

FICTIONALIZED AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RECOUNTS OF THE ONEIRIC GROUP BY VIRGIL TĂNASE AND ȘERBAN FOARȚĂ

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Abstract The present paper analyses how Virgil Tănase and Șerban Foarță depict the oneiric group in works of fiction that are autobiographical in nature. The two texts that we have selected for the analysis are *Playing Tag with Death* and *Show with Dimov*. We are interested in what aspects and events the authors have selected to present in their recounts of the oneiric group and how these descriptions fit with previous portrayals of the group. Our approach takes into consideration how the writers revisit and reproduce the past, as well as the fictional practices that they utilize in the process of doing so.

Keywords Oneirism, life writing, Leonid Dimov, literary group, autobiographical writing

The dream has long been associated with the idea of literary creation. However, it is a well-known fact that the way humanity understood and conceptualized dreams evolved at the same time as mankind. Romanticism was the turning point in how literary dreams were integrated into works of fiction. For the Romantics, dreams, with their confusing imagery and lack of conventional logic, were the expression of imagination. Documenting dreams became a way for writers to try to understand their creative process. With their propensity for evasion, the Romantics identified the existence of a reality beyond the cognoscible one, one that could only be known and experienced in the unconscious. The dream, therefore, became a way of evading from the hostile present, a way of probing reality in the search of one's self and the retrieval of the primordial Unity.

The publication of Sigmund Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* (1899), where the famous psychologist theorized that dreams are a reflection of the unconscious mind,

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revolutionized the understanding of dreams in the 20th century. After the atrocities of the First World War, Freud's theory of the dream was used by Surrealists in their attempt to uncover the unconscious mind, to better understand man, and to free it from social taboos. For the Surrealists, the dream was not a way to escape reality, but a way of deepening it. Thus, the super-reality that the Surrealists envisioned was not one that implied evasion, but rather one that mixed elements of reality with those of the dream to attain an absolute, purer reality. The automatic writing technique postulated by Breton and used by the Surrealist artists borrowed heavily from Freud's free-association method. In theory (but not always in practice) for Breton and his followers, art had no aesthetical purpose, but instead, it was perceived as a way of dealing with and resolving the problems of man and, therefore, as a way of radically transforming mankind. The Surrealist view of art and the dream that was popularized in France in the 20s and 30s soon became one of the most prolific literary and artistic movements in the world, the legacy of which is still alive today.

Aesthetic Oneirism

The oneiric group emerged into the Romanian literary scene in 1964, during the so-called period of relaxation, after a five-year "latency period" when the two founding members, Dumitru Țepeneag and Leonid Dimov, theorized a way of writing literature that broke away from the socialist realist doctrine imposed by the communist party. The name of the group was inspired by the Greek noun "oneiros" (meaning dream). As its name suggests, the group showed a special interest in the concept of the dream. Between 1964 and 1974, the decade when the group was active, ten Romanian writers were accepted as part of it: Dumitru Țepeneag, Leonid Dimov, Virgil Maziescu, Vintilă Ivănceanu, Daniel Turcea, Florin Gabrea, Iulian Neacșu, Emil Brumaru, Sorin Titel, and Virgil Tănase. The existence of the group was facilitated by the favorable political situation created during Nicolae Ceausescu's rise to power. Given the popularity and even notoriety of some of its members, both during and after its demise, the oneiric literary group is bound to evoke interest.

While the literary program developed by the group was not perfectly in sync with the writing formulas adopted by its members, the decision that Țepeneag and Dimov made of publishing it in 1968 brought them recognition as the first group (during the communist regime) that dared and managed to publicly present its literary theory. Their success was made possible because of the political context that they used to their advantage. Even though the two leaders of the group had developed the oneiric theory long before it was published, they waited for an opportune moment to do so. That moment came in 1968, during Nicolae Ceaușescu's attempt to gain approval by offering

writers new liberties (such as the right to publish more freely in literary magazines) and in the context of the communist leader's decision to publicly critique URSS's invasion of Czechoslovakia.

In 1968, Dimov and Țepeneag published several articles where they alluded to the theoretical ideas of the oneiric movement, articles that were generally well-received in the literary press. However, the main event that is considered the official introduction of the oneiric program came in November 1968, when Țepeneag, Dimov and Daniel Turcea, alongside Laurențiu Ulici and Paul Cornel Chitic, presented the oneiric literary program as part of a roundtable¹ published in "Amfiteatru", a literary magazine for students. While the ideas expressed by the three members of the group were not that different than those previously published that same year, the main distinction was the fact that the three oneiric writers introduced themselves as part of a literary movement. Immediately after the publication of the dialogue, the editor in chief, Ion Băieșu, was dismissed and the group was criticized in articles that were printed in the most important literary magazines of the time, as well as in "Scînteia", the official newspaper for the Romanian Communist Party.

The literary program put forward by the two theorists was inspired by the Romantic and Surrealist view of dreams, but it conceptualized the dream in an original way: the dream was no longer seen as a source, nor as an object that had to be studied, but rather a *criterion*, a way for the writer to use the symbolic logic of the dream in order to transfer the elements of the reality to an analog one. According to Țepeneag,² the decision that the two theoreticians made to publish the literary program of the group had a lot to do with the critical reception of their works. From 1964 to 1968, numerous Romanian literary critics described the writings of the members of the group as a form of Surrealist epigonism. Therefore, one important strategy that the two utilized was that of distinguishing themselves from the Surrealist tradition. This change of direction was surprising, especially given the fact that, in 1966, while the group was under the protection of Miron Radu Paraschivescu, its members came very close to becoming part of a larger neo-Surrealist group alongside important Romanian Surrealist writers such as Gellu Naum or Virgil Teodorescu. From a theoretical point of view, Dimov and Țepeneag rejected Surrealist literature for its use of the automatic writing method and its Freudian interpretation of dreams. The group argued, however, that they were inspired by the works of Surrealist painters such as: René Magritte, Giorgio De

¹ Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, Corin Braga, *Momentul oniric*, (București: Cartea Românească, 1997), 67-76.

² Dumitru Țepeneag, Ion Simuț, *Clepsidra răsturnată. Convorbiri cu Ion Simuț*, (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2003), 120.

Chirico, or Yves Tanguy. The two viewed Surrealist paintings as superior to Surrealist literature because they contradicted the automatic production method.

The literary works of the oneiric writers are also considered an important part of the process of the synchronization of Romanian literature with the European literary experiments of the 60s and 70s, more precisely, with French Nouveau Roman. In the 60s, Dumitru Țepeneag translated novels written by Alain Robbe-Grillet and Robert Pinget, and traces of the Nouveau Roman's influence can be found in his and other oneiric writers' literary works. The two theorists of the group were also translators of important critical texts such as Albert Béguin's *L'âme romantique et le rêve*, Marcel Raymond's *De Baudelaire au Surréalisme* or *Histoire du roman moderne* by R. M. Albérès. Many of these fundamental critical texts were translated during the same period when the two theoreticians developed the oneiric literary program.

In 1974, after he was forced to move to Paris due to his political views, Țepeneag tried to present the Romanian oneiric movement in France. However, the theoretician soon gave up on his plan after realizing that the ideas and the name of the group were too similar to those of Surrealism. Instead, Dumitru Țepeneag published a number of articles where he described the group's literary program as an attempt to bring together Breton's idea of *simultaneity* in literature with Paul Valéry's concept of *structure* (the idea belongs, as Octavian Soviany noted in 2011,³ to Marcel Raymond and it was first articulated in *From Baudelaire to Surrealism*, a volume translated into Romanian by Leonid Dimov). At the same time, Țepeneag tried to change the name of the movement from *aesthetic oneirism* to that of *structural oneirism*. By combining the idea of rationally structuring a work of literature with the concept of simultaneity, Țepeneag implied that, in the 60s, the Romanian oneiric movement reached a very modern way of understanding the text as a "place of autonomous metamorphoses."⁴ In later interviews, after the dissolution of the group, Leonid Dimov expressed different ideas than those of Țepeneag, as he explained aesthetic oneirism as a form of Neoclassicism. After 1989, Țepeneag argued that the oneiric movement was a precursor of Romanian Textualism. Nevertheless, in the 60s and early 70s, aesthetic oneirism was an important theoretical exercise in Romanian literature. After the group split-up, the legacy of aesthetic oneirism lived on as the works of oneiric poets such as Virgil Mazilescu and Leonid Dimov inspired a new generation of writers, including well-known authors such as Mircea Cărtărescu or Corin Braga.

³ Octavian Soviany, *Cinci decenii de experimentalism. Compendiu de poezie românească actuală. Volumul I. Lirica ultimelor decenii de communism*, (Bucharest: Casa de Pariuri Literare, 2011).

⁴ Dumitru Țepeneag, *Războiul literaturii încă nu s-a încheiat*, (Bucharest: Allfa, 2000), 182.

Any reader who wants to learn more about this literary group can do so by turning to the memoir-like fragments published in the last decades by Dumitru Țepeneag, the main theorist and, at the same time, the historian and advocate of the oneiric movement, as well as to the two anthologies put together by Corin Braga⁵ (1997) and Marian Victor Buciu⁶ (2007), respectively. While these resources are understandingly valuable, one particular type of writing is of interest to us: the fictionalized autobiographical recount. Autobiography has always been regarded as a problematic mode of writing⁷. Just like in the case of other types of life writing (*i.e.*, the memoir or the biography), in postmodernity, the autobiography brings about questions concerning the limits between fiction and fact and the representation and understanding of the past. In our attempt to seek to understand the dynamics between the members of the oneiric group, we have selected two autobiographical texts that offer such answers.

The two volumes that we chose to analyze, Virgil Tănase's *Leapșa pe murite* [*Playing Tag with Death*], and *Spectacol cu Dimov* [*Show with Dimov*] by Șerban Foarță are alike not only because they offer a retelling of each of the authors' experience with the oneiric group, but also because they are overtly fictionalized recounts of these experiences. This paper aims to examine how Virgil Tănase and Șerban Foarță present their experience of being part of or just a regular visitor of the oneiric group in works of fiction. When speaking about the fictionality of these texts, we strictly refer to the conventions associated with creative writing that each writer utilizes, and not to the possible untruths that they might contain.

Virgil Tănase: Life Writing and The Search for Truth

Out of the two authors that we have selected, Virgil Tănase is the only one who has been officially named a member of the oneiric group by Dumitru Țepeneag⁸ and,

⁵ Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, Corin Braga, *Momentul oniric*.

⁶ Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, Marian V. Buciu, *Onirismul estetic* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2007).

⁷ In his book on life writing and autobiografiction, Max Saunders explains the ambiguity of the term by taking into account its history: "The term «autobiography» was coined as Romanticism took shape towards the end of the eighteenth century. Paradoxically, this is also the period in which the view began to emerge that all writing had an autobiographical dimension. According to this view, which became increasingly consolidated through the nineteenth century, and which is even shared by postmodernism, the distinction between autobiography and other forms such as biography or fiction is thus always blurred", see Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

⁸ It is worth mentioning the fact that Șerban Foarță is also named by Țepeneag as one of the writers that were close to the group and who also merit to be considered part of it. However, Dimov and Țepeneag, the founders and the leaders of the group, never officially

even more importantly, was responsible for keeping the tradition of the oneiric literary meetings going from 1972 until 1974, after Dimov left the group and Țepeneag was obliged to stay in exile due to his political activity. Therefore, *Playing Tag with Death* has the merit of offering a narrativized insider view of how the group functioned between 1969, the year when Tănase became part of it, until its demise in 1974.

Published in 2011, as part of the *Subjective Histories* collection launched by Adevărul Holding in collaboration with The Romanian Institute for Recent History, *Playing Tag with Death* is a text that is difficult to define. In the introductory chapter, Tănase argues that the book is not a memoir, but rather a novel:

“My intention is not, therefore to write a memoir – another one! – but to do my job honestly by offering you a novel, this time a true one, so that the feelings that it evokes in you give you the opportunity to be, truly and fictionally, part of an era that you have not lived through, but that, fiercer than others, can help you find the meaning that you want to give to your life, by separating the good from evil.”⁹

However, technically speaking,¹⁰ *Playing Tag with Death* is not a novel in the traditional sense, but a recounting of the author’s life that makes use of narrative strategies. This way of dealing with life-writing is not unfamiliar when considering the other works of Tănase, such as the biographies that he has authored in recent years that are also fact-anchored and written using strategies that are characteristic to works of fiction.¹¹ The label that Tănase uses, that of “true novel” should not be overlooked as it offers a solution to how the text can be understood. As theorists have demonstrated, in the case of postmodern autobiographical writings, the authors have to negotiate a borderline between fiction and fact.¹² This is also the case with *Playing Tag with Death*, where Virgil Tănase is successful in playfully using the conventions of fiction to depict real events that offer a subjective, yet cohesive view of the life of the writer during the communist regime.

named him as such, Dumitru Țepeneag and Simuț Ion, *Clepsidra răsturnată: Convorbiri cu Ion Simuț*, 110-111.

⁹ Virgil Tănase, *Leapșa pe murite* (Bucharest: Adevărul, 2011), 6.

¹⁰ The hybrid nature of this text has been analyzed before by scholars like Alina Crihană in “Memoriile unui romancier «de familie bună» sau despre o nouă (?) etică a esteticului: Virgil Tănase – Leapșa pe murite,” *Caiete critice*, no. 12 (December 2012): 17–24.

¹¹ cf. the biographies written by Tănase about Chekhov, Dostoyevsky, Camus and Saint-Exupéry.

¹² The topic is explored in Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdótti, *Borderlines: autobiography and fiction in postmodern life writing*. (New York: Rodopi, 2003).

Although it touches upon Tănase's role and experiences as a member of the oneiric group, the central focus of this "true novel" is, as the title suggests, the attempt of the Romanian communist secret services to assassinate him and Paul Goma, another Romanian dissident who, at the time, lived in Paris and who spoke publicly against Nicolae Ceausescu and his dictatorship. As stated in the introductory chapter, this autobiographical novel has the purpose of offering what Tănase calls a true depiction of the communist era in an attempt to familiarize younger readers with the struggles of a writer under the communist regime. Nevertheless, the references to the oneiric group offer quite an insightful view of the sense of community between its members, and it presents readers with a clear image of how Tănase retrospectively sees the group and its importance.

Tănase's recount of the oneiric group starts with a statement regarding its significance at the time. The former member sees it as a form of opposition to the communist regime and as: "the only literary movement established in the communist countries, in every sense of the word."¹³ According to Tănase, the oneiric movement was born as a result of: "the crash of positivist thought, the metaphysic failure of science, the tearing apart of the social experience that was born from historical materialism."¹⁴ As Tănase suggests, the main reason why the group was reprimanded and, in the end, banned by the communists was the type of literature that it created, that broke free from the conventions of realist fiction. This hypothesis differs from that proposed by Dumitru Țepeneag¹⁵ who argued that, above everything, the group was an inconvenience to the regime because it presented itself as a group, a form of social organization that challenged the official rule. The theory provided by Tănase is coherent when considering the view that the author aims to get across through his work – from his perspective, the literary work of a writer is much more important than the political stance that he/she takes, as, at the end of the day, the writer has to be, first of all, a writer: "It is, without a doubt, an error – not an innocent one – by the way, made deliberately by some commentators of the era before 1989 when, to pass judgments regarding the writers' contestation of the communist regime and, in general, by artists, they refer to people, who by their nature are vulnerable, and not their work, their texts."¹⁶

One of the first interactions with the members of the group that Tănase depicts is that of his meeting with Ivănceanu and Țepeneag, in 1969, at the Writers' Creation House, in Sinaia. The episode is valuable as it is a first-hand presentation of how Dumitru Țepeneag recruited new members, as well as of the way two of the most exuberant members of the oneiric group, Dumitru Țepeneag and Vintilă

¹³ Tănase, *Leapșa pe murite*, 107.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 109.

¹⁵ Leonid Dimov, Dumitru Țepeneag, and Corin Braga, *Momentul oniric*, 251.

¹⁶ Tănase, *Leapșa pe murite*, 110.

Ivănceanu interacted with other writers. The meeting that led to Tănase's recruitment into the group is presented as being made possible by the impromptu poetry reading session organized by Ivănceanu, *l'enfant terrible* of the group, in the lobby of the Writers' Creation House: "In the evening, over a drink, in the common lobby where we gathered at random, happy to have a public, Ivănceanu read to us, belly dancing his poetry, entire pages from the volume that he was working on, *Vulcaloborgul și frumoasa Beleponjă*.¹⁷" The episode illustrates the eccentric behaviors that some of the oneiric writers took pleasure in displaying. An atypical group at the time, the oneiric writers differentiated themselves from others by refusing to conform to the rules and by bantering and making a mockery of the rigid situations that they found themselves in. In a paper from 2018¹⁸ that analyzes how the bohemian artists from the 60s and 70s acted, Laura Pavel argues that the "subversive writers" of the time shared a "histrionic condition" characterized by "borrowed behaviors". This tendency of adhering to a common way of being is also true in the case of the oneiric writers who also enjoyed "performing" when they found themselves in front of an audience. This hypothesis is supported by numerous other recounts of how this group of writers behaved in public. For instance, in *Amintiri și portrete literare [Memories and literary portraits]*, Gabriel Dimisianu, who frequented the oneiric group, remembers an "argument" staged by Ivănceanu and Țepeneag and reaches the following conclusion: "Because there was always someone present, an audience, a public, the members of the oneiric group always made sure of it. If performed in a close circle, these confrontations would not have been amusing to them."¹⁹

Playing Tag with Death also offers a valuable recount of the literary circle organized by Țepeneag, at his home, a place of meeting for like-minded writers who were interested in writing literature that did not follow the socialist realism program. As Tănase argues, the literary circle was not just a place for literary discussions, but also a way for Țepeneag and other writers to challenge the regime as the meetings took place in a private space. Therefore, Tănase's recount of the actions of the group highlights the political stance that the oneiric members took at the time and it is a valuable piece of autobiographical fiction that also pinpoints some of the most important events that made the oneiric group notorious in the eyes of the communist party. For instance, Tănase details the effects that Țepeneag and Dimov's interview with *Radio Free Europe* from September 1971 had among writers and their reaction to Țepeneag and Dimov's choice to return to Romania afterward, a move that was deemed unimaginable by many because of the dangers that it entailed.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Laura Pavel, "Boema literară a anilor '60-'70: moduri de a fi între autobiografic și fictional," *Vatra*, no. 1/2 (March 2, 2018): 137–42.

¹⁹ Gabriel Dimisianu, *Amintiri și portrete literare* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013), 199.

Tănase also unveils the effects of Tepeneag's decision to publish an article²⁰ in "Le Monde" about Paul Goma's novel, *Ostinato*, where he spoke openly about the censorship and the failure to impose a real de-Sovietization process in Romania. Immediately after the article was published, his apartment was searched and rumors that he will be subjected to a political trial upon his arrival in Romania started to circulate. Even though the reaction of the authorities was not as drastic as expected, at the time, the oneiric group was marginalized and attacked primarily by other writers. By illustrating these particular events, Tănase manages to expose the strangeness and the lack of real coherence of the political context in which the group existed. As the novelist suggests, at the time, it seemed like, irrespective of the political stances that some of the members of the group took, their actions were not always sanctioned as expected by the authorities. This tacit acceptance of the subversive actions of the group is later interpreted by Tănase as a strategy that the ruling party utilized to create the impression of liberty for those behind the Iron Curtain.

After Dimov no longer affiliated with the group, following him being banned from publishing literature after the interview he gave in Paris, and after Tepeneag's return to France, Tănase assumed a more important role as the organizer of the oneiric literary circle. Regardless of the efforts and the interest shown by some of the members of the literary circle, the meetings stopped taking place after 1974, after a conflict among the writers. By addressing his role in preparing and coordinating these meetings, Tănase touches upon the fractured relationships between the members of the group after its main leaders, Tepeneag and Dimov, no longer frequented it and its imminent demise given the constant surveillance that it was under. While doing so, Tănase does its part in helping to present a narrativized recollection of how the oneiric writers interacted after 1969. By choosing to present the final years of the literary circle, that is, from 1972 until 1974, Virgil Tănase's recount allows the story of the group to come full circle and, thus, it is a much-needed addition to the information provided by Dumitru Tepeneag about the beginning years of the movement.

Overall, the fictionalized portrayal of the oneiric writers that Virgil Tănase delivers is both fact-anchored, as well as somewhat obscured by what the former member of the group decides not to make known. Because Tănase's purpose is not to offer a comprehensive recount of the group's history, a project that he, however, has shown interest in writing before,²¹ but to tell his own life story, the moments that he selects to present are not always of importance for the group as a whole, but

²⁰ Dumitru Țepeneag, *Opere 5: Texte teoretice, interviuri, note critice, „șotroane”: 1966-1989* (Bucharest: Tracus Arte, 2017), 159-161.

²¹ Dumitru Țepeneag mentions this project in his journal, Dumitru Țepeneag, *Un român la Paris: Pagini de jurnal* (1970-1972, 1973-1974, 1977-1978) (Bucharest: Cartea românească, 1997), 263.

rather for his evolution. Nevertheless, the resulting narrative allows readers an inside look at how the writers of the group acted, the political context and it provides heartfelt portraits of some of its most important members.

Foarță – A Eulogy for Dimov

*Show with Dimov*²² by Șerban Foarță is another autobiographical text that offers an insightful look into the dynamics of the oneiric group. Through his masterful use of literary conventions, Șerban Foarță delivers a postmodern exercise of life writing dedicated, as the title suggests, to Leonid Dimov, one of the founders of the oneiric group. Even though Foarță was never officially a member, his friendships with many of the oneiric writers make his literary experiment of interest to our research. Technically speaking, *Show with Dimov* is another niche text that is written using various literary strategies. To live up to the title of the book, that seems to indicate that *Show with Dimov* is a play, the first poem included in the volume is preceded by a list of all the “dramatis personae” in the chronological order of their appearance in the “story” that Foarță constructs. As expected, among them, we can recognize many of the members of the oneiric group such as: “Țepe alias Dumitru Țepeneag,” Virgil Mazilescu, Florin Gabrea, Vintilă Ivănceanu, Daniel Turcea, Emil Brumaru, and Leonid Dimov, as well as numerous other writers and artists that frequented it, like Mircea Ivănescu, Sorin Mărculescu, Mircea Ciobanu or Teodor Pîcă.

As fiction and life combine once again, the members of the group are reduced to essentialized sketches of themselves, as they become part of the spectacle that showcases Leonid Dimov and his captivating, yet elusive personality. The volume contains, arguably, the same type of writing as that practiced by Tănase, as it is a memory-based narration that is punctuated by what the writer chooses to select as important events in his life and the lives of others. Yet, differently from Tănase, who uses fiction in an attempt to portray the truth, after all, he calls *Playing Tag with Death* a “true novel”, Foarță’s exercise is not one that is based on truth-seeking, but rather is one interested in offering readers a spectacle, a collection of events and situations that bank on the unusual and the fascination that the topic implies – all of which are written in a style that is best described as *a la manière de Dimov*.

Foarță qualifies his writing as a eulogy dedicated to Dimov, a practice that, in his interpretation, involves isolation and that can only be valuable for the person who carries it out. Memory thus becomes a journey within oneself that Foarță transposes into fiction in an attempt to revive the image of Dimov by taking

²² Șerban Foarță. *Spectacol cu Dimov*, (București: Vinea, 2002).

instances of memory and arranging them into an illusion of what once was.²³ The eulogy that Foarță dedicates to Dimov is made up of recollection of situations, inserts of drawings, paintings (many of them made by Foarță himself), aestheticized photographs, and even facsimiles of Dimov's signature and writing. Despite the impression that the book is a collection of *bric a brac*, the text has a cohesive structure given by the common theme that links together both the text and the image component: the act of remembering.

Just like in the case of Tănase's novel, the "story" that Foarță presents is not centered on portraying the oneiric writers as a group. Instead, the focus is placed on Foarță's friendship with Dimov, who he met through Țepeneag and Mazilescu in 1968. Despite this perspective, the volume contains sufficient details that allow the readers to construct an image of the oneiric group through the portraits and the anecdotes that it includes. For instance, the text mentions one of the absurd and risky games that Dimov and Țepeneag played, that of hanging over the railing of Dimov's 8th-floor balcony, or Foarță and Mazilescu's less dangerous balancing act on the back two legs of chairs. These instances of eccentric behaviors confirm, once again, the tendency that the group of writers shared when it came to disregarding rules and conventions, and they add to the list of stories that shape and complete the inventory of images of the oneiric group.

The first meeting with Dimov, and, at the same time, the initial depiction of the oneiric group as a whole is presented in detail. The first-hand recount of the cramped apartment where Foarță finds not only Dimov and his wife, but also Florin Gabrea, Daniel Turcea, Vintilă Ivănceanu and Mircea Ciobanu suggests a sense of intimacy and subversively that is characteristic of the group. A declared disciple of Dimov, Foarță presents his first visit to Dimov's small and packed apartment as a journey of initiation, and Dimov as a sort of magician or spellbinder of the group. By presenting Dimov in this light, Foarță reuses the same imagery that Țepeneag also utilizes when referring to the poet and his role in the group in his later writings.²⁴ The presentation of this first meeting is also an opportunity for Foarță to sketch brief portraits of Florin Gabrea, the youngest of the group, Vintilă Ivănceanu, who is presented as an eccentric character, and Daniel Turcea, a close friend of Foarță who is remembered throughout the text with nostalgic fondness.

However, the main "character" of the text is, unmistakably, Leonid Dimov, who is remembered both before and after he was no longer part of the oneiric group. The fragment-like nature of the volume allows Foarță to create a thoughtful

²³ In an article titled *Heraldica și humoristul. Cuvinte despre poezia lui Șerban Foarță*, Mircea A. Diaconu describes Șerban Foarță as a humorist that can successfully "descend into matter with the intention of fixing the detail, he can transform reality into sign and illusion, thus freeing himself from crisis, anxieties and ideologies," Mircea A. Diaconu, "Heraldica și humoristul. cuvinte despre poezia lui Șerban Foarță" *Contrafort*, no. 123-124 (2005): 8.

²⁴ Țepeneag, *Războiul literaturii încă nu s-a încheiat*, 51.

and touching portrait of the poet, whose gestures and attitudes often seem to border on being child-like. As one of the few accounts of Dimov available to this date, *Show with Dimov* is valuable as it adds to the image of the elusive poet whose influence on Romanian poetry is undeniable. The mix of poetry, photography, and paintings that Foarță uses to create the illusion of the past and to suggest Dimov's presence is an example of a highly imaginative approach to life writing. All the photographs, paintings, and facsimiles of the poet's handwriting only complement the text and they give potency to the eulogy.

The experience that Foarță offers to its readers is not easily available but rather conditioned by one's interest in the topic and ability to navigate the heterogeneous nature of the book that is packed with countless references to movies, books, and historical events of the time. Dedicated, in the end, "to Dimov & to the happy few,"²⁵ *Show with Dimov* is, in a way, an elitist manifesto, with a circulation of only 501 copies, along the same line as the stance that the oneiric writers used to have. As a close-knit group, at least in the years before the changes introduced by the July Theses, the oneiric writers thoroughly selected their members and they had a clear and intransigent view of what literature was and who it was meant for. In this sense, it is worth pointing to an article published in 1968 by Leonid Dimov, titled *Diversitate și accesibilitate [Diversity and Accessibility]*²⁶, where the poet argues, against the popular view on literature imposed by the state, that equated accessibility with value. According to Dimov, for art to be truly experienced, its public has to have a certain level of intellectual curiosity and propensity for knowledge.

When analysed together, *Playing Tag with Death* and *Show with Dimov* are two autobiographical recounts of the oneiric group that aid the reader in reconstructing a contextualized image of the group as a whole, and the relationships between its members and the other writers of the time in particular. Like any other autobiographical pieces of writing, the two volumes illustrate the difficulties of using memory to produce the past. The fictional practices that the authors use to represent or to narrate the past do not compromise the truth-value of the texts, but rather they are a tool that helps the writers in depicting the past and bringing life to the image of the group and the historical context. However, the ways in which the two writers approach the subject are significantly different. While Virgil Tănase provides his account of the past and his depiction of the oneiric group from an assertive position that seeks to illustrate what the author calls the truth, Șerban Foarță is much more experimental in his approach. No matter the modes of writing that they select, both authors deliver valuable recounts of the oneiric group and its members and they ultimately contribute to the process of showcasing the iconic status of the group and its intricate dynamics.

²⁵ Foarță, 48.

²⁶ Leonid Dimov, "Diversitate Și Accesibilitate," *Luceafărul* no. 40 (October 5, 1968), 6.