

‘A Romanian Solzhenitsyn’

Censorship and Paul Goma’s *Ostinato* (1971)

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This case study revisits the inescapably asymmetrical relationship between the artist and the repressive institutions of an omnipotent totalitarian communist regime, using documents that have largely gone unpublished to illustrate, here, the situation of Romanian culture under communism.¹ Paul Goma’s tribulations in the late 1960s, when he was trying to publish his novel *Ostinato*, reveal the political mechanisms of constraint, control, and manipulation used by the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) in the sphere of literature, and the strategies of artistic resistance which Goma resorted to.² An extraordinary exception to the rule, Goma successfully used his confrontation with the authoritarian institution of communist censorship in such a way as to promote his book in the European market. His example sheds light on the counterproductive nature of the official censor, which often, unawares, endorsed the very literary works it had intended to ban, pushing them on to fame in the process.³

Political context

In 1947, under Stalin’s protection and in close coordination with Moscow, communism was introduced by force in Romania. Officially installed at the country’s helm, the RCP established a regime of terror that modern Romania had never experienced before, however

well accustomed to dictatorships it may have been. Launching a major offensive, the RCP exerted absolute control over public and private life, building in parallel the legislative framework necessary to operate such a monolithic system. Other political parties were dismantled, as were the plurality of voices in the press and civil society—and, cultural life not being exempt, the publishing houses. After the Soviet model, a single Writers' Union of Romania (WUR) was established. Its outlook was expressed in a handful of periodicals, controlled by the party, and it boasted of the fact that it was the sole political force in the country. The entire cultural structure of Romania was dynamited.

The battle for absolute control over culture was ideologically motivated by the RCP's need for legitimation, a need that was all the more pressing as access to power had been secured arbitrarily. It should be noted that the RCP was set up in 1921, but was declared illegal only a few months later. The party officially re-emerged on the political stage only after 23 August 1944, when it had fewer than a thousand members nationwide, and its access to the government was made possible by the Soviet commissars. Once in power, the regime took concerted action to discredit and repudiate genuine values. The Romanian Academy, universities, and cultural institutions were purged of their foremost intellectuals. Many of the outstanding scholars and artists were subject to show trials, on diverse pretexts, which almost always ended with prison. Contacts with Western culture and 'bourgeois' Romanian traditions were prohibited. The regime's aim was to colonize the people's imagination and to ensure the triumph of its propaganda. Throughout its existence, the RCP endeavoured, exclusively for its own benefit, to identify art with propaganda, to the point of completely erasing the boundaries between them.

To establish a cultural monopoly, several institutions of ideological and political control had been set up. After the Soviet model, they were now brought together in a single institutional framework, the General Directorate for Press and Printing (GDPP), which was renamed the Committee for Press and Print (CPP) in

1975 (hereafter referred to as the ‘official censor’). Tailored to a maximalist design, it was to exert total control over information, monitor publications, and block any manuscripts and intellectual or artistic products suspected of being hostile to the regime. In the name of the party, censors selected by strict criteria of allegiance to party politics undermined various forms of art, styles, and works, the prohibitions varying according to different literary genres or even subgenres. Some of the aesthetic directions and attitudes (formalism, naturalism, aestheticism, the fantastic, the absurd) were permanently monitored by political readers. There were also certain themes—history, revolution, religion, contemporary issues, self-identity, eroticism—that tended to be censored more than others.

The rules of the official censor’s operation were consistent, based on relatively stable principles. Its mission was twofold: to protect the totalitarian communist regime by prohibiting sentences or phrases that were deemed subversive; and to strengthen the regime, through disfiguring surgical excisions intended to transform the literary work into a publishable product compatible with communist ideology. The two defining roles of totalitarian censorship—prohibitive and formative—were intertwined.

The periodization of institutional censorship

Not just the procedures, but the very process of censorship registered variations in intensity, depending on a political dynamic that was itself irregular. The history of communist Romania comprised, also in keeping with the Soviet model, harsher periods or brief spells of liberalism. The first period (1948–1964), referred to as the Dej Era after Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, Secretary General of the Party, was characterized by an inflexible dictatorship, short-circuited by episodic bouts of relative liberalization. The coming to power of Nicolae Ceaușescu in 1965 led to a ‘thaw’, with a symbolic high point in 1968. When the USSR invaded Czechoslovakia, Romania disavowed it, condemning the Soviet intervention as an act of

'interference in the internal affairs' of one Warsaw Pact state by another. This gesture was interpreted by Western analysts, and profitably exploited by Nicolae Ceaușescu for a time, as an 'act of dissidence' against Moscow. The 'July Theses' of 1971, which incidentally or not followed on Ceaușescu's recent visits to China and North Korea, put an end to the period of openness that had lasted a mere seven years, and inaugurated a programme of re-Stalinization in Romania.⁴ Simultaneously with an accelerating personality cult, Ceaușescu oversaw a turn to isolationism in international politics, and, internally, to authoritarianism, conservatism, and national communism. The country's general situation degraded gradually, culminating in the harsh 1980s, described by the Romanian writer Mircea Zăciu as 'the satanic decade'.

Following a largely similar route, the GDPP/CPP changed its behaviour according to the ever-changing directions and directives of its rulers, and, implicitly, according to the dynamics of literature.⁵ In the first period (1948–1964), censorship had, by law, a punitive function. It was top secret and its attitude was rigid and intolerant. Its purpose was to regulate and prohibit any deviation. In practice, it aimed to prevent the perpetration of the 'crime' by identifying and promptly punishing the subversive potential of any text. Amplified by the abuses committed by the censors, the regime's rule of terror eviscerated literature. Socialist realism, adopted dogmatically from the Soviets, was the all-pervasive method of creation. Officially, it was infallible: sanctioned by a decree issued by the state organs of communist power, socialist realism imposed uniformity of artistic styles and forms, nipping any creative élan in the bud. The great themes of world literature—love, friendship, death, freedom—were either instrumentalized in the service of the party or banned. Almost the entire literary production that received the censor's seal of approval would be relegated to obscurity after the end of the communist regime.

The relative political liberalization of 1965–1971 was also visible in the way in which a newer, more professional generation of censors read literary texts. Their outlook had changed. Relinquishing their

violent, repressive attitude, they no longer mechanically checked whether texts abided by the political directives and complied with the doctrine of socialist realism. They were professional readers of literature, accustomed to looking for clues between the lines. Art itself was granted permission (once socialist realism left the stage) to tackle more themes, and with a wider range of artistic techniques. Literature reconquered lost ground and reasserted its status, but although in the context of the entire communist period in Romania the artistic moments that followed were the most dynamic and productive, challenges multiplied and some topics remained taboo. The censors were confronted with works that talked about the lack of political freedom and expression, about social marginalization, illegalities of all sorts, the absence of prospects, about dullness, failure, and despair. Giving up many of its excesses, the official censor adapted, becoming more flexible, shifting emphasis from a prohibitive to a formative goal. Reforming its structures and practices, and even its staff, the GDPP resorted to a relative relaxation of control, replacing explicit constraint with manipulation and seduction. It deftly capitalized on the advantages of collaboration, which writers who wanted to have their works published found impossible to refuse. The GDPP’s main objective was no longer to prohibit (in future, censors only did that *in extremis*), but to foster—by coercing authors, but also by making enticing promises—the production of art that was compatible with the exigencies of ideology and with the will and whims of the party. Claiming to make great concessions, Romania’s dreaded inquisition of books could now limit itself to disfiguring texts.

By the early 1980s, political discourse in Romania had exhausted its scant store of liberal clichés and relapsed into intolerance. The July Theses, announcing new ‘measures’ for strengthening ideological control, were issued with the aim of imposing a form of neo-dogmatism. The official censor was promptly restructured, its methodology changed again to undo the concessions it had been forced to make during the period of relative liberalism. Censors gradually abandoned the median line, and, as they were encouraged

to do, they marched in the vanguard of the ideological offensive. In spite of the expectations and the efforts undertaken, censorship could not consolidate itself by returning to the methodology of the 1950s, when a brutal determinism had prevailed that countenanced only propaganda functions for literature. The new aggressiveness of political dogmatism failed to destabilize the autonomy of the aesthetic, acquired and decisively strengthened in the meantime. This led to what amounted to a period of cohabitation. Ideological pseudo-literature, cooked up in the party's laboratories, mimicked authentic creation, while failing to compete with it, far less dislodge it as the authorities intended. The distance between literature and the Communist Party increased exponentially, so much so that the party ended up by considering art in itself subversive. To make art and only art was in the 1980s a serious offence.

According to official documents, in 1977 the official censor GDPP/CPP was formally disbanded. Far from being a sign of liberalization, the end of this official institution simply marked a change of strategy in the party's policy on censorship. Declaring censorship to be irreconcilable with democracy was, then, out of the question: all censorship had to do was to adjust itself and become compatible with the standards of modern society. The mutation that had occurred was not, as officially claimed, a form of genuine liberalism, but a tactical manoeuvre that added to the totalitarian system. The abolition of the GDPP/CPP proved to be a masterstroke: afterwards, not only did censorship *not* disappear, it was strengthened. It expanded its sphere, and became in many respects even more formidable. Its function continued insidiously, as classic censorship was substituted by another, ubiquitous form of monitoring. In the absence of a specialized official censor, control was exercised through various party organs or so-called community organizations and through other political readers, who provided ideological vigilance and ensured the accuracy of the communist values imposed on literature and art, or on publications in general. Writers had to be far more at the disposal of their 'official readers', who had multiplied. The border between what was allowed and

what was disallowed became even more diffuse, and arbitrariness increased. The supposed democratic revolution which had led to the abolition of censorship was, in reality, limited to a change of focus. Censorship did not cease, but was carried out ‘differently’; censorship continued to be ubiquitous, but became volatile. Not only were the true intentions of the Communist Party to create an ‘ideological playpen’ better camouflaged by the democratic surface, but the regime itself took an important step towards a higher degree of governance, in which its power became infrastructural and the state could penetrate all layers of society. The totalitarian regime tended to naturalize censorship, turning a standardized political tool into the very environment for the production of culture. Thus, as time would tell, it was nothing but an act of coarse manipulation—a real *coup de théâtre*, which enabled censorship to survive its self-orchestrated disappearance.

At the same time, through its totalitarian and intolerant spirit the official censor kept the spirit of confrontation alive. Its inquisitorial activities produced authors who were forbidden, (self-)exiled, or morally and aesthetically corrupt, authors who were tolerated by the regime, but also compliant and profit-hungry (pseudo-)artists. No one could evade the distorting influence of communist censorship.⁶

The case of Paul Goma

At the end of the 1960s, it appeared that the Romanian authorities and writers were willing to compromise. Understanding that it would have to give up some of its claims, the RCP set itself to see artists not merely as its subjects, but also as possible partners, however erratic and fickle, who had to be manipulated and permanently supervised. In turn, writers tacitly accepted the self-professed right of the communist regime to decide in matters of literature and art, on condition they were allowed to produce an art devoid of political commitments. Each paid a price they were not allowed to set on their own, without being able to anticipate the long-term consequences of a pact that was by

definition fateful. Aesthetic freedoms, as many or as few as they were, were either obtained by writers through combined efforts and by astutely exploiting the right circumstances, or were the result of strategic concessions made by a party that was sometimes forced by the international context or by coinciding interests to adjust its dictatorial pretences.

In this climate of truce, writers invented strategies of artistic promotion. As they gained notoriety and/or benefited from the trust of the Party, some of them increasingly distanced themselves from ideology and the party (if not in their public attitudes, then in their artistic texts), being less and less willing to compromise in their fictional works. They were joined by younger writers. Together they conquered, one way or another, a space of relative artistic freedom, from inside which they approached themes and stated things that were otherwise prohibited. It was not just about acts of political courage, but about the desire for success among readers. No clear line of demarcation could be drawn between them, and this meant that the censors' behaviour was also not uniform: faced with attempts to push the limits, they adapted the punitive arsenal of the official censor to the status of the writer investigated. Towards some, then, the official censor was more lenient, taking just precautionary measures, while others, who had come to be seen as political undesirables, were watched carefully and, on occasion, prohibited from publishing their works.

Paul Goma (b. 1935) is a prominent Romanian writer who on multiple occasions courted controversy by taking on the repressive institutions of the totalitarian regime in Romania.⁷ He had his first brush with censorship when he was a student at the School of Literature in Bucharest, and was preparing to become a writer.⁸ After the Hungarian Revolution was put down in 1956, Goma returned his Youth Workers' Union membership card in protest. Because of his dissent, expressed much more insistently than was permitted at the time, the young Goma was arrested, tried, and convicted. From 1956 he served two years as a political prisoner, followed by 36 months of house arrest. He was released in 1964. This

experience became the subject matter of his 1971 novel *Ostinato*, towards which the censors, though generally more lenient during this period, were particularly alert, especially on account of the book’s politically undesirable topic and of Goma’s status as a former political prisoner. By sheer force of implication and thanks to the international fame he had acquired, Goma became an intriguing case both for the writers/editors and the Communist Party. In the late 1960s, when publication restrictions meant that books rarely made it into print, the official censor repeatedly rejected two of his novels: *Ostinato* and *Ușa* (1970, ‘The Door’).

Ostinato was the subject of a scandal. Published abroad (almost simultaneously in Germany and France), its launch at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 1971 led to the withdrawal of the official delegation from Romania, in protest against the book’s publication in the West without permission from the communist authorities. Goma’s previous efforts to publish his novel in Romania—starting in 1966, when he first submitted his manuscript to Editura pentru literatură (PHL, the Publishing House for Literature)—had met with trenchant objections from the official censor’s readers and their superiors. Several of his themes (the abuse of power, dogmatism, the persecution of Transylvanian Saxons) and the manner of treatment were considered unacceptable. For the official censor’s readers, the theme of imprisonment was taboo, because it reflected unambiguously the punitive, repressive impetus of the regime, which claimed to be producing ‘the new man’ with Enlightenment, humanist instruments. Few literary works had tackled the subject of imprisonment, and those which did looked through a glass darkly, sometimes placing the action in the past—between the wars or in the Dej period (in other words, in a period criticized by the party itself, because Ceaușescu wished to appear an innocent victim of his predecessor). Writings on this topic irritated the RCP to the maximum, fuelling its intransigence.

The official censor's objections

The official objections to *Ostinato* were its overly detailed representation of prison conditions in the communist period, 'the gloomy atmosphere of prisons', 'the direct account of physical squalor', 'the harsh treatment of prisoners', and the frequent use of torture. An additional sore point was the reconstruction of the biographies of political prisoners (a category of prisoner not officially recognized) when writers 'described the abuses, the "special" treatments forced upon them'. In the communist censors' *referate*, this 'enhanced the metaphorical significance of freedom deprivation and gave the narrative direct political implications'.⁹ It was particularly aggravating that the novel suggested that the regime used torturers, portrayed as instinctive and immoral beings, and other human scum as 'blind' instruments of its will. Several successive *referate* spoke critically of the fact that the novel highlighted the 'injustice and cruelty of the investigative bodies of the Securitate (the Romanian secret police), or the heinous treatment meted out to political prisoners until around 1964'.¹⁰ In Goma's work the figures of the Securitate officers were associated with members of the prison administration: narrow-minded, intolerant, insensitive people. The cynicism of the authorities, who had discretionary power over the lives of its prisoners, was set in narrative contrast with the 'humanity and solidarity of those in jail (including odious criminals)'.¹¹

A particularly serious fact (later noticed by Western critics too) was that only upon his release from prison did the protagonist find himself in real detention. Paradoxically, prison was the only place in which inmates felt free. Goma considers that he managed to reinforce this point in his second novel, *Ușă*, whose manuscript was examined under the proverbial magnifying glass by the censors. On another, even more serious level he returned to the theme of imprisonment in *Ușă*, with an even closer investigation of inner detention. As Goma said,

it is no longer a matter of a physical prison, but of the prison that exists within us. I meant to say that people, even without having experienced prison directly, were prepared for possible detention. ... *Ușa*, then, is a tragic novel because it is about people who are mutilated in order to be prepared for detention, even before they experience prison in a concrete way.¹²

Through symbolic contamination, prison becomes an extended metaphor for the entire communist regime, with Romania as an immense yet invisible prison yard. From the perspective of the censors, however, it would seem the metaphorical construction was less vexing than the transitive register in which *Ostinato* described prison in all its unadulterated horror.

The censors levelled further criticism against the preference for the theme of suicide, suggested at the end of the novel. Disallowed because it directly contradicted the ideology of optimism, suicide as a narrative solution was rejected by the censors because the failure of the individual suggested the failure of the re-education process. What it contradicted was the propaganda that the errors and illegalities committed by the Communist Party had been corrected, and its victims had been rehabilitated, reorienting their biography towards more positive goals. Consequently, Goma was asked to rewrite the end of the novel to bring it into line with party doxa. Much to the satisfaction of the heads of the official censor, Goma complied. In an intermediate version (in 1970) he changed the ending that had ‘suggested the hero’s suicide attempt, because he could no longer integrate himself after his release from prison,’ for another, in which ‘the hero is trying to get out of a prolonged crisis and to adapt to life as a free man.’¹³

Documents in the GDPP/CPP archive indicate this optimistic cliché of an ending could have made the difference between publication and prohibition. A brief comparison of *Ostinato* with *Păsărilor* (‘Birds’, 1973) by Alexandru Ivasiuc—the one banned, the other passed by the censors—shows that what radically separated the two authors was their vision. Goma adopted and asserted the

perspective of the victim, while what Ivasiuc said was in tune with the voice of power.¹⁴

The multiplicity and complexity of the objections raised by the censors against *Ostinato* clearly indicate that the Securitate, that all-powerful ideological institution, rejected any suggestion that the communist regime had a monstrous side. A literary objection was raised, finally, which derived from the political objections, albeit much paler in comparison: ‘in the novel there are numerous vulgar expressions or obscene paragraphs.’¹⁵

Goma's stratagem

Goma's novel *Ostinato* was not published in communist Romania because high-ranking party activists refused to give permission for the 1970 version, which even the leaders of the GDPP had deemed publishable.¹⁶ Later, Goma radically rethought his position, and subsequent versions not only ‘explained the initial comments [of the official censor], but also (thanks to some new chapters) emphasized more strongly a deeply flawed political orientation.’¹⁷ This spectacular volte-face and the possible motivations underlying it warrant analysis.

According to his own testimony, Goma had from the beginning worked on two versions, attempting a double editorial solution. In 1966, he submitted one manuscript to Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă (SPLA, State Press for Literature and the Arts). Shortly thereafter, in 1967, he sent a first version for publication abroad, followed by a second one in October 1968. In doing so he showed a courage that was almost unparalleled at the time, although tempered, according to some of today's literary historians, by fortunate connections. Goma did not keep his clandestine initiative a secret; on the contrary, in his ongoing battle with the censors and the publishers, he used the news of the book's subsequent translation to force through the novel's publication in Romania.¹⁸ Of course, he was not taken seriously.

It can be assumed that from October 1969, when Goma in all likelihood received an assurance that *Ostinato* would be published abroad in German, French, and Italian, he had a more secure position, and was even less willing to comply with the observations of the censors. However, his goal was still to publish the novel in Romania. After all, he had succeeded with another manuscript, submitted in 1966 and published in 1968 after ‘serious revisions’, and having accepted that the title be changed, from ‘Moartea noastră cea de toate zilele’ (‘Our Daily Death’) to its final form, *Camera de alături* (1968, ‘The Adjoining Room’).¹⁹ This was his literary debut, and at the same time the only book he published in Romania before 1990. He wanted *Ostinato* to be published, but not at all costs—he could not countenance far-reaching alterations imposed by the official censor rendering it unrecognizable, especially not at the risk of his book becoming what he called ‘paraliterature’—and Goma’s attitude was in fact consistent with his conception of the writer’s role in communist Romania: speaking truth to power.²⁰

In the period that followed, 1969–1971, Goma seems to have hit upon his own strategy in dealings with the official censor. This is visible in his obvious change of attitude, which occurred, according to the censors’ reports, in January 1971. Initially, his attitude had been one of cooperation. A month after he submitted the manuscript of *Ostinato*, in October 1969, the GDPP sent the directors of the publishing house ‘a series of comments with political content’. As a result, as the report noted, the novel was withdrawn, without a ‘to-be-resolved’ note (approval). Goma resubmitted the manuscript to the GDPP in February 1970 in a substantially different version, from which he had deleted some politically delicate episodes and made ‘massive’ changes. In the words of the censor’s report, ‘these have solved the main political issues’. The censor’s report also specified that the ‘changes made ... have toned down the violent language, have limited the pornographic scenes’.²¹

The author’s cuts seem to have been to the liking of the heads of the official censor. In two successive reports on 21 March and 25 June 1970 they expressed their satisfaction, stating that, ‘in its

current form, the GDPP can give the imprimatur for the work. However, as a precaution—and in keeping with their *modus operandi*—the censors ‘reported’ the novel to the Council of Culture and Socialist Education (CCSE) in early May 1970.²² The GDPP document mentioned the possibility of approving publication for this version, following some changes made by the author. For a while, the manuscript was held up; a note issued by the GDPP concluded that as of 17 July 1970 ‘the novel has not been returned for approval’.²³ Despite the fact that the official censor had given official assent, the novel could still not be published, most likely due to the cavils of another political institution that monitored cultural activity: the CCSE.

There are no documents that reveal what happened next, but then on 28 January 1971 another report issued by the GDPP, stamped ‘Confidential’, said that Goma, in a surprise move, had submitted a new, longer version of the novel to the publishers Editura Eminescu. He had introduced further taboo themes and new episodes, which might prove controversial from a political point of view. Goma tried to wrong-foot the self-proclaimed democratic regime by laying bare its retaliatory practices; the abuses of a regime that claimed to be in harmony with its own citizens and reliant solely on the strength of ideological conviction. The conclusion of the final censors’ report (prior to June 1971) was that such a novel, which ‘focused on the theme of imprisonment’ and ‘suggested a carceral universe as big as our whole society’, was ‘not to receive publication approval’.

I have selected the case of Goma because it is a telling example of a strategy adopted by a Romanian author in his confrontation with the communist official censor in the 1960s. It is also very relevant to look into the possible reasons for Goma’s change of attitude in early 1971. By cooperating at first, he had provided a substantially revised version, in accordance with the requirements of the censor. Yet at the very moment when, according to the official censor’s reports, a compromise appeared to have been reached and the book was about to be printed, Goma changed his mind and amplified the political implications of the theme: ‘every time they

proposed I should take something out, I did the opposite, I added something, emphasizing and consolidating precisely those passages which had shocked the censors.²⁴ Later, Goma confessed that, up to a point, his was not an entirely deliberate strategy; however, the GDPP documents attest the fact that he also used the exact same strategy for his second novel, *Ușa*, and at much the same time.²⁵

My contention is that in view of all the circumstances, the following hypothesis about the Goma stratagem can be advanced. Wind back the clock a few months, and it seems that Goma may have felt emboldened to provoke the official censor by the illustrious example of Solzhenitsyn, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1970, primarily for *Cancer Ward* (1968), a novel that he had managed to publish in the West together with *In the First Circle* (1968). Goma was perhaps encouraged by the signs of a receptive audience for literary treatments of communist re-education, and possibly had evidence that certain foreign publishing houses intended to publish his own novel, written on a similar theme. It is very likely that, in 1970, his manuscript was already being translated.²⁶ The association with Solzhenitsyn was fortuitous and opportunistic at the same time. The soubriquet ‘A Romanian Solzhenitsyn’, coined by his German editor, was used frequently in literary reviews in the West. With a real chance of seeing his novel published in the West, Goma may have felt tempted to push the limits, forcing the leadership of the official censor to make extreme decisions. A book banned in a communist state, as Solzhenitsyn had shown, could be eminently marketable in the West for that very fact.²⁷

Goma has his own explanation for his paradoxical behaviour. In subsequent interviews, he has said he did not yearn for political difference, and that he wished his novel would be appreciated for its literary value and not for the fame that a scandal would confer on him *post festum*.²⁸ He describes the process of cohabitation with the official censor as contradictory: he was required to rewrite the novel politically, but ended up by aesthetically changing its poetics. The book thus gained not only in political impact, but in artistic force and depth: ‘I submitted the book in ’67 and the promises kept

coming until 24 February '71 ... And I ought to thank them, I had the pleasure of polishing my work. If today the novel is closer to what I would have wanted it to be, it is thanks to censorship, which took care not to let me publish it with the imperfections it began with.²⁹

Conclusions

Explaining political insurgency through aesthetic necessity, Goma made a statement (an ironical one, of course) about the involuntary way in which censorship had helped him to escape the worst of self-censorship.³⁰ After all, it led him to react like a human—in other words, naturally—in a completely aberrant political context: 'I must thank those who allowed me to postpone my debut until the age of 32; without them I would not have known that you cannot write until you have had your fingers crushed. Now, I must thank censorship for helping me to get rid of self-censorship, because it is so impudent, insistent, and devoid of logic that I reacted humanly.'³¹ He experienced liberation, and the novel was enriched with meanings that it did not have originally. In his opinion, his fight with the official censor had beneficial results from a literary point of view. The novel only gained in complexity, his writing in depth and relief. Much the same was said by other authors, many of them from totalitarian communist regimes, but others too with experience of very different political circumstances. Scholars have yet to reach a consensus on this topic. In my opinion, these literary works represent the perverse secondary effects (because they were unintended) of the censorship act.³²

As for Paul Goma, his tactics checkmated the communist institutions of control: the responsibility for rejecting *Ostinato* was regularly shifted from the publisher, to the GDPP, to the CCSE. All the skirmishes over censorship then abruptly ceased the moment the novel was published in the West. The battle moved on to a strictly political plane, and the consequences, including the withdrawal of Goma's Romanian citizenship and his exile, were to be endured by the author himself.

Notes

- 1 I have consulted the following archives in the National Archives of Romania, the Central Historical National Archives Branch: Fund 2571 CPP (in particular those relating to the Directorate of Instructions and Control and the Directorate for Literature and Art) and Fund 2898 (in particular those relating to the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, the Propaganda and Agitation Branch, 1921–1976). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.
- 2 For the artistic strategies made possible by copyright see Lindegren in this volume; for the dialectic of censorship in British modernism see the introduction to this volume.
- 3 *Ostinato* thus serves as yet another example of how ‘censorious events’, somewhat counterproductively, can create interest in the very thing they seek to repress (see the introduction to this volume).
- 4 ‘The July Theses’ refers to a speech delivered by Ceaușescu in July 1971: seventeen proposals regarded as the starting point for a Maoist-style ‘cultural revolution’ in Romania, targeting intellectuals and cultural autonomy and advocating a strict adherence to communist ideology.
- 5 For censorship and the official censor in communist Romania, see Vianu 1998; Petcu 2005; Malita 2016.
- 6 For the full complexities of the Romanian literary field and the interaction of literary institutions under communism, see Macrea-Toma 2009.
- 7 Some of Paul Goma’s later publications such as *Basarabia* (2002) and *Săptămâna roșie/The Red Week* (2003) include problematic anti-Semitic statements. This contribution, however, focuses on the context of the 1960s and 70s when Goma was a dissident and an anti-communist writer.
- 8 The School of Literature in Bucharest was founded in 1950 by the Romanian Labour Party, after the Soviet model, to train carefully selected writers who were loyal to socialist realism.
- 9 Reports (*referate*) were the most important documents compiled by censors, having read the manuscripts submitted to publishing houses with ideology in mind. Meant only for the official censor, the reports included all relevant observations, which often included advice for the GDPP/CPP leadership on whether to approve for publication (sometimes on condition that certain amendments and revisions were operated in the texts) or to deny on the grounds that they did not comply with the ideology of the Communist Party. The head of the Directorate approved the reports, whereupon they became official verdicts, binding on both the publishing houses and the authors of the manuscripts.
- 10 National Archives of Romania, the Central Historical National Archives Branch (ANIC), Fund CPT, NOTE *Ostinato*–Paul Goma, Editura Cartea Românească, File 14/1971, fol. 60.
- 11 Ibid.

- 12 Tănase 1977, 40: ‘Censure, auto-censure et paralittérature.’
- 13 ANIC, Fund CPT, NOTE *Ostinato*–Paul Goma, Editura Eminescu.
- 14 Lovinescu 1990 suggests that while *Ostinato* ‘is not only a novel about prison, but also one of the inability to stay out of it’ (487) under the communist regime, *Păsărilor*, ‘presented as one of the most daring novels of late, is brave only in appearance and only in the details. ... The critique of the mechanisms of power is directed in such a way that it does not put into question the whole ensemble. Neither for the past nor for the future’ (519).
- 15 ANIC, Fund CPT, NOTE *Ostinato*–Paul Goma, Editura Eminescu. The erotic theme was incriminating in literature (and art). The approach to censorship derived from the official ideology, which regulated even the privacy and sexuality of the so-called ‘new man.’ The censors’ reports went so far as to say that scenes of a sexual nature were pornographic. Nudity itself was repudiated prudishly. With glaring semantic exaggeration the censors censored everything, including eroticism, using the fuzzily derogatory term ‘obscenity.’
- 16 High-ranking party activists (in particular, members of the RCP’s Central Committee, in charge of ideological activity) were authorized to intervene in the GDPP’s censorship process. By virtue of the Regulations, they had to be asked for their opinion in ‘exceptional’ cases.
- 17 ANIC, Fund CPT, NOTE *Ostinato*–Paul Goma, Editura pentru Literatură, No. 245, 23 October 1969.
- 18 Goma 2010, 16.
- 19 One month after the publication of the book in Germany, Goma admitted in an interview with the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that he had used, unsuccessfully, ‘every means an author has in Romania for publication [requests for audiences with senior political officials, petitions addressed ‘to the highest level’, etc.]. However, it is clear that an author in Romania has no such means—with the exception of compromises’ (20 November 1971, printed in Goma 2010, 38).
- 20 ‘Thus was born in Romania, after the strikes of 1968 and 1971,’ says Goma, ‘a ... *paraliterature* made of words published with the approval of the police: a “nice” literature, which says nothing about nothing and has enormous circulation numbers (for censorship loves trivialities), a “brave” literature in which they fire their cannons at flies (sharp criticism is targeted at shop assistants who steal, at waiters who are desperate for a tip, at girls who get involved with foreign tourists)’ (‘Censure, auto-censure et paralittérature’, in Tănase 1977, 34–5).
- 21 See the following documents in the archives of the DGPT: (1) the Literature Section, No. 245/23.X.1969, NOTE *Ostinato*–Paul Goma, Editura pentru Literatură. The censor’s report shows many notes in pencil, which mark the fragments that were removed or modified and those that ‘have remained.’ (2) No. 1753/21.III.1970. NOTE *Ostinato*–Paul Goma. Editura Eminescu, in File 17/1970, ff. 100–103. (3) NOTE, in File 18/1970, f. 59 [contains, to the left of the title, an indication, written by hand: “Not to be published. T.S.B. 17 VII.1970”],

- accompanied by: (4) NOTE *Ostinato*—Paul Goma, Editura Eminescu (undated document, which is the next one in File, v., 60–62.), in File 18/1970, ff. 60–62. (5) No. 1111/13.II.1971. NOTE *Ostinato*—Paul Goma, Editura Eminescu. (6) NOTE *Ostinato*—Paul Goma. Ed. Cartea Românească, in File 14/1971, f. 60.
- 22 Special cases had to be reported to other party authorities for strategic consultation, among them the Council of Culture and Socialist Education (which had replaced the Ministry of Culture and the Arts) and, in exceptional cases, to the Central Committee of the RCP. Political control was thus multi-tiered.
- 23 Any intermediate stage involved the resumption of the process of censorship and the recollection of opinions issued by various institutions.
- 24 Interview with Claude Bonnefoy, originally published in *La Quinzaine littéraire*, no. 154, 16–31 Dec. 1972, quoted in Tănase 1977, 62.
- 25 ANIC, Fund CPT, NOTE *Ușa*—Paul Goma. Editura Cartea Românească, File 19/1970, ff. 216–19.
- 26 Interviewed by Dieter Schlesak in *Merkur*, no. 296, December 1972, he confirmed this hypothesis: ‘Until May 1970, they did not dare to prohibit *Ostinato*, they merely found fault with the words and dissected sentences’ (quoted in Tănase 1977, 53).
- 27 ‘In fact,’ said the author in an interview, ‘I am pleased that those who forbade the publication of the book in Romanian gave an advertising boost to the same book in the West’ (‘Experimentele sunt necesare,’ in Tănase 1977, 39).
- 28 Ibid. 39.
- 29 Ibid. 44: ‘Censure, auto-censure et paralittérature’.
- 30 Although censorship itself was efficient, it was not the most important success of the official censor: self-censorship was. Most often, Romanian authors internalized political prohibitions to such a degree that all censorship had to tackle were matters of nuance.
- 31 Ibid. 38. The information is summarised in an interview with Sanda Stolojan; see Paul Goma, *Scrisuri*, I, 49.
- 32 Cf. Malita 2019, 5–35.