the communist society. Their mission was, as White defines it,

¹⁰ Lucian Ionică, “Mișcarea sf în România,” *Paradox* October–November (1981): 3.

“to guide young people into officially accepted leisure pursuits, prevent the formation of alternative or counter cultures and contribute to the elimination of social evils such as crime, drunkenness, in favor of more ‘cultured’ leisure activities.”¹¹ White develops the concept of “cultural enlightenment” to refer to the nature of the cultural manifestations taking place in these institutions. In Russian, Polish and Hungarian contexts the main function of cultural enlightenment has been described as *vospitanie*, *wychowanie* or *nevelés*, words that could be translated as socialization. Cultural enlightenment activities organized by a house of culture were first and foremost a form of socialization, and a science fiction literary club was such a form.

At the beginning of the 1980s a science fiction literary club was an example of an activity funded and supervised by a *Casă de cultură* (House of Culture). However, the initiative to organize such a club came from young people who were passionate about the genre. *Căsele de cultură* (The Houses of Culture) were the Romanian communist institutions to respond to such demands. Within this context, the administrators and cultural workers from a *Casă de cultură* (House of Culture) that got involved and supported such initiatives were in many cases science fiction enthusiasts and sincerely believed in the cause of making culture accessible to many and also of helping those participating in such literary clubs to develop their creative abilities.

Interestingly enough, Romanian science fiction fandom developed not only in a period when there was no regular publication dedicated to the genre but also when the number of science fiction books published by various publishing houses was reduced in spite of the large public demand. The process of publishing a science fiction book was not easy, involving not only approval from those checking for ideological conformity but also requiring favorable reviews written by literary critics prior to publication. Since science

¹¹ Anne White, *De-Stalinization and the House of Culture, Declining State Control over Leisure in the USSR, Poland and Hungary 1953-89* (London: Routledge, 1990), 3.

fiction was considered a genre having a meager literary value, such favorable reviews were rare. Moreover, in communist Romania during this period, the science fiction thematic was no longer a priority from an ideological point of view since the Romanian past had become the main legitimizing political discourse.

Therefore, in the 1980s, science fiction became a literary genre that existed outside the Romanian mainstream highly politicized cultural discourse. However, the science fiction community was integrated into the communist mass cultural institutions and its activities were financially supported by the state, and therefore the anti-communist potential of this community could be controlled. Yet, the science fiction community was always regarded with a certain suspicion by the political officials, although challenging the political system was not a preoccupation among the science fiction fans. This suspicion was above all nourished by the dynamism of Romanian fandom and the particular preoccupations and interests within this community that were rather different from those encouraged by the Party. Science fiction fans were primarily concerned with their passion for the genre and enjoyed the social experience provided by a literary science fiction club, that was not possible in other settings such as the national festival *Cântarea României* (Romania's Song of Praise)¹² or *Cenacul Flacăra*¹³ directed by the poet Adrian Păunescu. The science fiction fandom became in the 1980s an "alternative social community"¹⁴ as Henry Jenkins would put it.

¹² Dragoș Petrescu, "Cântarea României sau stalinismul national în festival," in *Miturile Comunismului Românesc*, ed. Lucian Boia (Bucharest: Nemira, 1998), 239-151.

¹³ Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, Cristian Vasile eds. *Comisia Prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România: raport final* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 330.

¹⁴ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers, Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 287.

However, science fiction fans were not fully satisfied with the institutional and logistic framework offered by *Casele de Cultură* (the Houses of Culture) and did much on their own to pursue their passion and develop the science fiction fandom. In the 1980s Romanian science fiction community developed more than it was thought by the Communist Party officials mainly due to some enthusiastic fans who became the real leaders of the movement. Making use of all possibilities and resources offered by the state, these persons, transformed the Romanian science fiction fandom into an exciting place that attracted a great number of young people. For these informal leaders of the fandom and for many science fiction fans, the genre and especially the social experience in the fandom became ‘a way of life.’

A person that should be mentioned at this point was Mihai Ionescu who in the 1980s played an important role in the development of the Romanian science fiction community. A mechanical worker by profession, he was a member of *Solaris* science fiction literary club from Bucharest and a passionate science fiction fan. As Alexandru Mironov, another leader of the Romanian science fiction fandom in the 1980s remembers: “Mihai Ionescu was one of the most complete self-taught person I knew. As for his science fiction library it was unique: thousands of books in various languages. He could not read all of them, but his library was an extraordinary resource for all of us. In his working uniform, he was considered by many a simple mechanic; but he was a very complex man, having a whole theory about existence; he was also well informed in physics, biochemistry, astronomy and so on.”¹⁵ As Tudor Octavian wrote referring to him, “after one talks with him for a while, gets the feeling he knows everything.”¹⁶ Mihai Ionescu was instrumental in the development of Romanian science fiction fandom in the late 1970s and the 1980s. He supported many science fiction literary clubs in the country with advice and resources (especially science fiction materials).

¹⁵ Alexandru Mironov, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, September 18, 2006.

¹⁶ Tudor Octavian, “Oameni excepționali,” *Flacăra* 1353 (4 May 1981): 5.

Unfortunately he died prematurely in a tragic accident in 1982, but became a legend within the science fiction community.

An example of his influence in the development of the Romanian fandom and also an argument for the fact that in the 1980s the development of the science fiction fandom was a voluntary action undertaken by fans is the letter Mihai Ionescu wrote in 1980 to Dan Merișca, the leader of the science fiction literary club from Iași, another legendary figure of Romanian science fiction fandom, advising him about the steps for developing and consolidating the Iași science fiction club. It is an important and interesting document that shows the strategies devised by science fiction fans in order to develop and maintain their community by making full use of the resources and opportunities offered by the state. I found this document in Dan Merișca personal archive I had the personal privilege of seeing in 2007, courtesy of his brother Lucian Merișca.

“Dear Dan,

Please consider several advices from an old science fiction literary club member: the name “anticipation literary club” limits the range of preoccupations, because anticipation deals only with the future and science fiction comprises works dealing with extinct civilizations, past visits of aliens to Earth, as well as subjects that do not have a localization in time or space. In Romania we do not have such books but I assure you that there are many. I think you should find a proper name for your literary club such as: Sirius, Aderca, Anestin, Zednic, Atlantida, Lemuria, etc.

Try to find a writer from Iași to help you; or a literary critic. Try to stick to a magazine, invite one of the editors to your meetings, make him also editor of your fanzine, flatter him in order to have access and publish in his magazine. You have to attract many people (especially pupils and students) and keep them involved. Try to avoid quarrels and be a pacifying person; but don’t forget to stimulate the debates even contradiction and the critical spirit. You have to teach people to write. They can start by imitating the style of an important writer, and then you give them a topic to treat according to the style that was studied. You should then select the writings and consider the best achievements. Usually, the most important problem is that people have not read enough and are unable to distinguish between trash and value. One of the simplest methods to write literature is by self-suggestion. One should imagine that is someone else and should try to see the world through different eyes. It would be ideal that the texts presented during the literary club meeting be multiplied and read before the meeting, because the reception is different when a text is written and read compared to when it is only heard.

You need more competent and objective literary critics. In case it is not

possible have the text available in many copies and therefore assure individual readings, then all texts should be read by the same voice, without theatrical exaggerations and without telling the name of the author, in order to avoid personal attacks. The translations should have the same regimen, inserted between original writings. A literary club is a place where people come to hear and express their opinion, where they could say what they like and not and especially why. It will be difficult at the beginning to find arguments but in time they will begin to realize how little they know themselves. This will be the first victory. (...) Go everywhere to the PCR to the mayor, to editorial offices, organize meetings in schools, at the university, factories, institutions, Pioneers House, but only with quality materials. You won't have time for all these. Try to make a team to help you. Forgive me for taking the liberty to give you so much advice; it took me ten years to realize all this.

In case you could pay for the transportation I can come to Iași and make a presentation about the history of science fiction. Please send me, in case you know, the personal addresses of the leaders of the literary clubs that were set up in Suceava and Botoșani.

Yours,

Mihai Ionescu”¹⁷

The initial name of the Iași science fiction literary club funded in February 1979 was *Cenacul de Anticipație* (Anticipation literary club).¹⁸ It did not have a specific identity, a proper name for a science fiction literary club. Mihai Ionescu's letter contained valuable advices related to this aspect. Shortly, the name of the science fiction literary club from Iași became *Quasar*. How to create an institutional identity, how to organize a literary club with an accent on writing methods and also how to get maximal support from the authorities are the main ideas of Ionescu's letter. Mentoring became a common practice within the Romanian fandom in the 1980s, a practice that contributed to the development of the fandom and of a new generation of writers. The development of the critical spirit of the science fiction fans was the target set up by Mihai Ionescu to Dan Merișca. There was no political agenda but instead a very clear methodology, how to efficiently run a science fiction club, one that presupposed to learn how to treat and negotiate with the authorities. I have argued earlier that in the 1980s the science fiction community developed more than it was thought by the Party officials. This letter supports this statement and is an excellent strategic plan for

¹⁷ Letter from Mihai Ionescu to Dan Merișca, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

¹⁸ Dan Merișca, *Revoltă în labirint* (Bucharest: Adevărul, 1996), 8.

the seating up of the science fiction literary club in Iași. It could be said that the science fiction culture was an alternative culture to the main ideological discourse i.e., national communism advocated in the 1980s by the RCP. But it was not a counter culture aiming to challenge the official discourse. As it can be inferred from this letter, Mihai Ionescu believed that the science fiction culture could coexist with the official ideological discourse, only that in the case of the science fiction community the fans should make use of all possible resources, especially support from the state, to develop and grow.

In 1980 *Quasar*, the science fiction literary club from Iași sent eleven participants to the ROMCON held in Timișoara. There are no archival materials to reconstruct the course of this convention, except oral history recollections. This convention was considered a crucial moment in the evolution of the Romanian science fiction fandom. Lucian Merișca refers to this event as the “revolution from Timișoara.”¹⁹ During the general assembly of the convention the leaders of the science fiction literary clubs strongly argued that they should also be part of the official committee leading a national convention and also have a say in the evaluation of the stories submitted to the annual science fiction national contests. The attempt was a success. Prior to that, the high table used to be populated with local Communist Party officials from the city organizing the convention and the persons evaluating the stories sent for the science fiction contest were usually mainstream writers or literary critics members of the Writers Union who had not much in common with the genre.

In November 1981 the 11th ROMCON was organized in Iași by the *Quasar* science fiction literary club, with the support of the local *Casa de cultură a studenților* (Students' House of Culture). It was a success as some participants remember. Besides the official program, a panel discussing the relationship between science fiction and the present, a

¹⁹ Lucian Merișca, personal interview with the author, Iași, May 24, 2005.

science fiction film projection, a theatre play, a jazz concert and the literary contest,²⁰ science fiction fans had their own “unofficial” program that included disco parties and drinking. After the 1981 ROMCON *Quasar* with its leader Dan Merișca became one of the most active science fiction literary clubs in Romania. Besides the national convention, in August 1981 *Quasar* organized together with the *Selenarii* science fiction literary club and with the financial support from the UTC the first science fiction creation camp in Guranda, Botoșani County. Besides participants from *Solaris* (Bucharest), *Quasar* (Iași), *H.G Wells* (Timișoara) the camp had a couple of important guests: professional science fiction writers Ion Mânzatu and Gheorghe Săsarman and publicists, the *Albatros* editor Constantina Paligora and Ioan Albescu from the magazine *Știință și Tehnică* (Science and Technology). This summer camp could be reconstructed from the diary of the camp written by Sorin Simion, a member of *Quasar* club. He recovered the activities from the departure on 2nd of August until the last day. Simions’ diary offers an excellent account of the fandom activities at the beginning of the 1980s.²¹ It should be mentioned that no trace of criticism towards the political system could be seen in this document. The participants were preoccupied to discuss specific problems related to the genre, write science fiction stories and enjoy themselves.

From this moment on, with the support of official communist institutions, science fiction literary clubs began to initiate different events. For instance in December 1981, *Cronos*, the science fiction literary club from Tîrgoviște, organized with the support of the *Casa de cultură* (House of Culture), *Cronos’ days* where more than fifty members of the science fiction community from all over the country were invited. The official thematic of the meeting was “Science Fiction and Peace,” an appropriate subject for the institution

²⁰ Programul celei de-a 11-a Consfătuiri naționale a Cenaclurilor de Anticipație, Iași 6-8 noiembrie 1981, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

²¹ Sorin Simion, Jurnalul Taberei de creație de la Guranda, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

hosting and financing the meeting.²² However, the official thematic of a science fiction convention financed by the state was just a pretext and an appropriate framework for organizing the event and get financial support from the authorities. During *Cronos' days* there were two lectures given by Communist Party officials yet the real aim of the meeting, as I could retrieve from a diary kept by Dan Merișca, was the elaboration of *Cronos*, the fanzine of the literary club from Tîrgoviște.²³

Keeping a personal diary during such a science fiction convention was a usual practice but unfortunately such testimonies are rare to find today. Dan Merișca kept a diary during this meeting that offers a glimpse into the atmosphere and the social experience during “Cronos’ days” in Tîrgoviște. Despite the serious topics and objectives set in the program such as the debate of the relationship between science fiction and peace and the way in which science fiction could raise the popular awareness related to the problematic of international conflicts, the main social element of the event was drinking. According to the diary the first night was a pub crawl in Tîrgoviște and in the morning of the next day Alexandru Mironov, one of the science fiction leaders, got upset by the situation. The next night was a disco party combined with a discussion initiated by Alexandru Mironov about the best ten Romanian science fiction stories. There was also a debate about the specialization of the science fiction clubs in Romania. The idea was to have a certain specialization of the science fiction literary clubs: some had to be responsible for drama, some others for theatre, etc.²⁴

The concerns of the Party that science fiction could develop into a subversive mass movement could not be substantiated. In a personal diary like Merișca’s the plan or the actions against the political system could have been drafted, yet what was described are the

²² Colocviul de anticipatie Cronos, December 26-27, 1981, Dan Merișca archive, Iași.

²³ Dan Merișca diary from the period of Cronos’ days Dan Merișca archive, Iași

²⁴ Ibid.

rather particular socialization actions within the science fiction community. The socialization was an “alternative” one in the sense that it was not shaped and controlled by the Party as was the case with other mass cultural movements such as *Cenacul Flacăra*. However, the science fiction community did not have an attitude against the communist regime. The science fiction fans were rather interested to find ways to act freely rather than to fight against the system. The only unorthodox attitude in Merișca’s diary that could be identified is irony directed towards the officials participating to these meetings. The opening lectures delivered in Tîrgoviște by Communist Party officials are mocked, and irony towards officials became topoi inside the science fiction fandom.

The increasing number of people involved in the science fiction community pressured officials to allow the presence of the genre in the mass media. For example between 1981 and 1983 a short weekly show at the national radio station was dedicated to science fiction. There were 93 shows *Radiobiblioteca SF* (Science Fiction radio library) that had a huge audience, a fact demonstrated by the numerous letters sent by fans to the editorial office, as Dan Ursuleanu mentions.²⁵ After 1983 the radio show continued in a different format, *Exploratorii lumii de mâine* (The explorers of tomorrow’s world), directed by Ștefan Ghidoveanu. The increasing number of science fiction literary clubs meant also new fanzines that responded for a while to the lack of a national science fiction publication. In 1982, *Univers*, the fanzine of the Bistrița Năsăud literary club, *Holograma*, *Quasar* literary club’s fanzine, *Helion*, the fanzine of *Helion* literary club from Timișoara, and *Contact între civilizații* of *Universal fandom* literary club from Bucharest were published.²⁶ However, the number of copies for these fanzines was small and their periodicity rather infrequent. They were especially distributed among science fiction fans.

²⁵ Dan Ursuleanu, “Radio SF,” *Almanah Anticipația* (1985): 85.

²⁶ Viorel Marineasa, Cornel Secu, “Lumea fanzinelor românești,” *Almanah Anticipația* (1983): 97.

Anticipația Almanac

At the beginning of the 1980s the number of conventions reuniting science fiction literary clubs increased together with the pressure put on the communist authorities to set up a science fiction publication having a national circulation. The science fiction fans were convinced that they were consuming and producing a valuable literature that was unfortunately neglected by the mainstream literary critics and therefore not properly promoted and published. For the members of the science fiction community a publication would have set up a standard and also would have given the chance to the most talented young writers from the fandom to be published. In 1983 this demand led to the appearance of a new science fiction periodical, a yearly publication, having a new name: *Almanah Anticipația* (Anticipation Almanac hereinafter *Anticipația*), (see appendix). With this occasion, the genre was re-branded *literatură de anticipație tehnico științifică* (technical-scientific anticipation literature), a label replacing the former *literatură științifico-fantastică*. The new term was a good ideological choice since it suggested an artistic instance of the ongoing ‘technological scientific revolution’ that was used in official Party documents to refer to that current evolutionary stage of the country that had to be passed on the way to communism. However, within the fandom the term science fiction continued to be used although the official name for the genre was *anticipație*.

Anticipația was published as a supplement of the magazine *Science and Technology* and was edited with the financial support of the CC of the UTC. Its chief editor was Ioan Albescu who was also party secretary of the UASCR (*Uniunea Asociațiilor Studențești a Tineretului Comunist*, Union of Students’ Associations) that was a subdivision of UTC. His editorial team was composed of two editors, Viorica Podină and Adina Chelcea and several consultants that were members of most important science fiction literary clubs from Romania: Sorin Antohi, Ion Doru Brana, Voicu Bugariu, Mihai Coman, Mihail Grănescu,

Lucian Ionică, Viorel Marineasa, Dan Merișca, Alexandru Mironov, Viorel Pîrligras, Cristian Tudor Popescu and Viorel Secu. *Anticipația* was published every year starting from 1983. It was an over 300 pages publication with an initial circulation of 30,000 copies. Due to the demand and the need for financial resources this circulation was usually doubled.²⁷

The reason the Party officials, especially UTC leaders, were convinced to initiate and finance a science fiction almanac is a pragmatic and cynical one. Through the new publication they aimed at controlling the science fiction community. Ioan Albescu the chief editor of the *Anticipația*, himself a science fiction fan, remembers. “We utilized a trick to convince the UTC leaders to finance a science fiction publication. We told them that the fan-clubs would meet anyhow (...) the Party was concerned, I think, with the clandestine activities inside the fandom... therefore we argued that it was better for the Party to finance a publication and the science fiction conventions, and in this way to know exactly what was happening within the community. The decision was taken in 1981 but the almanac was published only in 1983.”²⁸ In the editorial of the first issue of *Anticipația*, Ion Albescu also explained and conceptualized the usefulness of the genre, “contrary to many opinions, that are in fact based on ignorance and maintain that this genre is disconnected from reality, anticipation literature is now extremely necessary. It is a literature that makes everyone aware that today’s actions and realities have a major importance on the future development with all consequences implied.”²⁹

The RCP could not support a literary genre that was not useful and therefore, its social and political functions had to be specified. The chief editor, Ioan Albescu, was ready to offer a suitable explanation. He restated in all editorials, of every *Anticipația*, the ideological conformity and usefulness of the genre for the education of the youth. On its first

²⁷ Ioan Albescu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, July 26, 2003.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ioan Albescu, “Literatura de Anticipație tehnico-științifică,” *Almanah Anticipația*, (1983): 5.

page of *Anticipația* was a portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu (see appendix), but the rest of the magazine did not deal with political propagandistic matters as did most of the publications during that period. The seven annual issues of *Anticipația* reflect to a great extent the Romanian science fiction fandom life in terms of literary productivity. The authors published were mostly young writers that were members of science fiction literary clubs. Viorica Podină, editor of *Anticipația*, remembers how the work at this publication was carried out: “We considered that an almanac should satisfy all tastes; we were a team and each used to propose certain writings that were discussed and analyzed during our meetings. There were people in a total disagreement but at the end there was place for all types of proposals.”³⁰

At the same time, the editors also had to avoid publishing materials that could have been considered by the censorship as inappropriate.³¹ Ioan Albescu remembers that when George Martin’s horror story *Sand kings* was published he was scared about the consequences he could face, since the novel could have been interpreted as a masked attack against Nicolae Ceaușescu. “I was not a fan of horror literature. The final scene in this story was that the main character, a dictator, was eaten by its own disciples (...) in the 1980s the censorship was more sophisticated than in the 1950s. The author was not punished in order to save the appearances that there was a free society. However, the one that was punished was the chief editor.”³² It should be noted from this remark that in the 1980s the biggest pressure from the political control authorities was not on the writers but on the editors.

³⁰ Viorica Podină, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, August 7, 2004.

³¹ In the 1980s the censorship in Romania was worse than in the previous decade, although in 1977 The General Direction for Press and Printing was abolished. Instead of this institution in the 1980s every newspaper or magazine had its own censor. Fortunately the censor that was assigned to *Anticipația* was himself a science fiction passionate and therefore more “malleable” as Ioan Albescu, the chief-editor of the magazine remembers. Information based on: Ioan Albescu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, July 26, 2003.

³² Ioan Albescu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, July 26, 2003.

From its appearance *Anticipația* became the catalyst of the Romanian science fiction fandom, reflecting the literary activity within the community and stimulating people to write science fiction. From 1983 *Anticipația* also became the main organizer of ROMCONs and of the yearly national science fiction contest. The winning stories of the contest were published in *Anticipația*.

The Romanian science fiction fandom – a ‘controlled’ community

The science fictions fans used to meet on Saturdays and Sundays within the literary clubs. The science fiction community was a “Weekend-Only World” as Henry Jenkins characterizes it.³³ In the 1980s for many young people science fiction community represented an alternative space for socialization, not necessarily “an escape from reality as an alternative reality”³⁴ whose values were appreciated as a real “window through liberty,”³⁵ as Dănuț Ungureanu put it.

Within the science fiction fandom, the science fiction fans were less exposed than the rest of the youth to the propagandistic discourse glorifying the Romanian Communist Party leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu. According to Dan Merișca who published an account about the number of science fiction literary clubs in 1984-1985 in Romania, there were 40 such fan organizations.³⁶ Science fiction fans were not against the RCP although they were regarded with suspicion by the authorities. An attempt to stop or forbid the science fiction community would have been more harmful to the regime than its tolerance.

After the setting up of *Anticipația*, UTC decided to also finance the activities of the science fiction fandom. In the 1980s the UTC was an important Romanian mass

³³ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers, Television Fans & Participatory Culture*, 287.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Dănuț Ungureanu, Personal interview with the author, Bucharest, July 26, 2003.

³⁶ Dan Merișca, “Fandom 1984-1985,” *Almanah Anticipația* (1985): 117.

organization. Its functions within the communist political system were to provide political mobilization and socialization of masses according to the communist ideology but also do selection, recruiting and formation of the new elite.³⁷ The UASCR was a subdivision of UTC that had in the 1980s around 150,000 members.³⁸ Since the most important science fiction literary clubs were in university centers such as Bucharest, Timișoara, Iași, Sibiu and Craiova, the UASCR was responsible for their activity. As Ioan Albescu remembers, in the 1980s science fiction fandom was the only accepted and financed cultural movement in Romania, although it was not a political-ideological one.³⁹

The involvement of the UTC in the supervision of the science fiction fandom could be inferred from a circular letter sent in 1982 to all Houses of Culture and Students' Houses of Culture that hosted science fiction literary clubs. The letter entitled, *Precizări privind îndrumarea unitară a ceneclurilor de anticipație tehnico-științifică* (Specifications for the unitary guidance of the activities of the literary circles concerned with technological - scientific anticipation), opened with a preamble. First, a general assessment of Romanian science fiction fandom is made. At that time there were 31 literary clubs in Romania devoted to technological-scientific anticipation. Their members were young specialists, workers, pupils and students. It was also mentioned that the last years have witnessed a growing interest of the participants in the actions organized within these clubs, such as debates on scientific and technological issues. Moreover, it was mentioned that some of the members made a reputation due to their professional achievements both in Romania and abroad. Second, the principle of the unitary guidance mentioned in the title was justified taking into account the role of the genre (technological - scientific anticipation) in the multilateral development of the youth. The science fiction clubs were considered according to the letter

³⁷ Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrinu, Cristian Vasile eds. *Comisia Prezidențială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România: raport final*, 176-198.

³⁸ Ibid., 196.

³⁹ Ioan Albescu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, July 26, 2003.

the main centers for the stimulation of such development. The unitary guidance and coordination had to be carried out according to the Party resolutions and to the indications given by Nicolae Ceaușescu.⁴⁰ After this overview, five main measures for the science fiction clubs were proposed:

“1. The central Committee of the UTC shall provide a unitary guidance for the activities of all SF clubs based on the Communist Party decisions and on the laws of the country as well as taking into account the tasks put forward by Nicolae Ceaușescu related to the multilateral personality formation of the youth and to the educative-instructive organization of the spare time. For this purpose the Central Committee of UTC shall collaborate with the National Council for Science and Technology, The Council for Culture and Socialist Education and the Writers’ Union.

2. The activity of the science fiction clubs shall be directed towards the following aims: to stimulate the literary creations of the youth, to increase their interest and their capacities for technological scientific productions, to promote the “new” in all domains, to promote atheist education for youth, to increase the interest for literature among all youth categories. We have to make sure that the literary productions done in the science fiction clubs are inspired by the problems related to the evolution of human society. The search for new sources of energy, the exploration of the Universe in an optimistic manner should develop among the youth the enthusiasm and the desire for an active participation to the building of a bright future for our country and for humankind.

3. The committees for literary creation of the Central Committee of UTC and the county committees of the UTC shall involve the members of the literary clubs in different specific actions organized with the youth at central and local level.

4 The most valuable anticipation literary creations shall be popularized in the publications dedicated to the youth, in publications with an internal character, to TV and radio, and the best shall be recommended for publication as books.

5. The UTC Central Committee together with the National Council for Science and Technology, the Council of Culture and Socialist Education and the Writers’ Union will organize every year conventions of the anticipation literary clubs where the place and the role of this literature in the process of the communist education will be debated.”

First Secretary, Pantelimon Găvănescu⁴¹

In November 1982 the 12th ROMCON was organized in Sibiu (see appendix) by *Univers XX* science fiction literary club and for the first time UTC is mentioned in the official program as the main organizing institution. The printed version of the program opens with a large quote from Nicolae Ceaușescu. The program of the convention consisted in

⁴⁰ “Precizări privind îndrumarea unitară a cenaclurilor de anticipație tehnico-științifică,” a document issued by UASCR in 1982, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

⁴¹ Ibid.

several round tables coordinated by scientists or by members of the Writers' Union. One of them focused on the relationship between anticipation literature and technological development. The genre was considered not only an important instrument for providing scientific and technological education but also was seen as an inspiration and stimulus for young people to embrace technical professions. Dumitru Prunariu, the first Romanian astronaut, chaired a round table where the participants discussed about the human exploration of outer space, the existence of aliens and especially about the role of Romania in future space research.⁴²

Science fiction ROMCONs – formal and informal

ROMCON is the acronym for Romanian science fiction convention. As mentioned before, from 1982 the UTC decided to finance these national science fiction meetings and the first ROMCON that benefited from this institutional support was held in Sibiu in 1982. In 1983 the 13th ROMCON took place in Bucharest, but it lasted only one day. At the last moment, the organizers were informed that the convention had to be cancelled and all science fiction participants had to return to their cities. The concern of the Romanian Communist Party officials was that such a manifestation in Bucharest could degenerate into an action against the communist regime.⁴³ However, the official reason for the cancellation of the convention supposed to take place at the 23rd August factory from Bucharest was that the plant did not meet its production plan.⁴⁴ In the 1980s although there was a large science fiction community in Bucharest, the capital city was avoided as a place for hosting science fiction conventions. In 1984 the ROMCON was held in Cluj, 1985 in Lugoj, 1986 in Iași,

⁴² Programul celei de-a XII-a consfătuiri naționale de literatură de anticipație și a celei de a X-a sesiuni de comunicări a clubului Univers XX, November 12-14, 1982 Sibiu, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

⁴³ Ion Hobana, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, June, 23 2004.

⁴⁴ Horia Aramă, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, June, 17 2004.

1987 in Craiova, 1988 in Pitești. The last ROMCON during communism was held in Timișoara in September 1989.

In the 1980s the official program of a ROMCON had to reconcile the particular preoccupations and interests of the participants with the political and ideological requirements of the RCP. For instance, at the 12th ROMCON held in Sibiu in November 1982,⁴⁵ the activities appropriate for a science fiction convention such as workshops and roundtables on science fiction, scientific and technological problems and their relationship with the literature, as well as lectures given by science fiction writers and scientists were combined with a visit to the village museum and to the Octavian Goga memorial house in Rășinari, activities related with the RCP interest in national historical values. Moreover, topics that were specific for a science fiction convention had to be rephrased to fit the ideological commandments. For instance, the name of a panel was *Știința și anticipația tehnico-științifică – factori modelatori în educarea ateistă, umanist-revolutionară a tineretului* (Science and Technological Scientific Anticipation – Modeling Factors for the Atheist, Humanist Revolutionary Education of the Youth).⁴⁶

In addition, although rather inappropriate, topics related to Romanian history became almost a rule at ROMCONs. In 1984 a Cluj ROMCON panel focused on the Dacians as the Romanians ancestors, and their level of scientific development based on archeological discoveries.⁴⁷ In 1985, at the Lugoj ROMCON, besides the problems related to science fiction, the participants discussed also the importance of the region for the history of

⁴⁵ Programul celei de-a XII-a consfătuiri naționale a cenaclurilor de anticipație și a celei de-a X-a sesiuni de comunicări a clubului Univers XX, November 12-14, Sibiu, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

⁴⁶ Zilele cenaclului “Henri Coandă” Craiova, August 6-7, 1988, Invitație program, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

⁴⁷ Programul celei de-a XIII-a consfătuiri naționale a cenaclurilor de anticipație, October 13-15, 1984, Cluj, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

Romania.⁴⁸ In 1988 during the ROMCON organized by *Antarg*, the science fiction club from Pitești, the organizers had to reconcile in the program the projection of a science fiction movie in the first day, with the lecture delivered by prof. Petre Popa, president of the County Council for Socialist Education and Culture with the title “Pitești – 600 years of existence.”⁴⁹

During the last ROMCON held in 1989 in Timișoara, a whole panel was devoted to the way in which Mihai Eminescu, the Romanian national poet, had anticipated several scientific developments.⁵⁰ The panel was based on previous research carried out by I. M. Ștefan, a science fiction writer and theoretician. In 1987 he had published in *Anticipația Almanac* a study entitled *Eminescu and scientific Anticipation*.⁵¹ According to I.M Ștefan in the 19th century, the Romanian national poet Mihai Eminescu had anticipated Albert Einstein’s relativity theory.

Based on the official program, a ROMCON may seem a rather conventional gathering. However, during these ROMCONs there was also an informal program that could be reconstructed only through oral history interviews. After the official panels and lectures, during the night there were the so called *cenaculuri de noapte* (night literary gatherings). These were informal meetings in the hotel rooms, where participants read and commented on their own science fiction productions and also translations, especially from Western literature. They also watched movies on VCRs and listened to music.

According to Ioan Albescu, the secret police recorded all the discussions during *Cenaculuri de noapte* (the night literary gatherings).⁵² Although many critical opinions

⁴⁸ Programul celei de-a XV-a consfătuiri naționale a cenaculurilor de anticipație, October 4-6, 1985, Lugoj, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

⁴⁹ Programul de desfășurare a manifestării cultural artistice, zilele Antarg, 1988. Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

⁵⁰ Uniunea Tineretului Comunist Comitetul Central, Redacția revistei “Știință și Tehnică,” *Cenaculurile timișoarene “Helion” și “H.G. Wells,”* Consfătuirea anuală a cenaculurilor de literatură și artă de anticipație tehnico-științifică, Timișoara, September 28-30, 1989, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași..

⁵¹ I. M. Ștefan, “Eminescu și anticipația științifică,” *Almanah Anticipația* (1987): 5-10.

⁵² Ioan Albescu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, July 26, 2003.

(mostly jokes and ironic statements) towards the communist regime were expressed during these meetings, no repressive measures against those that were participating in such meetings were taken. Without doubt among the science fiction community there were *Securitate* (Romanian secret police) informers. The secret police first and foremost wanted to know about the atmosphere during these meetings and to see whether they had a potential to degenerate into something more serious against the regime.

The possibility to transform science fiction into a dissident movement was never real. After 1989 many science fiction fans maintained that in fact what they were doing in the fandom was an anti-communist activity but such affirmations could not be substantiated with facts. Science fiction fans were always aware that they were under *Securitate* surveillance. Often their reaction to this pressure was expressed in the political jokes and irony and not an open dissident attitude. Science fiction fans were not interested to reform the system but rather they were interested to maintain and enjoy their activities within the fandom. In the 1980s the socialization within the science fiction fandom offered the feeling of freedom and detachment from the present political and ideological commandments. Yet, this socialization was in fact closely supervised by the communist state since the science fiction community, as well as *Anticipația*, were financed by UTC, an official communist institution.

The jokes and ironies toward the communist regime were tacitly tolerated. Cristian Lăzărescu, science fiction writer and science fiction fan, considers that the existence of the science fiction community was beneficial for the communist regime.

“Science fiction literary clubs and especially national science fiction conventions with the night meetings were the best place for a few people to express all their frustrations and dissatisfaction related to the political regime. Everything was expressed in written form but covered in symbols, metaphors and *lizards* because none had the courage to express things openly. For the authorities everything was perfect as long as these were “drawer writings.” It was a perfidious strategy but

efficient. During a science fiction convention all these tensions were released then everything was put back to normal by the end.”⁵³

As mentioned, the irony and political joke were a characteristic of this period. The jokes were mocking the system and were the perfect way to release the accumulated tensions. Călin Bogdan Ștefănescu, who edited in a volume a collection of political jokes from the period, mentions one that reflects to a great extent the atmosphere during a science fiction informal meeting. The joke is the following: “At an international youth congress during the ice-breaking party four people a Frenchman, a German a Chinese and a Romanian would tell others how they have fun in their respective countries. The Frenchman says: “In our country we have a lot of fun. We go out with girls and party. All girls are healthy except one who has AIDS. The excitement is that no one knows who she is and that makes everything very fun.” The German guy says: “We use to organize car races. All the cars are fine, except for one whose brakes are not working but no one knows which one has the problem and this makes everything so funny.” The Chinese man adds: “We used to go to one’s home and drink tea. Chinese tea is very good; however on the table all the cups have wonderful tea except one in which is poison. However, no one knows which cup is poisoned and this makes everything so thrilling and fun.” The Romanian is the last and says: “In Romania we used to meet with friends at one’s house and discuss the present political situation, tell political jokes and criticize the regime. We have much fun. However, one of us is a secret police informer but no-one knows who that person is.”⁵⁴

During the ROMCONs in the 1980s there was a continuous interplay between satisfying the requirements of the Party and organizing the time for the real interests of the participants. Also, in the 1980s ROMCONs were perfect umbrellas for debates between intellectuals that were not necessarily interested in science fiction but were ready to use state

⁵³ Cristian Lăzărescu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, August 15, 2004.

⁵⁴ Călin Bogdan Ștefănescu, *10 ani de umor negru românesc: jurnal de bancuri politice* (Bucharest: Paideia, 1991), 58.

resources for organizing events that matched their interests. For instance in 1986 at the national science fiction convention held in Iași, important Romanian intellectuals such as Andrei Pleșu, Gabriel Liiceanu and Mihai Șora were invited to a panel organized by Sorin Antohi on utopian writings.⁵⁵ This panel was not included in the official program. Yet financially it was supported from the same funding. Ioan Albescu mentioned about the participation of such people to the science fiction reunions: “They were coming because they had nothing else to do.”⁵⁶

Science fiction fandom – access to resources

In the 1980s the science fiction fandom became a complex community of people. Some of their actions were independent from the official institutions that regulated the activity of the science fiction fandom and were directed towards pursuing their interest for the genre. Thus, one major problem faced by the science fiction fans in the 1980s was the lack of science fiction books, especially those by western writers. Such books were not translated and published in Romania. However, this situation was solved within the science fiction community in an interesting way and within this context every book and resource that became available to the science fiction community has its particular story.

Mihnea Columbeanu remembers how he got in contact with Western science fiction, which made him start writing science fiction, “An American, a good friend of my parents, used to come often to the Balkans for ethnographical researches. When leaving he used to leave many things. Once he gave me a leather jacket in whose pockets I found two science fiction anthologies. There were the best of the year. There were so many good stories. They were not censored unlike those published in Romania. This made me start writing science

⁵⁵ Sorin Antohi, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, June 10, 2003.

⁵⁶ Ioan Albescu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, July 26, 2003.

fiction.”⁵⁷ Columbeanu shared his books with his colleagues from *Solaris* and *Prospectart* science fiction clubs from Bucharest.

Cristian Lazărescu remembers that valuable sources for science fiction materials were the French Institute, the British Council and the American Library from Bucharest. “We had subscriptions. In the 1980s we got a lot of books from these libraries. We use to nick science fiction books before they were nicked by others. These libraries received books regularly and we knew the date. There were queues to get a book. *Interzone* magazine was also available.”⁵⁸ Mihai Ionescu’s personal library was also a valuable resource while in Timișoara the closeness to Yugoslavia made possible the procurement of various titles published in the West. Also Sergiu Levin’s personal library was a precious resource for Timișoara science fiction fans.⁵⁹ Levin was a medical doctor by training and a science fiction passionate. He had relatives in Israel who would send him books he shared with other fans.

Although there were not many copies of Western science fiction books available in the country, they managed to circulate among many through the network of the science fiction clubs. For those who could not read in foreign languages, the books were translated by fans and circulated among them in typewritten form or as Xerox copies. Columbeanu remembers, “there were people that translated books, including myself, not for publication, because it was not possible but for reading at the literary club. It was a whole book circuit. Many personal libraries were enriched through this barter.”⁶⁰

In 1985 Dan Merișca sent a circular letter to all science fiction clubs in the country. His plan was to centralize the titles of the existing science fiction books in Romanian – and to find the solutions to make them available to the science fiction readership. A copy of the letter found in Dan Merisca’s archive is relevant for the features of this project.

⁵⁷ Mihnea Columbeanu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, August 20, 2004.

⁵⁸ Cristian Lăzărescu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, August 15, 2004.

⁵⁹ Silviu Genescu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, May 15, 2004.

⁶⁰ Mihnea Columbeanu, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, August 20, 2004.

“The plan is to set up a repertoire of science fiction books and magazines written in foreign languages available in Romania. This virtual library would facilitate the book circulation within the science fiction literary clubs, offering therefore valuable models for writers and sources for translators.”⁶¹

Dan Merișca also imagined a set of rules for the functioning of this library related with loan conditions. The letter ends with a list of the books available at *Quasar* club. The name of the owner is in put in brackets and at the end it is also specified which book had been translated into Romanian.

“1 Amis Kingsley – New maps of hell (D Merișca)

2 Ash Brian - Who's Who in SF (D Merișca)

3 Asimov Isaac - Asimov's mystères (D Alexe)

4 Barbet Pierre - L'univers des geons (R Haritonovici)

5 Brackett Leigh - Les Hommes stellaires (R Haritonovici)

6 Brown Fredric - Paradox Lost (D Alexe)

7 Farmer Philip - Ose (D Alexe)

8 Simack Clifford - Cosmic Engineers (D Alexe)

9 Vian Boris - L'herbe rouge (D Alexe)

10 Wul Stefan - Oms en serie (D Alexe)

The books numbered 3,6,8,9 have been translated.

The book number 7 could be taken only by someone who is ready to translate it. Loan mode: by mail”⁶²

The *Nova* science fiction literary club answered Dan Merișca's initiative by sending a letter containing the books available in Sibiu. The “patrimony,” as it was put, of the Sibiu literary club consisted in four science fiction books: Three of them were printed in Moscow: *Science Fiction: English and American Short Stories* (1979), *Le chemin D'amaltee* (1973), and *Things to come* (1977). The fourth book, *The future of the future*, by John McHale was printed in New York in 1969. In the letter it is mentioned that besides the books listed there are also available several novels in French and English copied from the original. A list of

⁶¹ Dan Merișca, Biblioteca virtuală de science fiction, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

⁶² Ibid.

translations was also added. A more comprehensive letter with more titles available was received from Timișoara.⁶³

There were some other initiatives to make science fiction resources available to more fans and especially encourage those willing to write science fiction. For instance in 1985 Marian Florea a member of the *Solaris* club, writes a proposal about setting up an itinerant science fiction literary club and sent a proposal to the magazine *Science and Technology*. A copy of this document was found in Dan Merișca's papers. The aim of the project was to bring together scientific "anticipation" in literature with the real scientific research. The first step was supposed to be the indexing of scientific ideas present in the literature available in Romania. Each literary club should have a scientific committee directed by a scientist. Ideas had to be centralized. The next step after indexing the literary ideas was a real scientific study of those hypotheses with the potential for very useful practical results.⁶⁴

Besides the particular interests related to the genre, in the 1980s the science fiction fandom functioned also as an alternative supply chain of products that were not available on the open market. A letter by Doru Pruteanu to Dan Merișca is case in point.

"Dear Dan,

I send you the package with the Sirius colleagues (a safer solution). I've tried to purchase a much more and varied range of goods but the business was hard because I had to act Saturday when all the crooks are tuned and it's very crowded. Besides the place swarmed with many fellows who were seizing the goods and the owners. The content of this package is the following:

	Purchase Price			Price-Timișoara black market
Item	Price 1 item	Number of items	Total	
Wrist watch	400	1	400	400-500
Pudding	10	10	100	15

⁶³ Letters from *Nova* and *HG Wells* sf literary clubs to Dan Merișca, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

⁶⁴ Marian Florea, Propuneri: Cenaclul itinerant de anticipare a științei, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

Menthol sweets	10	10	100	15
Chewing gum	5	10	50	10
Chocolate	20	5	100	25-30
Batteries	12.50	8	150	15
Super Filter	12.50	20	250	15
Total			1100	

1. wrist watch – I think that you could easily sell it for 700. It is the price with which a friend from Deva managed to sell the same kind of watch.

2. Pudding. I think you should give them for 15. It should be prepared in the same way as cacao with milk (...explanation of the recipe)

3. Chewing gum – in Făget market (90 km from Timișoara) a package is sold for 20 lei .15 would be a reasonable price as well.

4. For chocolate you could ask 30. In harder times it was sold here even with 35-40.

6. Batteries. At least 20/item. I have the feeling that they could be sold for even a higher price.

7. Super Filter. The same at least 20/item. You should remember that last summer at the seaside the price used to be 40.

This is all. Try to place them rapidly in order to restart the operation. We could eventually increase the amount to 1000/person

Other things:

Send me please *Absolut Inflexibil* and *Toate Pânzele Sus* [two novels]

These are the issues from CPSF which are missing from my collection: 52, 98, 143, 151, 166, 169, 170, 244, 254, 316.

From The Fantastic Club I do not have ...(3 novels mentioned)

(...)

Dorin Pruteanu”⁶⁵

This letter shows the existence of an illicit form of commerce within the science fiction fandom, a practice known as *bișniță* during the period. The goods were purchased from the western border and then sold with a certain profit. It was forbidden to practice this type of commerce during communism. However, the science fiction network functioned as a perfect distribution chain for these goods offering at the same time protection. It should be

⁶⁵ Letter from Doru Pruteanu to Dan Merișca, Dan Merișca Archive, Iași.

also noted from the letter that the commerce was not the only topic. Besides the instructions about pricing and selling the two science fiction fans also exchange information that are related solely with science fiction namely the procurement of some missing science fiction magazines.

A new generation of writers

The renaming of the genre *literatură de anticipație* (anticipation literature), the new annual publication *Anticipația* and the numerous science fiction literary clubs corresponds to the appearance of a new generation of science fiction writers. They are considered by Mircea Opriță “the new wave,” that matches with the 1980s generation of the mainstream literature.⁶⁶ Mihail Grămescu, Alexandru Ungureanu, Cristian Tudor Popescu, Lucian Ionică, Gheorghe Păun, Dănuț Ungureanu, Mihnea Columbeanu, Cristian Lăzărescu, Rodica Bretin, Dan and Lucian Merișca, George Ceaușu, Radu Honga, Victor Martin, Marcel Luca, Silviu Genescu, Ovidiu Bufnilă, Dorin Davideanu, Bogdan Ficeac, Ovidiu Pecican, Mircea Liviu Goga, Ovidiu Petcu, Ștefan Ghidoveanu, Marina Nicolaev, Doru Pruteanu are some of the most interesting Romanian science fiction writers in the 1980s.

Their intellectual profile was different from the previous generation of science fiction writers. Some of the old figures such as the former *CPSF* chief editor Adrian Rogoz, Vladimir Colin or Ion Hobana were appreciated and were frequent members in the juries giving literary prizes at national annual contests of science fiction. Sorin Antohi wrote about the profile of the new generation of writers: “The young science fiction writer is in most cases a self taught person that has technical training and a literary personality that has been forged in the literary club discussions. Before being published and receiving a certain public

⁶⁶ Mircea Opriță, *Anticipația Românească* (Bucharest: Viitorul Românesc, 2003), 286.

appreciation, the young writer gets recognition within the alternative hierarchy of the fandom. Often their writings are transformed during the sf clubs meetings following the advice received.”⁶⁷

A science fiction literary club was very important in developing the literary talent of a writer. Most of the 1980s science fiction writers participated in the literary clubs debates and criticisms. Writers from the period acknowledge this aspect. For example, Mihnea Columbeanu remembers that his novel *10 Kilograme de uraniu* that was published in *Anticipația* had several versions that were discussed and improved within the literary club of which he was a member. Cristian Lăzărescu started to be fond of science fiction as a child, then started to write and sent a novel to the radio show “Radiobiblioteca SF” hosted between 1981-1983 by Adrian Rogoz. “When I was in the army Adrian Rogoz had a radio show. I sent him a text and, by chance and as a surprise, I heard my text read at radio. I had science fiction books at home, which were an inspiration for me, written by Efremov, Beleaev, Horia Aramă, Romulus Bărbulescu and Victor Anania, Sergiu Fărcășan, Camil Baci, then Gheorghe Săsărman and Mircea Opriță. After my service in the army I went to *Solaris* literary club then I went to *Prospectart* which was the best science fiction club from Romania. It was a special state of spirit. Cristian Tudor Popescu invited me to join the club. *Prospectart* was a fan club where one could learn the art of writing. Here, based on the critical input from the others I improved my science fiction stories.” Although he had technical studies, Lăzărescu decided to change his profession; he enrolled at the Film University becoming a film director.

In the 1980s the fandom promoted a new generation of writers. Antohi wrote about the “marketing reading.”⁶⁸ The literary club public had an important influence in the final form of a novel and on the writer’s artistic identity. Even the double authorship, which was a

⁶⁷ Sorin Antohi, “La margine de Galaxie,” *Almanah Anticipația* (1985): 75-6.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 76.

usual practice within *Quasar* literary club, became a widespread method of writing science fiction. Within the fandom, as many recollect, there were fierce discussions related to the process of writing. As Lucian Merișca remembers, there were many suggestions like: “cut the end,” “transform this short story into a novel,” “how would it be for the main hero if.”⁶⁹ There was also, as Antohi puts it, the irrelevant questioning about verisimilitude or scientific consistency and debates and arguments about the aesthetical dimension of this genre.⁷⁰

In order to have their writing published the authors were aware that no negative opinion towards the political system could be present. Within this context, the official censorship was not as effective as self censorship. In the 1980s, most of the original productions written and read in science fiction literary clubs were dystopian or horror stories. There were masked criticisms about the political situation of Romania, known as “lizards.” As one science fiction writer remembers: “We used to write stories with lizards, something with two meanings.”⁷¹ The terms “lizard” is recurrent in science fictions fans recollections from the 1980s. It refer to allusions in the science fiction texts that were in fact hidden critiques of the present that were “slippery and quick,” like a lizard. Sometimes such stories with “lizards” evaded the vigilance of the censors and succeeded to be published. According to Ana Vinea, the term “lizard” comes from a TV sketch from the 1970s featuring a very popular Romanian theater actor Amza Pelea⁷² and refers to oblique, subversive, mostly humorous allusions inserted in texts, movies or performances towards the present realities. Finding one gave rise to a pleasant feeling of complicity, of sharing a small act of rebellion with an anonymous group of like-minded individuals.

It would be an overestimation to consider science fiction written in Communist Romania and the activities within the fandom as a form of dissidence or a dissident

⁶⁹ Lucian Merișca, personal interview with the author, Iași, May 24, 2005.

⁷⁰ Sorin Antohi, “La margine de Galaxie,” 76.

⁷¹ Dănuț Ungureanu, personal interview with the author, Timișoara, May 22, 2004.

⁷² Ana Vinea ed. *Mărturii orale: Anii '80 și bucureștenii* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2003), 307.

literature. The *Securitate* (the secret police) was aware of this and tolerated these writings which were considered a perfect way to relieve social tensions. Dystopian science fiction and warning science fiction that would be further analyzed have created the opinion that the genre was a dissident literature which opposed the communist regime but in fact such allusions were tolerated.

In many cases the struggle of a writer to have a novel published and pass the censorship was not motivated by a political conviction or by the aim to dispatch a message that would have subversive overtones towards the system. Writers were convinced by the esthetic value of their literary productions and were motivated to write mostly by this conviction and not by the necessity to criticize the communist system. In some cases the editors were ready to help and to fix inappropriate pieces of writing. Alexandru Mironov who during this period edited several science fiction story collections remembers how he managed to have one pass the censorship, an action that destroyed his friendship with the writer. After reading the novel he received, Mironov realized that the end was unacceptable for publication, it was too gloomy for the communists. Being a science fiction fan himself and a writer, Mironov rewrote the end of the novel giving it a positive finale, without consulting the author. The novel got published and the author got very disappointed with Mironov's gesture. He was not angry because a critical message had been obliterated but because the change had destroyed the literary value of his writing.⁷³

Moreover, when writers wanted to criticize the present the solution was to use a metaphorical discourse hard to decode by those that were not initiated. As Andrei Pleșu puts it, "the existence of censorship led to the elaboration of ingenious subtexts, allusions, and camouflage, techniques practiced with great virtuosity by writers and assimilated promptly

⁷³ Alexandru Mironov, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, September 7, 2004

by the mass of readers.”⁷⁴ However, in some cases a book was rejected to economize resources. In the 1980s it was very difficult to have a book published. The main reason was to economize paper. For instance it was not possible to publish a book having several volumes. Yet some writers managed to outsmart this limitation. For instance Horia Aramă’s trilogy about utopia was published as three different volumes with different titles.⁷⁵ “It was the same project about utopia. But I could not publish it with the same title in three volumes. So, I was advised to give different titles. Those interested in the topic realized that it was about the same project, but since it was a large history of utopian writings I could not treat the whole thing in only one volume.”⁷⁶

Warning science fiction

Anticipating scientific and technological developments was not the only direction undertaken by science fiction writers. In the West for instance, starting from the 1950s an anti-progressive reaction developed mainly based on the understanding that scientific developments could also lead to catastrophic scenarios, such as the consequences of an atomic war. This awareness inspired a science fiction related more and more with social science.

In the 1980s within the Romanian fandom, science was no longer considered a prophetic medium but a point from which writers could extrapolate through ‘thought-experiments’ both in utopian but especially in dystopian directions. Within this context, this literature became an experimental medium exploring not only future scientific and technological achievements but also their social implications either negative or positive.

⁷⁴ Andrei Pleșu, “Intellectual Life under Dictatorship,” *Representations* (January 1995): 62.

⁷⁵ Horia Aramă, *Cetatea soarelui* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1978); Horia Aramă, *Colecționarul de insule*. (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1981); Horia Aramă, *Insulele fericite*; (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1986).

⁷⁶ Horia Aramă, personal interview with the author, Bucharest, June 17, 2004.

In communist Romania, science fiction started as a genre for children meant to popularize science and later to portray the features of the communist utopia. In an article published in 1987 Alexandra Maroon summarized its social functions: “science fiction contributes to the materialist education of the youth, stimulates people to embrace a scientific and technological career and prepare them for the contact with the future.”⁷⁷ However, in late 1980s communist Romania such functions were not enough. During this period, the political and ideological focus of the RCP was no longer the scientific development and progress. Ideologically the past had become more important than ever and the concern for the future, expressed by the Communist Party officials, was especially related with the problem of peace.

Therefore, this period was marked by a campaign of the RCP against nuclear armament and war. In 1986 Nicolae Ceaușescu initiated a referendum for reducing the size of the Romanian Army by 5%. The result was 99.99% in favor of the measures proposed by the Romanian communist leader who also aimed at winning the Nobel Peace Prize. Moreover, large rallies for peace were held and a poem allegedly written by Ceaușescu was included in every literature textbook. This poem was (in a word for word translation): *Let us make from cannons tractors/From atom lights and sources/From nuclear missiles/Plows to labor fields*. However, under Ceaușescu, Romania was Europe's fourth biggest exporter of weapons.⁷⁸

Within the new political context of the 1980s science fiction had to redefine itself in order to demonstrate its usefulness to the authorities while maintaining its identity. At the same time, science fiction literary clubs writers were not eager to write stories depicting

⁷⁷ Alexandru Mironov, “Funcția formativă a cenaclului de literatură SF,” *Almanah Anticipația*, (1987): 163.

⁷⁸ Petre Opreș, “Exporturile de armament, muniții și tehnică de luptă,” *Jurnalul Național*, March 25, 2006 available at <http://1989.jurnalul.ro/tire-special/exporturile-de-armament-munitii-si-tehnica-de-lupta-502042.html> (accessed June 9, 2009).

communist achievements or making political propaganda. They were rather inspired by Western science fiction literature and searched for narrative ways in which to depict the social problems of the present. Dystopian plots that were masked criticism of the Romanian political regime were the main thematic feature. However, this message that within the fandom was read as a critique of the present was presented to the Communist Party officials as useful literature that would support the pacifist efforts of the regime.

Therefore this science fiction trend was named “warning science fiction,” a term very popular in the fandom. Under the label “warning science fiction” fandom science fiction writers could imagine bleak future scenarios. Presenting the dangers of tomorrow it was argued that this literature would in fact warn about their real existence, thus avoiding such possibilities. As it was explained in the editorial of *Paradox* fanzine, “the literary creations of the young writers from the “H.G. Wells” literary club do not present future utopian scenarios but rather aim to warn about the present fate of the planet that is threaten by violence, obscurantism, inequity and hunger. This is the thematic of the current *Paradox* issue.”⁷⁹ Dystopian science fiction having the same name, warning science fiction or “roman d’avertissement” existed also in the Soviet Union during this period and the label was used also to overpass the rigors of the censorship.⁸⁰

Ioan Albescu, the chief editor of *Anticipația Almanah*, defined the functions of warning science fiction. According to him, warning science fiction was useful in the sense that it first of all warned the reader about the possible dangers and perils that the Earth has to face in the future helping him to avoid them. According to him “warning science fiction is an engaged literature that is preoccupied with solving present concerns, the problems that the society has to face through extrapolating their consequences in the future.”⁸¹ The main

⁷⁹ Cornel Ungureanu, “Pledoarie,” *Paradox*, (1985): 3.

⁸⁰ Leonid Heller, Michel Niqueux, *Histoire de l’utopie en Russie* (Paris : PUF, 1995), 255.

⁸¹ Ioan Albescu, “Anticipația,” *Almanah Anticipația* (1984): 4.

dangers for the future, according to Albescu, were, “human alienation in the context of technological development, the nuclear danger, and a possible ecologic catastrophe provoked by man.”⁸²

Warning became therefore a label word attached to science fiction to justify its usefulness in supporting the actions of the Romanian Communist regime. In fact, warning science fiction stories were literary productions with a double meaning that had to be interpreted not only as a literary discourse serving the ideological commandments but also as masked attacks on the communist system. Many examples could be given: for instance the catastrophic consequences of a nuclear war are presented by Ion Popa in *Comando* but the short story could also be interpreted as a critical reference to communist Romania, since the future society depicted in the science fiction plot was a dictatorship.⁸³ Dystopian scenarios were both the image of communist decay and warnings for the future. Many novels with a double meaning were published as warning science fiction, but many more that could not be published were read in the literary clubs sessions.

Vladimir Bucur’s story *Salt în destin* (Destiny Dive)⁸⁴ received the first prize at the 1985 national science fiction contest and was published in *Anticipația*. The action is set in an indefinite future in a society full of inequities. In that society the fate of a person (the moment and the circumstances of death) was decided at birth with the help of a machine based on the social stratification. However, a better destiny in a society divided in five castes, was only possible with the help of money. In the story, the main character, Ham, member of the fifth caste (the lowest one) reached the last day of his life and decided to spend it in a very expensive place, ordering the most expensive drink (that was milk). It is a bleak image of the future, although generally the society looks amazing. Scientific

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ioan Popa, “Comando,” *Almanah Anticipația* (1984): 115-122.

⁸⁴ Vladimir Bucur, “Salt în destin,” *Almanah Anticipația* (1985): 55-56.

developments are unbelievable, yet the real possibilities that could be obtained with the help of science are perverted in a society where everything is regulated and established from birth based on wealth. The short story could be interpreted in many ways. It could be a criticism directed toward a society that attempted to regulate everything in the life of their subjects like the communist one but also as a criticism of a social model governed by the power of money. The story could be also seen as a meditation about the possible negative effects science might have if not properly administered. In the final scene the character survives due to an inexplicable “fate transfer” with a man from a superior caste. There is a happy ending and endless possibilities to interpret the plot.

In *Zece kilograme de uraniu*⁸⁵ Mihnea Columbeanu describes the encounter between extra terrestrials that have survived a spaceship accident and have landed on Earth. They try to obtain from the humans ten kilograms of uranium critical for their survival. Although on Earth there were important quantities of the needed elements the visitors can't get it due to the bureaucracy. First they have to prove they are aliens, and then have to meet various officials to approve their request. Finally they found out that only the *Geneva Congress* can approve such a request. Unfortunately the solution is of no help since the uranium was needed in 24 hours. The message is clear: bureaucracy could kill.

The most known “warning science fiction” story published in the 1980s was a translation, *Regii Nisipurilor* (Sandkings), written by George Martin.⁸⁶ In 1984 the American science fiction writer became one of the most important international science fiction authors within the Romanian fandom. His fame grew after the fall of the communist regime when the science fiction fans returned to his story published in *Anticipatia*, considered retrospectively an anticipation of Ceaușescu's fall. After 1989 the plot of the story was interpreted as a metaphorical articulation of the Romanian revolution when Ceaușescu was

⁸⁵ Mihnea Columbeanu, “Zece kilograme de uraniu,” *Almanah Anticipatia* (1987): 85-96.

⁸⁶ George Martin, “Regii Nisipurilor,” *Almanah Anticipatia* (1984): 281-296.

condemned and shot by those that before were praising his name. One more time science fiction was seen as a literary genre that would forecast future social developments. The story *Sandkings* for which George Martin got the Nebula and Hugo prizes had been published in 1984. It was translated without any copyright obtained (this was a common practice in communist Romania) by Ion Mihai Pavelescu, and published in *Anticipația* in 1984.

In *Sandkings*, Simon Kress the main character was a person living in a distant world. He had a particular passion for extraordinary forms of life. He owned a couple of pets: a carrion hawk and an aquarium full of genuine Earth piranhas. Once, kept away from his home by his businesses he returned to discover that all his pets were dead: “he had no neighbors he could conveniently impose on to take his pets. He was amused to find that his tank of Earth piranhas had cannibalized themselves into extinction and, of the two exotic animals that roamed his estate, only one remained.”⁸⁷

In search of some new pets to satisfy his pursuit of amusement, Simon finds a new shop in the city where he is intrigued by a new life form he has never heard of before; it was a collection of multi-colored sandkings. The curator explains that the insect-like animals, no larger than Simon's fingernails, were not simple insects, but animals with a highly-evolved intelligence capable of staging wars between the different colors, and even develop a certain religious behavior in the form of worship of their owner. As Kres was told, “I projected a holograph of my face into the tank, kept it there for a few days. The face of god, you see? I feed them; I am always close. The *Sandkings* have a rudimentary psionic sense: proximity telepathy. They sense me, and worship me by using my face to decorate their buildings. All the castles have it, see? They did. On the castle, the face of Jala Wo, the curator, was serene and peaceful, and very lifelike.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Ibid., 281.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 283.

Kress bought the creatures and a terrarium was installed at his home. He was very fond of his new pets. He was amused by their wars and happy with the fact that they worshipped him by crafting his face on their castles. His sandkings were a great success in front of his friends. He was primarily interested in the wars, but since the creatures fought quite rarely he begins to starve them so they would start fight over small scraps of food. When hungry, the creatures would change Kres's image, his face on the castles becoming more sinister. The man who sold him the creatures warned him that starving the sandkings is a bad idea and that they would fight better if given plenty of food but Kress does not respect the advice. Finally the sandkings escape and take over Kress's home, killing the one they use to worship.

The story was presented by the chief editor of *Anticipatia* as an example of warning science fiction. According to him violence cruelty and warrior behaviors are in fact the source of self destruction.⁸⁹ However, many read Martin's story as an image of Romanian socialist society. Ceaușescu was Simon Kress who was pleased to see his sandkings (that could be associated with the Romanian people) worshipping him.

When the story *Sandkings* was published Ioan Albescu the chief editor of *Anticipatia* managed to promote it as a useful warning science fiction but it was read by the science fiction fans as a masked criticism of the Romanian communist political system and its leader Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Conclusion

The last decade of the communist regime in Romanian represented a new phase for the evolution of science fiction. First of all a new national publication was set up, the yearly

⁸⁹ Ioan Albescu, "Anticipația," *Almanah Anticipația* (1984): 5.

Anticipația Almanac. Second the fandom developed primary as an initiative of the fans then their actions were supported by the official institutions, Houses of Culture, UTC and UASCR. The RCP was concerned that science fiction could degenerate into actions against the communist regime so everything from publications to literary clubs and conventions was carefully controlled. However, despite the masked criticisms towards the regime present in the science fiction stories and during the literary clubs discussions, the science fiction fans were primarily interested in activities within the fandom and did not follow a political agenda. To consider science fiction a dissident social movement would be an exaggeration. For Cornel Secu a science fiction club leader from Timișoara, science fiction fandom was a refuge, a way to escape the present problems, socialize and mock the current realities. It was not an open-dissident criticism but rather something encrypted, in irony that created a sense of complicity among the members of a science fiction club. “Sunday morning we use to abandon all our problems and were going to the science fiction literary club.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Cornel Secu, personal interview with the author, Timișoara, May 16, 2004.

CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation I have investigated the place of science fiction within Romanian communist literature and its social role during communism. Science fiction might be considered an unusual topic for a historical investigation. However, in communist Romania this genre attracted a large audience and also a community, consisting of numerous science fiction literary clubs having specific activities, developed. Therefore, the analysis I proposed in this thesis encompassed both the genre and the social community generically called the fandom. Science fiction was instituted in communist Romania as a literature for children and youth having a clear pedagogical and propagandistic mission, namely to inculcate into the youth, its main audience, the necessary values for the formation of a new communist man. From the 1970s when the ideological legitimizing discourse of the Romanian communist regime was changed, when the former scenario about the bright Romanian communist future full of scientific and technological achievements proposed by the regime to the population was replaced with the story of the Romanian past in which the leader of the RCP, Nicolae Ceușescu, was portrayed as the follower of the national historical figures, science fiction and the community organized around the genre evolved into a ‘catalyst’ for alternative and rather free spaces of socialization. I used the sintagm “rather free spaces of socialization” because freedom was only the sentiment experienced by the members of the fandom as resulted from the numerous oral history interviews I conducted. It was not a full freedom. In fact, the science fiction literary clubs, publications and events were financed by the state and the science fiction conventions were closely supervised by the *Securitate*.

Science fiction did not have a tradition in Romania before communism. In the interwar period the popular interest for a literature treating scientific and technological problems was scarce and the social and economic development of Romania was not

considered as depending on scientific and technological achievements. The communist regime instituted in Romania after the Second World War came with a different conception related to social progress and change. I have used the concept ‘social imaginary’ as it is defined by Bronislaw Baczko to refer to this new collective representation of social reality that the communist regime promoted after it came to power. Within this context, ideologically, science took the role of a religion since the political system was based on the Marxist-Leninist scientific norms and the development of science and technology was considered the leading force to communism. In its first decade Romanian communist science fiction served the extensive campaign for science and technology launched by the communist regime. Scientific atheism would best characterize the message that this genre dispatched. The social imaginary promoted by the communist regime also through this genre involved shaping a new identity according to the ideological values of the new regime.

The model adopted in Romania was the Soviet one. In the first chapter I analyzed the adoption of science fiction in Romania as a genre for children and youth together with the sovietization of the literary space. The writers were considered ‘engineers of the human soul’ and the method of Soviet literature, socialist realism, was adopted together with a new institutional structure for writers, the Writers’ Union. The transformation of Romanian society and the effectiveness of the social imaginary promoted by the communist regime were also helped by the reorganization or ‘politechnization’ of the educational system. Within this context, science fiction was considered a complementary way to offer scientific education to the young readers and therefore an efficient instrument in the social engineering process carried out by the communist regime. Both the new education system and the literature for children and youth, of which science fiction was a part, were aimed at transforming the youth into efficient and cultured workers required for the accelerated modernization planned by the new regime.

From the beginning, the genre also offered political socialization to its readers. The political ideological tensions between capitalism and communism during the Cold War, the space race between the Soviet Union and the United States as well as fictionalization of political discourses of the communist leaders became a thematic feature of the genre in its first years. Children, who constituted the science fiction readership, were less prepared to understand to the political agitation actions conducted by the communist regime but the science fiction plots presenting the conflict between the capitalist and the communist world through spy and adventure stories, introduced the readers into the problematic of the Cold War. What I argue is that compared to other socialist realist writings, science fiction was more appealing for the young readership. However, the new genre lacked a proper legitimization for that readership so that in the first years most science fiction writers were recruited from the people with technical training but also having a certain literary talent. Some well-known mainstream writers published stories as science fiction, the most important name being Mihail Sadoveanu. These aspects were largely presented in the second chapter.

The 1960s represented a new period for the Romanian science fiction which, as I demonstrated in the third chapter, was determined both by the transformation of the Soviet science fiction following Stalin's death and by political evolution within the Romanian communist regime, especially the distancing actions from the Soviet Union. With respect to science fiction the appearance of utopia as a theme was the main narrative development. As in the previous decade, Soviet novels were translated and published into Romanian and then imitated by local writers that, with the new thematic feature, became more interested in the aesthetic dimension of their writings. Utopia themes represented also a challenge to socialist realism. From the viewpoint of the political development in Romania, the 1960s are known as a period of relative liberalization. It was reflected also in the literary space by the

lessening of censorship and by more autonomy granted to writers. Science fiction utopian themes increased the popularity of the genre, a fact reflected by the large number of letters sent by readers to the *CPSF* editorial office. The increasing popularity of the genre might have been influenced also by the critical innuendos toward the present communist society contained in a metaphorical form in the utopian formulations. However, besides the literary improvements that were noticed by literary critics in the 1960s, the portrayal of science fiction utopia still was an efficient communist propagandistic instrument targeting the youth. As was demonstrated in the section in which I have analysed the letters sent by the readers to the *CPSF* editorial office, this genre was not read only as escapist but also as a possibility for readers to experience the future, ‘the communist one,’ presented by the communist propaganda as an inexorable reality.

However, both socialist realist and communist utopian science fiction are related to the social imaginary that the communist regime aimed to promote at the beginning. The prominent role assigned to science and technology as the major elements leading to the promised communist future was the main commonality both in the socialist realist science fiction and in the communist science fiction utopia. The difference is however important and is related to a different conceptualization of time. Whereas in the case of socialist realist science fiction, the time frame was limited by the so called ‘theory of near anticipation,’ communist science fiction utopia, which is a scientific utopia par excellence, passed the limits of near anticipation which represented a challenge to the socialist realist norms. This aspect was put forward in the analysis of Soviet literature by Leonid Heller. However, in relation to the social imaginary that the Romanian communist regime aimed to promote, the utopian perspective was not substantially different. The change from socialist realist science fiction to utopian science fiction did not imply a transformation of the social imaginary. In both periods of Romanian science fiction, science was considered the only way leading to

the promised communism future, and the social imaginary was constructed based on this belief.

From the 1970s a major transformation could be noticed with respect to Romanian communist society that this time also affected the social imaginary. This period was analysed in the fourth chapter. The July 1971 Theses and three year later the new programme of the RCP adopted during the 11th congress were the main elements of what I called the ‘national turn’ of Romanian Communism. I use this formula to refer to the radical change of the legitimizing discourse of the Romanian communist regime based on the national historical past. Consequently, the ideological significance granted to science and technology in the first two decades of communism considerably decreased. In the 1970s the Romanian communist regime aimed to reconfigure the social imaginary. But within the science fiction community emerging at that time, the social imaginary created around the belief that science and technology were the leading solutions for progress was resilient. The past was not an appealing discursive strategy for the science fiction readership. Instead the ‘end of ideology debate,’ the ‘convergence of systems theory’ and the science fiction literature from the West that became obtainable by Romanian readers stimulated rumination in the emerging Romanian science fiction community. Even though the communist regime came to consider that science fiction was no longer useful for the education of youth and in 1974 following a new press law the *CPSF* was suppressed, the genre survived. Its fans had formed a community of science fiction literary clubs that were hosted mostly by the houses of culture. From this moment on science fiction was not only a literary genre in Romania but an increasing and dynamic community.

In the late 1970s and the 1980s it became evident that the industrialization efforts undertaken by the communist regime in its first decades were a failure. In the 1980s the development of the fandom determined the starting of a new science fiction publication

having a different name, *Anticipația*, and the community became an alternative space that offered a rather free form of socialization to its members. I analysed this evolution in the fifth chapter. I used for this period the term ‘alternative’ in the sense that the science fiction community existed somehow outside the established cultural milieu. Science fiction activities were not presented in mass media but they were supported by the state. The science fiction fans speak about a ‘sentiment of freedom’ felt within the fandom but in fact everything was controlled. The science fiction community did not transform into a dissident anti-communist community. It was a community based on the resources offered by UTC, UASCR and the houses of culture. The RCP succeeded to oversee the science fiction community and to prevent any open dissident manifestations. The masked criticisms and “lizards” enclosed in the stories were tacitly tolerated, and as science fiction writers and fans from the period remembered this was an excellent way to release social tensions.

However, in the 1980s the growing number of science fiction literary clubs was considered by Alexandru Mironov as the beginning of the civil society. It would probably be hard to demonstrate this claim but for sure the social and intellectual life within these clubs influenced and transformed many people that after 1989 became well-known media and cultural figures in Romania. For instance, Cristian Tudor Popescu, who started as a science fiction writer in the 1980s and was a member of *Solaris* and *Prospectart* science fiction literary clubs from Bucharest, was designated Romania's best journalist four years in a row after 1989 based on opinion polls. Sorin Antohi, Bogdan Ficeac, Valentin Nicolau, Dănuț Ungureanu, Silviu Genescu, Lucian Merișca, Lucian Ionică, Bogdan Haritonovici are other important names from the present Romanian public space whose development is related to the socialization within the science fiction community. They were active in their respective science fiction clubs and the debates on science fiction writings and other subject of interest contributed to the development of their critical spirit. Therefore, finally it could be stated that

one of the function of science fiction in the 1980s, the fandom especially, was to foster the formation and development of the critical spirit for many people.

Science fiction was adopted in communist Romania in the 1950s as a literature for children and youth meant to popularize science and offer political socialization. At the beginning it promoted the social imaginary proposed by the communist regime. From the 1970s and especially in the 1980s when the ideological legitimizing discourse of Romanian communist regime became the national historical past the science fiction community did not adopt the new ideological perspective but became an alternative space for socialization. It did not become a dissident movement. It was financially supported by the state, closely followed by the *Securitate* (The Secret Police) and the literature that was published carefully checked by the censorship. The dystopian literature produced during this period, the double metaphorical language, the so called “lizards” were masked critiques of the communist regime that were tolerated because of their presumed capacity to release social tensions. This whole environment as already hinted above contributed to the social and intellectual life of many people that became known after 1989.

In this dissertation I have also opened a new direction of research, presenting the analytical potential that a rather disregarded genre by literary critics and a rather marginal community, the science fiction one, could offer for the history of Romanian communism. The evolution of Romanian science fiction, both literature and community, offers a picture of the specificity of the Romanian communist regime revealing the compromises between the communist system and the social groups such as the science fiction one. Moreover, this research is a contribution to the analysis of the communist youth culture in Romania.

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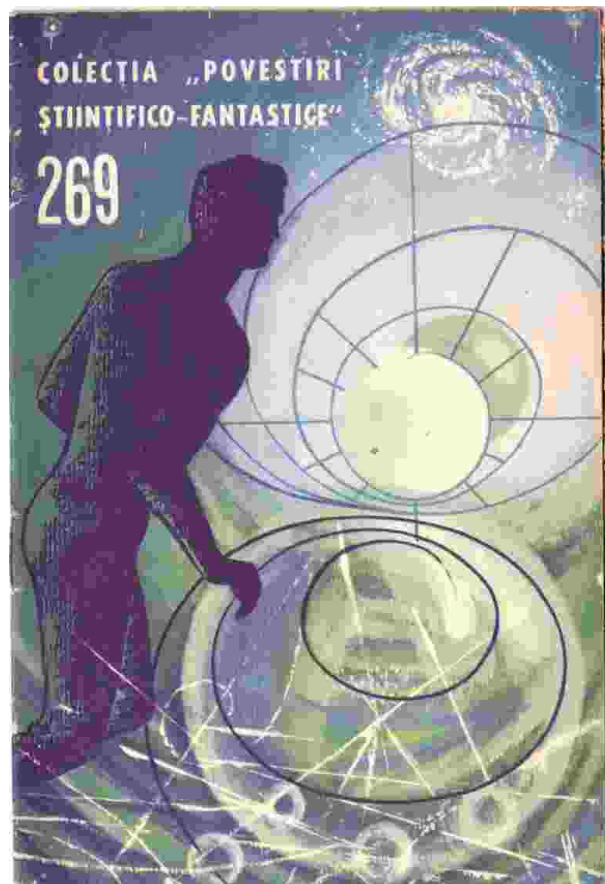
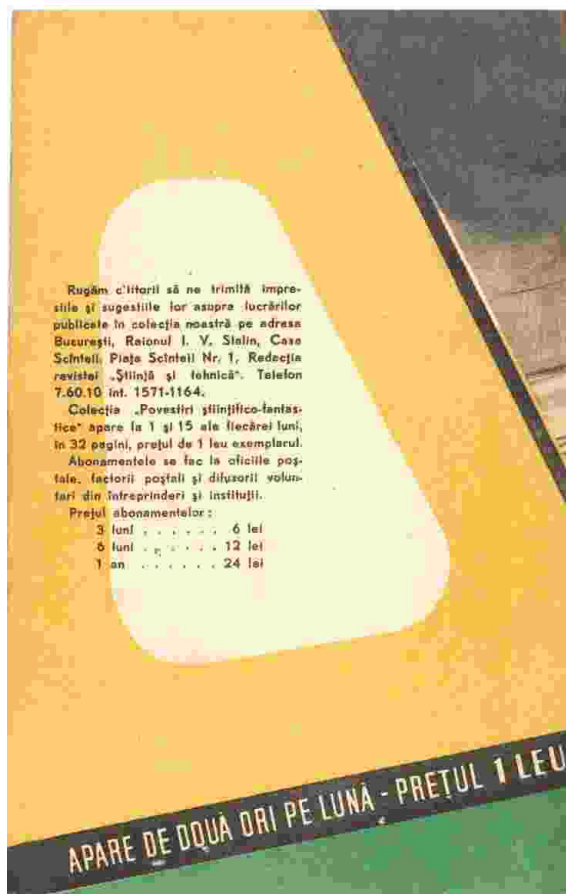
Appendix

Appendix: A history of Romanian science fiction 1955-1989, in images

Pictures of two *CPSF* covers representing the design of the first years



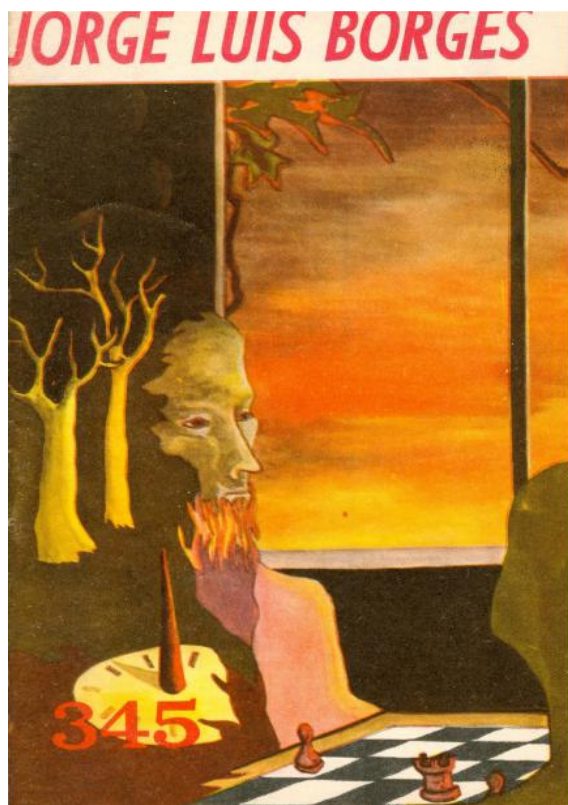
The last *CPSF* cover, which displays the cheap price of the magazine, 1 leu. The cover of the 269th issue, a different design compared with the first years.



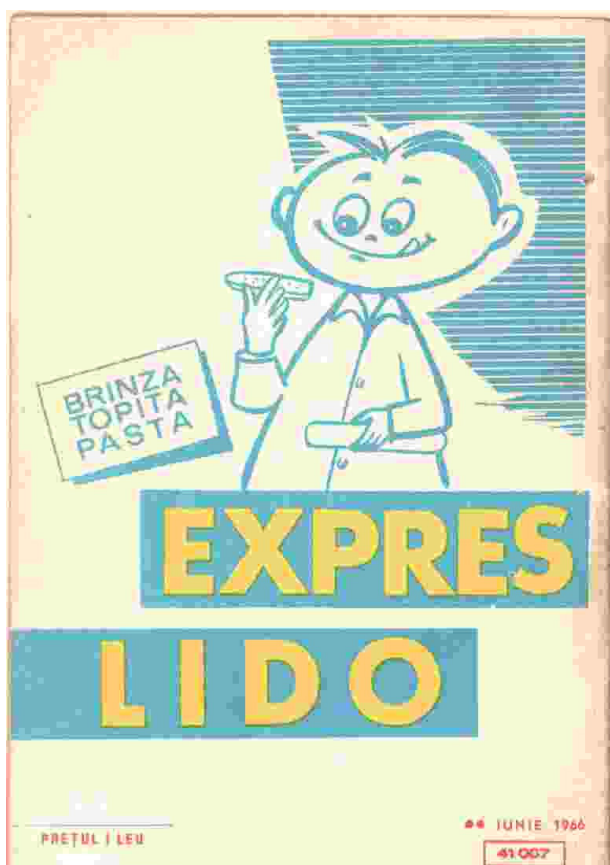
Biographical notes about the authors published in *CPSF*. George David was a soldier and Cristian Costanda graduated in mathematics and mechanics.



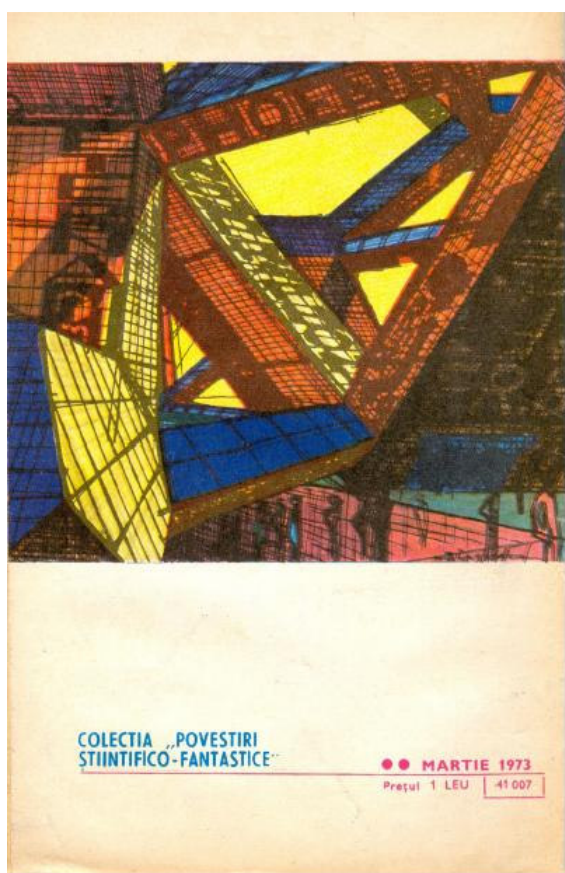
In the late 1960s during the period of “political autonomy and ideological relaxation” western authors were also published in *CPSF*.



In the late 1960s on the last *CPSF* cover advertisements for products for children were published; in the two images below advertisements for cheese and sweets.

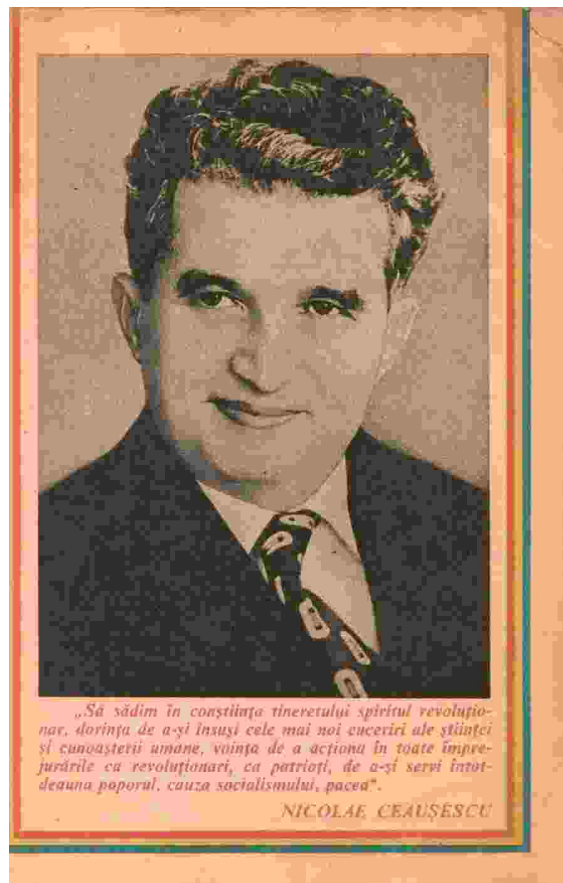
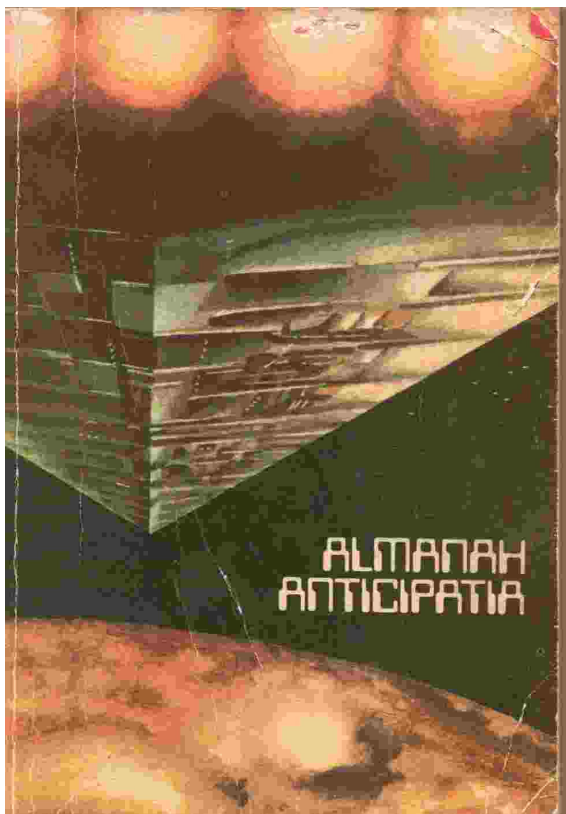


Advertisements for Pepsi Cola on the back cover of *CPSF* from 1967 and furniture on the last *CPSF* cover in December 1968.



The national communist period is felt also in the design of the *CPSF* covers. This one, a back cover from 1973, represents the city of Timișoara in the year 2000. Design by Marius Sîngiorzan.

The first cover of *Anticipația* from 1984. In the 1980s on the first page of every *Anticipația* was a portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu.



Dumitru Prunariu, the only Romanian cosmonaut, chaired a roundtable at the 12th ROMCON in Sibiu 1982. Dan Merișca archive, Iași.



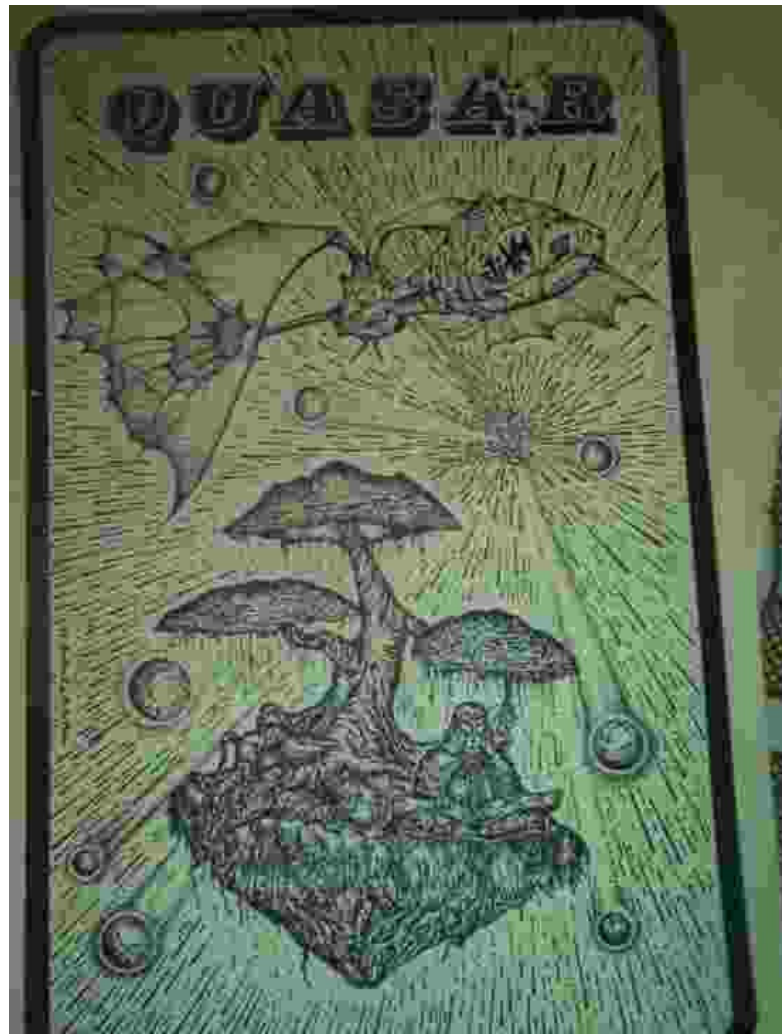
Literary critic Mircea Opriță speaking during a ROMCON in the 1980s. The picture of Nicolae Ceaușescu on the wall was a must during this period. Dan Merișca archive, Iași.



Members of the Quasar sf club from Iași in the 1980s.



Cover of the Quasar's fanzine in the 1980s. Dan Merișca archive, Iași.



Pictures taken during the ROMCONs in the 1980s. Dan Merişca archive, Iaşi.



The author, the tape recorder on the table and former H.G. Wells sf club members from Timișoara during a convention in 2004.

