

Between theology, literature and life: Virgil Gheorghiu and his biography

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Thierry Gillyboeuf, *Virgil Gheorghiu l'écrivain calomnié. Essai*, Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2017.

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Important writer of Romanian exile during the communist exile and author of the *25th Hour*, Virgil Gheorghiu¹ was also a controversial personality. Showing an early talent, he started to publish during the interwar period (*Viața de toate zilele a poetului [The daily life of the poet]*. Bucharest: Romanian Book Press, 1937), and he was even from that period a known and successful writer (with a prize from the Romanian Royal Foundation for his poetry book from 1940; *Caligrafie pe zăpadă [Calligraphy on snow]*. Bucharest: Royal Foundations „Charles the second” Press, 1940). Still, his main success will be the aforementioned book entitled *25th Hour*, where he denounces the communism crimes but also the bad behaviour of the Nazi and legionary movement.

In the same time, the success will bring him a lot of problems: a trial with Monica Lovinescu for the copyrights² after his previous appreciations (*Ibidem*, p. 481) and recommendations to Gabriel Marcel for the foreword (Gabriel Marcel, “Preface,” in *La vingt-cinquième heure* by Virgil Gheorghiu, translated into French by Monique Saint-Come, col. “Feux Croises,” Paris: Librairie Plon, 1949 p. I-IX), and a huge

scandal started by Virgil Ierunca, where many accusations will be never proved.

Despite of his importance and of the fact that, during the time, some authors have written about him³, there has never been until now a complete and impartial biography dedicated to him. Therefore, the recent work of Thierry Gillyboeuf, French researcher closed to the writer and specialised on this topic (Thierry Gillyboeuf, „Cel de-al treilea volum al *Memoriilor* [The 3rd volume of the *Memories*]”, in Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, *Omul care călătorea singur [The man who was travelling alone]*, translated into Romanian by Gheorghiu Ciocoi. Bucharest: Sophia Publishing House, 2010, p. 5-11), entitled: *Virgil Gheorghiu l'écrivain calomnié. Essai* (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 2017), is an important and necessary contribution for this topic and it will bring not only new information about it, but also a synthesis and some clarifications.

Structured as an essay without the pretensions of a scientific research (but without a lack of scientific rigor) and accompanied by some interesting photos with the writer (pp. 49-64) and a complete list of his publications and their translations in different languages (pp. 93-95), his presentation starts with the beginnings of the future writer's life and ends by presenting his posthumous reception.

Using information provided by the two volumes of his diaries (Virgil Gheorghiu, *Memorii – martorul orei 25 [Memories. The witness of the 25th hour]*, translated into Romanian by Sanda Mihăiescu-Cârsteanu, col. “Sinteze-documente-eseuri,” Bucharest: 100+1 Gramar Press, 1999; *Ispita libertății – memorii II [The temptation of freedom – 2nd volume of memories]*, translated into Romanian by Sanda Mihăiescu-Cârsteanu, col. “Sinteze. Documente. Eseuri,” Bucharest: 100+1 Gramar Press, 2002), but also from other sources (like his novel *The man who was travelling alone*, considered the 3rd volume of his diary; Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, *Omul care călătorea singur [The man who was travelling alone]*, translated into Romanian by Gheorghiu Ciocoi. Bucharest: Sophia Publishing House, 2010, other works of the author, books and articles dedicated to him and s. o.), he goes deep with his research presenting biographical aspects

analysing his works, or arguing with some of his enemies. For highlighting the context of his life and activity he uses sometimes comparisons with other Romanian writers from exile like Vintilă Horia (and his work *God has been born in exile*; Vintilă Horia, *Dumnezeu s-a născut în exil [God has been born in exile]*, Madrid: Carpații Press, 1978) or with the international situation of the time. Also he compares different descriptions of the same event before subscribing to one or presenting it in his book.

Conscious about the complex social, cultural and political context where Gheorghiu lived, Therry Gillyboeuf states from the beginning of the presentation the fact that “the political, literary and human course of Virgil Gheorghiu is really married with the deflagrations and the changes of his country, but also with the changes of the tormented and torn 20th century. This is how the son of a fumble priest from Carpathian Mountains became at thirty years the author of the greatest success of the bookstore of the immediate post-war period and one of the major books of our time, before making the object of an extremely violent cabal that will definitely make him a dubious character, even infrequent, leading in a regrettable forgetting a work to rediscover” (p. 8).

Then like a man born in Romania he goes deep into the details of Gheorghiu’s biography and speaks about the local context of his birth, his childhood and adolescence, period of study, the beginnings of his literary and publicist activity and his marriage. Afterwards, he presents in a very animated manner his diplomatic activity, his glory period, the scandal with Monica Lovinescu and his difficult life in exile. Of course, he doesn’t forget to speak also about his clerical career, his meetings with the Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople, to whom he will dedicate a book (Virgil Gheorghiu, *Viața Patriarhului Athenagoras [The life of Patriarch Athenagoras]*, translated into Romanian by Cristian-Dumitru Moldovan, Alba-Iulia: Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2009), or about his travel to Lebanon from where he will return inspired and, in consequence, will publish a new book (*Hristos în Liban [Christ in Lebanon]*, translated into Romanian by Valentin Vesa, Alba-Iulia: Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2009). In this book he

doesn't avoid sensible topics like the conflict with Monica Lovinescu or the serious accusations brought by his detractors, offering interesting arguments in his defence.

In his conclusion, referring to some aspects from one of his apologetically texts (Virgil Gheorghiu, "Le sceau de l'infamie (Journal intime)", in *La cravache*, Paris: Librairie Plon, 1960, pp. 219-237), he also highlights the fact that: "the virulence of the attacks of which it has been the subject is inconceivable. But even today, his name bears the marks of it. That's what he himself called the Seal of Infamy (the title of a beautiful text he wrote in those years)" (p. 90).

By presenting in a complex and dynamic way the life, activity and work of Virgil Gheorghiu, highlighting some hidden aspects of the controversies to which he was often victim and bringing a new approach of his writings, Thierry Gillyboeuf brings again into attention the work and life of the great Romanian writer from the French exile of the 20th century, translated in 30 languages and screened in a movie with Anthony Quinn as a principal character. Let's hope that his work will be just the first one from a long list where his name will be again valued and his personality will be investigated at its real dimension.

Notes

¹ Virgil Gheorghiu, *La vingt-cinquieme heure*, translated into French by Monique Saint-Come, col. "Feux Croises", Paris: Librairie Plon, 1949), and of some other important books of literature (like: *La seconde chance*. translated into French by Livia Lamoure, col. "Feux Croises", Paris: Librairie Plon, 1952; *L'homme qui voyagera seul*, translated into French by Livia Lamoure, col. "Feux Croises", Paris: Librairie Plon, 1954; *Le Peuple des Immortels*. translated into French by Livia Lamoure, col. "Feux Croises", Paris: Librairie Plon, 1955; *Les Sacrifices du Danube*, translated into French by Livia Lamoure, ol. "Feux Croises", Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957; *Viața lui Mahomed [The life of Mahomed]*, translated into Romanian by Gheorghiuță Ciocoi, Bucharest: Sophia Press, 2016), or theology (see: *Saint Jean Bouche d'Or*, translated into French by Livia Lamoure, col. "Hommes de Dieu," Paris: Librairie Plon, 1957; *Condotiera*, translated into Romanian by Georgiana Matei, Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea Publishing House, 2011; *Sfântul Ambrozie al Milanului [Saint Ambrosius of Milan]*, translated into Romanian by Gheorghiuță Ciocoi. Bucharest: Sophia Press, 2013; *Tatăl meu, preotul care s-a urcat la cer*.

Amintiri dintr-o copilărie teologică [My father, the priest who ascended to sky. Memories from a theological childhood], translated into Romanian by Maria-Cornelia Ică jr. Sibiu: Deisis Press, 1998.

² These are described in: Monica Lovinescu, *La apa Vavilonului [To the Vavilonvalley]*, col. "Memorii-Jurnale-Convorbiri," Bucharest: Humanitas Press, 1999, p. 67; Neagu Djuvara, *Amintiri din pribegie (1948-1990) [Memories of wandering (1948-1990)]*, 2nd edition, Bucharest, Humanitas Press, 2008, p. 132-134; Virgil Ierunca, *Trecut-au anii... Fragmente de jurnal. Întâmplări și accidente. Scrisori nepierdute [The years have passed.... Journal snippets. Incidents and accidents. Unsold Letters]*, col. "Memorii – Jurnale – Convorbiri," Bucharest: Humanitas Press, 2000, p. 338-339; Sanda Stolojan, *Nori peste balcoane. Jurnal din exilul parizian [Clouds over the balconies. Diary from Paris exile]*, translated into Romanian by Michaela Slăvescu, col. "Memorii-Jurnale," Bucharest: Humanitas Press, 1996, p. 22-23), the jealousy of Mircea Eliade (Mircea Eliade, *Europa, Asia, America... Corespondență A-H [Europe, Asia, America... Correspondence]*, 1st volume, edited by Mircea Handoca. Bucharest: Humanitas Press, 1999, p. 325.

³ Traian Cicoare, "Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, la trei lustre de postumitate," in *Symposium*, vol. V (2007), Issue 1 (9), p. 366-370; Gabriela Pliuță, "Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, "Exile dans la Coquille de l'écriture du roman „La seconde chance”, in *Language, discourse and multicultural dialogue*, 1st volume, Târgu Mureș: Arhipelag XXI Press, 2013, p. 552-565; Constantin Cubleşan, *Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu – aventura unei vieți literare [Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu – the adventure of one literary life]*. Bucharest: Sophia Press, 2016; Amaury D'Esneval, *Gheorghiu*. col. Qui suis-je? Pardes: Puiseaux, 2003) or have mentioned him in their books dedicated to the Romanian contemporary literature (Dumitru Micu, *Literatura română în secolul al XX-lea [Romanian literature in the 20th century]*, Bucharest: Press of the Romanian Cultural Foundation, 2000, p. 320-324; Ovid. S. Crohmălniceanu, *Literatura română între cele două războaie mondiale [Romanian literature between the two World wars]*, 2nd volume, Bucharest: Minerva Press, 1974, p. 562-570), or in some studies or articles (Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „Elemente ale spiritualității ortodoxe în opera literară a lui Virgil Gheorghiu [Elements of Orthodox spirituality in the literary work of Virgil Gheorghiu," in *Symposium* – "Cultural Transparency and the Loss of Privacy in the Era of Digital Technology: How Is This Shaping Our Becoming and the Ethical Dilemmas Related to It", Edited by The Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality from New York, vol. XXIII (2016), p. 63-73; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „Conflictul dintre Virgil Gheorghiu și Monica Lovinescu, reflectat în scrierile lui Mircea Eliade și Neagu Djuvara [The conflict between Virgil Gheorghiu and Monica Lovinescu reflected in the writings of Mircea Eliade and Neagu Djuvara," in Doru Sinaci, Emil Arbonie (eds.), *Administrație românească arădeană – studii și comunicări din Banat – Crișana [Romanian administration from Arad – studies and communications from Banat]*, Emil Arbonie, Arad: "Vasile Goldiș" University Press, 2017, p. 575-585; Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco: L'Oubli du fascisme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002; Florin Țurcanu, "Un moment roumain a Paris." in Mihai Neamțu, Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban (eds.),

Memory, Humanity and Meaning. selected essays in Honor of Andrei Pleșu's Sixtieth Anniversary offered by New Europe College Alumni&friends, 515-530.
Bucharest: Zeta Books, 2009, p. 515-530).

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