

**GEORGE EMIL PALADE" UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE, PHARMACY,  
SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY IN TARGU MURES  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF LETTERS, HUMANITIES AND APPLIED SCIENCES  
FIELD: PHILOLOGY**

## **PHD THESIS**

### **Summary**

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**MICHAEL SEBASTIAN. MONOGRAPHIC STUDY**

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## **Summary**

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# MICHAEL SEBASTIAN. MONOGRAPHIC STUDY

## Summary

The purpose of this doctoral thesis is represented by examining the personality of Mihail Sebastian and his work, by situating the writer in the socio-cultural context of the era that determined the trajectory of a destiny with tragic imprint. Our critical approach capitalizes on the ways of critical investigation by analyzing the levels of Sebastian's creation, the novelty elements of our approach deriving from deciphering the correlations and correspondences between the avatars of biography and the fictional universe, but also by suggesting reading perspectives that expose dilemmas and contributions of identity, perspectives justified by the writer's re-entry into the attention of critics and the reading public, especially through the *Journal*, but also through the other sides of *Creation*, re-evaluated and resized from novel reading angles.

As we try to suggest by the title and by the structure of the doctoral thesis we sought to focus the research interest on the relationship between autobiography and fiction, by correlating the fact of life, with its representations in the journal, or with other documents from the interwar era. We sought to draw the significant lines of the aesthetic physiognomy of the writer, in conjunction with his artistic Creed, with the manner of creation, analyzed in immanent dynamics, or in comparison with other works and writers of the interwar period. Criticized or praised, ignored or claimed with emphatic rhetoric, marginalized or glorified, Mihail Sebastian has preserved, in time, his actuality, his capacity for expression and creative authenticity, all the more so since the era in which he created was, despite the ideological excesses of the right, a moment of maximum cultural development, of fulfillment of aspirations, through names and creations of magnitude and resonance, entered into our cultural heritage. Through his singular identity destiny, Mihail Sebastian stood out as an analytical and empathetic spirit, receptive to literary experiments and innovations, an empathetic temperament, with a writing that combines mimetic representation and the dynamics of confessional writing, thus delimiting a dilemmatic biographical structure not lacking in acuity of rationalism and imaginative force. A gifted writer, Sebastian was an ebullient, expressive, substantial essayist, novel theorist and author of novels in which interiority is a corollary of the aspiration to moral authenticity.

Critics with whom he was contemporaries appreciated the talent of the writer, his culture, intuition, intelligence, vocation of an elevated humanism, despite the prejudice that sometimes persists of a second shelf writer, or "drawer" (Nicolae Manolescu). The critical reception of Mihail Sebastian's work includes several extensive studies published before 1989. It is the monograph *Mihail Sebastian* of Cornelia Stefanescu (1968), then *The Book of Dorina Fatoiu Mihail Sebastian or the irony of a Destiny*, *The Anthology of critical texts Mihail Sebastian interpreted by...*, curated by Anatol Ghermanschi or the book of Ion Braescu *Mihail Sebastian, researcher of French literature* (1965). These exegetical contributions are added to some important books published after 1989, through which are explored less known aspects and sides of Sebastian's biography and literary activity: Iulian Baicus, *Mihail Sebastian, projections on the screen of European culture* (2007), Romulus Bucur, *Mihail Sebastian or about the inconvenience of being born a Jew* (2007), Mihai Iovanel, *the unlikely Jew. Mihail*

*Sebastian: an ideological monograph* (2012), Marta Petreu, *The Devil and his disciple: Nae Ionescu-Mihail Sebastian* (2016) etc.

Resorting to autobiographical writing, the writer refuses any romantic emphases, any rhetoric of clamoring the ego, the literature being dedicated to lucidly probing the abyss of interiority, his epic skills being defined by examining female psychology, while his talent as a playwright being a notable one, through plays of genuine value, which have known a great audience success. At the same time, Sebastian's Diary is one of the most important autobiographical testimonies of modern Romanian literature, a chronicle of a troubled me, but also a chronicle of the political and cultural life of the interwar period, captured in its finest details. Sebastian's disappearance, only 38 years old, after a troubled existence that experienced humiliation, deprivation and aggression of anti-Semitic ideology, represents a cruel irony of a wasted Destiny, illustrating a broken flight to the horizons of an unfinished creation, in full creative power.

In this doctoral thesis we have proposed to analyze, from a monographic perspective, the personality of Mihail Sebastian, emblematic figure of the Romanian literature of the twentieth century, with a diverse and complex work (prose, dramaturgy, literary criticism, publishing and musical chronicle). Born into a simple Jewish family, his name in the civil status documents being Iosif Mendel Hechter, the writer sometimes used pseudonyms, one of them being Victor Mincu, the onomastic masks having the role of camouflaging his Jewish condition. Sebastian was persecuted during the Second World War, an era in which he wrote a memorable diary, published posthumously, both in the USA and in Europe, a masterpiece of the autobiographical genre of remarkable documentary and literary importance, in which the writer evokes scenes, human figures and testimonies of Romanian anti-Semitism during the war, rendering the avatars of a condition that bore the stigma of being Jewish, in a nationalist society, imbued with an extremist ideology, so that due to its origin, Sebastian was forbidden in the 40s to represent the drama *The Holiday game* and *the nameless star*. Mihail Sebastian wrote four novels, at the age of 25 the novel *Women* appeared, a year later the writer got to know the notoriety with the novel *of two thousand years*, a vivid and disturbing book about anti-Semitism and about the existence of a young Jewish intellectual in Romania. Sebastian began to keep a journal until his death in 1945, the Journal being smuggled out of communist Romania in 1960 and published later. The publication of the journal was considered a true editorial event, through the testimonies about the biography of the writer, about the literary life of the era and about the social-historical context of the time, marked by discrimination and persecution against the Jewish population between 1930-1940. Apart from documenting his Jewishness in a moment of crisis, Sebastian's diary abounds in accounts of love affairs, of misunderstandings, passions, reconciliations, in vivid, dynamic notations, exposed with sincerity and lucidity, of notoriety being his loves, especially with actress Leni Caler, loves that can be perceived as a counterpoint to the picture of ideological confusion and skirmishes in Romania of 1935-1945, when tens of thousands of Jews were deported to Nazi camps. Like the protagonist of his novel *two thousand years*, Mihail Sebastian lived under the specter of anti-Semitism, as a student, then as a lawyer and as a writer, first under the impact of anti-Semitic rhetoric, then exacerbated under the sign of violence, aggression. "Cowardly Jew" [...]. "I grew up with that cry, I was spat on from behind," Sebastian writes at the beginning of the book. It is not only the abuse and violence of strangers that are illustrated in his autobiographical pages, but also some anti-Semitic statements by friends, colleagues and

mentors that, to use a verb with an Ionian accent, turn from intellectual bourgeois liberals into virulent anti-Semites.

It is the period when Sebastian becomes unemployed, in which his plays cannot be played in theaters, the writer experiences an increasingly acute sense of solitude. The way in which Mihail Sebastian lived in an antisemitic environment is illustrative also in the light of a biographical episode from 1934, when Sebastian asked the philosopher and publicist Nae Ionescu to write a preface to his book two thousand years. The philosopher sends him a downright insulting text about his condition as a Jew, a text that Sebastian agrees to publish as a preface to his novel, continuing, however, to admire Nae Ionescu, being sincerely grieved at the philosopher's death in 1940: "at home yesterday morning, two hours after his death," he wrote. "He is so dear to me." The bibliographic sources used in our research will be books and articles from the bibliography of the work and critical bibliography, in volumes or periodicals, but also websites or other electronic resources. The doctoral thesis aims to analyze the universe of this emblematic writer for the theme of identity and the human condition in an age when ideologies out of the control of reason risk nullifying humanity. The general objective we have pursued is to examine the historical and literary context, by comparative analysis of the works of writers from the same period, or by interpreting the themes and motifs used in the works of Mihai Sebastian. The structure of the doctoral thesis is appropriate to these objectives, devoting chapters of different dimensions to his biography and relations with literature, prose, dramaturgy, Journal, publicistics, and there is also a chapter dedicated to the critical reception of Mihail Sebastian's work. In order to achieve these objectives, we used certain methods that we considered appropriate, such as the method of scientific documentation, the historical method, the method of comparative analysis, the method of interview the method of text analysis.

Writer "canonical in a canon that is no longer the aesthetic one"<sup>1</sup>, Mihail Sebastian had a tumultuous existence, due primarily to his condition of identity as a Jewish writer who lived in an era when far-right ideology became dominant. Rather modest and sporadically received in the first post-war decades, Sebastian's work experienced a revitalization of public interest and literary criticism after the appearance of the *Journal*, in the context of the major interest in autobiographical literature (memoirs, diary, travel notes, etc.): "the last decades have seen the rise of memory as a phenomenon both political (see the cultivation of memory through coherent and broad institutional policies) and cultural-literary (currently, in the United States, it is not rare for writers who until 40 years have published at least one volume of memoirs, a species once left to senectutes; not to mention France swallowed by "autofictions")."<sup>2</sup> Subjective literature has diversified and acquired novel accents and forms in the post-Decembrist period, due to a devaluation of fiction and fictional texts, but also through the prism of a capacity to broadcast writings of this type on Channels other than traditional ones, by their arrangement in the online space, on the internet or on different social networks: "in Romania of the 90s, the boom of subjective literature was interpreted, correctly, as the counteroffensive of a long repression of information. But different causes led to similar effects. Dissatisfaction with fictions can be seen globally. There are two causes here. First, the

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<sup>1</sup> Mihai Iovanel, *the unlikely Jew. Mihail Sebastian: an ideological monograph*, Carta Romaneasca Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

exponential increase in the possibility of publishing and archiving personal information, via the internet, led to the explosion in quantitative terms of the premise "my life is a novel". Second, this reasoning continues, "in recent decades, rationalist principles regarding the possibility of a universal truth have experienced a continuous decline. The most powerful global connector remained ethics, as not so much an arid philosophical discipline as a political principle by which one can claim the position of victim in the past and claim the central position in the present. It is a phenomenon that could also be observed in the United States (where ethnic, cultural, sexual minorities, etc. have been reconsidered by official policies of political correctness), and in post-communist countries (where the new elites have carved their symbolic capital from the material of a posteriori structured anti-communism)"<sup>3</sup>. All this, writes Mihai Iovanel, led to "the uprooting of the self-sufficiency of the aesthetic, which continued its bourgeois life only in universities. But even universities had to keep up: hence the plethora of canons and canonization criteria. The canon-type of the beginning of the Millennium is an "impure" one, since the premises are mixed" <sup>4</sup>. In Romania, Sebastian is not the only one, but "the main author who has become canonical in a new style, with an important ethical component. It owes this, in good part, to the official tabuization of Romania's anti – Semitic policies, acute (in the sense of criminal) in the 30s and especially the 40s of the XX century-those in and about which Sebastian writes. As every canon contains the "truth" of a period, Sebastian is also able to speak of the truth of our age: not as a subject, but as an object of historical reading, as historical as possible" <sup>5</sup>.

The doctoral thesis we propose has a monographic character, highlighting through an exegetical perspective that follows two interpretative threads: one towards the research of biography, the other towards the systematic study of the work, considering with viable arguments validated by tradition, that between the two components, life and opera, there are numerous links, intersections and convergences, although we cannot agree with the mechanistic approach that reveals that the work is a mechanical consequence of existence. We consider that there is in the whole of Mihail Sebastian's work a thread of subjectivity, an autobiographical substrate that can be found in prose, dramaturgy, publishing and, of course, in the pages of the journal. Of course, Sebastian is a writer who adheres to many of the features of the generation to which he belongs, a generation that places emphasis on experience and experiment, on biographism and sometimes extreme living, his work reflecting all the contributions and particularities of a life lived at the extreme, in full exercise of lucidity and passion, the writer being a careful witness of the era, an actor and a director of his own gestures, attitudes and fulfilments, involvement in his own existence and in the climate of the era being marked by fervor and dynamism of the idea. We should look at Sebastian's work also from the angle of a disturbing unfinished, because the thread of the writer's life was brutally severed by an accident that denied us the opportunity to see other literary works written in the three genres that consecrated him. In Sebastian's case, the convergences and complementarities between life and work are obvious, the study of the two components being relevant from the perspective of the immanence of the text, but also of the knowledge and assumption of the social-historical context, marked by the ideological upheavals of a period when the extremes approached

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

perilously long sometimes, the writer being, paradoxically for a Jewish intellectual, disciple of a far-right philosopher, Nae Ionescu, friend of ideas and ideals with some young creators attracted by legionarism (Eliade, Cioran, etc.), but also attracted to communist ideology after 1944, being the victim of an accident in 1945.

Interwar literature undergoes aesthetic changes, thematic mutations and expressive metamorphoses depending on the ideological substrate and contextual replications of the era, because "the period after the Great Union – observes Paul Cernat – radically resizes the old geo-cultural tectonics, and Bucharest's economic and administrative centralism produces, through its homogenizing and unifying project – against the background of the crisis of European modernity and the advance of totalitarianism – the collapse of parliamentary democracy and the dismemberment of the country"<sup>6</sup>. Romania now knows a relativization of democratic norms and Freedoms, a rebound of liberalism, through the recrudescence of the far right, in conditions in which the state was unable to manage a prolonged political and economic crisis, with serious social consequences, which led to restrictions and sacrifices on the part of the population (the economic crisis of 1929-1933, the "sacrificial curves" during the Iorga-Argetoianu government, dissension between parties and political groups, the establishment of the royal dictatorship of Carol II, the abuses and odious crimes, Romania's entry into the war with Germany, etc.), all these outline a nightmare picture, illustrated by the tragedy of the Jews in Romania, they represent "the danger of the Bolshevik and the invasion of foreign capital, he is the cause of corruption, of politicking, he is the exponent of harmful modernizations, of foreign and harmful forms of culture"<sup>7</sup>. Victor Neuman and Keith Hitchins consider relevant three important orientations that determined ideological directions and political discourse in the interwar period. A first orientation illustrating "the theory of rapid and unconditional integration in Western civilization, known as Europeanism", was supported by E. Lovinescu and Stefan Zeletin<sup>8</sup>. The second orientation, marked by "the theory of native models, also called traditionalism"<sup>9</sup>, was represented by Nichifor Crainic and Lucian Blaga. The most important interwar ones that supported the ideology of modernism or traditionalism were Sburatorul, led by E. Lovinescu, thought (Nichifor Crainic), literary movement (Liviu Rebreanu), literary Fortress (Camil Petrescu), Hiena (Pamfil Sheicaru). Camil Petrescu advocated, for example, the noocratic status of magazines, in the context of a confusion of values in an era of pragmatism and the devaluation of Public Taste: "The Gazette and the theater cultivate the preferences of grocers, manicures, administration students, wives of wealthy waiters. Vulgar geniuses of the periphery, launched by the circulation gazettes, once with the " finest " soaps, penetrated all the way to the University, to the gates of the Academy. A festive number and a banquet given in honor of a theater Merchant met adhesions of the most, wandered there with

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Cernat, *retro Modernism in the interwar Romanian novel*, art publishing house, Bucharest, 2009, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Victor Neumann, *history of the Jews in Romania. Documentary and theoretical studies*, preface by Pompiliu Teodor and Paul Cornea, Timisoara, Amarcord Publishing House, 1996, p. 177.

<sup>8</sup> Stefan Zeletin published between 1921 and 1922 a series of articles in Dimitrie Gusti's magazine, *The Archive for science and social reform*, gathered in the volume *the Romanian bourgeoisie*, published in 1926. V. *doctrines of political parties*, edition and notes by Petre Dan, Bucharest, Garamond Publishing House, 1996, p.78.

<sup>9</sup> Victor Neumann, *ideology and phantasmagoria. Comparative perspectives on the history of political thought in East-Central Europe*, Iasi, Polirom Publishing House, 2001, p. 104. Similar opinions can be found in Keith Hitchins, *Romania 1866-1947*, fourth edition, trad. from English by George G. Potra and Delia Razdolescu, Bucharest, Humanitas publishing house, 2013, pp. 333-373.



unconsciousness and eloquence, or of calculations”<sup>10</sup>. E. Lovinescu, "the tamer",<sup>11</sup> as Tudor Arghezi called him, undertook, in the history of modern Romanian civilization (1924-1926) a vast theoretical operation to modernize the Romanian culture, by synchronizing with European values, preserving, of course, the identity emblem of Romanian literature and culture. A median position, located between tradition and modernity had had the Romanian life, a wide-ranging magazine of poporanism, in which debates about national specificity and integration in the architecture of Europeanism were quite frequent. Dimitrie Gusti considered that the "European body" is "a human continent, a spiritual construction, a splendid manifestation of Will and thought"<sup>12</sup>. This national/ european relationship is translated into a conceptual duality that underlies Maiorescu's theory of imitation (of "forms without foundation") and Lovinescu's theory of synchronism which sees in imitation "the principle of the formation of our institutions and the essential element of the formation of the institutions of all peoples"<sup>13</sup>, taking Gabriel Tarde's sociological theses from *Les lois de l'imitation* (1890), Lovinescu adapts them to the Romanian cultural climate and applied them to the entire Romanian Cultural and spiritual phenomenon. Lovinescu summarizes, in his fundamental work on modern Romanian civilization, the ethnic features of the Romanian people, bluntly, in a direct, objective assessment, devoid of any idylizing ornaments: "nationality [...] is confused with passivity and inability to adapt. The social stratification of all peoples can therefore be regarded as happiness: at its foundation is a large peasantry, inert, passive, traditional, custodian of nationality, and above the upper classes, Noble once, urban today, intelligent, receptive, through which all the elements of universal civilization are introduced and which, therefore, constitute the true factor of progress."<sup>14</sup>

Lovinescu was a fervent follower of synchronization with European values, democracy, progress and modern civilization, in contrast to the return to the past, idylism, ruralism and the history of modern Romanian civilization reveals, illustrates and amplifies such a conception. The period after 1918 knows a diversity of ideological accents, between which two trends are dominant, one of liberalism, which will work with many synopses, the other, extreme, of the reactionary right, in which an important role is played by the development of the legionary milice, founded in 1927 by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, characterized by extremist nationalism, emphasis of ethnic superiority, which had many adherents within the generation of '27, a generation of exalted livingism, which faced a severe moral crisis and Emil Cioran, Constantin Noica, Haig Acterian, Petru Comarnescu and, somewhat, Mihail Sebastian), publishing their articles in magazines that were at the antipode of democratic values such as thought, word and current, cultivating ethno-nationalist accent values that excluded diversity, dialogue, competition. It should be noted that the intellectuals of generation '27 expressed, not once, their creed in articles of radical nationalist emphases, with accents of racial discrimination, accents that were also found in the political discourse of the so-called

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<sup>10</sup> Camil Petrescu, "democracy and literature", in the *literary Citadel*, an. I, 1925, no. 1, December 19, p.1. V. and Zigu Ornea, *traditionalism and modernity in the third decade*, Bucharest, Eminescu publishing house, 1980, pp. 209-210.

<sup>11</sup> Ioana Parvulescu, "the tamer", in *literary Romania*, no. 17, May 2-8, 2001, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Dimitrie Gusti, "the problem of the European Federation", in Ovidiu Pecican (coord.), *Europe in the interwar Romanian thought*, Iasi, European Institute Publishing House, 2008, p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> E. Lovinescu, *history of modern Romanian civilization*, vol. III: *the laws of the formation of the Romanian civilization*, Bucharest, "Ancora" Publishing House, 1926, p. 72.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

democratic parties: "even the Democratic currents in Romania (Liberals, peasants) are forced to verbally adopt the protective coloratura of the nationalist discourse if they want to preserve their political efficiency"<sup>15</sup>. The cult of the generation intersected with the ideological and militant exaltation, the generation itself being defined, in Mircea Vulcanescu's vision, by the "solidarity of the age groups", the "absolute identity of spiritual attitudes" and, perhaps primordially, the unity of the "Romanian soul"<sup>16</sup>.

The doctoral thesis starts from the premise that the biography and work of Mihail Sebastian reveals a dynamic textual reality filtered through the prism of an objective gaze, which decants the dimensions of fictionality and the lenses of subjectivity through which the world is viewed, the dual character of the text being determined by the permanent conjunctions, convergences and dialogues between the permissiveness of autobiographical discourse and fictional inserts, with numerous slides between biographism, confession and fiction, with various gradations of aesthetic or documentary relevance, illustrating the diversity of the levels of Sebastian's work. The choice of theme is therefore justified by the relevance of Mihail Sebastian's writing, which summarizes an authentic, modern form of the confessional style. The main objectives of the research are: the investigation of the cultural and historical context that formed the basis of the writing of these texts, the inventory of the particular features of the texts, the establishment of the main directions of reception of the work in the specialized critical discourse, and the identification of an appropriate position of these texts in the interwar Romanian literature.

The scientific character of the paper is supported by the bibliography underlying the documentation and analysis of the corpus, the bibliographic resources circumscribing studies of literary theory, literary histories, criticism studies, literary dictionaries, articles and literary Chronicles covering the topic of the doctoral thesis. The materials consulted thus contribute to the validation of our research approach, bearing the signature of established critics and theorists, among them (E. Lovinescu, G. Calinescu, Eugen Simion, Nicolae Manolescu, Mircea Angheliescu, Ion Negoitescu, Adrian Marino, Mircea Mihaies, Phillipe Lejeune, Dorina Fatoiu, Mihai Iovanel and others). Among the methods used are the thematic analysis, which involves valorizing the Themes, Motifs and symbols that are found at the level of the text, but also the comparative study method, which involves establishing connections between texts of different types and from different eras and relating them to diverse cultural and literary models.

Starting from the directions established for this research endeavor, PhD thesis *Mihail Sebastian. Monographic study* it was structured in five chapters that expose the avatars of biography and creation, revealing the convergences between life and work, between autobiographical discourse and fiction, resorting to a contextualization of the corpus texts, which provide biographical data, but also value judgments in the dynamics of interpretations and analyzes applied on the text, which offers a perspective of (re)reading that aspires to be able to bring these literary works into actuality, to (re)awaken the taste and interest for their reading. What brings new Our research consists, therefore, in the option for a rich corpus of

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<sup>15</sup> Virgil Nemoianu, "Mircea Eliade between Chicago and Bucharest", in *operas*, vol. 5: *Romania and its liberalisms. Tradition and freedom*, Bucharest, Spandugino publishing house, 2016, p.40. V. and Victor Neumann, *ideology and phantasmagoria*, p. 105.

<sup>16</sup> Mircea Vulcanescu, "generation", in *Criterion*, year I, no. 3-4, November 15-December 1, 1934, pp. 3 - 16 (reproduced in *idem, "the young generation"*, edition curated by Marin Diaconu, Bucharest, Compania publishing house, 2004, p. 54, 58, 65).

texts, the analyses we have carried out on the corpus being relevant both in itself and by correlating one with the other texts, from which results an overall, complex picture of the Romanian Cultural and literary space of the interwar period, all the more so as literature builds/ provides an image of the era to which it belongs, while the historical era motivates and supports, up to a point, the fertile space of literature.

We consider that we expose, thus, a direction of Applied reading that would bring to the surface a set of texts whose particularities could be reconsidered, thus, through their just recontextualization. The doctoral thesis aims, therefore, to explore the entire work of Mihail Sebastian, from a monographic perspective, following the interferences and connections between the different fields of creation. Trying to dismantle the intimate mechanisms of such a complex creation, we found in novels, plays, essays and journal pages a singular and important voice of interwar Romanian literature, with a special impact on later readers. Sebastian's texts reveal, thus, the double identity of the writer, who, involved in a permanent dialogue with himself, reveals himself entirely, in total sincerity, free of reticences and inhibitions, with illusions, deceptions and limits inherent in the human condition that evolves in an atmosphere of crisis, aggression and existential urgency.

Writer of Jewish origin, with a multifaceted literary activity (literary criticism, essay, publishing, novel, dramaturgy), Mihail Sebastian is one of the most spectacular "cases" of interwar Romanian literature, his talent being manifested in various fields of the art of the word. With a protean literary structure, Sebastian illustrated the field of prose, dramaturgy, diaristic discourse, essayistics, literary publicistics, political, cultural commentary or journalistic text itself. We tried, in the pages of the doctoral thesis, to favor the knowledge, with a high degree of veracity, of the personality of Mihail Sebastian and his work, to explore how the writer was located in the socio-cultural context of the era, his destiny being characterized as tragic and ironic at the same time. Pertinent judgments, nuanced understanding of the literary phenomenon, objectivity and validity of analyses, all these qualities make Mihail Sebastian one of the literary chroniclers of vocation and exegetic talent of the interwar era, a literary chronicler who avoided arbitrary or equivocal comments, seeking to establish an accurate diagnosis of literary works, to render as precisely as possible the outline of an identity, to capture distinct literary processes and forms, in their intrinsic individuality, revealing, in an objectified, equidistant critical language, what and unrepeatable in a literary work. Even if he also had impulsive reactions, polemics being a formidable weapon for him, however, Mihail Sebastian was always aware of the assumed responsibility of a literary critic, a trainer of the destiny of receiving a literature.

During the heyday of the Romanian novel, the interwar era was quite hectic, with polemics and vehement debates, in which important writers were involved, including Mihail Sebastian. Let us recall that E. Lovinescu used the formula of "objective creation" to define the emancipation of the novel and its extraction from the tutelage of lyricism and subjectivity, emancipation which was, in the critic's view, synonymous with the modernization of Romanian literature and synchronization with European values. The emancipation of the novel meant the representation in the novel of the urban environment, which replaced the rural space, but also the presence of the intellectual character, meant to lead, through its complex, rich inner structure, to the intellectualization of the epic inspiration. The lyricism of the novel was not limited only to ambience, vision or style, but also to the existence of a

moralizing narrator, who sometimes made his presence felt in the text, through artificial interventions in the destinies of the characters. In Garabet Ibraileanu's view, the terms of creation and analysis are subsumed to the concepts of objective and subjective novel, The Path of modernization of prose joining the line of psychological analysis and subjective tectonics of the epic, of inspiration from the urban world but also of the presence in the center of the narrative text of the intellectual, complex character, capable of living the dilemmas of modern life. In the interwar period, the two novel formulas, objective and subjective, coexisted, so that against the background of psychological and social observation specific to the objective novel, A subjectivizing narrative perspective was also developed, through the presence of characters who had a status of observers or reflectors, because a fact, a character assumed analysis from several perspectives, relativized their contours and dimensions, the narrative vision increasing in authenticity and verisimilitude.

Mihail Sebastian is part of a generation that, through works, actions and ideological dynamism, stood out as problematic, being marked by a true fervor of identity searches, through themes such as knowledge, Eros, the feeling of tragedy, failure, holiness, lucid passions but also the revolt of the spirit. All these themes are found not only in the work of Mihail Sebastian, but also in the creations of his generation colleagues, Mircea Eliade being a representative name in this respect. The first novels represent a sign of epic modernity and the synchronization of Romanian prose with European prose. In fact, in the work of Mihail Sebastian are intertwined objective, concrete data of reality, with an affective substrate of great complexity. Objective realism coexists with a "subjective realism" oriented towards the nuanced world of the spirit, a phenomenon common to many writers of the interwar period. For *two thousand years* it is a book that has aroused the longest discussions and controversies, a novel that oscillates between two ideational and narrative typologies: it is a journal-novel or autobiographical novel and a novel of ideas or an essay-novel. Mihail Sebastian here exposes his condition as a Jewish intellectual who lives, thinks and writes in a world of intolerance and ideological turmoil. In the first two parts of the novel, some forms of direct writing are capitalized, while in the third part the angle of epic perception widens, the narrative capitalizing on a novel intrigue and a diverse typology of the characters, the confession being fictionalized, even if the story uses the first person, with the inventory of facts and happenings from Uioara, the trip to France, love stories, ideological debates, etc. the narrator is in a dilemma situation, looking for solutions-and always lucidly Jewishness. The solution of identity problems is very difficult to achieve, the protagonist going through multiple experiences, the autobiographical novel assuming a multistage construction, turning at the same time into an ideological novel and a novel of morals. Through the themes and motives addressed, Mihail Sebastian can be considered an innovator in the Romanian prose space, through the exercise of Eros, articulated in two registers: innocent and mature love major coordinates of the novels *the city with acacia trees* and *the accident*. Mihail Sebastian's novels are structured in the form of monologues, diaristic sketches or letters, innovative compositional elements in the field of Romanian literature. In all novels, narrated either in the first person or in the third person, the epic substance is constituted by analytical availability and introspective spirit, the external events, restricted in number, being sketched or summarized, as pretexts for analysis, deliberations and inner development. It could be said that the beginning prose of Mihail Sebastian represents rather epic exercises, with mainly analytical character, placed under the sign of confession, in which the mentality and ideology

of the generation from "Criterion" are reflected, interested in several major themes: authenticity, experience, failure, soul crises, the problem of intelligence and relationship with society, morality, solitude, the drive towards transcendence, culture, introspection, thanatic thrill, themes that can be found in Sebastian, but also in the prose of Anton Holban or in the novels of Mircea Eliade. The *two thousand year* novel focuses on the moral labyrinth of human consciousness, outlining the tortuous path of the road to oneself, with hesitations and uncertainties concerning one's own captive consciousness, besieged by an aggressive reality, in which the dimensions of the fictional universe configure expressions of freedom, fantasy or ethical alternatives. The city with acacia trees is rather an analysis of female psychology, Mihail Sebastian describing the atmosphere of the provincial city, traditions and *Customs, banal everyday events, without developing too much the social drawing and without exploring in detail the mentalities arising from the provincial atmosphere*. Worthy of interest is the profile of the environment and the dimensions of the adolescent soul, a mixture of sensuality and candor, of the sense of tragedy and propensity to mystery, of the playful spirit and revelation of the oneiric, in a prose in which the characters are made up of lights and shadows, but not lacking soul nuances. Referring to the qualities of a novelist, Sebastian considers that there is no vocation of a novelist the novel being a matter of attitude and less of talent, the authentic novelist having to be endowed with passion of detail, curiosity, temptation of objectification, relevant being the expression of the essential, in the space of epic fiction. For Sebastian the provincial city is a topos of the human par excellence, with small happenings and signs of alienation represented in a narrow horizon, with scenes that unfold in *ralenti*, with common dramas, banal, predictable, the novelist having the obligation to break away from this universe of the province, to represent the larger and more diverse universe of the big city, rich in possibilities from different spheres, from beautiful, to tragic, grotesque and comic.

Mihail Sebastian also analyzes the relief of his own creation, in the notes entitled *Diary of a novel*, Confessions that transpose the two essential hypostases, of practitioner and theorist of the novel, protean literary species, which relies on experiment, on the dose of insolent reactions of the author, materialized in the period of creation, in a moment of creativity dynamics, by recording the diverse fact, the banality, the gestures or everyday events, because the novel has as its starting point, Sebastian emphasizes, an undefined sensation, passing then through an expressive through a sensory, perceptive and intellectual processing of the real, the prose writer must reveal the experimental value of his writing, which initially has the air of a founding gesture, like a self-reflexive narrative, especially if it is about provincial dramas and the type of misfit, relevant to the mixture of humor and melancholy of Sebastian's epic, who believes that the provincial Fair has fictional potential for a budding novelist, as plot, theme, Vision and ethyl. Despite the convulsive ideologies and polemical predispositions, the interwar era is the one in which it is. Lovinescu valorizes the novel as an "objective creation" evaded the tutelage of lyricism with great chances of acceding to modernity, its emancipation being achieved by representing the ambiance of the urban environment, which replaces the rural space, by the presence of the character-intellectual and by intellectualizing the epic problem. The poetic stage of the novel was not limited to atmosphere, vision or style, but also to the status of the moralizing narrator, with interventions in dialogues or in the destiny of the heroes.

The universe represented by the writer in his novels introduces us to a world of stifled sensations, vague expectations and unmotivated anxieties, through which stages of becoming

being are revealed (the fascination of the instincts of Eros oscillating between ignorance, curiosity, attraction, repulsion and exhaustion, etc.) a relevant element that must be remembered is how the writer avoided the pitfalls of naturalism, even if there is an attraction for an aestheticizing eroticism. It could be said that the change in the dynamics of the novel occurs through the appeal to the first person, a way of opening access to the universe of intimacy and interiority, through spiritual ascents and failures, Mihail Sebastian's novels being structured in the form of monologues, diaries or letters, innovative forms and compositional architectures, in all novels, articulated in the first person or in the third person, the narrative substance being represented by analytical spirit and introspective approach, with the rendering of restricted spaces and environments, sketched or summarized, pretexts rather developments of interiority.

The dramaturgy of Mihail Sebastian is not limited to the comic, the laughter, nor to the revelation of the tragic dominance of the human, it is rather a theatrical type that predisposes to dream, to reverie, to the aspiration to nobility of soul, because the vacuum seems to be for the writer and for some of his characters a way out of the labyrinth of history and of an aggressive, inadequate world. The dream is thus perceived as a compensatory element, a way of refuge, of salvation, through which Sebastian individualizes himself in the context of interwar drama, as an admirer of Giraudoux, the French playwright who stages sensibility, poetry and dreaming. On the other hand, Mihail Sebastian configures, in his dramatic chronicles, an original conception of theater, through which a significant role is given to fantasy, The Game of imagination, the dream. The characters of Mihail Sebastian's dramaturgy live with implication and revealing inner dynamism the trials of loneliness and exclusion, questioning a reality inadequate to their own sensitivity. Sebastian's pieces illustrate a strong vocation through exquisite construction, firm vision and unmistakable style. As we have observed before, in the early stage of dramatic creation the didascals are reduced, subordinated to the replicas, they are concise and objective, essentialized, so that the conduct of errors is deduced from the replicas, the didascals excluding the portraits of the characters, which are represented by gestures, replicas, action. Sebastian's dramaturgy is representative of an era in which searches, renewal, hesitations and errors, victories and defeats, sometimes violent confrontation between art and ideology, between ethics and aesthetics were dominant. The analysis and interpretation of Mihail Sebastian's dramaturgical work is not easy at all, his vocation as a playwright taking place in a controversial period, the interwar period, when the dramaturgy, quite insignificant, until then, by the small number of authors who wrote plays, acquires a special status.

The Diary of Mihail Sebastian reveals the confessional dispositions of the writer, the capacity of the inner dialogue of an intellectual who continually confronts his own conscience, his own limits and his own shortcomings. Exhausted at times, exasperated by the vicissitudes of history, the writer desperately laments ("I would like to shout, I would like to scream"), does not hide his fears, with a precarious existential situation, is superstitious, lacking momentum or dynamism. At the same time, the *Journal* is also distinguished by the multitude of human figures (writers, theater people, students, Jews, colleagues from the *word*, or from the *Journal of the Royal foundations*), finding in these autobiographical pages useful information and data for deciphering human and artistic characters and typologies, a literary climate that provides an image of the orientations and dimensions of Romanian literature in the interwar period. Worthy of interest are the notes concerning Max Blecher, whom he

visited in Roman, or Eugen Ionescu, who, having a mother of Jewish origin, was exasperated because of the anti-Semitic measures of the era, being frequently encouraged and supported by Sebastian, who in the diary captures images, inventories events, people and scenes, deciphering meanings and meanings of life. Character of his own drama, the diarist gives meanings to a history with broken meanings, in a world where life and death coexist, The Diary transcribing the precarious balance of an existence always on alert, finding in these dynamic, tragic and tense notes the very idea of suicide or suggestions of disappearance. No doubt that Sebastian's impressions, notations, confessional narratives are intensely subjective and they must be treated as such, with caution, because any diary, no matter how objectivity it would demonstratively assume, is intensely personalized, being an expression of the emotions of the writer, as the critic Dan C. Mihailescu: "everything absolutely everything in a memorial work must be taken with caution, with as many turnkey bemoles as possible, must be corroborated with other and other data and works more or less similar. Each part must be thought out, according to the whole of the event, the whole of the individual, according to the precise historical moment, etc., so that in the end, no matter how enticing the trenchant statement may be, it may be regarded prudently, touched with mefience, carefully recorded, of course, but never in the name of the definitive."<sup>17</sup> The narrative respects the common scenario, with an introductory passage, a unfolding of the action and a climax, in an ascending logic, in which the presentation of the eventential scenario leads to self-reflection, to the itineraries of interiority, there being a balance between the external world and the representations dictated by interiority, the homodiegetic perspective being, in *The Diary* of Mihail Sebastian, totalizing and subjective, interrogative and dilematic, even if there is in the pages of the diary also a heterodiegetic heard from other sources, Mihail Sebastian being among the few Romanian writers who resort to such a strategy of subjective narrative, correlating narrative, description and dialogue exposing facts, describing emotions or sensations, combined with the representation of suggestive portraits, disseminated throughout the autobiographical exposition.

The appearance of the *Journal* reconsiders Mihail Sebastian's place in the Romanian culture, through this remarkable autobiographical text, along with other works in prose, dramaturgy, essay. It is a book that generated emotions, passions and fervor, going beyond the strict field of literature, through the theme of Jewishness with all related dimensions (the problem of the tragic fate of the Jews in Romania, anti-Semitism, in the context of the exacerbated nationalism in the interwar period, during the Antonescu regime, etc.). There are consistent references in the *Journal* to young intellectuals attracted by far-right ideology (Eliade, Noica, Cioran), but also conceptual suggestions about the theme of truthfulness, the relationship between living and expression or about the identity dilemmas of intellectuals situated in a tense historical context. Sebastian's *diary* records authentically, without passions or mystifications, the position of the writer-victim of an oppressive ideology in the interwar period, but also the attitude of the Romanian authorities towards the Jews during the Second World War, debunking myths and historiographical fictions. With the contest of a tense and expressive writing is examined the collective depersonalization, observed in the form of surprising metamorphoses of some friends of the writer, seized by extreme ideologies and surprised in the hypostasis of unusual alienations, in relation to the change of the social-

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<sup>17</sup> Dan C. Mihailescu, the *confirmation of a myth*, in Jordan Chimet, *op.cit.* . pp. 147.

historical context. Sebastian acutely feels his victim status; the writer is lucid, incredulous, sad, witnessing moral resignations, ethical disaggregations, deviations and destruction of consciousnesses, under the ratio of an intransigent ethical framework. The author of the journal reevaluates his own friends, surprised in contradictory poses, with swipes towards nefarious ideologies that denote moral cracks of the democratic attitude, illustrative being Camil Petrescu's meeting with Sebastian in which Camil complains that there are too many Jews in the center of the capital, telling him, on another occasion, that he will join the Iron Guard, if the movement will bring him a profit. Sebastian's *diary* records an objective picture of the Romanian interwar context, describing "precisely the mood of the intellectual elite of those years, giving an image of the deaf anti-Semitic atmosphere in the common people's feeling. Those who criticize Sebastian deny him precisely the ability to objectively portray facts."<sup>18</sup>

That is why the perspective on autobiographical literature, in our case on Sebastian's diary pages must be balanced, possibly also by correlating with other diaristic pages of his generation colleagues: "in order to understand today and to explain – as much as possible – what were the real motivations of life attitudes at that time, *Sebastian's Diary* will have to be confronted with the diaries, correspondence Memoirs of those mentioned by him, in order for objectivity to be - to some extent - assured. Very valuable documentary source-the accuracy of the scoring is obvious-but also partial source, because the selection and explanation are made from an angle determined by the selection of the moment."<sup>19</sup> Respecting the inner and outer dynamics of the diaristic genre by imposing a calendar of notations, sincerity, self-addressing or addressing to a supposed fictitious interlocutor, fragmentarism, obsession of illness and death, spontaneity, *Mihail Sebastian's Diary* represents a text of exceptional value, both documentary, ideatic and stylistic, a period document and a soul document, in which Mihail Sebastian certifies your talent, creative force, ethical responsibility that comes from each page of the diary. Misfit writer, dreamy, disturbing, interrogative, dilematic, drastic with himself and with others, sensitive and intransigent, Mihail Sebastian assumes, through his *diary*, a first place in Romanian literature.

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<sup>18</sup>William Totok, *daily anti-Semitism, diary entries of Romanian-Jewish writer Mihail Sebastian*, in Jordan Chimet, *file Mihail Sebastian*, Universal Dalsi Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, p. 232.

<sup>19</sup> Roxana Sorescu, in *Sebastian under the Times*, Universal Dalsi Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p.102 .



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