PhD THESIS ABSTRACT

GRIGORE T. POPA – DOCTOR WRITER AND JOURNALIST

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Iaşi, 2011
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...take risks and make sacrifices, because life steps on risks and progress is built on sacrifices.

Grigore T. Popa

Each person’s life, no matter how insignificant, has its moments that can serve as an example by other people. But most of all, the life of the chosen ones, of those rare personalities who marked the collective life of a certain people or even of the entire humanity, can show us all the right way to perfection.¹

In a volume published in the 1930s, Professor Nicolae Leon noticed the value of some young collegiates “that carried on their activity in Iasi in those times” and was certain that their work would become landmarks for the next generations. Grigore T. Popa was one of the four people mentioned by Nicolae Leon. “(…) I am sure that after 40 years – if they don’t become interested in politics – their work will be discussed, as we currently discuss the work of V. Conta, A.D. Xenopol, Al Philippide or Dimitrie Alexandrescu.”²

Professor Leon’s intuition proved to be right. Grigore T. Popa had nothing to do with politics and his scientific and social achievements were extremely important. What can we notice today? Grigore T. Popa’s name appears on T-shirts and

¹ Dr. Gr. T. Popa, Învățății noștrii. Dr. I. Cantacuzino, Ed. „Cartea Românească”, București, ..., p. 3.
² Prof. dr. Nicolae Leon, Note și amintiri, „Cartea Românească”, București, 1933, p. 249.
ball-point pens, it is the name of a street in Timisoara, a piece of information in high school textbooks and an exam subject in the students’ mobile phones. Haven’t you seen Grigore T. Popa’s name on many doors? Have you ever wondered what this person was like? Rousseau, in a letter to the mathematician and physicist Jean le Rond d’Alembert wrote these words ”Nowadays, Sir, we are not great enough to know how to admire you”. Nowadays, Mr. Grigore T. Popa, we are not great enough to know how to admire you.

Grigore T. Popa was interested in many different fields, and this was not out of snobishness or hypocrisy, but with real competences, and many of his ideas are still up-to-date. Noica said about this type of intellectual that „...when he is great, the Romanian scientist can’t bear to have one simple specialization. Cantemir, for example, couldn’t stick to one specialization and nor could Ion Heliade Radulescu, or Hasdeu, or Iorga in the field of history, or Parvan in Classicism and later in archaeology, or Enescu in music, or Coanda in scientific inventions, or Blaga in literary creation, or Calinescu in culture and literary criticism, if we can mention him here, or Moisil in mathematics, with the same restraint however, or Stefan Lupascu in current phyllosophy (he is probably not the

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3 In two alternative textbooks for the 11th grade (approved this year) we can find the following statement: ”the port-hypophysar system (described by the Romanian anatomist Gr. T. Popa together with Unna Fielding)” in Dan Cristescu, Carmen Salavastru, Bogdan Voiculescu, Cezar Th. Niculescu, Radu Carmaciu, Biology. Textbook for the 11th grade, Corint Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p. 54 and Elena Hutanu Crocnan, Irina Hutanu, Biology. Textbook for the 11th grade, The Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House R.A., Bucharest, 2008, p. 69.
only one to be interested in the whole body of new sciences), or this most outstanding example who is Mircea Eliade.”

The thesis approaches Grigore T. Popa’s work in the field of literature and journalism.

In the magazine whose main co-founder was Grigore T. Popa, entitled *Insemnari iesene*, for which he was journalist, literary critic, essay writer and prose writer, or in other numerous newspapers, magazines, leaflets and volumes that he published, Grigore T. Popa’s writing was remarkable, as pointed out by C.D. Zeletin in his article ”The writer-doctor Grigore T. Popa”, for its ”effervescence, erudition, polemical spirit, frank assertion, acid verb, courage of opinion, sense of humour. He combined in his writing a strong admiration for the eternal values of humanity with an infinite curiosity for modern values. There are few critics who can separate, as he does, the modern from the up-to-date, the up-to-date becoming modern only if it is endowed with perennial spiritual perspective and has overcome the censureship of time”.

Even in his college years he got involved in political, social and cultural problems, either directly or by means of the students that he was leading as General Secretary, Vice-President and later President of the ”Student Centre” in Iasi or as Dean of the Mihaileana University, main trustee of the ”St. Spiridon” Hospital board of trustees, President of the ”Didactic Circle” in Iasi, etc. or analyzing the events of the inter-war period, Grigore T. Popa, by the competence with which he

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could approach any subject and in thousands of pages, offered to the Romanian literature and journalism an inheritance that deserves to be published in a collection.

The reason for choosing the theme ”Grigore T. Popa – doctor writer and journalist” is the discovery of a serious, competent, well-informed and objective writer who reveals a profound spirit not accustomed to any sacrifice.

His name is linked to many important events that marked the student community in Iasi at the beginning of the 20th century, the academic circles, the Romanian press, radio, the inter-war political circles (the political parties were interested in him), the relations with the Royal House or the Church, culminating with a conference at the Romanian Atheneum – ”The Christian morals in modern times. Is the faith in Jesus Christ’s teaching still possible nowadays?” which represented for Grigore T. Popa the sentence to death, a death carefully prepared by those that he called representatives of the Antichrist.

We can say that his life and everything that he wrote were sublimely ended by this conference and the following fragment can constitute a key to the interpretation of his creation:

Today the humanity is embarassingly wandering in the darkness of feelings and the ruin of life, from where hope and the humanity have been banished. Trying to become superpeople, the disciples of Antichrist have turned into beasts who destroy all culture and civilization.

Under these circumstances it is time for each pure consciousness to wonder: Where to?. And the answer is not hard to find: back to the Christian morals!
The published materials concerning Professor Popa’s activity is inconsistent and distributed according to some events (the approach of his work as researcher is dominant): newspaper articles, commemorative manifestations, short speeches at the beginning of universitary years, an in memoriam leaflet (”In commemoration of Grigore T. Popa. Studies, documents, accounts”, Omnia Publishing House, Iasi, 1999) and a volume published with the family’s help (Grigore T. Popa, ”The Reform of the Spirit”, Viata Medicala Romaneasca Publishing House, Bucuresti, 2002).

He was mentioned by false historians among the precursors of socialist concepts and the militants for these ideas, among the authors who tried to sustain some ideologists of the regime. Nevertheless, Grigore T. Popa was always a upstanding person and, moreover, by his attitudes and opinions he opposed the communist regime:

the communists hunt by means of the police the ideas that they do not like and try to exterminate the opposition, promoting hate and violence against any other belief, except for their own.

Consequently, one of the objectives of the thesis is the presentation of the real history of Professor Popa’s position concerning the social and political events of those times.

If little has been written about the researcher, about the journalist and writer Grigore T. Popa the references are even fewer. There was a symposium ” Grigore T. Popa – essay writer, prose writer and journalist” (organized by the Society of Doctor Writers and Journalists of Romania in 1997), three
articles (the first two previously published in the 22 and *Memoria* magazines, and the other one written by Professor Popa: ”America is building” and there was an attempt to make a presentation - but largely censured - of the conference ”The Christian morals in modern times. Is the faith in Jesus Christ’s teaching still possible nowadays?” in the volume ”The Underground of Memory. Pages from the Resistance of Culture. 1944-1945, selection and presentation by Vasile Igna”, Universal Dalsi Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001. In the volume ”Doctors of Iasi in documents: Grigore T. Popa. Vol I”, this conference is published ”as it was held, uncensured”. The conference represents a ”testimony for Grigore T. Popa’s courage because nowadays the model embodied by this Romanian scientist, who belongs to the gallery of ethical models produced by the Romanian people, can become a point of reference for modern generations”.

Maybe ”after a certain age we start to look back; the time of our life becoming shorter and shorter it demands to be enriched with the life of those who existed before us”7. Grigore T. Popa’s life was, as some people say, a short one. Each person has his own perception of the duration of a life but there are few people who have understood that ”the true measure of a lifetime is not its length but the inheritance that it leaves behind” (Corrie ten Boom). But, more importantly, the essence of life lies in its meaning.

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We conclude this introduction with a general urge, that we direct now towards the scene of Grigore T. Popa’s existence: ”life is worth reading and talking about”.

The thesis is structured in two main parts:

I. *The present stage of knowledge*: the presentation of the Professor’s fields of interest

II. *Personal contributions*: the analysis of the ideas expressed by Grigore T. Popa, the way they were perceived and their actuality; documents concerning his work and activity (public documents, letters, photos, etc.); the identification of his dossier at the National Council for the Study of the Archives of the Security.

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**CONCLUSIONS**

*It is time for us to return to our souls...*

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Gustave Flaubert, in a letter to his friend the writer Louis Bouilhet, wrote: “La bêtise consiste à vouloir conclure”. To conclude would mean “to freeze”⁹, to end something. Our intention is exactly on the contrary: to open something. We wish to open the pages of a work which is still waiting to be discovered and published in its entirety.

“When you open a book, it flies away. And you together with it, as if you were travelling on the neck with soft feathers of a huge butterfly. But a book doesn’t have only one pair of wings, but hundreds, as a sign that it can take you not only from one flower to another in this glorious world, but to hundreds of inhabited worlds. (…) we understand that the flight, even if it takes us to far-away places, always takes place within ourselves. The books are butterflies with which we can fly through our own mind, under the huge roof of our head. (…) By reading and flying, which is one and the same thing, you do nothing else than draw the magical map of your own soul.”¹⁰

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Before synthesizing some ideas that we could get to by reading texts, documents and images that result in a massive body of archives, I underline the fact that it is important to extract the man Grigore T Popa and look at him in the

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integrality of his being – as much as each of us can understand and know.

The title of the thesis ”Grigore T. Popa – doctor writer and journalist” can make us wonder if by reading his work, the relation established between reader and writer and the act of decoding the meaning of his texts, we can get a perspective on the author as a human being. Reading the documents and Grigore T. Popa’s literary and journalistic work we could understand that ”the work reveals infinitely more than the biographical «sources»”\(^\text{11}\). Michel Foucault once said that his work could be read as ”fragments of autobiography”\(^\text{12}\).

Another aspect that I want to underline is the fact that the texts are often considered by commentators to be some ”raw material for their studies”. The author is a person that you have to feel, to understand and you also have to breathe the atmosphere of his work. His work is alive, it breathes because Grigore T. Popa was alive and in relation with those who listened to him or read his work. He could create a space, gave birth to a space between himself and those standing in front of him or in front of a page written by him – that space was something connected to the soul. The writer C.D. Zeletin told me that during the years when he was working to decipher “The flowers of evil”, he tried to identify himself with the metabolism of those verses: he lived the poetry, he sang it, and he dreamt about it, he danced it.\(^\text{13}\) The interior obduracy of the

critics is mirrored in their understanding and interpretation of a
certain work. The life and the work transgress each other.

“The work of a man is always a dim image of the man
himself. Out of what a man can conceive only a small fragment
becomes reality, the greatest part of the subtlety of an existence
is lost once the man disappears. But creeping around
someone’s seeable achievements, we can come to understand
his soul and we come close to the essence of his interior
turmoil. Those who ever try this way of reading someone’s
achievements succeed in better understanding people and
acquire the capacity to extract the essential. This faculty makes
it easier for us to place individualities in the right time frame
and to understand what is universal in the seeking
manifestations of a person. And of what we conceive only this
is really valuable: what is connected in one way or another to
what is universal, to what is eternal. The rest is the soot of
some consumed material.” These thoughts of Grigore T Popa’s
can constitute the hard core from which we can start our
interpretative attempt.

The theme of this work attempts at offering the writer
Grigore T Popa to the reader and at opening a large horizon for
the interpretation of his work. Umberto Eco’s concept of
“opera aperta” or “work on the move” is operational in this
case, too. “A work of art, even if it is produced by some
implicit or explicit poetics of necessity, is substantially open to
a series of virtually endless possible readings, each of them
making the work live again according to some perspective,
some taste some personal operation”\textsuperscript{14}.

Meetings were essential for Grigore T Popa’s formation. As a person who had his roots in a village and had to be receptive so that he could recognize a certain aspect in the huge amount of sensations offered by his natural environment, he paid attention to any spiritual vibration emitted by those around him. He always focused on the others and on what was around him, because he was aware of the fact that offers could come from anywhere and they shouldn’t be missed. He could see the value of some people around him and later they became landmarks for him. The same things can be said about him and here we can mention his collaborator George Emil Palade, who, urged by his teacher, took a path that led him to great achievements.

As an anatomist Grigore T Popa viewed a man in his entirety: body and soul. The corpse lying on the dissection table, even if physically it is in a horizontal position, simultaneously it is transgressed by a dimension that turns the anatomist to the depth of verticality. As beings endowed with sense and sensibility, with a soul, we can’t be content with the strictly biological dimension of life, with the existence of just one level of reality. The former medical student, the Archbishop Bartolomeu Anania, once said: “life falls under the incidence of the biological, the soul falls under the incidence of the eternal”.

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Someone’s preoccupations in the field of biology and medicine must be articulated with the preoccupations in the field of culture. To break the teaching of biology from its cultural and historic context leads to its alienation from culture. Grigore T Popa offered another way to view anatomy: anatomy as a means to get to some deeper knowledge. He urged his students to use biology in order to get, in a different way, to the field of culture. In those times many professors stuck to the disciplinary level, unable to enrich the relation of their domain with other fields. He demonstrated that anatomy can become an interrogative subject and not an imperative one.

Grigore T. Popa was a man-bridge; a man interface – between the medical culture and the humanist one. He created paths between people. This is proven by the intense metabolism between himself and other men of science and culture from our country but also from Europe and America.

Grigore T. Popa’s debut, even if publicly unknown, represented a work that supposes great humility. The act of translating, even after publication, leads to the translator being sacrificed. This conscious sacrifice is proves his interior quality.

Translation was for Grigore T. Popa one of his constant activities. Between “Haeckel” and “Gray” there was a great
number of works brought by him to the Romanian literature – by commenting on some books or quoting ample fragments from different volumes belonging to the German, French or English literature which hadn’t been translated into Romanian.

His access to the space of the German, French or English language – languages that he knew very well – turned out to be a benefit for the Romanian science and culture because, by means of his contacts all over the world, he could be in touch with everything that was published and presented to the Romanian public the most important books of those times.

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Grigore T. Popa had “a gift for retirement among old books. And (…) that (specific to the Moldavian people) of talking.”\textsuperscript{15} The writer Paul Gore, the penname with which he signed his literary texts, revealed his life in the text, offered himself by communication and communion.

The thematic matrix of his writing is the man’s return to his own internal being. Leaving our interior behind, the vacuum occupies the space, and thus the exterior becomes the only reality and the only way to exist. His texts approach the theme of reducing a person to a single reality, the exterior one – when everything becomes possible through this reduction – and this leads to a person being turned into an object.

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The journalist Grigore T. Popa reveals a person’s behavior placed in a social context or in social situations. Many

\textsuperscript{15} Cristian Bădiliţă, \textit{op. cit.}
of his pages are texts of social psychology. For him, to understand meant, “in the first place the field in which and against which you shaped your personality”\(^{16}\). It represented the kind of engagement “scientifically armed, in the social world”\(^{17}\) of the Romanian university people.

The Romanian society had its own unbalanced aspects at the time when Grigore T. Popa expressed himself: there was a significant social fracture and a democratic culture which was not mature yet. The special dialectics of viewing – the eye with which he could see things and place them correctly -, the validity and clarity of his demonstrations enable us to consider him one of the greatest inter-war Romanian psychosociologists.

Grigore T. Popa approached many journalistic genres: editorials, analyses, essays, literary critics, scientific or musical reviews, pamphlets, book reviews, biographical articles, travel articles, cultural articles, notes.

His readers often recognized his style without turning the page to see his signature. A lively interrogation, a freshness of curiosity and a vivid writing enabled people to call him “an artist with words”\(^{18}\).

As a person who was awarded the Nobel prize for literature stated in his reception speech, “The more substantial a person’s esthetic experience is, the more refined his taste will be, the more precise his power to take moral decisions will be,


\(^{17}\) *Ibidem*, p. 107.

the freer, even if not necessarily happier, he will be”\textsuperscript{19}. In Grigore T. Popa’s case this statement is confirmed.

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Grigore T. Popa, “an imposing personality”\textsuperscript{20}, was the outstanding figure of a leader, whose spirit, force, morality and discretion\textsuperscript{21} led to his being considered a representative Romanian collegiate.

Grigore T. Popa distinguished himself as a strong and charismatic personality even in his college years. His being extremely sociable, his verbal and interpersonal intelligence, his ability to solve all problems efficiently imposed him as a leader among students. He was General Secretary, Vice-President and President of the ”Student Centre” in Iasi and he participated in and organized numerous specific activities such as student congresses, public meetings, strikes, he initiated motions and took a stand against many negative aspects of the society. Having a well-developed organizational culture he managed to gather masses of students to support the national ideal for which he fought permanently. In his public activity, Grigore T. Popa embodied the image of the transformational leader whose vision was constantly different from the situations he had to face and, consequently, he struggled to

make some changes possible within the system and he never gave up, no matter how many obstacles he had to overcome.

"To lead means to highten a person’s vision up to superior levels, to enable a person’s performance to go up to superior standards, to build a personality beyond its normal limitations."\textsuperscript{22}

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Grigore T. Popa was a man of the city, but also a man of the cell. It could seem abnormal for these two hypostases to coexist in the same person. He understood that this duality is a characteristic of his existence: „to be means, in the first place, to be on stage, in front of yourself and the others”\textsuperscript{23}.

This existence is revealed by the psychologist who analysed some samples of his handwriting. The attempt to get to know Grigore T. Popa’s personality by means of a graphological analysis makes his portrait more complete. ” Grigore T. Popa was a man endowed with a special interior finesse, a loving soul, but also quite strict as far as the contents of things is concerned. He knew that life was ephemeral and he liked the details of life that made him thrill. Meticulous, endowed with a noble mind, but very well organized. A dual nature, strict but merciful at the same time: he granted you a few chances and after that he drew a conclusion, the final one, without any ambiguities.”


received from the psychologist who analysed some samples of Grigore T. Popa’s handwriting dating from different periods of his life and some important moments of his existence.\textsuperscript{24}

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We often have the tendency to equalise two terms: ”culture” and ”ethics”. But throughout history it could be noticed that this relation is not true at all. In Grigore T. Popa’s biography there were some personalities – intellectuals, writers – who could be considered role models for their erudition. Their spiritual evolution and their moral side-slips demonstrated that the above-mentioned relation was not a characteristic for their personality. A year ago, at a conference organized by a group of social and cultural action, Andrei Plesu talked about the insubstantiality of the cultural-ethical relation promoted by some writers: “Culture does not guarantee any ethics. It does not make possible a consequent moral behavior. You undoubtedly know that there many civilized villains in the world. Knaves full of readings. People who read a lot and who demonstrate an extraordinary lack of interior structure and interior rigor. Moreover, they think that the fact that they are people of culture gives them the right to approximate in what their ethics is concerned. \textit{They are not like other people, they can digress, they can roll out, they can have lots of imagination.} Therefore, culture does not guarantee a rigorous behavior.”\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24} The text comprising a detailed analysis of Grigore T. Popa’s handwriting will appear soon in a volume of the author, the psychologist Arabella Marinca, Paideia Publishing House.
“We are alive and history is alive, we are creators and history is creative when we live in order to affirm our beliefs, to confess them.”

At the time when the communist power was devouring territory after territory and was trying to bite off what was most precious to the Romanians – faith - the person who had the inner strength to speak in the lecture room of the Romanian Athenaeum was Grigore T. Popa. It was the voice of ”a Christian engaged in the city”27, who had lived according to the values that he promoted, values that anchored his being.

The conference with which he put an end to his public existence proved without any ambiguities that it was Christianity that shaped the world and the solution and salvation is our return to the Christian morals. How come that the one who wrote about the reform of the spirit and about evolution, about the continuous transformation of the human being, ended the conference speaking about the necessity ”to return”? The title of his conference ”The Christian morals and the modern times” represents but two realities: that of the everlasting and that of ephemerality. By the term ”return”, Grigore T. Popa claims that the human being has only one way:

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his evolution towards the Creator, and the beginning of this road is the return to the soul, turning our face to God.

After writing these pages, after reading Grigore T. Popa’s work and life, we believe that on the observation chart of his life we can write in capitals the trinominal: Competence – Consistency – Ethics.