

# Clandestine Reading in Communist Romania: A Few Considerations

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*“Silent witnesses to sleep  
and insomnia, battles and  
withdrawals, assistants and  
friends, books have always  
been my shield, my city  
and my sword.”*

*Ion Vianu*

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## **The Policy of Prohibition**

**C**ONSIDERED, JUST like under any dictatorship, to pose real threats to the state security, reading practices were constantly monitored by the political power in communist Romania, becoming the object of several resolutions and regulations. Shortly after the establishment of the communist regime (through the king’s forced abdication and the proclamation of the Popular Republic on 30 December 1947), a first such regulation was issued by the Department of Publishing and Control within the Literary Directorate of the Ministry of the Arts and Information: *An Introduction and Instructions to the List of Publications Prohibited As of 1 May 1948*. Comprising over 8,000 titles that were banned as part of a necessary “operation of sanitising the sector of the printed word in our country,”<sup>1</sup> the document stipulated that this action “shall be continued in the form of additional brochures, numbered 1, 2, 3, etc., which shall each contain 1,000 (one thousand) new titles, until the country’s entire sector of publications of any kind has been completely de-fascised.”<sup>2</sup>

Through such legislative instruments, the so-called special collections of the public libraries, comprising definitively forbidden books and books that were only accessible through special warrants, became richer and richer.<sup>3</sup> Although the first years of the dictatorship witnessed massive book expurgations, the phenomenon would continue until the downfall of the regime. In 1949, the General Directorate for the Press and Publications took control of the operation through memoranda that signalled immediately if an author had left the country or if changes in the state policy had occurred; taken over by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture, these memoranda acquired the force of normative acts. Besides centrally issued directives, incentives were given to librarians to perform voluntary work and make “suggestions for eliminating printed material that is not included on the lists edited by the Ministry of Culture.”<sup>4</sup> In 1967 was founded the State Committee for Culture and the Arts, which became the Council for Socialist Culture and Education in 1971. The prerogatives of this body included setting forth specific normative instruments. According to Ordinance No. 1003 of 15 August 1968 regarding the classification, preservation and circulation of book collections, the special collections fund comprised: “a) publications whose content goes against the general political line of the Romanian Communist Party and of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Romania, since these are materials which denigrate the Romanian country and people; b) imported printed materials which are to be filed under the special circulation collection by the authorities from the General Directorate for the Press and Publications; c) works whose content is obscene.”<sup>5</sup> Over the following years, the same Council issued several notices, similar to the ordinance of 1983, regarding “the withdrawal from the reading circuit of all the books present in the libraries under your supervision, authored by the writers mentioned in the appendix, given that they have left the country.”<sup>6</sup> Whenever there was an emergency, the removal of printed material was done through swift telephone notices: “Subsequent to the telephone notice received from the Ministry of Education and Learning, the Department of Libraries, issue no. 12 (December) 1984 of the *Amfiteatru* review shall be included in the restricted circulation collection. It shall remain in this collection until further notice.”<sup>7</sup> All these expurgations would result, by the end of the 1980s, in an impressive number of prohibited publications. Thus, Paul Caravia, the author of a substantial research on the prohibitions operated especially at the Central Romanian State Library, mentions that “*In 1987 (on 8 April), we learn from an internal report that the Central State Library had 26,549 book items and 16,000 periodical items under examination in the ‘S’ collection*”<sup>8</sup> (emphasis original).

## How and What Was Read? The Practice of Clandestine Reading

**T**HE CONSISTENT book prohibition policy, which targeted not only public collections, but also the circulation of forbidden titles in private libraries (a consequence of the suppression of individual freedom), generated and fostered the clandestine practice of reading. Given that, in communist Romania, reading was a mass phenomenon (entailing the preservation of individual values and substituting other entertainment forms), its clandestine nature was bound to reach gargantuan proportions. A renowned theorist of reading and the author of a prestigious study entitled *Rereading* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1993), Matei Călinescu is quite right to point out in his memoirs that “Whoever has not experienced a totalitarian regime can hardly imagine the complicated forms of what might be called *torture through reading* or, at the other extreme, *torture through the absence of reading*—with all the gradient shades between the disgust triggered by forceful reading to the famish triggered by censorship, including the ravishing hunger provoked by total censorship in political prisons”<sup>9</sup> (emphasis original).

What was read, after all, and how could the “hunger provoked by censorship” at all satiated? First and foremost, it was the books extant in private libraries established before 1948 that were read. A decisive role in that respect was that played, again, by professors. Matei Călinescu confesses to the formative importance of his access to professor Tudor Vianu’s library (a prestigious academic from the University of Bucharest, as well as the father of his friend, Ion Vianu, who is also his interlocutor in the confessional epistolary we have cited from): “Evidently, by using his father’s enormous library (one didn’t read much poetry in my home), we read and recited and learned by heart only the lines of these officially prohibited authors, alongside, of course, the poems of great foreign poets, either in the original or in translation, from Mallarmé to Valéry, from Novalis and Hölderlin to Rilke. As for Romanian poets, Ion Barbu, Arghezi and Blaga became real cult objects for our little secret society.”<sup>10</sup> Moreover, he was to become himself an initiator for Nichita Stănescu, who later turned into a great poet: “It was a privilege for me to introduce him to the great clandestine Romanian poets back then—Ion Barbu, Blaga, Arghezi, Bacovia—whom he read with a joy that was equally one of cognition and recognition (and gratitude).”<sup>11</sup> It wasn’t only the old school professors, like the humanist Tudor Vianu, who facilitated the younger generation’s access to fundamental books; Paul Georgescu, a young Marxist literary critic and a defender of the dogmatic, Stalinist line in the 1950s, also violated the official prohibitions: “As a professor, I gave my students books that were no longer being edited: Arghezi, Bacovia, Blaga and many

others.’ ‘Have they been returned to you?’ ‘No way. Some people even turned me in for disseminating rotten literature. They failed miserably in life.’”<sup>12</sup>

At other times, forbidden books were provided by second-hand booksellers, who had to show extreme caution at dealing in such items. Thus, by the mid 1950s, at the School of Literature (an institution founded and closely supervised by the party in order to ensure the formation of propagandistic writers who were not under the influence of Western ideology) arrived “forbidden books that we read under the covers with flashlights.”<sup>13</sup> Amongst the books thus read was, according to Marin Ioniță, a former student of this school, the “monumental *History of Romanian Literature from Its Beginning Until Today* (the one with the marshal dressed in a white robe with a cross, which was sufficient reason to be investigated by the Securitate if they found the book on you). It had subversively been introduced into the school by Labiș too, who had purchased it from the same old second-hand bookseller who would clandestinely sell books only to the customers he trusted. I remember how we jostled each other and bumped our heads trying to read it, in a hidden chamber, turning its pages with bated breaths.”<sup>14</sup>

Young readers also happened to access the libraries’ secret collections. Ana Blandiana grabbed such an opportunity when she was a teenager:

*I think I must have been 13 or 14 when I learned that the sealed chambers contained forbidden books from the library of the former Greek-Catholic bishopric. I managed to remove a hinge that had been thrust into the door’s ancient wood and I entered having a mixed feeling, of pride and fear, of adventure. What I discovered then—as well as the consequences of my discovery—would shape my becoming. I shall never forget the amazement of the first moment when, having managed to set the door ajar, I found myself not in a room, but facing a mountain. A mountain of books rising almost to the ceiling, having been thrown there at random, not even placed into stacks. I became an intellectual by trying to exhaust that mountain.*<sup>15</sup>

A student in philosophy, Alexandru Ivasiuc also managed to clandestinely read the fundamental books for his formation:

*I read *The Critique of Pure Reason*, a work without the study of which you cannot consider yourself a student in philosophy, lying down on my stomach on the balcony of the philosophy faculty’s library, happy that I had laid hands on the key to those books. The librarian had given it to me discreetly, slipping it into my hand and advising me warily not to lift my head lest I should be seen from the reading room. That place of book piles had a nice smell, the smell of*

*library dust. I had read Tudor Vianu's Aesthetics as well as The Philosophy of Culture, and I encountered there dozens of reference names and titles that would otherwise have been impossible to obtain.*<sup>16</sup>

Librarians could also get arrested, as it happened in the case of adolescent Radu Cosașu, while he was stealthily reading Mircea Eliade's novel *The Return from Heaven* ("I read the book in the forest behind our house, having carefully searched for the thickest trees that might guard me from any eyes—it was the first time I had secretly read a book"<sup>17</sup>). The guilty reader would therefore resort to extreme gestures: "I buried the book in my forest, by my house."<sup>18</sup> Although during the years that followed, Radu Cosașu, turned journalist and writer, dedicated himself to the communist cause and the new regime, he would not give up the practice of clandestine reading. In the meagre room his aunt had allowed him to use, under the bed's mattress, he would hide forbidden books, the most important one being Isaak Babel's *Red Cavalry*—much to the horror of an upholsterer, who had come in for repairs: "he won't enter a room where there are so many books... he's scared to do is."<sup>19</sup> In the same room he read *From the Register of Dainty Ideas*, essays by Paul Zarifopol, a Cartesian, ironic, anti-Marxist thinker; the book was "wrapped in the cover pages of *Sanda Marin—A Cookbook*, because the author, according to the person who lent it to me, I shan't say exactly who, but it was an important person, 'the author is not yet well with the authorities."<sup>20</sup> This happened several years after Cosașu had read *Craii de Curtea-Veche* (The philanderers from Curtea-Veche), an aesthetically exquisite and refined novel written by Mateiu I. Caragiale, and had taken down long passages from it "under *Scânteia* (The Spark) [the Communist Party's official paper] that served as a perfect cover for the volume."<sup>21</sup> Despite having taken so many other liberties, Cosașu did turn down the invitation of some of his fellow writers to read, also clandestinely, Khrushchev's Report: "two good acquaintances of mine, who worked for some children's publications, had invited me to join them on this lake, where they would read Khrushchev's unmasking report to me."<sup>22</sup>

Under the dictatorship, books from abroad enjoyed the greatest prestige. As the critic Nicolae Manolescu writes, "to us, foreign newspapers or books were a sort of safety valves or survival means. Reading permanently kept the illusion of the West and of the civilised world alive. . . . Those books were so important that we spared no effort to lay hands on them. When they were confiscated from us, we grieved for them as for great losses."<sup>23</sup> The writer Adriana Bittel also recollects about books that circulated underground, "fresh foreign books, smuggled in by those who were permitted to travel or by Western guests—fiction books, as well as books on recent history, political science, literary theory,

memoirs, all of these volumes being conspiratively passed from hand to hand until they fell apart.”<sup>24</sup> A young poet, Aurel Dumitrașcu records his escape, immediately after the downfall of the dictatorship, into the reading of foreign books: “Fleeing into another language as escapism, as therapy. Kojève, Leo Strauss, Marlio, Zinoviev, Kundera, Artuad, Volkoff, Bataille, Scarpetta, and Sinyavski. And Sade. You have always been a blissful reader. The only way we can still be Europeans is through the books we read.”<sup>25</sup>

Constantly reviled in the official documents for their purported deleterious effects, these foreign books both provided their readers with major reading satisfactions and exposed them to the greatest perils. During the first, quasi-Stalinist stage of the dictatorship, books arriving clandestinely from the West were used, on several occasions, as incriminating evidence in political trials. An exemplary case in this sense is the 1958 trial of the Constantin Noica group (named after the group’s most prominent and influential figure), which included 23 intellectuals (literary critics, philosophers, and theatre people). According to the *Notice to Proceed with the Criminal Case*, they were accused of having read “material with a hostile content targeted at the Democratic-Popular regime of R[omanian]. P[opular]. R[epublic].” and of having disseminated it “amongst their friends and acquaintances.”<sup>26</sup> In the terms used in the same judicial documents, these were “counter-revolutionary materials clandestinely smuggled into the RPR,” materials “written by the country’s traitors, IERUNCA-UNTARU VIRGIL, MIRCEA ELIADE, CIORAN EMIL and VINTILĂ HORIA.”<sup>27</sup> More precisely, these materials are E. M. Cioran’s *La tentation d’exister* and Constantin Noica’s public letter addressed to him, “Lettre à un ami lointain” (published in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1957),<sup>28</sup> Mircea Eliade’s novel *Fôret interdite*, *An Anthology of Romanian Poetry Written in Exile*, edited by Vintilă Horia, and Eugène Ionesco’s play *Rhinocéros*. The indictments for the deeds (or, rather, the readings) committed by the defendants ranged between “the offence of sedition against the social order” and “the crime of treason”;<sup>29</sup> consequently, the sentences varied between “25 (twenty-five) years of forced labour” and “six years in a correctional prison,” supplemented, in all the cases, by “the seizure of all assets.”<sup>30</sup> The most relevant commentary on the disproportion between deed and retribution belongs to N. Steinhardt, one of the former defendants:

*The most horrendous aspect of the trials where the accused confesses to and admits everything is that ninety-five percent of the incriminated acts are true to fact. With the only difference that these acts are not criminal acts. Which explains why Western jurists let themselves be deceived: accustomed to the classical proceedings, they examined the consistency between statements and deeds, without questioning, however, whether the deeds were indeed criminal acts. They were*

*so convinced, for them it was so blatantly evident that the incriminated acts were offences that they took everything for granted. They did not re-examine the axioms. The charges that were brought against us were not false. We had, in actual fact, read books by Mircea Eliade, by Emil Cioran, by Eugen Ionescu. We had often frequented Tr., where we had had tea in **Rosenkavalier** teacups, chattered and unburdened our souls.<sup>31</sup>*

After 1964 (when the so-called Romanian “thawing” began, followed, in 1971, by another period of constriction), owning and reading foreign books no longer automatically entailed the possibility of arrest and conviction; however, it continued to be used as a means of intimidation and blackmail. Livius Ciocârlie, a writer and university professor from Timișoara, experienced this at the end of the 1980s, when, together with his wife and his daughter, who had arrived in Bucharest, he was approached by three policemen under a certain pretext, and invited to follow them to the precinct from the train station. There they were made to give statements and were searched: “the chief, in civilian, finds an issue of *Libération* in the suitcase. So that’s what they have been looking for. Nicolae [Manolescu] gave it to T. for me to read, it comprises only articles about us, including one whose title is ‘Les écrivains roumains ont froid.’ Educated, like all of his kind, the man gets the point immediately. Another statement, the newspaper is seized.”<sup>32</sup>

Conversely, those who travelled to the West experienced genuine “library sickness,” a mixture of reading frenzy and frustration. It was the case of Ioana Em. Petrescu, a writer and professor at Cluj University, who was a Fulbright grantee at UCLA between 1981 and 1983. In the letters sent to her friends back home, Ioana Em. Petrescu constantly talked about “the nostalgia for everything I shall never manage to read”, admitting that she was “obsessed with what would remain unread for ever.”<sup>33</sup> Living “as though the universe were a compulsory reading list,”<sup>34</sup> the Romanian writer succeeded in buying very few of the books she desired; instead she took down notes and photocopied intensely, out of a feeling that she had a unique, unrepeatable opportunity, and out of a fear of missing books that “might serve me for a lifetime.”<sup>35</sup>

In Romania, however, clandestineness meant more than the reading of forbidden books; it also meant reading books that were approved by the system for their “degree of truthfulness,” in Ana Blandiana’s words from a 1983 interview: “At present, there is a number of significant Romanian writers, whose prose and poetic works do not make for very easy reading, but whose books sell out quickly, are permanently on loan, or are sold at an inflated price.”<sup>36</sup> Sold on the black market, at an inflated price, such books brought a critical perspective upon the regime (a perspective mediated through, and therefore made accessible by fiction), having a potentially subversive effect. While reading, for instance,

Augustin Buzura's novel *The Road of Ashes*, Liviu Ioan Stoiciu wrote down in his journal in 1989: "Really, how was the publication of this book possible? If you were to record the dialogues in this novel and turn up the volume of your speakers, the Securitate would most likely arrest you on the spot, I could bet on that..."<sup>37</sup>

## Why Were Books Read? The Functions of Clandestine Reading

HAVING REACHED the proportions of a generalised, mass phenomenon, and having become for many a current, oftentimes engrossing activity, practised everywhere,<sup>38</sup> while standing in line or during meetings,<sup>39</sup> or on commuting trains,<sup>40</sup> reading had certain essential—I believe, indeed, vital—functions under communism. In *The Hooligan's Return*, Norman Manea refers to the existential endurance that reading provides: "The real survival test in the unheated rooms in the old apartment building next to Cișmigiu Park was the winters. Like the besieged population of Leningrad during the blockade of World War II, people also resisted by reading in socialist Jormania."<sup>41</sup> Matei Călinescu offers a description and an explanation of this process: "Reading in a totalitarian world is almost the equivalent of reading in prison—when the guardians allow it. The reading that ensues is simultaneously rigorous, careful (the relatively few books worth reading are read profoundly, intensively) and projective—in the sense that the reader projects onto the text his or her own secret aspirations, desires, thoughts, theories. The interest for this type of reading comes from the tension between attention and projection, between the respect for the letter and the tendency to see the text as an allegorical expression of the reader's drama."<sup>42</sup>

Through the act of reading, readers may discover or build their inner lives and individual thinking which are denied to them by the regime's levelling politics. "It is obvious," Ana Blandiana admits, "that what was previously sought through literature was an ounce of inner freedom—rather difficult to obtain through the other forms of spiritual manifestation."<sup>43</sup> Herta Müller subscribes to this idea. Books, she says, "helped one not remain speechless to oneself. It wasn't that books could change anything; they only described what man was like when there was no scope for happiness in sight. Even that little, and it still means a lot—I have never expected more from a book."<sup>44</sup>

Besides acting to sustain and preserve inner life, reading also served as an instrument of identifying and partaking of an authentic concern of public life. As Ion Vianu suggests, it was only private reading that could "put us at an adequate,



opportune distance from the totalitarian school outlook that sought to impose itself upon us!” The same author confesses that thanks to prohibited Romanian, as well as certain Western books (in his case, Albert Camus’ *L’homme révolté*), “an ideal portrait of my country was forged inside me; but for that, I would never have been able to bear the terror, the vulgarity and, especially, the disappointments I experienced when I came to realise how difficult it would be—in temporal terms—to build a country in Romania.”<sup>45</sup> Florența Albu also resorts to an identificatory reading of forbidden foreign books, including George Orwell’s *1984*: “I have just finished reading G. Orwell’s *1984*. A cruel, mind-blowing vision. This year—1984—or over the past couple of years we have already experienced Big Brother’s power: we have been living for decades in full-blown *angsoc*: what Orwell predicted about 35 years ago, what might have seemed the hallucination of a sick mind is beginning to be the reality. . . . A harsh, unbearable book, in permanent confrontation with our present.”<sup>46</sup> The books of Raymond Aron and André Glucksmann, which reached Ion D. Sîrbu *via* his friends living in exile in the West, made him exclaim helplessly: “the books for which I have endured here are written comfortably in the West.”<sup>47</sup> Belonging to a younger generation that has only experienced the consequences, rather than the regime of the great communist terror (like I. D. Sîrbu, a writer who served a political sentence of many hard years in prison), Vitalie Ciobanu admits that his readings helped him to acquire the “exterior sight” which would enable him to elude communist ideologisation and to discover alternative moral values: “I owe to Kafka the standards of my moral conduct, as well as the access to a different literary horizon. His force of suggestion broke the mirror.”<sup>48</sup> Reading assumes, thus, a therapeutic community function: in Alexandru Vlad’s words, “The assiduous reading Romanians were steeped in, up to a certain December night in 1989, must have acted as a sort of therapy. . . . A group therapy in which we were, alternately or concurrently, objects and subjects, patients and confessors, sanitary agents and submissive guinea pigs.”<sup>49</sup>

“Neurotic reading,” as Simona Popescu refers to it, accounts for the existence, under the dictatorship, of what Al. Cisteleanu calls “a reader *sentenced* to read,” who would, at times, get crushed beneath “my greenhouse of books,”<sup>50</sup> in Victor Felea’s words. According to most testimonies, however, the prevalent functions of reading were those of protection, resistance,<sup>51</sup> inner liberation and the development of a critical spirit, as evinced by the following pithy and vibrant lines written by Ion Vianu: “How many were the times when, faced with unbearable platitude or the cruelty of the times, I sought refuge between the pages of books, like under a warm duvet, allowing me to fall asleep and dream the sweet dream of poetry? Alternatively, how many were the times when, with a fresh mind and fully awake, I used books as weapons against brutal imposture or against the

temptation to yield to it? Silent witnesses to sleep and insomnia, battles and withdrawals, assistants and friends, books have always been my shield, my city and my sword.”<sup>52</sup>



## Notes

1. *An Introduction and Instructions to the List of Publications Prohibited As of 1 May 1948* has been completely re-edited in Ionuț Costea, István Kiraly, and Doru Radosav, *Fond secret. Fond “S” Special: Contribuții la istoria fondurilor secrete de bibliotecă din România. Studiu de caz: Biblioteca Centrală Universitară “Lucian Blaga” Cluj-Napoca* (Cluj: Dacia, 1995). The quoted passage is from page 184. As regards the legislation that endorsed censorship (including book censorship) under communism, see also Liviu Malița, *Teatrul românesc sub cenzura comunistă* (Cluj: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2009), 109–127.
2. *Ibid.*, 188. “De-fascisation” was a deceitful term, which designated all the real or potential ideological adversaries of the new regime, and not just those who had adhered to or had sympathised with fascism.
3. According to the *Instructions Regarding Book Selection from the Library Collections* (1950–1955), the distinction between the two collection sections is as follows: “The prohibited library cannot be accessed by anyone without the approval of authorities that shall be appointed thereafter. The books in question shall be deposited separately, and the library book cards shall be removed from the public catalogue. The documentary library may be consulted by the University’s scientific staff and by the students at their professors’ recommendation. The library cards of these books shall be removed from the public file cabinets; the books, however, shall remain in the library’s book stacks (or on the library book shelves)” (Costea et al., 262).
4. *Ibid.*, 266.
5. *Ibid.*, 302.
6. *Ibid.*, 328. The document from where the quoted excerpt is taken is *The Council for Socialist Culture and Education’s Notice of 12 August 1983*, which was remanded to the Central University Library in Cluj under the heading “Classified information.”
7. *Ibid.*, 333. The prohibited issue from the *Amfiteatru* journal—18, 12 (December 1984)—contains four poems by Ana Blandiana, which describe an exhausted, excruciated country: *The Children’s Crusade*, *Everything*, *Demarcations*, *I Believe*. Up until the fall of the dictatorship they circulated in samizdat fashion. Here are, by way of illustration, two of these texts: *The Children’s Crusade*: “An entire people / As yet unborn, / But condemned to birth. / Queuing beforehand for birth. / Foetus by foetus, / An entire people / Which sees not, hears not, understands not, / But moves forward / Through the writhing bodies of women, / Through the blood of mothers / Misunderstood”; *I Believe*: “I believe we are a vegetal nation, / Where else could we get this calmness / In which we await the shedding of our leaves? / Where

else could we get the courage / To go down the slide of sleep / Almost to the brink of death / Having the certainty / That we will be able to get born—/ Again? / I believe we are a vegetal nation—/ A mutinous tree / Is yet to be seen.”

8. Paul Caravia, ed., *Gîndirea interzisă: Scrieri cenzurate. România 1945–1989* (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 2000), 33. Comprising over 500 pages, the book also includes an Index of prohibited publications.
9. Matei Călinescu and Ion Vianu, *Amintiri în dialog*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Iași: Polirom, 1998), 130.
10. *Ibid.*, 82.
11. *Ibid.*, 96.
12. Florin Mugur, *Vîrstele rațiunii: Convorbiri cu Paul Georgescu* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1982), 146.
13. Marin Ioniță, *Kiseleff 10: Fabrica de scriitori* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2003), 41. The book in question is *The History of Romanian Literature from Its Beginning Until Today* by G. Călinescu, the princeps edition from 1941. Published during the war, under Marshal Ion Antonescu's dictatorship, the book's first page had the latter's photo on it.
14. *Ibid.*, 62.
15. Ana Blandiana, *Cine sunt eu? (un sfert de secol de întrebări)* (Cluj: Dacia, 2001), 352–353.
16. Alexandru Ivăsiuc, *Pro domo* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1974), 80.
17. Radu Cosașu, *Ficționarii (Supraviețuiri, IV)* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1983), 27.
18. *Ibid.*, 28.
19. Radu Cosașu, *Supraviețuiri*, vol. 4, *Pe vremea cînd nu mă gîndeam la moarte* (Bucharest: Ed. Fundației Pro, 2005), 152.
20. *Ibid.*, 163.
21. Radu Cosașu, *Supraviețuiri*, vol. 2, *Armata mea de cavalerie* (Bucharest: Ed. Fundației Pro, 2003), 175.
22. *Ibid.*, 191.
23. Nicolae Manolescu, *Cititul și scrisul* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 217.
24. Adriana Bittel, “Din tinerețe pînă azi,” *Lettre internationale*, Romanian edition, no. 52 (winter 2004–2005): 100.
25. Aurel Dumitrașcu, “A rezista în provincie,” *Contrapunct* (Bucharest) 1, 14 (6 April 1990).
26. Mihai Giugariu, ed., *Prigoana: Documente ale procesului C. Noica, C. Pillat, N. Steinhardt, Al. Paleologu, A. Acterian, S. Al.-George, Al. O. Teodoreanu etc.* (Bucharest: Vremea, 1996), 13.
27. *Ibid.*, 31.
28. In the trial Sentence (Sentence No. 24/1 March 1960), Constantin Noica was accused also of having illicitly read this publication: “In order to get into the possession of the *Nouvelle Revue Francaise* journal, which existed in the special collections of the RPR Academy Library, the accused, Noica C-tin requested the complicitous help of Dimitriu Paul, a clerk at the academy library (currently undergoing trial), who smug-

- gled it out and then made copies of Cioran Emil's article, which he then disseminated amongst seditious elements, foremost of whom was Noica Constantin" (ibid., 444).
29. Ibid., 509.
  30. Ibid., 512–519. A very good reconstruction of the trial, based on documents, the defendants' statements and witness testimonies, can be found in Stelian Tănase, *Anatomia mistificării* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997).
  31. N. Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii*, ed. Virgil Ciomoș (Cluj: Dacia, 1991), 231.
  32. Livius Ciocârlie, *Paradisul derizoriu: Jurnal despre indiferență* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993), 43–44.
  33. Ioana Em. Petrescu, *Molestarea fluturilor interzisă: Scrisori americane, 1981–1983*, ed. Ioana Bot (Bucharest: Ed. Didactică și Pedagogică, 1998), 61.
  34. Ibid., 82.
  35. Ibid., 88.
  36. Blandiana, 44.
  37. Liviu Ioan Stoiciu, *Jurnal stoic din anul Revoluției, urmat de Contrajurnal* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2002), 58.
  38. "At home, warmly dressed, wearing woollen socks, under blankets, by the bed-lamp, at daytime, at noon" (Simona Popescu, "All That Nostalgia," *Observator cultural*, no. 130, 20.08–26.08.2002: 6).
  39. Gabriela Adameșteanu, *Cele două Români: Articole și fragmente memorialistice* (Iași: Institutul European, 2000), 106.
  40. Stelian Tănase, *Acasă se vorbește în șoaptă: Dosar & Jurnal din anii târzii ai dictaturii* (Bucharest: Compania, 2002), 12.
  41. Norman Manea, *Întoarcerea huliganului* (Iași: Polirom, 2003), 309.
  42. Călinescu and Vianu, 305.
  43. Blandiana, 330.
  44. Herta Müller, *Regele se-nclină și ucide*, trans. and notes by Alexandru Al. Șahighian (Iași: Polirom, 2005), 193.
  45. Călinescu and Vianu, 115–116.
  46. Florența Albu, *Zidul martor (Pagini de jurnal) 1970–1990* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1994), 260–261.
  47. Ion D. Sîrbu, *Traversarea cortinei: Corespondență cu Ion Negoitescu, Virgil Nemoianu, Mariana Șora*, preface by Virgil Nemoianu (Timișoara: Ed. de Vest, 1994), 529.
  48. Vitalie Ciobanu, "Omul sub lupă," *Lettre internationale*, the Romanian edition, no. 52 (winter 2004–2005): 86.
  49. Alexandru Vlad, "Tentația inversării proporțiilor aisberg-ului," *Familia* (Oradea) 30 (130), 10–11 (October–November 1994): 13.
  50. Victor Felea, *Jurnalul unui poet leneș, ianuarie 1955–martie 1993*, ed. Lidia Felea (Bucharest: Albatros, 2000), 630.
  51. I have given an extensive description of the phenomenon of resistance through culture (through reading, as well) in my book entitled *În lumea nouă* (Cluj: Dacia, 2003).
  52. Călinescu and Vianu, 122.

**Abstract****Clandestine Reading in Communist Romania: A Few Considerations**

This study retraces the main aspects and mechanisms of clandestine reading in communist Romania. The first section (“The policy of Prohibition”) is an overview of the institutions and the main normative instruments deployed by the communist power towards monitoring book circulation and reading practices from 1948 to 1989. The second section (“How and What Was Read? The Practice of Clandestine Reading”) identifies the prevalent strategies of subversive reading: borrowing books from private libraries, accessing the secret collections of libraries and second-hand bookshops, reading books from the Western world (always a dangerous and clandestine venture), and the Aesopic reading of books that, while being approved by the system, brought serious critiques to the regime under the guise of fiction. The last section (“Why Were Books Read? The Functions of Clandestine Reading”) is an inventory of the main existential functions of reading: constructing and preserving inner life, participating in the real public life, resisting the pressures of the political system, shaping alternative community values and forging a critical spirit.

**Keywords**

policy of prohibition, practice of clandestine reading, strategies of subversive reading, functions of clandestine reading