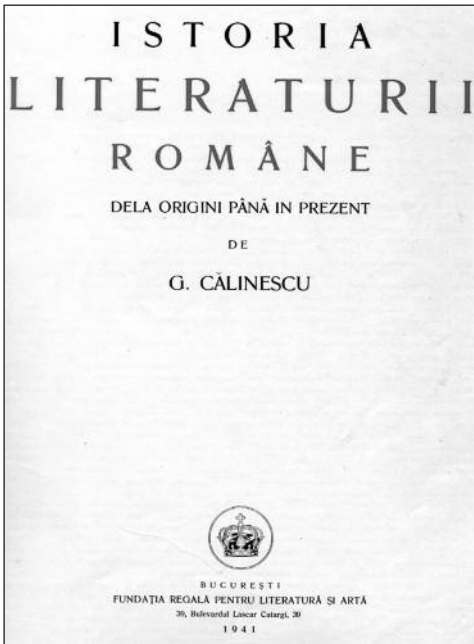

RESTITUTIONS

A Report of D. Popovici on the *History of Romanian Literature from Its Beginning Until Today*

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IN 1942, the year following the publication of G. Călinescu's *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* (History of Romanian literature from its beginning until today), the Ministry of National Culture and of the Religious Denominations appointed Professor Dimitrie Popovici to make an investigation of the newly published book. Minister of Culture was, at the time, the philosopher Ion Petrovici, who had held a similar position in Octavian Goga's government between 1937 and 1938. The Minister demanded an investigation through an official letter, which, drawn up and sent to the Cluj Professor on May 22, 1942, notified him that "Ms. Perticari Davila has filed a complaint with the Ministry whereby she claims that Mr. G. Călinescu, a lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of Iași, insults the late Alexandru Davila in his *History of Romanian Literature*. For this reason, the Ministry, given the Decision No. 47504/1938, published in the *Monitorul Oficial* No. 66 of March 21, 1938, appoints you to make the investigation mentioned in the aforementioned Decision."

The Decision, which set up the legal framework for the investigation, stipulated that, if the defendant was a university professor, the investigation was to be conducted by “a full professor from the higher education system,” and thereupon a special committee made of “the Higher Education Commissioner, a full professor [most likely the same person as the author of the report—our note] and a public attorney from the Ministry’s Legal Department” was to issue, as appropriate, a notice of ruling and demand disciplinary punishment. On the other hand, Article 4 of the Decision stipulated that “the investigation will include the hearing of the defendant, who will make a written statement. The defendant has the right to submit a written report along with the supporting documents to the investigator.”

We do not know whether G. Călinescu really went through the hearing, as stipulated in the legal procedure, and, if he did, we do not know whether or not he drew up such a report, which should have put him face to face with the investigator. We do however know that the “full professor from the higher education system” appointed to write the report was the literary historian Dimitrie Popovici (1902–1952), the former honorary assistant of Dumitru Caracostea between 1924 and 1926 and a university professor himself at the Faculty of Letters in Cluj from 1936 until the end of his life.

The result of his research on Călinescu’s *History* was a text of a little more than seven typewritten pages, which he sent to the Higher Education Commission on July 21, 1942, approximately two months after his appointment.

The D. Popovici Archive seems to preserve all the papers connected to the investigation: the report in question, the letter sent to the Professor, as well as a D. Popovici’s request submitted to the Higher Education Commission concerning the refund of 12,000 lei, which he had spent on two Bucharest visits: he was given his task in the first visit, and gathered data from the Romanian Academy Library in the second one. The Archive also contains some handwritten reading cards with, mostly, information from the time’s journals about the 1915 attempted murder of Alexandru Davila and excerpts from the articles written upon his death in 1929.

All the documents from the D. Popovici Archive—in the possession of the Romanian state after the childless death of the literary critic Liviu Petrescu (D. Popovici’s son-in-law) in 1999—are in the Special Collection Fund of Octavian Goga Cluj County Library.

Ms. Perticari Davila, whom the letter acknowledges as the plaintiff, was none other than Elena Davila, one of Alexandru Davila’s three sisters, General Perticari’s wife and, after her brother’s death, the owner and executrix of the writer’s archive. She was seemingly not only a “passionate biographer of the family”¹—she published a volume entitled *On the Life and Correspondence of*

*Carol Davila*² in 1935—, but also, as the complaint suggests, a guardian of the family prestige: it seems that she was disturbed by Călinescu's allusions to what had probably been that time's gossip about her famous brother's personal life.

This is, on a more anecdotal note, the context that led to the drawing-up of the report required of Dimitrie Popovici.

The Main Ideas in D. Popovici's Analysis

IT IS somewhat ironic that Dimitrie Popovici, a spirit with a definite "penchant for order,"³ for whom rationalism had become "a moral ideal,"⁴ was the one who was requested to draw up a report on G. Călinescu's *History of Romanian Literature from Its Beginning Until Today*. Although the two authors comprehend history in general and its writing in quite different ways, the real distance between them is mostly given by their perspective on knowledge. The irony, if the situation can be looked at in this way, consists of the fact that D. Popovici's report shouldn't have addressed the theoretical principles underlying Călinescu's *History*—which he would have, undoubtedly, criticized—but it should have strictly analyzed data of a documentary, biographical nature. It was obvious that Elena Davila's complaint "could not be caused by the favorable evaluation [in the *History*'s article on Alexandru Davila—our note] of *Vlaicu-Vodă*, but by the introductory biographical statements on the author and his father, General Davila." The professor could not however resist the temptation, and conducted his investigation on three levels: (I) the biographical level; to a lesser extent, (II) the adequacy of Călinescu's *History* to the principles set forth in the adjoined preface and (III) the questioning some of these principles.

The Analysis of the Biographical Data

AFTER OPENING his report with some general considerations on Călinescu's *History* ("it is surprisingly lacking in conceptual unity and historical information and it displays several obsessions" etc.), because "the study cannot be followed in all its details—this would mean to completely recreate it—," D. Popovici decides to limit his considerations to the "two chapters incriminated in Ms. Peticari Davila's complaint," namely, the chapters about Dinicu Golescu and Alexandru Davila.

It may appear surprising that D. Popovici included the chapter about Dinicu Golescu into his research material. Indeed, if we only take into account the let-

ter he had received from the Ministry of National Culture and of Religious Denominations, this seems groundless, as Ms. Peticari's accusations seem to incriminate only the chapter about "the late Alexandru Davila." The fact that the writer's grandmother on his mother's side, Zinca, was Dinicu Golescu's daughter, was no cause for a broader area of investigation. Things become clearer when we take into account the fact that Professor Popovici had been personally asked to go to Bucharest in order to receive his appointment. At the Ministry, he was probably asked to read the very complaint filed by Alexandru Davila's sister. In the complaint, there was—as we may rightfully assume⁵—discontent about the *History's* chapter on Dinicu Golescu, which was completely left out in the official letter sent to D. Popovici. Only in this way was the Professor entitled to discuss "the two chapters incriminated in Ms. Peticari Davila's complaint" in his report.

More than anything, looking at the objectivity of the sources, D. Popovici reproached the *History's* author for lacking a genuine documentation and for falsifying the spirit of several passages from *Notes of My Journey*, which resulted in an arbitrary portrait of Dinicu Golescu, and which placed Călinescu "completely outside the truth."

Although, in the *History*, Golescu is considered "a boyar like all boyars, humble with the powerful, taking money from the needy, according to his own testimony, living a lazy life and whining away from hardship," Popovici found him to be "a man morally different from the Jassy critic's portrait of him. Far from being 'a boyar like all boyars' who takes money from the poor, Golescu is a harsh critic of boyars, of public servants and a fearless defender of the needy." On the basis of the same passages that "Mr. Călinescu uses to partially ground his study," the Cluj Professor restored the name of the *Notes of My Journey's* author by viewing him not as "an oppressor of the people," but, on the contrary, as "a forerunner of militant socialism."

Furthermore, D. Popovici's opinions on Golești's Constantin Radovici only reinforced his thoughts expressed between 1938 and 1940 in his Cluj University lectures on "Romanian Literature in the Enlightenment Era" and on *Modern Romanian Literature—Integration into the Western Cultural Trends*,⁶ where he stated that "In these pages, Golescu brings Romanian society and his own conscience to a merciless trial, fosters an unchecked spiritual exuberance and a high social consciousness, and reveals the vibration of the most powerful moral strings of Romanian culture"⁷ "in its modern age."⁸

After these few considerations of the way in which G. Călinescu understands and portrays Dinicu Golescu, D. Popovici goes on to the "second fragment incriminated in Ms. Peticari Davila's complaint," namely, the one about her brother, which is found at pages 579–580 in the *History of Romanian Literature*

from *Its Beginning Until Today*. Quite compact in the *History*'s first edition—although, according to Ionuț Niculescu, “Davila is given the most substantial presentation in a literary history until then”⁹—the chapter about the author of our historical masterpiece, the drama *Vlaicu-Vodă*, was rewritten by Călinescu in 1961 to be included in a second edition and went up from one page in the first edition to about four pages in the second one. Professor Popovici, however, only knew of the first version of the chapter, the same one that was the reason for Ms. Perticari Davila’s complaint.

After giving a tinge to some of the historian’s statements in the chapter’s biographical passage and after amending others, D. Popovici notices that “the information that Mr. Călinescu uses on Al. Davila is accurate.” In fact, in the lecture held in Cluj in 1946–1947 on *Eminescu in Literary Criticism and History*, D. Popovici confessed about Călinescu: “Although he occasionally builds on incorrect data, this is due to a lack of information—which can happen to anyone—but never to consciously corrupted information.”¹⁰

As to the professor himself, he obviously does not want to use unverified information, thus he even asks for help from experts in matters such as the issue of the Jewishness of Countess d’Agoult.

He shows the same thoroughness in documenting the attempted murder of Alexandru Davila by his valet, Jean Dumitriu. On one of the typewritten cards in the D. Popovici Archive investigation file, there is even a list of consulted articles—16 of them—with exact references to the newspapers where they were published. Thus, he takes the following notes after reading the *Adevărul* newspaper for several consecutive days in 1915:

April 7 “Murder of Al. Davila”

*Short note on the event; no information about the circumstances. In the **Last minute** section, information about the search for the murderer. The suspect is Jean Dumitriu, “a swindler, very insolent even to his master.”*

*April 8. In the **Last minute** section: Jean Dumitriu was arrested in Brăila. He confessed to the murder, without stating the reasons. Two photos of the murderer are shown: D.’s valet is a handsome lad. He is the son of Davila’s cook.*

April 9. He confesses the reason for the murder: “Davila mistreated him.”

From an obituary published in the *Rampa* in 1929, the professor retained the literal text of an analogy made by the author of the obituary: “When a madman shattered Mihail Eminescu’s skull with a stone, death was kind enough to come quickly, whereas when a murderer shattered Davila’s skull, life persisted with a meaningless energy that absurdly prolonged the suffering.”

Ionuț Niculescu wrote on the same topic in 2001:

On April 5, 1915, the valet thrust a knife into his master's head while he was sleeping. Operated by Toma Ionescu, Take Ionescu's brother and an authority in the field of surgery, Davila remained alive, but was paralyzed for the rest of his life (14 years). He was attended by few and forgotten, as often happens, by all those who owed him gratitude. The criminal record detailing the attempted murder disappeared from the Ministry of Justice Archives even before the beginning of the First World War. It seems that some well-known members of the elite were involved in this murky business.¹¹

Inadequacy in Following the Method

FOR the most part, D. Popovici's report naturally focused on a documentary analysis of Călinescu's *History*, as was officially requested, it also drew attention to a totally different aspect: "the separation of the cultural from the artistic."

Our opinion is that, although the professor's conclusion is somewhat justified by Călinescu's work itself, it results however from an erroneous interpretation of the way in which the *History's* author understood the separation of the cultural from the artistic.¹² More specifically, when he rhetorically wonders "to what extent *is* [our emphasis] the cultural separated from the artistic in some writings" of Dinicu Golescu, D. Popovici performs a translation of an operation that G. Călinescu would be entitled to perform on the texts themselves. In other words, whereas Călinescu considered that the separation of the cultural from the artistic was one of *his* responsibilities as a literary historian, which was made possible by the application of "the same strictly literary *methods* [our emphasis] to the *whole textual substance*" (our emphasis—that is, the substance that is *strictly* literary and the substance that is *rather* cultural—our note), D. Popovici considered that the separation of the two spheres may or may not exist in the *writings themselves*, which would strictly delimitate them, so that the separation of the cultural from the artistic should eventually lead to the dismissal of those works that fall more within the domain of culture in favor of those pertaining to literature. However, G. Călinescu noticed that "if it is absurd to consider literature simple phenomena belonging to the history of language, of printing, and of culture, it is as equally fallacious to part history at an arbitrary point. Why must Romanian literature start with Cârlova? Before him, there are works, if not admirable, *then likely to explain what follows after them*" (our emphasis). The statement aims, of course, at their *artistic* side, and is partially equivalent

to D. Popovici's own statement, which distinguished, in the development of Romanian culture and literature, "an evolution . . . that is always *more artistically tuned, in an atmosphere gradually purified of the extrapoetic*" (our emphasis).¹³

Thus, as Mircea Martin also notices, Călinescu succeeds in transcending "both the *confusion* and the *breach* between the cultural and the aesthetic," by distinguishing "within the cultural mixture" that "*subjacent aesthetic vein* subordinat-ed to other objectives and values" (other than the aesthetic ones), that he would follow in old Romanian literature "before it became independent and authoritative, before the aesthetic value was cultivated for itself."¹⁴

In effect, even from the second paragraph of his preface, G. Călinescu clearly limits the object of his *History*—as well as of criticism in general—by stating that "only writings expressing complex intellectual and emotional structures, with the purpose (*or at least the result* [our emphasis]) of achieving an artistic feeling, can be classified as literature." This last statement explains well enough why the *History's* author "left out Coresi for good" and discussed "the writers of the Transylvanian School 'in a cursory manner,'" as well as why he included Dinicu Golescu in his *History*: Călinescu considered that Golescu's *Notes of My Journey* also deals, although "only adventitiously," with "the aesthetic nature of the landscape."

An Objection of Principle

D POPOVICI'S last question about the *History of Romanian Literature from Its Beginning Until Today*—both rhetorical and polemical—concerns the "real reason" why G. Călinescu "lumped in his work" the whole informational mixture on Carol and Alexandru Davila. "Preoccupied only by the 'aesthetic conscience,' as he confesses in his preface, Călinescu does not use in any way this information for the analysis of *Vlaicu-Vodă*."

In 1942, while drawing up this report, D. Popovici explained the prevalence of the anecdotal by Călinescu's "thirst for publicity." However, five years later, in the lecture on how Eminescu was acknowledged by Romanian literary criticism and history, he regarded it in connection to Călinescu's understanding of literary history, which he considered "obsolete." Popovici claims that "within this complex discipline, the biographical cannot be cultivated for its own value; it is a subordinate element that can be used only if required and only to the extent required by the interpretation of the work."¹⁵ The distance between the two historians is all the greater as Călinescu consciously assumed this use of the anecdotal element, because he was convinced that, on the one hand, the critical and the creative spirit are organically linked, and that, on the other hand, "a

biography is of high quality and consistently scientific if all its moments coherently portray a hero in his manifestation.”¹⁶

On many occasions, D. Popovici admitted that the critic had “a talent for presenting the facts,” but Popovici preferred “defining the personality instead of writing a biography along epical or lyrical lines.”

□

Notes

1. Ionuț Niculescu, *Alexandru Davila: Micromonografie* (Bucharest: Universalia, 2001), p. 8.
2. Elena general Peticari-Davila, *Despre viața și corespondența lui Carol Davila* (Bucharest: Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, 1935).
3. Ioana Bot, *Histoires littéraires: Littérature et idéologie dans l'histoire de la littérature roumaine* (Cluj-Napoca: Centre d'Études Transylvaines, Institut Culturel Roumain, 2003), 243.
4. Ioana Em. Petrescu, in her “Preface” to Dimitrie Popovici, *Poezia lui Eminescu* (Bucharest: Ed. Tineretului, 1969), 26.
5. Our considerations of the plaintiff's complaint are only hypotheses, as we could not look at the complaint.
6. These lectures were published in the professor's first volume of *Studii literare*, edited by Ioana Em. Petrescu, his daughter, in 1972, at Dacia Publishing House of Cluj and were entitled *Literatura română în epoca Luminilor*.
7. *Ibid.*, 363.
8. *Ibid.*, 349.
9. Niculescu, 31.
10. D. Popovici, *Studii literare*, vol. 6, *Eminescu în critica și istoria literară românească* (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 1989), 108.
11. Niculescu, 17.
12. Because we do not have the space to further analyse this issue, we shall only sketch the main ideas of the argument made in our master thesis, whose main topic is this very report.
13. Popovici, *Studii literare*, 1: 22.
14. Mircea Martin, *G. Călinescu și complexele literaturii române* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1981), 159.
15. Popovici, *Studii literare*, 6: 114.
16. G. Călinescu, *Principii de estetică* (Bucharest: Ed. Fundației pentru Literatură și Artă, 1939), 82.

Abstract

A Report of D. Popovici on the *History of Romanian Literature from Its Beginning Until Today*

Devoted to a report drawn up by D. Popovici at the request of the Ministry of National Culture and Religious Denominations concerning G. Călinescu's *History of Romanian Literature from Its Beginning Until Today* (1941), the present study seeks to outline the main coordinates and ideas of an investigation which, starting from biographical data, came to focus on matters pertaining to literary theory, in the framework of a manifestly polemical discourse. The report drawn up by D. Popovici clarified the matter of the incriminated biographical information, but its author exceeded his original mandate, also discussing matters pertaining to Călinescu's critical approach that had clearly not been mentioned by the plaintiff at the origin of the report, Ms. Peticari Davila.

Keywords

D. Popovici, G. Călinescu, Alexandru Davila, literary criticism, literary theory