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**THE CULT OF NICOLAE CEAUȘESCU’S PERSONALITY
IN THE 1980S POETRY. CASE STUDY: THE MAGAZINE
“ROMÂNIA LITERARĂ”**

ABSTRACT

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Keywords: *encomiastic poetry, cult of personality, Nicolae Ceaușescu, propaganda, censorship, opportunism, ideological conformism, official celebrations, arrogation of national history, sacralization of the leader, mythologizing the president's origins, the dictator's mythic facets, the magazine „România literară”, constrained artistic discourse subjected to political pressures, occasional versifiers, dictatorial regime*

Abstract: The present study is based on the premise that the Romanian literature from the communist period cannot be fully understood in the absence of an analysis of all its forms of expression, including those that are uncomfortable, marked by compromise, or aesthetically questionable. In this regard, we have considered that a detailed analysis of the encomiastic poetry dedicated to Nicolae Ceaușescu contributes to a better understanding of the Romanian literature during that period. It highlights the extent to which poetry was instrumentalized for the consolidation of political authority and for the construction of the cult of personality.

An examination of literary histories devoted to the communist period reveals that compromised literature of a propagandistic nature, oriented toward strengthening the cult of the leader's personality, is rarely addressed in depth. This segment is often avoided by literary criticism, probably on the grounds that it is too minor or lacking in aesthetic value to deserve detailed analysis. Even in the major works of important critics, the issue of propagandistic literature and its role in consolidating the cult of personality of Nicolae Ceaușescu is treated only marginally, through brief and cursory references.

In our view, the need to integrate a detailed analysis of propagandistic literature and its role in consolidating the cult of personality of Nicolae Ceaușescu into literary histories is fundamental for several reasons.

First, literature cannot be separated from the political and ideological context in which it was produced, and the omission of this segment creates an incomplete picture of the evolution of Romanian culture during the communist period.

Second, propagandistic literature functioned as a major instrument to legitimize power, contributing to the maintenance of a climate of obedience and to the perpetuation of social control mechanisms. To ignore it means not only to disregard a significant chapter in literary history, but also to diminish our understanding of the ways in which the regime instrumentalized culture for its own purposes.

At the same time, a critical analysis of this literature is indispensable for understanding the mechanisms through which the aesthetic was distorted by the ideological, and the artistic

discourse was subjected to political constraints. In order to construct a literary history which is faithful to the realities of the period, and reflects not only authentic values, but also forms of compromise and cultural subordination specific to the totalitarian regime, we need a comprehensive approach..

Thus, the main challenge of this research consisted in identifying and analyzing the role of encomiastic poetry during the communist period in consolidating the cult of personality of Nicolae Ceaușescu. We also sought to demonstrate that this type of literature functioned as an instrument of propaganda.

Considering the scope and complexity that an exhaustive analysis of the encomiastic poetry would have entailed — exceeding both the framework of a doctoral study and the available temporal and methodological constraints — we chose to narrow down the study to a clearly defined segment. This approach allowed us to avoid dispersing our efforts across an excessively vast corpus and to carry out a focused yet rigorous analysis.

Given that the main objective of our research is to investigate the role of poetry in consolidating the cult of personality of Nicolae Ceaușescu — a phenomenon that reached its peak in the 1980s — we decided to focus our attention on the ninth decade of the twentieth century. The choice of the magazine “România literară” was not incidental, either as it represented — and continues to represent — a reference publication in the literary field. Moreover, limiting the analysis to the material published in this weekly allowed us to delineate a manageable corpus without compromising the relevance of the research. We considered that the prestige of “România literară” turns it into a faithful mirror of the literary and political context of the time, offering an appropriate framework for analyzing the role of the encomiastic poetry in consolidating the cult of personality.

The present study focuses on encomiastic poetry published in Romania during the communist period, with a particular emphasis on the 1980s and the early 1990s, a period in which Nicolae Ceaușescu’s personality cult reached its peak. This research aims to investigate how poetry was instrumentalized to consolidate political authority and construct the leader’s image, analyzing the close relationship between literary discourse and the ideological context of the era.

The main objectives of the study are: to identify and analyze encomiastic poetry dedicated to Nicolae Ceaușescu, to highlight the propagandistic mechanisms behind the production of these texts, and to understand the role of literature in legitimizing the personality cult. Furthermore, the study seeks to examine recurring patterns and central themes in encomiastic poetry, map the profiles of the authors involved, and provide a comparative perspective on editorial practices across different literary magazines.

The methodology employed combines textual analysis with historical contextualization and literary criticism. The research is based on the selection of a relevant corpus of texts, primarily from the weekly magazine “România literară”, and includes archival research, biographical studies, and contemporary periodical sources. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study aims to capture not only the literary character of encomiastic poetry but also its propagandistic and social functions, as well as how it reflects the pressures and opportunities created by the communist regime for writers.

The first chapter of the study, entitled “Romanian Poetry in the 20th Century – Contextualization”, aims to provide an analysis of the evolution of Romanian poetry during the communist period, highlighting the interdependence between the political context and literary production. The subchapter dedicated to the years of establishment of communism seeks to outline the impact of the rise of the Romanian Communist Party on the literary scene, examining the ways in which censorship and propaganda shaped poetic creation. It also analyzes the role of literary criticism in promoting the ideal of the “new man” and the manner in which love poetry and narrative poetry were adapted as ideological instruments for disseminating socialist values. Furthermore, the chapter addresses the attempts at the de-Stalinization of literature and presents the motivations underlying this process.

The discussion then moves to the 1960s, a period characterized by relative cultural liberalization. The subchapters devoted to the July Theses of 1971 and to the poetry of the 1970s–1980s highlight both the mechanisms of ideological control and the forms of anti-communist resistance expressed through literary creation. The final part of Chapter I examines the press as an instrument of propaganda in relation to its influence on the reception of poetry, concluding with a synthesis of the role and significance of poetry during the communist period.

Methodologically, the study is based on a combination of textual analysis of the poems, their historical contextualization, and an examination of literary criticism. This interdisciplinary approach makes it possible to highlight the mechanisms of propaganda and censorship, as well as to analyze the ways in which poets developed strategies of resistance and subtle forms of opposition within their works.

Chapter two provided an analysis of propaganda, defining its characteristics and rules while addressing the issue of ethics in propagandistic discourse. This section made it possible to establish the conceptual framework later employed in the analysis of encomiastic poetry. In this respect, it highlighted the way in which literature can be transformed into an instrument of political legitimization.

The analysis showed that propaganda was not limited to the simple transmission of political messages; rather, it aimed to construct a coherent framework in which social reality was reinterpreted and presented in a manner favorable to the regime. The associating of the leader with prestigious symbols, as well as the appeal to seemingly authentic testimonies of the “working people,” contributed to consolidate an idealized image of socialist society and to legitimize political authority.

At the same time, propaganda functioned through subtle mechanisms of information manipulation and the stimulation of social conformism. The selective presentation of reality, the emphasis placed on collective consensus, and the instrumentalization of public celebrations created the impression of a united and enthusiastic society in which support for the leadership appeared unanimous. In reality, these practices served to mask the dysfunctions of the system and to limit the possibility of expressing critical perspectives.

An essential role in this process was played by the use of the so-called “wooden language,” which functioned as an instrument for the standardization of discourse and the control of collective thinking. Through the repetition of ideological clichés, the enforcement of standardized terms, and the removal of stylistic differences, this type of language contributed to reducing the complexity of public discourse and to limiting the individual’s critical capacity. In this sense, propaganda operated not only at the level of political communication but also intervened in the cognitive structures through which reality was interpreted.

The third chapter was devoted to the structural and institutional analysis of the cult of personality surrounding Nicolae Ceaușescu, with particular emphasis on the way in which the internal organization of the Romanian Communist Party facilitated the concentration of power in the hands of the leader. The research demonstrated that this phenomenon was not merely the result of a propagandistic campaign but was grounded in a specific political structure characterized by the concentration of authority, the absence of clear institutional norms, and the development of a pyramidal clientelist system.

The study underlined the role of mechanisms such as patrimonialism and sultanism, through which power was exercised in a personalized and arbitrary manner, while relations of kinship and loyalty reinforced the leader’s control over the political apparatus. At the same time, it emphasized the importance of the concept of the “limited good,” which generated internal competition and social commitments aimed at obtaining resources and maintaining one’s position within the hierarchy. Thus, the phenomenon cannot be interpreted as a spontaneous process but rather as a planned strategy sustained by institutional mechanisms and social relations that enabled the reproduction and legitimization of the leader’s absolute authority.

Chapter four examined the role of the press in the cultural life of communist Romania, with particular emphasis on the weekly journal *România literară*. By presenting the history and structure of the magazine, the study demonstrated that it functioned not only as a platform for literary expression but also as a medium for transmitting official discourse.

In order to provide a broader picture of the literary scene, the research was extended to a sample of twenty literary journals published throughout Romania, selected so as to include both publications from major cultural centers and from medium-sized or smaller cities. Thus, from Bucharest the journals analyzed included “*Lucafařarul*”, “*Amfiteatru*”, “*Tribuna României*”, “*Flacăra*”, and “*Dialog*”. From Iași, the journals examined were “*Viața Românească*”, “*Convorbiri literare*”, “*Contemporanul*”, and “*Cronica*”, while from Cluj the study considered “*Steaua*”, “*Echinox*”, and “*Tribuna*”. Regarding other cultural centers across the country, the analysis focused on the following cities: Timișoara (“*Orizont*”), Oradea (“*Familia*”), Sibiu (“*Transilvania*”), Brașov (“*Argeș*”), Târgu Mureș (“*Vatra*”), Bacău (“*Ateneul*”), Constanța (“*Tomis*”), and Pitești (“*Argeș*”). The selection included both weekly and monthly journals, as well as student and general publications with predominantly literary or ideological profiles.

The analysis made it possible to identify several tendencies: literary journals functioned as instruments mediating between literary creation and official cultural policy, reflecting both literary interests and the ideological directives of the regime. At the same time, the study revealed a certain regional and editorial variability, indicating the existence of different spaces of expression, adapted to local specificities and to the type of audience, despite propagandistic standardization. Although the research did not aim to produce an exhaustive study of the entire literary press, it provided a useful orientational framework for understanding the functions and limits of the cultural press during the period under analysis, as well as the relationship between literary and official discourse.

The following chapter, entitled “The Reflection of the Cult of Personality of Nicolae Ceaușescu,” represents the most extensive section of the research and is structured around two main directions of analysis: on the one hand, the producers of encomiastic poetry, and on the other hand, the editorial and cultural context in which these texts were published. The study focused on the profile of the compliant writer through the analysis of sixteen of the approximately 110 authors who signed encomiastic poems in the pages of *România literară*. The examination of the texts revealed recurring motifs, patterns of panegyric discourse, and the editorial occasions that favored the publication of this type of poetry. Within this corpus, we identified several categories of authors: on the one hand, writers who enjoyed a certain literary prestige, and on the other, lesser-known authors, some of whom have not even been recorded in contemporary specialized

dictionaries. At the same time, a distinction was drawn between poets possessing genuine artistic ability who nevertheless resorted to encomiastic literature for various reasons—whether institutional, opportunistic, or circumstantial—and those lacking significant literary value, for whom this type of poetic production often represented the principal form of public affirmation.

The examination of approximately 500 issues of the weekly *România literară* from the decade under analysis showed that certain recurring occasions generated the publication of encomiastic poetry. The president's birthday, for instance, was annually marked by a veritable succession of poetic praises. At the same time, an important role was played by the so-called "confiscated holidays," which, prior to the establishment of the communist regime, had possessed a different symbolic meaning. These include, on the one hand, the date of 23 August, reinterpreted as the day of liberation from fascist domination, and on the other, the date of 1 May, transformed by communist propaganda into a privileged moment for the affirmation of official ideology. However, the congresses of the Romanian Communist Party remained by far the most important generators of encomiastic poetry. In the years in which such major political events took place, the texts of this kind published in the weekly magazine doubled their number.

In relation to this aspect, the final part of the chapter was devoted to a comparative study. Aiming to analyze the way in which the cult of personality of Nicolae Ceaușescu was reflected in other literary journals as well, not only in „*România literară*”, the research demonstrated that, at least on the occasion of the Thirteenth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party, almost all literary publications were compelled to participate to the official propagandistic discourse. The analysis also showed that weekly journals tended to be more heavily ideologized than monthly publications, most likely due to their higher frequency of appearance. Monthly publications tended to concentrate propagandistic materials in the opening pages of the journal and subsequently allocate space to literature and the arts. As for the authors who produced encomiastic poetry, the research showed that they were largely the same individuals who also published in *România literară*. This demonstrates the existence of a relatively stable core of authors mobilized for producing this type of poetic discourse and suggests the institutionalized character of encomiastic practice within the literary press of the period.

The final chapter analyzed the various manifestations of the cult of personality and the manner in which it was consolidated through poetry. The study shows that the constant reproduction of idealized and exaggerated images of the leader contributed to the strengthening of the cult of personality. Literature thus became a highly effective instrument of propaganda. The analysis focused on a selected corpus drawn from the approximately 350 poems published during the final decade of the communist regime. Among them, the mythic facets of the leader identified

by Adrian Cioroianu and Manuela Marin were also present. In addition, other representations appeared, intended to reinforce the image of Nicolae Ceaușescu as the “Architect of Modern Romania,” the “Father of the Nation,” and the “Builder of World Peace.”

Thus, the Ninth Congress of the Romanian Communist Party is transformed into a founding moment of a new historical era, presented as the starting point of the country’s prosperity and development. Through this interpretation, the political event acquires a foundational dimension, while the election of Ceaușescu is presented as the expression of the unanimous will of the people, although in reality the decision-making mechanism was controlled by the party. Encomiastic poetry thus contributes to constructing the image of the leader as the “elected” representative of the nation and as the initiator of a new historical stage.

The study also demonstrated that poetic and journalistic discourse portrays the leader as the “architect of modern Romania,” attributing to him the merits for infrastructure projects, administrative reorganization, and urban development. Through this symbolic strategy, state initiatives are personalized and directly associated with the image of the leader, transforming collective or institutional achievements into evidence of his exceptional vision and capacity.

Another central element of propagandistic representation is the paternalistic image of the leader. Ceaușescu is described as the “father of the nation,” a protective yet authoritative figure responsible for the well-being and destiny of the people. This representation implies the symbolic infantilization of society and legitimizes the relationship of dependence between citizens and the leader, obedience being presented as a form of gratitude and loyalty.

At the same time, propaganda constructs the image of Ceaușescu as the “son of the people,” emphasizing his modest origins and closeness to ordinary citizens. This double position—both father and son of the nation—creates a mechanism through which the leader is presented simultaneously as the supreme authority and as an authentic representative of the people. Through the repeated use of these metaphors in poetry and public discourse, the image of the leader acquires mythical dimensions, being placed within a heroic and almost messianic register.

The analysis also highlighted other directions through which encomiastic discourse contributed to reinforce the mythologized image of the leader. Thus, Nicolae Ceaușescu is frequently presented as a promoter of world peace, an image heavily exploited in propaganda in order to suggest his international influence and his role as a guarantor of global stability and balance. This representation served to reinforce the political legitimacy of the leader and to project onto him an authority that transcended the national sphere.

At the same time, the poems create the portrait of a “providential man,” emphasizing the virile, paternalistic, and authoritarian dimensions of the leader’s figure. Masculinity thus becomes

an essential component of the propagandistic imaginary, the leader being presented as the embodiment of strength, courage, and the capacity to guide the collective destiny.

Last but not least, the reinterpretation of the historical past and the association of Nicolae Ceaușescu with heroic figures from national history represent a frequent strategy to legitimize the leader's authority. By integrating him into an imaginary genealogy of great leaders of the past, encomiastic discourse seeks to create the impression of historical continuity between the glorious epochs of the nation and the political present of the communist regime.

Overall, encomiastic poetry functions as a propagandistic instrument that contributes to the mythologization of the leader and to the naturalization of his authority. By associating Nicolae Ceaușescu with decisive historical moments, with the material achievements of the regime, and with symbolic roles such as architect, father, or son of the nation, the literary discourse participates in the reinforcement of an idealized image of the leader and in the ideological legitimization of the political regime.

The fundamental novelty of this research lies in treating encomiastic poetry published in "România literară" in the 1980s as a legitimate object of literary analysis. While most studies on literature from the communist period focus either on works of resistance or on texts that managed to avoid ideological compromise, this thesis shifts attention to an area that has been either briefly treated or deliberately avoided: explicitly laudatory poetic production integrated into the mechanisms of the cult of personality. We considered it necessary to devote greater attention to this uncomfortable area, as it is essential for understanding the era.

Through a comparative analysis of the texts, the research highlights the existence of certain constants: the sacralization of the leader, the mythologization of his origins, the overlay of the political figure on paternal, heroic, or providential imagery, and the arrogation of national history to consolidate the image and authority of the communist leader. Nicolae Ceaușescu appears in these poems as the architect of collective destiny, guarantor of peace, father, and son of the nation, among others. Thus, literature, through its specific devices, not only reflects the cult of personality but also refines it.

Regarding the relationship of this thesis to existing literature, the research complements previous studies. Works on communist literature have analyzed socialist realism, the 1960s generation, and the 1980s poetry in its subversive dimension in detail. However, encomiastic poetry in the literary press of the 1980s has been addressed only fragmentarily, sometimes illustratively, without benefiting from a thorough analysis in a proper sense.

This study proposes a methodological approach that combines literary analysis with historical contextualization and studies on propaganda, demonstrating that these texts cannot be

understood exclusively in aesthetic terms but must be interpreted within the complex ideological context in which they were produced. A new perspective offered by this thesis is that the analysis reveals a paradoxical phenomenon: the excess of encomiastic expression can be read as a symptom of the fragility of the myth. The repetitiveness of forms and images, as well as the uniformity of discourse, indicates a mechanization of praise that suggests a constant need for reconfirmation.

Another significant result of the research concerns the magazine “România literară”. The analysis of the editorial space highlights the coexistence of texts with genuine literary value alongside encomiastic productions aligned with the ideological belief. The number of authors involved in the propagandistic discourse is significant, and writers of notable literary stature are not among those who signed such texts. This suggests that encomiastic poems were published primarily in response to regime pressure, to keep the magazine within the editorial circuit.

We also observe that the appearance of this type of opportunistic literature was concentrated around major political events, indicating a practice imposed by the authorities, to which editors could not oppose themselves without considerable risk. Over time, the frequency of laudatory poems increased, these being published not only close to political dates but on a more regular basis, reflecting the intensification of editorial control mechanisms.

The analysis of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s cult of personality reveals a meticulously orchestrated ideological construction, with deep ramifications in Romania’s political and cultural life. The roots of the phenomenon can be traced back to Soviet models and the authoritarian tradition of communist regimes, yet Ceaușescu managed to adapt his image to the national context.

Moreover, the analysis of the encomiastic poetry published in “România literară” during the final decade of Ceaușescu’s regime highlights the complex function of literature as an instrument of reinforcement of the cult of personality and legitimization of the political power.

The study demonstrates that the laudatory poetic production was not solely the result of direct coercion but developed within a system of symbolic rewards and pressures that encouraged conformity. Most authors involved in this type of writing appear to have manifested opportunism, exploiting the ideological context to gain visibility, professional stability, or material advantages. In many cases, their modest literary training was compensated by a rapid adherence to the official language, adopting the rhetorical formulas and ideological clichés of the time. Thus, the poetic discourse becomes predictable, saturated with conventional metaphors about the leader, the party, the homeland, and a bright future, in a way that prioritizes declarative loyalty over expressive authenticity.

Thus, our study treats encomiastic poetry from the communist period as a literary phenomenon strongly conditioned by the political and ideological context. The analysis highlights

the ways in which poetic discourse was instrumentalized to legitimize authority and construct the personality cult of Nicolae Ceaușescu. The research shows that poetry functioned as a mechanism of mythmaking and sacralization, reflecting the regime's strategies for consolidating the personality cult. Within this framework, the literary text manifests as a space of negotiation between ideological pressure and the creativity of the authors, providing insight into how the communist regime exerted its influence over the literary field.

The hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the study were largely confirmed. The analysis of the text corpus revealed that encomiastic poetry was not merely an expression of literary opportunism, but a propaganda mechanism with recurring patterns related to official celebrations and the myths associated with the leader.

At the same time, the objectives set out in the introduction were achieved. We contextualized encomiastic poetry, examined propaganda mechanisms, highlighted the role of poetry in consolidating the personality cult, and proposed a methodological framework for analyzing this type of text. In doing so, we combined textual analysis, historical contextualization, and the examination of literary criticism. This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between literature and power.

Therefore, we can assert that encomiastic literature reflects the mechanisms of adaptation employed by writers within a totalitarian system. The lyrical creation becomes a space of negotiation between aesthetic aspiration and political constraint. The result is a persistent tension between the demands of art and ideological imperatives.

Finally, the full acknowledgment of literature produced during the communist period, including its propagandistic segments, represents an essential condition for the contemporary critical discourse to reach maturity. A complete literary history can only be constructed through an honest confrontation with its own cultural past. Encomiastic poetry, however questionable from an aesthetic standpoint, remains an essential document of the era and a testimony to the ways in which literature can be drawn into—and even appropriated by—power.

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