

I. LITERATURE – BRAND OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

MARIN PEDA – FROM DEBUT TO CELEBRITY

Lucian CHIȘU

Director of „G. Călinescu” Institute of Literary History and Theory,
The Romanian Academy
lucianchisu@gmail.com

Abstract:

MARIN PEDA – FROM DEBUT TO CELEBRITY

This article deals with Marin Preda's writings which precede the novel *Moromeții* (1955) and refers to the period in which the Romanian literature was under the inexorable pressure of politics. It is by chance only that, through its topic, *Moromeții* found itself in the wake of the events and consequences that occurred at the end of World War II, culminating in the establishment of communism in Eastern Europe. To a certain extent, these events are prefigured in the book. The publication of the volume in the cultural climate of that time corresponds to the period in which the authors were subject to the humiliation of passing through the Caudine Forks of socialist realism, while reception criticism would judge them using Inquisition-like methods. Preda's early prose writings and *Moromeții* faced the situations above. Existentially, until the appearance of the novel that brought him fame, Marin Preda had experienced a tumultuous existence, full of failures and traumatising episodes.

Key-words:

Marin Preda, biography, haphazard, debut, communism, socialist realism, *Moromeții*.

We shall resort, in our endeavour, to *Cronologia vieții literare românești*¹ 1944 - 1955 ('The Chronology of Romanian Literary Life'), tomes known under

¹ *Cronologia vieții literare românești* (CVLR), 1944-2000, Editura Muzeului Literaturii Române & Semne, București, 56 volume, 2010-2020. CVLR (2001-2012) is currently in press, totalling 10 volumes with information about the Romanian literary life until the final

the *CVLR* emblem, compiled by the researchers of “G. Călinescu” Institute of Literary History and Theory of the Romanian Academy beginning in 2010, which covers a much longer period of time. Alongside biographical data illustrating young Preda’s life full of deprivations, these genuine gold mines include quotes and comments on the reception of the writer’s first prose works. The *CVLR* reveals many references, illustrative of the tenacity, stout-heartedness with which Marin Preda followed his vocation, working on *Moromeții* (‘The Morometes’) and later sending versions of his novel, in various stages of completion, to be published by the newspapers and journals of the age. In the year of the writer’s birth centenary, Stan V. Cristea republished the volume *Marin Preda, anii formării intelectuale*², third edition, a book with numerous precious pieces of information about the young man’s intellectual aspirations back then. Furthermore, as regards Marin Preda’s short prose in the period of his debut, there are many details and comments which are entailed, one might say, by the growing interest aroused over time by his work. Retracing the steps taken, we shall resort to some brief comments that date back to his literary debut up to, we daresay, the year that Marin Preda gained his fame. It is true, when *Moromeții* came out, Marin Preda became an established author enjoying the admiration of the reading public and positive reviews from literary critics. In the collective imaginary, the young man would wear the laurels of celebrity. However, things should be nuanced. There was nothing to admire about Marin Preda’s personal life, because at the time he could barely make a living. It is out of this daily tragedy that his aspirations, sometimes ardent, sometimes rather dull, to become a novelist came to life. They fulfilled and lighted up his destiny when *Moromeții* (1955) was published in full rise of communism, in difficult years, humiliating for truly valuable writings. The difference between literature,

year dealt with in *DGLR (Dicționarul General al Literaturii Române*, ed. a II- a, revizuită, adăugită și adusă la zi, Editura Muzeului Literaturii Române & FNSA, 8 volume, București, 2016-2020).

² Stan V. Cristea, 2016, *Marin Preda, anii formării intelectuale*, Craiova: Editura Aius, 350 + CXX p.; 2019, 484 + CLXXII p.; 2022, ed. a III-a, revizuită și adăugită, 530 + CLXXVI p. As regards the 1942-1946 journals, for which the publication day and month are mentioned, complete information (year, issue, day, page) can be found in the three editions above.

which existed exclusively through its artistic virtues, and the new ideology, which had decided that Marxism–Leninism was the main and indivisible criterion of all fields of arts, was that *Moromeșii* contained every artistic quality absent from the picture above. What had been lost or gone to the background, the essence of art, that is, the pure aesthetic emotion and idealistic contemplative fiction, almost devoid of practical finality, could be found in abundance in Marin Preda’s novel.

As regards Marin Preda’s literary debut, data from various sources have been corroborated. Some are taken from official documents and/or excerpts from the press of that time. Others are recollections from his entourage (the writer’s relatives, Aurora Cornu, Marin Preda’s first wife, schoolmates). There is also information provided by the authors and poets the prose writer crossed paths with during his formative years as well as records of literature specialists of the 1940s. Many of these are to be found in the writer’s memoirs (*Viața ca o pradă* ‘Life as Prey’, 1977) or in the conversations (interviews) conducted by Adrian Păunescu³, Florin Mugur⁴, Sânziana Pop⁵, Mihai Ungheanu⁶ and so on. Opinions are divided with respect to the literary debut of Marin Preda, for the writer himself either intentionally omitted the truth or was the victim of a *lapsus memoriae*.

The absolute debut – to distinguish it from that invoked by the prose writer – occurred in the journal “*Tinerețea*” (1942/20 January) with the sketch *Nu spuneți adevărul*. Sorin Preda, nephew of the author of *Moromeșii*, himself a valuable prose writer of the 1980s, provides some clues regarding the Siliștea origins⁷ of the sketch character, demonstrating that the episode *Nu spuneți adevărul* was, in fact, a much-improved version of the story *Înainte de moarte*⁸, included in Marin Preda’s debut volume *Întâlnirea din pământuri*

³ „România literară”, 1969/13 March, pp. 6-7.

⁴ „Argeș”, 1972/ May, pp. 3-5.

⁵ „Lucașfăruș”, 1974 /18 May, p. 3.

⁶ „Lucașfăruș”, 1976/ 26 April., p. 3.

⁷ Sorin Preda, 2010, *Moromeșii, ultimul capitol*, București: Editura Academiei Române, p. 117; ediția a II-a, Cluj-Napoca: editura Eikon, 2013, p. 82.

⁸ Stan V. Cristea, *idem*, p. 254 mentions the existence of an intermediate variant, the sketch *Doctorul*, ‘also published in “*Tinerețea*”, but in the new series, of 1945’.

(1948). Additional details are also provided by Marin Ciobanu⁹ in a book dedicated to the “heroes” of Siliștea-Gumești, the writer’s hometown, present in his books.

Starting from the premise of an intention, so not of an omission, if we should refer to the debut favoured by Marin Preda, we may say that it occurred the same year, but three months later, in “Timpul” (15, 16 April) with the sketch *Pârlitu’*. According to his own confessions¹⁰, the sketch had been written years before for the journal of Școala Normală de Băieți of Cristur - Odorhei, where he had studied, and it was a story about a peasant of social status similar to that “I described in the two volumes of *Moromeții*”¹¹.

In short, Marin Preda authored other prose writings published in the “Timpul” newspaper (1942): *Strigoaica* (23 May), *Calul* (4 June), *Salcâmul* (7 July), *Noaptea* (5 August), *La câmp* (22 September); this mere enumeration reveals the existence of numerous drafts belonging to the future novel *Moromeții*, around which the published sketches, stories and novellas revolve. This points to an exemplary consistency, which says a lot about the auctorial status, as Marin Preda understood it, a status which reveals him to us as a perfectionist, a man dedicated body and soul to literature, in other words – using a typically Moromete phrase – “harnessed to literature”.

In the spring of 1943, he was conscripted. The military service, completed two years later, accounts for the small number of collaborations: *Colina* (“Vremea războiului”, 7 March), *Merticul*, also scheduled to appear in the volume¹² (“Fapta”, 11 March) and *Rotila* (“Evenimentul zilei”, 25

⁹ Marin Ciobanu, 2014, *Marin Preda și ai săi*, București: Editura Muzeului Literaturii Române, p. 41.

¹⁰ Marin Preda, *Creație și morală*, idem, 424; from *Convorbire cu Marin Preda: Marea călătorie*, by Sânziana Pop, „Luceafărul”, XVIII, nr. 17 (678), 26 April 1975, p. 3., *Apud* Stan V. Cristea, *Marin Preda, anii formării intelectuale*, Craiova: Editura Aius, 2022, p. 274.

¹¹ *Întâlnire cu publicul băcăuan* [răspunsuri la întrebări], in „Ateneu”, VIII 18 May 1974, p. 2; Marin Preda, *Creație și morală*, idem, pp. 423-424, *apud* Stan V. Cristea, *op. cit.*, p. 397.

¹² In „Fapta” (11 March), *Merticul* is accompanied by a short presentation signed by Mircea Damian.

April), published when he was still in the army. Marin Preda published nothing in 1944.

The young prose writer came back into focus in 1945 with *Plecare* (“Tinerețea”, 16 September), *Doctorul*¹³, a later version of his absolute debut (“Tinerețea”, 21 October), and *Iubire* (“Viața socială” C.F.R., 8 December).

Those who knew him at that time describe the deplorable clothing and physical condition as well as the life full of expedients of the future prose writer. 1946 is the year of searches and attempts of editorial assertion of the young man who entered the publishing and cultural environments in Bucharest, getting acquainted to the life and mentalities of the writers’ guild. Following the letters of recommendation signed by Geo Dumitrescu, Marin Preda spent his life working as a reviser for the “Timpul” newspaper and as a clerk for the Central Statistics Institute. Early that year, his short story *Ceata* was published (“Lumea”, 1 January) and included, with some changes, in the volume *Întâlnirea din Pământuri*, under the title of *În ceată*. Less than three weeks later, another short story, *Măritișul*, was printed in “Veac nou” (19 January) and after that he attended the *Șezătoarea literară* announced by “Lumea” (10 March); here, he would make a deep impression on Petru Dumitriu¹⁴, who would recount years later: “...I met the author of *Desfășurarea* one evening in 1945 when, in one of the auditoriums of the University of Bucharest, several hundred students would listen to poetry recitations and readings of prose. A young man with a troubled face came up on the rostrum and read ‘like nothing’, as he would say, a story about an acacia. In the story, a peasant’s wife comes out in the doorway: short, fat, hands on her hips, she ‘looks like a pot with two handles’. I pricked up my ears while hearing this unexpected dark humour comparison, intimately related to the rural universe. I listened carefully to the entire piece and realised he was one of the most authentic writers who had ever told us stories about peasants”.

¹³ See footnote 7.

¹⁴ „Note de cititor despre povestirile lui Marin Preda”, in *Viața Românească* (1953/Sept.).

Nothing new came out until the end of the year, when “Studentul român” published *Nepotul* (10 December), a fragment whose main character, Stan Tudose, “hints at possible other projects preceding the cycle of *Moromeții*”. This quiet period may be related to the writer’s efforts to make his editorial debut. It was not his first attempt¹⁵. From related information included in the *CVLR* 1946, we find, from the “Universul” newspaper (11 January), about the projects and objectives promoted by *Cultura Națională* Publishing House. Eager to resume the tradition of good books by stimulating local valuable authors and through translations of universal literature masterpieces, *Cultura Națională* announced a competition for novels and short stories, the jury of which was made up of personalities of cultural life (P. P. Negulescu, chairman) and established names of the interwar literature and literary criticism: Gala Galaction, Șerban Cioculescu, Pompiliu Constantinescu and Ion Biberi. Marin Preda submitted a version of the manuscript *Întâlnirea din Pământuri* and received an honourable mention for it, as stated in the press release of the journal “Națiunea” (10 April), led by G. Călinescu. The young man, only 24 years old, deemed his participation in this contest as a personal failure, which prompted him to make a number of revisions until he completed the final version.

At the end of the same year, according to the “România liberă” (25 November, the section *Obiectiv*), the “King Michael I” Foundation had Marin Preda’s short-story volume *Fântâna albă* underway.

In the first quarter of the following year (1947), the publication of the volume was also announced by the journal “Revista literară” (16 March), which printed the short story *Salcâmul*, accompanied by an introduction written by Miron Radu Paraschivescu: “He is only 25 years old, but he thinks a lot and writes a little, as if he were 50. Serious, locked in a mutism which is

¹⁵ The imminent publication of the volume *Măritiș* by Marin Preda was announced on the last cover of Ștefan Popescu’s book, *Poezia trubadurilor*, but, despite this announcement, the project failed. The reasons this attempt came to a bad end are unknown, but they may have to do with the publishers’ unreasonable enthusiasm or the precarious financial situation of the publishing house, which did not lack the publicity: *Măritiș* was also advertised in „Viața” (12 June and 18 July) and „Vremea” (12 July).

not misanthropy but self-measure, hardworking, honest and determined, Marin Preda imbues his work and personal ethics with all the virtues of the peasants of Teleorman, the place he left at the age of only seven to make his way in the world, and concentrates a completely unique epic force. [...] Marin Preda is, among the youths of his generation, the completest and most fulfilled hope so far. [...] It is an almost poetic vision through which the young writer captures the miracle of life in its most mundane and grey aspects, troubled and deeply rooted in it, keenly observing it and recounting its mysterious, deeply human and dramatic vibrations; and all this with means of a classical simplicity, as he has learned from Gorki or Jack London. *Salcâmul* – this prose poem which dwells on the anonymous but no less terrible tragedy of a tree, and thus of an entire village – **is part of a volume of short stories soon to be published by the printing house of “King Michael I” Foundation.** Readers will realise the force of Marin Preda’s talent, a writer we dare predict will become, in ten years’ time or in fifteen years’ time, one of the most prominent novelists in our literature.” The author of this presentation had “read” the young writer with so much insight that his text may be considered emblematic of his entire creation, a gesture which Marin Preda would be grateful for, referring to MRP as ‘his literary godfather’.

That same year, the prose writer was present in two consecutive issues of the journal “Contemporanul” (21 and 28 March) with his *Casa de-a doua oară*, included in the first volume of *Moromeșii*. The now familiar “Revista literară” printed the story *Întâia moarte a lui Anton Tudose* (27 April).

Geo Dumitrescu wrote the editorial *Pledoarie la... „Criza culturii”* (‘Plea to... the crisis of culture’) in “Revista literară” (3 August), nominating Marin Preda among the prose writers “in the fever of creation”.

In 1948, the future novelist submitted *Unul la munte*¹⁶, a version of the short story *Merticul*, to be published in the journal “Flacăra” (29 February) and, towards the end of the year, the novel fragment *Începutul*

¹⁶ Announced in „Flacăra” (29 February) as a „short story, fragment, in the vol. *Unul la munte și alte nuvele*”.

afacerii cu Palici, “with Ilie Moromete as main character”¹⁷, also appeared in “Flacăra” (10 October).

As regards the year 1948, it should be mentioned that, as early as 1945, events of an unprecedented gravity had started to occur in Romania on the political, social and cultural levels. They culminated in the progressive suppression of constitutional rights, the transformation of the kingdom into a people’s democratic republic, removal of multipartyism and elimination of political adversaries and, in terms of culture and literature, the import and imposition of cultural revolution theories, namely, of socialist realism, which was to create the “new type of man”, forged in the Soviet Union. Andrei Zhdanov, who inspired the socialist-realist trend, would conclude that artistic works should educate in the communist spirit and authors should discard whatever had been left in them by the old ideologies or beliefs about art. From the imposition of the new ideological prerogatives, as a form of literary class struggle, to the emergence of the insidious forms of censorship and its unrestrained establishment, time passed quickly. This perspective became the iron law of literary criticism and of all humanistic disciplines, of all social sciences. 1948 is the year of Tudor Arghezi’s public execution (“Scânteia”, 5, 7, 9 and 10 January) in the article signed by Sorin Toma, *Poezia putrefacției și putrefacția poeziei* (‘The poetry of putrefaction and the putrefaction of poetry’), a text which the unforgiving “Flacăra” (20 July) considered “an example of Marxist literary criticism”. These changes would affect all creators, swooping upon Marin Preda’s literature as well. The waves of ideology ravaged older writings but hit particularly those of those years, in that, according to the Soviet model, the writers of all active generations should conform to the demands of the class struggle, in the name of which literature and culture were confined to combating all artistic phenomena – literature, arts, film – that would not focus on glorifying the superiority of Marxist-Leninist principles to the other forms of political and artistic representation, of social organisation. The unconditional adhesion to the “new

¹⁷ *Apud*, Stan V. Cristea, 2022, *Marin Preda, anii formării intelectuale*, Craiova: Editura Aius, ed. a III-a, revizuită și adăugită, p. 375, 349.

religion” had been accompanied by a real wave of class hatred, the Manichaeism of these black-and-white projections resulting in the removal, also from the historical-literary past, of other forms of artistic manifestation, with the exception of the contributions, however modest they might have been, of representatives of the exploited classes. In literature, the Decadent trend, formalism, later Onirism, modernism, in general, had not only been refuted, but pushed up against the wall in order to make room for socialist realism, for the literature devoted body and soul to the cause of the party. According to a Stalinist precept, writers were considered the “engineers of the soul”, a phrase based on exact calculations and schemes, which should canonically give rise to a literary art subservient to ideological directives, over whose compliance the literary critics would keep a close watch, providing guidance and, above all, imposing penalties.

For the sake of accuracy and truth, we should say that, before the actual debut, which occurred, or rather moved parallel to these increasingly troubled years, Marin Preda had nevertheless drawn the attention of some of the literary critics of that age. His name was present in literary reviews as well as in comments about his published prose.

In a special New Year’s issue of “Dreptatea nouă” (1 January), M. Roșca announced the important changes which had taken place in the literary environment, namely the introduction of “writing as a social role” to the detriment of “the concept of gratuitous writing”. Zaharia Stancu, Marin Preda, Petru Dumitriu and Eusebiu Camilar were among those mentioned to have opted for this new vision. Similarly, in a note in *Calendarul popular al ziarului “Universul”* (10 January) Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu warned that “the literary year cannot pass by the authors without a volume, but with... a work”; as regards Marin Preda, the critic said: “In this highly varied group¹⁸, Marin Preda stands out through a dark animism and an overwhelming presence of destiny”.

Finally, in the first quarter of this fateful year, the writer made his editorial debut with *Întâlnirea din pământuri*, Editura Cartea Românească,

¹⁸ The group included Aurel Baranga, Aurel Van Gert, Laurențiu Fulga and Alexandru Jar.

București, 1948. The critical reception of the volume followed a gradual trajectory, the tone of comments varying as the “guidance criticism” sharpened its attacks in full, unique authority. Constant Ionescu could not separate the book from the rural universe of its theme and labelled it, from the very title, according to obsolete historical-literary criteria: *Semănătorismul [sic!] și literatura despre țărani, astăzi*. The review appeared in “România liberă” (19 April). Four days later, “Contemporanul” (23 April) would salute the publication of the volume, with all the well-deserved praises. The young critic of only 27 back then, Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, showed off his erudition by introducing Kafka, Kierkegaard, Camus, Poe, Faulkner and Paustovsky in his critical discourse and concluded: “Reaffirming our confidence in his potential, we are looking forward to the novel his latest short story heralds.” The same laudatory appreciations accompany the review signed by Octav Șuluțiu in “Națiunea” (26 April): “The vigour of this realistic picture perfectly illustrates Marin Preda’s writing skills, promising to bring a very personal touch to rural literature. A great quality of the writer is the suggestive force of his realism – he writes in a simple manner, but with a tension that sometimes lends dramatism to his stories. Furthermore, he knows how to concretely evoke reality, with an expressiveness as admirable as the sobriety of the means employed.”

Paying attention not to the style, but the ideology which should wrap up the content, I. Popper tore him to pieces in “Flacăra” (9 May) based on the criteria defined in the title” *Un scriitor talentat și o concepție literară depășită* (‘A talented writer and an obsolete literary conception’): “Here is why the naturalistic clichés, which Mr Marin Preda’s talent manages to attenuate only in part, annoy. [...] However, it is clear to us that all these formal considerations cannot cover the observations above regarding the content, human communication in *Întâlnirea din pământuri*, and add a negative load to it. That is why Mr Marin Preda’s talent, employed in the best pieces he offers us, within an outdated literary conception, aiming at depicting realities that history pushes further and further towards the periphery of Romanian life; this talent cannot give this satisfaction through the results it provides. The issues raised in *Întâlnirea din pământuri* go beyond the pages

of this book. They describe a transitional phase that Romanian culture and art have not succeeded in completely overcoming; that in which a new content of life is overlapped by obsolete forms of expression which are no longer appropriate. [...] We are certain that an effort by Mr Marin Preda will bring his next work to the level of a true literary accomplishment.”

In the inaugural issue of the new series of “Viața românească” (June), Petru Dumitriu applauded the publication of the new volume: “Mr Preda’s book starts with what one refers to as a tour de force. The peasant invective explosively erupts, from the first words, harsh, concrete, carnal, smelling of dirt, full of the blunt passion that is so natural and frequent in the direct vicinity of land”. Nicolae Corbu, in “Scânteia” (7 June) and Hilda Doru, in “România liberă” (26 June), keep it in the spotlight. Finally, Anton Strihan addresses a question to Marin Preda regarding the appearance of a future novel (*Ce ne aduce șantierul literar? Despre un viitor roman al lui Marin Preda*, “Flacăra”, 17 October) and the answer comes promptly: *Moromeții*.

Octav Șuluțiu, previously mentioned, reaffirms his favourable appreciation in the retrospective analysis *Literatura română în 1948*, published on the penultimate day of 1948 in “Națiunea”, which places Marin Preda among the best of the best in literature that year.

The original stories signed by Marin Preda in 1949 are *Fonciirea*, published in “Flacăra” (16 April), the fragment with the same title in his future novel, *Moromeții*, which has become a classic in school textbooks; the short story *Povestea unei călătorii*, in the double issue of “Viața Românească” (March-April), in which “the family of Ilie Moromete appears slightly better outlined”¹⁹. The echoes of critical reception continued that year when Marin Preda’s story *O adunare liniștită* was printed by Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, București, 1949, along with a 32-page booklet. *Cărți noi*, a column in “România liberă” (15 January), announces the appearance of the booklet in issue 5 of the collection *Cartea poporului*. Petru Dumitriu briefly comments on it in *Fișier*, “Flacăra” (23 January): “The short story is

¹⁹ Stan V. Cristea, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

part of the volume *Întâlnirea între pământuri* [sic!] by Marin Preda, one of the writers who have emerged from today's young generation in order to deliver literature to the masses along the new road of realism. His artistic means, which are still developing, already point to a vigorous talent in which the proximity to the object does not shatter the vision, but, on the contrary, adds values of authentic and vibrant participation. His direct, almost dramatized style is meant to capture the interest and keep it throughout the story.”

The preoccupations with completing the novel *Moromeții* interfered with the new demands of the social order, whose gravitational force was unavoidable. The politico-ideologising context of that time forces Marin Preda to deviate for a while from his main occupations (*Moromeții*) in order to align himself with the directives that had seized creation and the writing environments. In fact, the situation was much tougher, with no way out, with socialist realism as the only form of literary and artistic approach to the social realities of the time, the other alternative²⁰ being to give up writing. Under

²⁰ The 1944-1964 period was one of the darkest in Romanian history, hence in Romanian culture. The transition from monarchy to “the dictatorship of the proletariat” did not logically respond to internal socio-political realities, but was expressly the result of arrangements among the three victors of the Second World War – the USSR, the USA and Great Britain – and of their power plays. At the Yalta Conference (4-11 February 1945), held on the occasion of the imminent victory of the “allies”, the world map became, metaphorically speaking, a cake which the leaders of the time – Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill – divided amicably among themselves. As is known, Romania entered the sphere of influence of Great Britain (10%) and the Soviet Union (90%), which came into effect. The forced establishment of communism in our country seized every relevant compartment; from morals, mentalities and social structures, the entire scaffolding of communist ideology, consolidated in almost half a century, was supported from the base to the top by a complicated political machine that was to last until 1989.

As expected, after 1989, the communist phenomenon became a priority issue in numerous studies, carried out from various perspectives. The polemics which emerged after 1990 hardly consider some evidence, ignoring it. This evidence includes the impact of the theory of spheres of influence in world politics, which is permanent, the Cold War effects, armed struggles during the years of the establishment of communism in our country, collaborationism in its typical and lasting forms of manifestation, the dissolution of private property and the destruction, by uniformization, of social class identity. In the short five-decade history, some of the Romanian intellectuals and politicians left the country, thus saving themselves. Others, unfortunately the overwhelming majority, were imprisoned and

the inexorable pressure created by the abovementioned circumstances, the writer would tell Constantin Varta, the author of the feature *Câteva ceasuri într-o uzină literară – La Sinaia, printre sciitorii noștri*, “Flacăra” (28 May), that he had abandoned *Moromeții* to work on “a larger story, of 100 pages, about the life of factory workers. [...] As for the future novel, the first volume will be ready in June or July²¹. [...] I want to show how the middle peasantry that grew after World War I has disintegrated: very few have got rich but an awful lot of them have been left with nothing but their own two hands to make a living.”

“Scânteia tineretului” (19 June) published fragments from an “original short story of the young writer Marin Preda.” It was entitled *Ședința de producție* and is a fragment-version of the future *Ana Roșculeț*. The journal “Flacăra” (25 June) started the survey *Scriitorii și cititorii despre problemele criticii* (‘Writers and readers on matters of criticism’), to which E. Camilar, Victor Tulbure and Marin Preda, among others, respond. In the name of socialist realism, the latter acknowledged some critical reproaches on his volume *Întâlnirea din pământuri*: “When I put out the book *Întâlnirea din pământuri*, I still believed in man’s eternal essence, I was, as one could see, on an idealistic, metaphysical position. Literary critiques did me a great service pointing out the class substratum of conflicts, which I deemed as eternally human. Also, the critics did a good thing when they admonished me

those still living were set free starting in 1964. The immense sacrifice in forced labour camps, genuine extermination camps actually, was justified by the unfortunately vain illusion, disseminated through diplomatic channels in the first years following 1944, that the Anglo-Americans would come (back) before long. A small part, those who had left the country, joined the new power either out of left-wing convictions or after thinking things through, which after 1989 triggered, domestically but mainly abroad, accusations of great moral gravity against the “collaborationists”. Vis-à-vis the previously mentioned circumstances, the situation of younger generations, of which Marin Preda was a part, together with his confreres, had been different, but still hopeless. The reproaches directed towards the writer after his death, when he could no longer defend himself against detractors, are basically attacks full of resentment, the result of explainable writerly jealousies, which revealed, at least in this case, the diseased nature of post-communist literary prosecutors. The age is known as “the Obsessive decade.”

²¹ As is known, the author’s hopes would not materialize with the version of April-June 1949. The first volume of *Moromeții* was not published until 1955.

for my tendency to describe mainly the dark side of humans. The decadent line I was moving along was quite clearly shown to me along with the danger it entailed and that is precisely why I think I have managed to remove it from my new book. I would ask the critics not to be gentle but to deliver a principled, honest, clear and well-argued criticism. Only such criticism can help the writer.” Only a month later, “Contemporanul” (21 July) issued Marin Preda’s *Filmul*, another fragment from the short story *Ana Roșculeț*, with a note saying “This fragment is part of a longer story. Ana Roșculeț is a workwoman who got alienated from her co-workers and became the ‘lost sheep of the flock’, as someone says in the story.”

Towards the end of the year, *Ana Roșculeț*, Editura pentru Literatură și Artă a Uniunii Scriitorilor, București, 1949, was printed. The 120-page short story came to the attention of Radu Trifan from “Almanahul Literar de la Cluj” (December): “*Ana Roșculeț* is a small novel or an extensive newspaper report, which recounts an essential part of the life of a woman working for the Romanian Cotton Mill in Bucharest, from the nationalisation of the factory until today, in almost two years of socialist transformation of the entire country. [...] The revolution stirs and changes what is deeper, more rooted and harder to fecundate in an individual: his solitude. [...] From here her journey, which the author recounts, will begin. We reproduce the scene that takes place right after her meeting with Tomiță, when Ana watches the Soviet film *Dreptate în Baltica*. It is a crucial moment in her life.”

The following year, 1950, in the absence of other texts signed by Marina Preda, I. Coriban from another Transylvanian publication, “Lupta Ardealului” (8 January), reviewed the short story *Ana Roșculeț*: “By following this complicated process of spiritual transformation of a working woman – with all its twists and turns – and highlighting the role the trade union and especially the Party play in the development of the class consciousness of working people, Marin Preda’s long story becomes a valuable document in the age of serious efforts following the Nationalisation of 11 June 1948.” Faced with the ideological demands laid down by the literary coryphaei of the new times, the prose writer himself became some

kind of “black sheep”, because he had not sufficiently conformed to socialist realism. I. Popper, who had previously warned him on behalf of the party when *Întâlnirea din pământuri* had come out, did it again in “Flacăra” (4 February). According to Popper, in order to depict the struggle between the old and the new in his heroine’s soul, Marin Preda had had to struggle with himself, with his objectivism, “a remnant of a past naturalistic manner, which pushes the author to mention certain faults and weaknesses [...] without taking a stand against these shortcomings.” The utterly dramatic manner in which the directives had changed people can also be noticed in Geo Dumitrescu’s article, *Pentru ascuțirea vigilenței în lupta împotriva naturalismului* (‘Sharpening vigilance in the fight against naturalism’), in “Flacăra” (25 March), in which he discusses this particular short story. He made no concessions to his former protégé. Signalling “unhealthy naturalistic infiltrations”, the author pointed out that his first reaction to Preda’s short story was not what he had expected and it was only “on the surface that he could help the writer, show him the dangers threatening his creation, mobilise him to fight for their complete extermination. [...] The way in which the theme is dealt with reflects deficiencies in the very ideological conception, which may be clearly seen when analysing the unfolding of events in the story. The shortcomings have to do with a certain position of the author in relation to his theme, his heroes, the purpose of his entire story.” In the second part of the article published in “Flacăra” (1 April), G. Dumitrescu comments on the positive hero and the Party spirit by analysing the author’s incompatibilities with the socialist-realist method, i.e., drawing “closer to the roots of this fatal and reactionary naturalism, which, as a matter of fact, not only jeopardises the work and growth of the author of *Anei Roșculeț*, but is also a threat to several of our great or smaller writers.” In Geo Dumitrescu’s opinion, “the book flows and ends *sine ira et studio*, almost without perspectives, without participation, as a mere report. [...] This is the root of all evil. This indifference, this neutrality of the writer, his essentially bourgeois objectivism. [...] Here Comrade Preda must clarify his perspective first and foremost, for the Party’s spirit excludes hesitations, indecisions, and one cannot create new art, cannot explore new literary fields with obsolete,

bourgeois photographic cameras.” Geo Dumitrescu’s accusations are among the most serious in those times and endangered the very destiny of the writer. Just as piranha attacks, criticism rushes at and devours texts at the slightest ideological leak. In the *Teorie și critică* section of “Viața Românească” (May), Al. I. Ștefănescu published *Cu privire la Ana Roșculeț*, accusing Marin Preda of objectivism, naturalism, reactionism etc., a text that almost includes the prose writer in the category of enemies of the people and of the Soviet Union: “Amidst the great struggle between the camp of peace and socialism led by the Soviet Union and the aggressive camp of imperialism, naturalism is used on the ideological front by instigators of war as a weapon against the working people, as a means of clouding the mind, of oppression and exploitation. [...] Therefore, a progressive writer who, under the influence of naturalism, uses this reactionary literary method in his writing, does not serve the cause of the progressive forces of society. His work, far from being of use to the working class, may thus prejudice the struggle for liberation from the capitalist exploitation. [...] At present, naturalism is one of the ideological weapons of imperialism, one of the most perfidious means of inoculating our country with the enemy’s ideology through art.”

In 1951, Marin Preda scarcely published anything. Instead, he made some fact-finding visits, some of which served as material for the continuation of the first volume of *Moromeții*, not yet published. He wrote the feature report *În zilele secerișului, în sat la Călinești* for “Contemporanul” (20 July): “The collective farm had begun threshing the pea. Everything had been prepared in time. Threshing had been started by the head of the Farm, Lupașcu, and the secretary of the main organisation, Vasile Hâmpu, who had been feeding the thresher for several hours.” A short story fragment, *Drum nou*, appeared in “Cultura poporului” (July-August). Both are written in the Morometian key of the second volume²². The unsigned article *Probleme actuale ale literaturii din R.P.R. în lumina lucrărilor lui A. A. Jdanov* (‘Current issues of literature in the People’s Republic of Romania in the light

²² Marin Preda, 1967, *Moromeții*, volume 2, București: Editura pentru Literatură (E.P.L.).

of A. A. Zhdanov's works') was included in the *Orientări* section of the "Viața Românească" journal (September). The directives regarding literary creation were firmly laid down and mandatory: participation in the work of building socialism, relentless fight against the class enemy, the struggle for the "complete destruction of any remnant of bourgeois ideology, fight against formalism, aestheticism, naturalism (some traces of which had been identified in the writings of Marin Preda, Zaharia Stancu, Eusebiu Camilar)." That year, he submitted the short novel *Mare proprietar* to the publishing house Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă (E.S.P.L.A.), whose title was changed to *Desfășurarea*. On the other hand, the financial situation of the writer improved after he was appointed editor of "Viața Românească" in December 1951.

Before its publication, the short story *Desfășurarea*, E.S.P.L.A., București, 1952, appeared in "Viața Românească" (August-September). According to some of the exegetes of Marin Preda's work, the story had been written on the advice of Paul Georgescu because "possible accusations of ideological deviations were still hovering over him"²³, which was easy to remove by printing an "appropriate" text. N. Tertulian wrote an extensive review of *Desfășurarea* in "Contemporanul" (19 October). Across multiple pages, the critic salutes it and, in order to highlight it, cancels all the qualities of every work that Marin Preda ever wrote: "In his earlier short stories about the village life (1948), the author depicted a world full of people driven by instincts and wild desires generated by private property, such as the hunger for wealth and selfishness that take on monstrous forms (Miai in *O adunare liniștită*) or the trivial cruel passions disintegrating the Moromete family, where relationships are dominated by hatred and fighting (*Dimineața de iarnă*); some stories in the volume *Întâlnirea din pământuri* were deeply consumed by the germ of naturalism. [...] In the light of these previous creations, it becomes clear why Marin Preda's latest short story is a turning point in the creation of this writer, endowed with a strong talent: it largely

²³ Stan V. Cristea, 2022, *Marin Preda - biobibliografie*, Craiova: Editura Aius, p. 35.

reflects the author's ideological growth and maturity, his having deeply and creatively assumed the criticism he received."

Marin Preda returned to writing in 1953 in order to complete *Moromeșii*, the version of the second volume, but his plans failed; the draft of the promised novel *Adam Fântână*, promoted by E.S.P.L.A., also remained unfinished. S. Damian wrote in "Contemporanul" (6 February) about *Conflictul literar și eroul pozitiv* ('The literary conflict and the positive hero'), the title of which is explained by the main character in the short story *Desfășurarea*: "Such a hero is the communist Anghel in Marin Preda's *Desfășurarea*. [...] Part of a typical conflict, Anghel is the typical hero, who expresses the essence of a characteristic phenomenon in the life of our villages: the emergence of capable, stout-hearted political leaders, hardened in the struggle against the perfidious enemy." George Munteanu is present in "Almanahul literar" (February) with his opinions regarding *O nouă etapă în dezvoltarea nuvelisticii noastre* ('A new stage in the development of Romanian short stories'), more specifically, his impressions after reading *Desfășurarea*: "In relation to this, it may be said from the very beginning that the writer passed in every respect the test to which reality subjected him; that he followed in the footsteps of life, knowing that, in its depths he would discover 'inner reserves' unsuspected by other writers and exploit them with great skill."

The report entitled *Cu privire la munca secțiilor de creație ale Uniunii Scriitorilor* ('On the work of the creative departments of the Writers' Union), "Contemporanul" (20 March), stated: "The important theses regarding the standards of realistic art included in the report of Comrade G. M. Malenkov were hardly applied in the analysis of literary works. [...] Writers such as Marcel Breslașu, Marin Preda, Nicolae Jianu are generally absent from these discussions."

The next two weeks contained the same elements of indoctrination. "Contemporanul" (27 March, 3 and 10 April) published the article *Unele probleme ale creației literare din R.P.R. în lumina tezelor asupra literaturii și artei expuse de tovarășul G. M. Malencov în Raportul ținut la Congresul*

al XIX-lea al P. C. U. S ('Some issues regarding the literary creation in the People's Republic of Romania, in the light of the theses on literature and art laid down by Comrade G. M. Malenkov in the Report delivered at the 9th Congress of the CPSU'), resulted from debate organised between 24 and 27 March by the Writers' Union Bureau. Eugen Frunză, who wrote the account, concluded: "However, our literature does not yet measure up to the life, to the reality of our Motherland, although, actually, it should be one step ahead of life. This lagging behind is clearly shown by the narrowness of themes in our literary works. At the same time, writers have not faithfully depicted the figure of the most remarkable sons of our people, of communists. They are insufficiently concerned with the great issues of socialist industrialisation, with the figure of the advanced worker. [...] It should be said that the monotony, lack of expressiveness, schematism are incompatible with the literary standards." In an article in "Scântea" (25 June) signed S. F. (Sergiu Fărcășan), the author deals with *Denaturări ale realității în unele opere literare* ('Distortions of reality in some literary works'): "Thus, when the hardworking peasants in the short story, led on by the rich, want to withdraw from the collective farm, representatives of party bodies are laudably presented as predicting, instead of a sustained political work, the resort to arrests and other measures of administrative repression. Literary criticism, when dwelling on the short story *Desfășurarea*, did not notice this gross mistake."

Under the unfavourable auspices of the article above, *Moromeții*, on its way to the printing house, would inevitably pass through the ideological swamp. In early 1954, "Flacăra" (1 March) published the fragment *Polina*, with a presentation aside: "The novel *Moromeții* by Marin Preda reconstructs a realistic picture of the Romanian village in 1937-1938. Following the destiny of two peasant families – the Moromete and the Bălosu families – the author Marin Preda successfully illustrates the idea that, in the context of the private property and small production of goods, 'the peasantry as a class not only does not grow, but, on the contrary, breaks up year after year into the bourgeoisie (the *chiaburi*) and the poor (proletarians, semi-proletarians)'

(The History of CPSU, p. 21). Both Ilie Moromete and Tudor Bălosu aspire to a more bountiful life, but take different roads. Ilie Moromete, a peasant with eight acres of land, father of six, would work hard, relying on his own force and that of his family. After years of labour, he realises he has gained nothing for himself and for his family. His family falls apart during a conflict between Ilie Moromete – who intends to keep his family united by means of honest work – and his sons, possessed by a strong desire to get rich at any cost. Tudor Bălosu’s family will evolve in a completely different manner. He will set off in pursuit of wealth using licit and illicit means typical of the capitalist society, starting by cruelly exploiting his wife and his daughter, Polina. A sudden change suddenly occurs in Polina when his father, Tudor Bălosu, forces her to marry a hideous but rich man, only to increase his wealth. Polina will realise the abomination of the real relationships in his family and will fight to free herself, getting married, against Tudor Bălosu’s will, to Biriță, a poor man whom she loves. The fragment below depicts scenes in which Polina, aware of the rights she has earned through her work in her parents’ household, valiantly claims them.”

An extensive article was published in “Lupta de clasă” (July), the ideological organ of PMR (Romanian Workers’ Party). In the wooden language specific to the official documents of the age, Traian Șelmaru, the author of the text, refers to *Unele probleme ale dezvoltării literaturii în R.P.R. Uniunea Scriitorilor* (‘Some issues regarding the development of literature in the People’s Republic of Romania. The Writers’ Union’) and discusses the directions and achievements of its members in the light of the Proceedings of the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union: “In the article *Party Organisation and Party Literature*, as in other works, Lenin pointed out the writers’ duties in the revolutionary struggle of the working class. [...] Lenin delivered a fatal blow to the ‘apoliticism’ of literature and art, exposing the bourgeois essence of this theory, showing that the interests of the exploiting classes are hidden behind the slogan ‘art for art’s sake’. [...] The party systematically fought the reactionary bourgeois ideology and the concrete manifestations of formalism and cosmopolitanism were criticised in

the party press. [...] The writers were required to avoid schematism while maintaining the ideological correctness, and the recommended solution to reconciling these demands was ‘the in-depth knowledge of life’. [...] One should fight the fact that many of the positive heroes of our literature speak a poor, flat language, without colour and brightness, which reduces their spiritual figure. Even writers like Petru Dumitriu often assign a vulgar language, which is not lacking in swearing, to their heroes. Marin Preda also makes such mistakes.” That same year, the prose writer published the sketch *Îndrăzneala* (“Viața Românească”, July), later re-issued in “Flacăra” (1 August), then included in the anthologies celebrating the 10th anniversary of the armed insurrection of 23 August²⁴. A second edition of *Desfășurarea* should be linked to the awarding of an important prize²⁵ to this short story, which shortly became a script for the film adaptation with the same title. An investigation launched by “Flacăra” magazine was printed (1 October), providing the answer *La ce lucrează Marin Preda* (‘What Marin Preda is working on’). The column *Pe drumul realismului socialist* (‘On the path of socialist realism’) in “Viața Românească” (December) includes two interventions. One was signed by Al. Oprea and gathered impressions on some of the component parts of the debut volume, *Întâlnirea din pământuri*. Al. Oprea pointed out that *Izbânda realismului în creația lui Marin Preda* (“The victory of realism in Marin Preda’s creation”) was somehow overshadowed: “The influence of decadent literature has made its dark mark on Marin Preda’s creation. Marin Preda has brought a keen knowledge of reality and man to his writings. But the influence of the naturalistic method of creation will often prevent him from deeply understanding that life material, will make him fully present precisely what is desultory, uncharacteristic and not what is typical, essential.” The other intervention, more amiable, belongs to Petru Dumitriu (see footnote 14).

²⁴ *Ani de luptă* (prose collection), București: E.S.P.L.A., 1954 and *Cântare patriei* (patriotic prose collection) București: Editura Militară, 1954.

²⁵ Marin Preda received The Second Class Award (Premiul de Stat clasa a II-a) for *Desfășurarea*, a 30,000 lei cash prize, which was a very large sum as compared to salaries back then.

The writer resumed his work on *Moromeții* in 1955. Two novel fragments were printed in the new publication “Gazeta literară” (10 February) and in “Flacăra” (1 March). In the distorting light of socialist realism, the serial publication of the novel began in “Viața Românească” (issues 6-9). It was the only possible way. *Moromeții* was published the same year, with illustrations by Jules Perahim, by the Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă (E.S.P.L.A.), București. Despite the hostile cultural environment, dominated by political intrusions into the literary life, *Moromeții* was to be well received by the public, while the author’s merits and the artistic value of the text, having gone through and overcome the obsessive decade, have remained at the same high levels to this day. Its publication in the midst of ideological dogmatism was only the gateway to the literature of those years, the only one open to authors and to the reading public. It would seem that *Moromeții* did not contravene the literary policy and, by extension, the cultural developments of the age. In fact, *Moromeții* is much more. The novel’s popularity was not due to its theme, but to its artistic realisation. *Moromeții* is, first and foremost, a masterpiece in its artistic, and by no means ideological side, a narrative-ideational structure of the highest stylistic value. The novel had the chance to be published during those troubled years due to the subject matter in which the issue of class struggle was insinuated into the very core of the text. Essentially, the writer would present the social and historical context of the dissolution of small properties, the hard life of land workers, on whose shoulders the heavy taxes imposed by the state were resting, and the way of life perpetuated from older times, with traditions, customs and mentalities, some of which had shaken its stability. One finds an entire humanity in Ilie Moromete, the main character. He does not give up when faced with difficulties, sympathises with the poor in the mountains, comments on politics with biting irony at Iocan’s smithy, becomes scornful towards his well-off neighbour, Bălosu, softens up when his son Niculae, ill with a fever, receives the first prize at school, gets emotional at the song whistled by a young man in love, Bică. Through Moromete, Marin Preda typologizes some kind of peasant wisdom born of the hardships of land labour and the harshness of life. Emerging, as a character, in an age of ideological pandemic,

Moromete is not contaminated by its effects, but is rather a Socratic peasant. Moromete has all the spiritual, unaltered qualities that socialist realism would not consider. The interference of these issues in the subject matter of the book – conceived long before the political “guidelines” became obligatory – is circumstantial, coincidental, unrelated to the incidences of expression, existing only as a background.

This is the only way to explain why, in all ages and under all regimes, regardless of their nature (monarchies, republics, dictatorships) and their often drastic limitations, which the “times” tried to impose, monumental works still emerged. In the field of literature and in all liberal arts, they are proof that the talent and originality of artistic thinking, embodied in the auctorial self, do not run into barriers, fetters, obstacles, certifying that man was born free, under a sun that shines the same upon all fellow people, equal in rights.

However, through all ages, probably from the dawn of man until today, reality has appeared different.

That is why we love this beautiful utopia that art has been entertaining throughout the centuries.

Bibliography

*** *Cronologia vieții literare românești* (CVLR), 1944-2000, Editura Muzeului Literaturii Române & Semne, București, 56 volume, 2010-2020.

*** *Dicționarul General al Literaturii Române* (DGLR). Ed. a II-a, revizuită, adăugită și adusă la zi, Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române & FNSA, 8 volume, Bucurști, 2016-2020.

CHIȘU Lucian, Hanganu Laurențiu (coord.), *Literatura în epoca totalitarismului*, Editura Printech, București, 2008.

CIOBANU, Marin, *Marin Preda și ai săi*, Editura Muzeului Literaturii Române, București, 2014.

CRISTEA, V., Stan, *Marin Preda - biobibliografie*, Editura Aius, Craiova, 2022.

Cristea, V., Stan, Cristea, *Marin Preda, anii formării intelectuale*, Editura Aius, Craiova, 2022.

Preda, Marin, *Viața ca o pradă*, București: Editura Albatros, 1977.

Preda, Marin, *Creație și morală*. Articole, evocări, eseuri, interviuri. Ediție de Victor Crăciun și Corneliu Popescu, București: Editura Cartea Românească, 1989.

Preda, Sorin *Moromeții, ultimul capitol*, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2010, ediția a II-a, Editura Eikon, Cluj-Napoca, 2013.