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Tatjana Debeljački vs. Dorin Popa

Interview

Can you tell us something about your hometown and growing up?

I was born in a village called Stiubieni, Botosani county, in Romania. My parents came to work in the city of Iasi, the cultural capital of the region of Moldova. As the Romanians go now to work in other countries like Italy, France, Spain or England, my parents brought me to Iasi to have access to a better learning environment, to do more studies than they did. Both me and my younger sister, Rita, we have graduated university, and this was perhaps the brightest thing in the life of our parents - Maria and Constantin Popa, both deceased now. Back then, in the early '60-'70, people moved from rural to urban areas as they now departs from Romania to France, Italy, Spain, England, a similar phenomenon of migration based on economic and social reasons.

I have been living in Iasi since 11 years old. My parents enrolled me at the best schools, so I can follow, then, high school and college. Iasi is known as the city of culture and students, with 5 public universities and 2 private colleges, ranked among the best in Romania. The first one is 'Alexandru Ioan Cuza' University, the

one I graduated and where I am now teaching, with a humanist profile, followed by "Gr.T.Popa" University of Medicine. Iasi was also the city to host the first theater in Romania, set up in the 19th century by some much appreciated intellectuals with deep roots in Romanian history: Vasile Alecsandri, Mihail Kogalniceanu and Iacob Negruzzi, who, then, became prime ministers, ministers, ambassadors, or mayors of the city of Iasi. The first university in Romania was founded in Iasi, in 1860, and is actually the university where I am now a teacher. The city also hosts an excellent philharmonic, an opera, a botanical garden of great beauty led by a colleague, professor at the same university. The largest regional hospital is also set up in Iasi, and is serving patients from several counties. Iasi's priorities are many and are consolidated especially in the humanistic cultural space, and it is based on a strong multicultural environment. The first Jewish theater in the world, The Green Tree, was founded in Iasi, where a large Jewish community existed, before the Second World War. Today it only operates in Bucharest, the number of Jews in Iasi reducing greatly after the establishment of the Communist regime.

When did you publish your first book and how did the success follow later?

I started to publish since high school in professional cultural magazines, and as a student I was the editor-in-chief of the 'Dialogue' magazine of "Al.I.Cuza" University, whose description written on its cuff was 'Students' Cultural Magazine', a position which was difficult to be assumed in the '80s, when all the Romanian publications were called ORGANS of the communist party. Our cultural magazine 'Dialogue' was, together with 'Equinox' from the 'Babes-Bolyai' University of Cluj-Napoca, the best rated student magazines by our intellectual elite (there were 14 such titles back in the 80's in Romania).

There, at 'Dialogue', I met Alexandru Calinescu, the famous French literature professor, Professor Alexandru Zub, a historian, member of the Romanian Academy, Andrei Corbea-Hoisie, professor of German literature, Stefan Afloroaei, professor of philosophy, today a corresponding member of the Romanian Academy, and I was colleague with a number of students who later became

reference names in the Romanian cultural space: Liviu Antonesei, poet, critic and talented writer, Sorin Antohi, essayist and historian of culture, Florin Platon, a historian of vast culture, with profound concerns in the Romanian space, Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu, a literary critic in college, and now a sociologist with serious studies in Paris where he teaches a few months a year, Dan Alexe, now living in Brussels, becoming famous for his films and documentaries made in the ex-Soviet space, in the new Muslim republics, as well as in Afghanistan, Iraq and throughout the area. In addition, Dan Alexe is a very talented writer and essayist, his volumes stirring vivid discussions in today's Romanian intellectual space. Also, at 'Dialogue' I met the sister and brother-in-law of the famous historian of religions, the successor of the famous Mircea Eliade, Ion Petru Culianu (from an old and prestigious family of Iasi intellectuals)

The sister of Ion Petru Culianu is Teresa Petrescu-Culianu, and her husband, Dan Petrescu, was one of the most prominent anti-communists in the last few years of the Ceausescu regime. Dan Petrescu is also a very talented essayist and talented writer.

The 'Dialogue' magazine has succeeded in publishing on its pages other future great intellectuals: Codrin Liviu Cutitaru, Bogdan Calinescu, Gabriel Horatiu Decuble, Radu Andriescu, Simona Modreanu, Mona Antohi, Constantin Dram, Mirel Cana, Lucian Vasiliu, Florin Cintic, Florea Ioncioaia, Catalin Turliuc, Valeriu Gherghel, Petru Bejan, Lacramioara Petrescu ...

In college, during some university competitions, I surprisingly managed, in 1983, to be awarded the 1st Prize for poetry, in Craiova. I was very glad then, the prize was previously awarded to some very prominent poets before (Florin Iaru, Mircea Cartarescu and Ion Muresan). On that occasion, in 1983, a page appeared in the 'Amphitheater' student magazine in Bucharest and, although I thought I would be allowed to publish a volume, this did not happen.

I also won editorial debut contests organized by the publishing houses of Albatross - Bucharest and Junimea-Iasi, but I was always said that I wrote too pessimistic and my debut volume never appeared. Every year I was promised that my volume would appear the next year. They talked me so much and never published a volume

until 1990, when communism was no longer present in Romanian cultural institutions.

I was only allowed to publish a few poems in some collective volumes, which were called 'Letterbooks with debutants'.

So, only in 1990 I was able to publish the volume of lyrics titled (I kept the title I chose 10 years before!) 'The Utopia of Possession'.

The volume has had many literary chronicles, in almost all Romanian magazines, mostly favorable, and has been awarded the Iasi Writers' Union debut award. One year later, I was also invited to be a member of the Writers' Union, which I had dreamed of from high school.

Before going to the next question, I want to recall two writers, two poets from Iasi, from another generation, the one before us, Mihai Ursachi and Emil Brumaru, who deeply inspired me and my generation. Ursachi and Brumaru influenced us by their almost free, dissident, nonconformist behavior and openness to dialogue with their younger brothers. Even if me and my colleagues did not follow their poetical, well-drawn paths, which we admired, they allowed us, and even invited us to find the most suitable expression in that repressive universe and inspired us to not give up.

To conclude, I managed to publish the first book of poems only in 1990, after more than 10 years since I handed it over to the publishers and after the main poets of my had already published 2-3 books, to my joy.

The volume published in 1990 was identical to the one I entrusted to the editors in 1980! In these 10 years, I felt that I could not grow, or evolve. I have been condemned to look at my first-ever poems as if I could not write anything new... Was I not really able to write anything new for 10 years? Of course, my expectation was to feel I am 'cleaned up', healed by having the first book published. I could not have a second book, if my first would not appear...

The true purpose of art is to uplift humankind, inspire reverence and morality, and instill in people's hearts a true sense of beauty?

Yes, to a large extent, I still think so, especially because in my youth I was a fan of Feodor Mihailovich Dostoevsky, and he was convinced that "Beauty will save the world /the mankind!". And, basically, who can save the world more delicate, less aggressive, less painful than happiness or beauty ???

Only the beauty, I believe, may come into play at this level of humanity, only beauty can find the way to let things grow harmoniously. Who else ???

The instigation of beauty towards harmony, even severity, with little resources, seems to be present, without much philosophy and meditation, in all the acts around us, in the way we educate our children more recently, in the way we relate to our partner and even in our projections of happiness - a word with new and much less meanings !

But if we look around, we find that most of the energies and resources are now spent in the vocation of happiness.

Beauty has a tremendous chance now, especially since mankind has given up the hypocrisy of suffering as the reward of all efforts; humanity now, clearly, proposes happiness without fearing that it has wronged the way.

A very good example in this sense is, I think, the proletarian action, in a way, of Steve Jobs, who did not go in the construction of his revolutionary machines with the obsession of the engine that will ensure their action, no! Steve Jobs, in contrast to the history of work until then, began to work from the objects that will incorporate /will wear the engines that will give them life and efficiency, so from the beauty of the contact that man can establish with his own tools. A small step for mankind ??? A rather necessary step, especially since sharp minds consider that *"the prospective energy of poets and artists rapidly catalyses the prospective energies of financiers, engineers, industrialists, etc. It is not accidental that great poetry is the privilege of the most civilized states - it is, at least as much as prose, a mark of the stage of a civilization / language"* (Radu Vancu - The Sign of Cancer).

Professionally professor teaching Journalism and Communication Sciences at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi?

I envy my students, at their age I could not study Journalism and communication, there were no university courses in this sense. There was a professional school of journalism in Bucharest, where, without any admission exam, young workers were called to enter. The only (political) criterion was the commitment to the Communist Party and their engagement to the activities within Young Communist Union (UTC). This is why, when the press became free, in 1990, these journalists trained in Bucharest could not deal the new reality, they disappeared from the press!

Until the faculties of journalism appeared in Iasi, Bucharest, Sibiu, Timisoara, Cluj, Brasov, Galati, around 2000, the quality press was largely supported by us, those who have apprenticed in the student press, where, besides the rigor, we also exercises freedom (especially because, almost all of us, we were writing literature).

It has thus happened that I had to write the first journalism courses in my university and

in this part of the country: 'Introduction to the media system', 'Journalism Text and Discourse', 'Communication and Advertising', 'Techniques of Collecting Information', 'Camil Petrescu, the journalist' (a great Romanian writer who was also a very good journalist, founder and director of many publications). Perhaps this is why I was very glad and proud when, in 2005, Svetlana Alexeevici, a very a good journalist from Belarus, was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature!

Authored many volumes of journalism and mass media studies and published scientific articles in journals home and abroad?

Yes, indeed. Because there was no valid bibliography for quality and free journalism for years, I have written the necessary courses for my students. I was proud of having managed to publish volumes of Media History and journalistic text, fundamental disciplines for any young man who wants to practice journalism as a profession.

After 1990, there were no books, no courses, no teaching methods, just a huge enthusiasm of some professors who have assumed with much energy and the vocation of pioneering the difficult work of creating a journalistic school.

Now I lead two editorial collections at the Publishing House 'European Institute' of Iasi (Society & Press and Journalism), where we have published many Romanian writers and journalists of high quality: Liviu Antonesei, Sorin Antohi, Virgil Nemoianu, Viorel Marineasa, Ion Dur, Nicoleta Salcudean, Delia Oprea, Radu Calin Cristea, Arsavir Acterian, Dumitru Tepeneag, Codrin Liviu Cutitaru, Florea Ioncioaia, Nicolae Gabriel.

As part of my scientific activity, I have published numerous studies and papers in Romanian and international indexed journals. I have also coordinated many grants and research projects, as well as institutional development projects, where young PhDs and post-doctoral researchers were supported to engage in their research. I also founded, in 2013, the first Post-Doctoral School of Studies in Communicating Sciences in Romania.

Publications, radio and TV stations, mostly on cultural issues. er national and international association?

In 1990, as communism cracked in Romania, I felt the need to help, as much as I could, the press who began to feel the air of freedom. So it happened that I participated in the launch and development of some weekly magazines ('The Time') or daily newspapers ('Monitorul'/today 'The Newspaper of Iasi') and at professionalisation of independent TV stations (TeleM and Europa Nova Iasi) and radio stations (North-East Radio, where, I had a weekly cultural live show, 2 hours, in the evening, for 2 years).

In those years, I was the correspondent from Iasi for central publications that I considered serious and of good quality: 'Cotidianul' ('The Daily'), during the years when its founder, Ion Ratiu, lived and was present in the editorial office, 'Acum' ('Now'), started by Stelian Tanase, 'Ultimul cuvânt' ('The Last Word'), 'Dreptatea' ('Justice'), 'Contemporanul' ('The Contemporary'), the review of the Ministry of Culture, where I was the columnist for 10 years. In Iasi, I collaborated with the magazines 'Cronica' ('The Chronicle') and 'Convorbiri literare' ('Literary Conversations').

I am a member of the Romanian Association of Journalism, of the Romanian Professionals in Communication, PEN Club, Amnesty International, Union of Writers in Romania, and member in several international poetic associations (from USA, Albania, Greece).

Believes in the randomness and richness of life, and that every day is a possible adventure?

Yes, I think life deserves to be lived every day, day by day, with passion, it's worth loving with passion, although I have almost all my life been dominated by suicidal ideas. Suicide has attracted me and, at the same time, scared me. I had a suicide

attempt, at 21-22 years old, with strong pills, even antidepressants, but I was saved by my father who found me in my house and took me to the hospital in the night. I was miraculously saved. After that, for some time, I felt much profoundly the joy of living. Then, later, the idea of suicide turned and stood for long. I already had two sons, Andrew and David. The suicide began to leave me only after I met Alina in 2000. Alina, an eminently good and nice woman, always positive - a positive goddess, a fairy as I no longer believed there was in the world - always glad that we are together, investing herself in every moment of our lives, made me wanting to live long. Before I met Alina, I did not think I could get old. Now I am always stunned by how many younger people than me live in the world ... Like the Globe has become the homeland of young people, only young people all over the world and on the Internet, on Facebook. Just a few years ago, I did not even know there were people in the world, I did not see them, I did not know about their existence.

Now, I meet every day as a great adventure if I live it with Alina - my third wife (and last, in fact, my only wife!). Together, we lived extraordinary adventures. Some years ago, we were together in the Colombian town of Buenaventura, going by taxi from Cali, and we spent the whole day and night being frightened to walk down the street. There were still kidnappings following in Buenaventura, followed by redemption requests, and, between cities, the army stopped our taxi with firearms with bullets directed to us. I had never dreamed of anything like that, we did not know what to do with fear, fear, fear! Together, we were in San Francisco, Alcatraz, by boat, in Acapulco-Mexico, Las Vegas, Boynton Beach and Palm Beach, near Miami, Florida, in Laguna Beach, Malibu, Beverly Hills and the wonderful Lake - Forest, in Vancouver & Calgary, Canada, on the Trolls' Road, at the Geiranger Fjords, in Norway, and we saw hundreds of reindeers and mooses, travelling across Finland. Wonderful adventures!

What can you tell us about your work, prizes, journeys and friendships?

As a student, I won prizes for poetry in many contests in the country and perhaps the most important prize is the 1st prize at the National Student Festival in 1983. Then, after 1989, after the anti-communist revolution in Romania, when we could contact the West, I started sending poems to various international competitions in France and Italy and, amazingly, I found that, in some, I even took the 1st Prize, even no one heard about me before.

In 1995, I was published in a magazine in Luxembourg and I was invited at an international poetry conference in Portugal. Then I went out for the first time, I traveled outside Romania. This is how I met Wole Soyinka, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1986, and I met him again, 10 years later, in Colombia, in 2005. In Portugal, in 1995, I met poets from Belgium, Slovakia, France, Italy, Spain, Serbia, Croatia, Germany, Russia, Hungary – this was an unprecedented event for me. It happened, then, at this festival, to have lunch with the President of Portugal, Mario Soares, who still lives. He was at the end of his second term, he was for many years Prime Minister too, and he wanted to meet with a group of poets from Europe. It has not happened to me since then. President Mario Soares smoked a cigar along with the smokers at the Festival and we had lobsters in the menu. I did not even know how to eat them, it was the first time I'd ever seen it in the plate. I thought I did not eat anything better!

In 1998, I was invited to a poetic international congress at Bratislava, a congress organized by the World Academy of Arts and Culture, based in California, USA, in the program being also a poetry contest. I was awarded the first mention at that contest, and the first prize was won by the poet Tomas Tranströmer from Sweden. In Bratislava, in 1998, I became friends with him and his wife, Monika, and then we exchanged letters for many years. In 2011, Tomas Tranströmer won the Nobel Prize for Literature, but I did not see him again, he died in 2015.

In 1999, I was in Mexico, at the annual congress organized by the World Academy of Arts and Culture, in Acapulco. There, I met poets from Venezuela, Mexico, Japan, Spain ...

In 2004, I was invited to the World Congress of Literature in Seoul, Korea. In Europe, at least in Romania, Korea is unfortunately not well known, but I want to tell you that it is the most civilized country I've ever visited, more civilized than Japan. In my opinion, Korea can only be compared with Norway – the country me and Alina love the most! In 2004, I could not afford to go to Korea with Alina, but later, in 2014, we traveled together in Korea, after she received a two-week fellowship there. Seoul is just as beautiful and modern as New York, but much cleaner, perfectly clean.

In Korea, in 2004, I reunited with previously known poets but also with others I did not know: Ernesto Kahan - Israel, Aki Wakunai - Japan, Mariana Larssen - Sweden, Karen Kung - Taiwan, Y Van Ngueng- USA, Imre Szoldos-Hungary & Taiwan. Let me just remember here some of the poet friends in Europe and the world: Anjie Krog - South African, Knut Ødegård - Norway, Pedro de la Pena - Spain, Milan Richter from Slovakia and many others.

In 2005, I was at the Medellin International Poetry Festival, the third poet from Romania ever invited there, after Marin Sorescu and Mircea Dinescu, some years before. Then, in 2005, I warmly rejoined Wole Soyinka and spent the week in the same Grand Hotel in Medellin, taking breakfast every morning together. Alina was with me and has some beautiful pictures with Wole Soyinka from those days. I treasure these memories very much and only this year I shared them on Facebook.

Along with Alina, only with Alina - Alia, I was at the North Pole driving many miles under the ocean. With our car, a sport Volvo for two people, we love to travel through Italy, Spain, Belgium, Budapest, England, Ireland, but especially in Norway - our favorite country! - Sweden, Finland and Denmark, even in Gibraltar with its famous macaques monkeys... In Norway, I drove on the famous Atlantic Road, perhaps the most famous route in Europe and through the world's longest tunnel. For me and Alina, all these trips through miraculous cities like Estoril, Sintra - Portugal, Toledo, Barcelona, Valencia, San Sebastian, Ronda - Spain, Brugges, Moses, Antwerp - Belgium, Munich, Hamburg -Germany, Linz, Austria, Geneva, Laussane - Switzerland, Tallinn - Estonia, Prague -Czech Republic, Ljubljana - Slovenia, Bratislava - Slovakia, Dubrovnik – Croatia, and so many others are our adventures, our amazing adventures and discoveries.

Do you think you have outwitted the expectations?

I could not even get close to my expectations, I have no reason to be content.

My only contentment (but enormous!) is that I met Alina - Alia in this life, which suddenly became very beautiful. We have been together for nearly 20 years, and today I love her more powerful, more profoundly than ever. And of course, now, I am very pleased that I did not commit suicide in my youth, or later when it was as hard as it was in my youth.

As you might say, I'm happy I have failed in my suicide and I do not want to ever meet with it again!

Is there anything that you could pinpoint and tell us about yourself between dreams and reality?

To a certain extent, I was born after the collapse of communism, at the age at which Jesus left this world! I still have great expectations from myself; the world is still very young for me.

Although many great people lived on earth and have asked questions, painful, inhuman questions, this world, our world, is just starting to ask its first really serious questions who can improve its existence, the first questions about destruction that does not destroy it. This is why there are probably so many poets in the world today, because the world needs to know, almost artistically, what destruction does not destroy it.

How much destruction does the world stand without disappearing?

What are your plans for the future creative work?

I believe / I hope that if I continue to live at least a few years, I will be able to write very well, as I find it increasingly clear what I want to say. What do I want to say? Everything!

That is, the exact way in which this beautiful and infinitely dangerous world is reflected in my brain, in my senses, in the senses of a man from East, born in communism, in a village in Moldova and forced to accept the dictatorship and the stupidity of communism for 33 years, and who has to testify today the dictatorship of mediocrity, not only in Romania, but in the most selective places in the world.

Is there anything that you could pinpoint and tell us about yourself between the dream and reality?

Reality has long surpassed my dreams. Until I was 30, I did not think that I could even visit the countries around Romania, namely Hungary, Serbia, Bulgaria and Russia. Since that moment until today, I have been able to see all of them, plus USA, England, France, Italy, Ireland, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Spain, Germany, Andorra, Switzerland, Norway and all the northern countries, Latin America, Japan and Korea. I am still yearning to see Australia, New Zealand and Iceland, but first of all, I want to visit St. Petersburg, Dostoevsky's town.

Another thing: until I was 30, in fact, 33, I did not hope to have the name printed on a book. Today, I have published over 20 volumes, and I hope to write at least as many again.

If in the 19th century and during a long part of the 20th century it was said that life imitates literature, today this is inconceivable and reality often exceeds the boundaries of a writer's imagination. I do not know any writer that could imagine the Charlie Hebdo massacre. If, for centuries, literature has been the focus of

public attention, today, as writers, we must have the modesty of accepting that sports and shows are far ahead of literature in people's attention.

Then, my students overcome my dreams. With each new academic year, I have more and more beautiful, smarter, and more inclined students to communicate. It is a pleasure and a joy for me to work with them. I have met, up to date, a few thousand students and with many of them I still keep in touch by email or Facebook. I could not imagine what brilliant and interesting careers many of them had and in what wonderful cities of the world could some have arrived!

Have you achieved everything you have ever wanted to and if you could live your life again would you be an artist again?

If, by magic, it could be possible to live on this exciting and passionate world once more, I would only want to change one thing. I would like to learn, since very young, from kindergarten, to respect my fellow man, to respect the other.

In communism, under the shelter of slogans, we despised the other as well as ourselves.

The only thing really missing in communism was the respect for the other, in fact. There was no respect for man. This way, population was easier to be manipulated, and we could withstand the dictatorship more easily, as neither the dictatorship, nor us really matter.

During the last thirty years, I educated myself, I trained myself to respect every human being. It was very hard for me to learn respect, but after Alina came into my life I felt it was easier. Love can teach you anything, unlike what I thought in my youth.

Now, among young artists, among young writers, I feel much better than among my generation. In Romania, the new generations of writers are unexpectedly good, mature. I never imagined this. I would really like to be a young debutant today and sit with many young and very young Romanian writers such as Radu Vancu, Lia

Faur, Alex Goldis, Bogdan-Alexandru Stanescu, Robert Serban, Codrin Liviu Cutitaru, Florin Lazarescu, Dan Coman, Cristina Modreanu, Catalin Pavel, Dan Alexe, Mihai Iovanel, Bianca Cernat, Stefan Manasia, Claudiu Komartin, Ioana Vintila, Marius Chivu, Ciprian Macesaru, Paul Cernat, Mihok Tamas, Florin Irimia, Lucian Dan Teodorovici, Radu Nitescu,

Of those listed here, Dan Alexe and Codrin Liviu Cutitaru are no longer very young, but in the last few years they have started to publish novels and stories, writing essays, criticism and cultural studies.

All these, along with well-known writers such as Andrei Plesu, Florin Iaru, Mircea Mihaies, Dan Stanca, Liviu Antonesei, Mircea Cartarescu, Sorin Antohi, Gabriel Liiceanu, Viorel Marineasa, Horia Roman Patapievici, Alexandru Cistelean, Ion Muresan, Andrei Cornea, Ion Bogdan Lefter, Bogdan Ghiu, Daniel Banulescu, Radu Calin Cristea and Teodor Baconschi, can make you wish writing.

Is there anything you would like to say that you think is important and that I haven't asked you two way?

You asked me the most appropriate and deeper questions.

I would just like to tell you that, a few days ago, in a magazine in Turkey, the Albanian poet Agron Shele says he is impressed and inspired, among many writers, by the two of us - you in Serbia, and me in Romania.

I was very moved to find our names standing by. This was unthinkable 30 years ago.

Dorin Popa, thank-you! It was a great pleasure talking to you and you are always welcome to our houses "Diogen pro culture" and "Maxminus".

You are not only very generous and talented, but also very friendly. Your questions invite to nostalgia, to the same extent as urge to involvement and action. Thanks to you, I became a passionate follower of 'Diogen pro culture' and 'Maxminus'.

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