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THE RECEPTION OF C. S. LEWIS IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA¹

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Abstract

This paper presents the circumstances surrounding the publication of the Romanian translations of C. S. Lewis's best known works. In the first part, the author gives information about the Romanian authors who were acquainted with Lewis's writings during Communism, when the translation and printing of books on religious topics was under the tight control of a totalitarian government. In spite of that control, two Lewis titles—*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Mere Christianity*—which were translated in the US, were smuggled into Romania. The second part of this paper deals with the remarkably changed situation after the emergence of a new regime in 1990. Since then Lewis's books have been published, often in multiple print runs, by secular as well as Christian publishers, with a total of 12 fiction and 13 non-fiction titles, indicating a wide popular reception of his work.

Keywords: *C. S. Lewis, reception history, C. S. Lewis in Romanian, Iosif Țon, Andrei Pleșu*

1. INTRODUCTION

Several factors contributed to the much slower permeation of C. S. Lewis's writings in the Romanian cultural space, as compared with other places: (1) During the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, Romania's cultural model was France (let us not forget that during his youth Emil Cioran desired "a Romania with China's population and France's destiny"); (2) the Communist regime culturally isolated Romania, diminishing interaction with the Occident to a minimum; (3) the explicit Christian character of many of C. S. Lewis's works would have made them impossible to publish in a country whose leaders were determined to eradicate "religious mysticism and obscurantism," as a precondition for the emergence of the New Man and socialism.

¹ Heartfelt thanks are due to Estera Decean, who translated this paper into English, and to Paul Leopold, who revised the text with great diligence. The responsibility for the final form of the text is entirely mine.

Behind the Iron Curtain, Romanians were denied free access to C. S. Lewis's works, though, as will be shown in this study, his name was not completely unknown in Communist Romania. Several intellectuals, e.g. Ștefan Nenițescu and Nicolae Steinhardt, who had either travelled or been educated in the West before 1945 and who had had contact with the Anglo-Saxon milieu, were familiar with the writings of such authors as G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis. Later on, in the 1970s and 1980s, some of the few Romanians who had the opportunity to travel abroad enthusiastically read C. S. Lewis and played an important part in promoting his writings when the totalitarian system, marked by restrictions and censorship enforced by severe surveillance, collapsed.

In the present study I endeavour to retrace the main stages C. S. Lewis's works went through in entering the Romanian cultural and religious space, beginning with the period before the fall of Communism, when Lewis's was practically an unknown name, further identifying the paths on which his writings spread in post-communist Romania, and eventually listening to the wider echoes of his work in the cultural press, in specialized research and (why not?) in the Romanian blogosphere.

One fact needs to be specified from the very beginning: the author in question was an active member of the Anglican Church. Of course, Anglicanism is not a monolithic religious block, not least because its complicated history led to the emergence of religious subtraditions—some conservative and liturgical (“high”), some Evangelical (“low”). Without claiming to be an infallible judge of Lewis's religious views, I would argue that he was a conservative Anglican. However, since Lewis never made a point of his confessional identity, he became compatible with a wide spectrum of religious traditions, from historical ones (Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism) to the Protestant and Evangelical (“Neo-Protestant,” to adopt the term used sometimes of Romanian Evangelicals). Obviously his fiction (*The Space Trilogy*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*) addresses an audience for whom his confessional membership would be of no interest. As for Lewis's scholarly works, they largely address specialists who appreciate above all his extraordinary knowledge and competence in the area of medieval and renaissance literature.

We could say that Lewis permeated Romanian culture in four different ways, on four clearly detectable editorial paths. Of course, like every intellectual construct, the classification I propose is marked by a certain procrustean artificiality. In order to construct an intelligible (not to say, intelligent) outline, the explorer will inevitably need to segment reality into categories which are not always rigidly distinct. The four ways in which Lewis made his entry into Romanian culture are as follows:

- Lewis, scholarly author known to a restricted circle of intellectuals;

- Lewis, author of devotional works and Christian apologetics, promoted by Evangelical publishers (Societatea Misionară Română and Logos);
- Lewis, classical Christian author, promoted by Humanitas Publishers;
- Lewis, author of fiction for children (*The Chronicles of Narnia*), published by RAO Publishing House.

An observation which should be made from the outset is that, at the moment, Lewis the scholar is missing from the Romanian book market altogether. The only translation that gives an inkling of C. S. Lewis's activity in the arena of literary criticism is the essay collection titled *Of This and Other Worlds* (*Despre lumea aceasta și despre alte lumi*, Humanitas, 2011). The book highlights his interest in literary criticism, but reveals nothing of his special competence as a medieval and renaissance scholar. To my knowledge, at present none of Lewis's scholarly books features in the editorial plans of any Romanian printing house.

In the above classification, the author of children fiction is listed in the last position, yet we must emphasize that the earliest stage of Lewis's penetration into Romanian culture was represented by the clandestine publishing of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* during the mid 1970s. The book was translated and printed abroad and then smuggled into Romania, where it was spread by underground means. The year when the book was released cannot be established with certainty, but those who had access to it during the Communist years testify that it was already available in 1977.

In the following sections we will chronologically present the first three ways in which Romanian readers became acquainted with C. S. Lewis. I have deliberately omitted the section dedicated to the other versions of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* or to *The Chronicles of Narnia* series published by RAO Printing House. Those who are interested in this subject should also be aware of Colin Duriez's *A Field Guide to Narnia*, published in Romanian as *O călăuză prin Narnia și prin întreaga operă a lui C. S. Lewis* (Aqua Forte, 2008).

The title of this study announces an analysis of Lewis's reception in Post-Communist Romania, but the events that took place after 1990 cannot be properly explained without referring to the previous period. This is why I am going to present some information which will help us understand the extent to which Lewis's works were known in Romania during the years 1945-1989.

2. C. S. LEWIS, AS AN AUTHOR KNOWN ONLY TO A RESTRICTED CIRCLE OF INTELLECTUALS

2. 1. N. STEINHARDT (1912-1989)

The first Romanian intellectual that is known to have been familiar with some of Lewis's books is N. Steinhardt, an Orthodox monk who converted to Christianity while serving a prison term under Communism. His diary reveals that he visited London between 1937-1939 and that, during those years, he attended a few religious meetings of the Oxford Group (Steinhardt 152-53, 220-21, 592-93). Given that Steinhardt was well acquainted with G. K. Chesterton's writings, an author he mentions often, it is no wonder that his *Diary of Happiness (Jurnalul fericității)* contains a reference to *The Screwtape Letters*. The fragment in question is inserted below "August 1970." Accompanied by Dinu Pillat, the author had paid a visit to the monk Ilie Cleopa, then living at the Sihăstria monastery. A three-hour talk with the famous Orthodox confessor centred on the two main types of temptations: the "left-side" temptations (those derived from vices and passions) and the "right-side" ones (those derived from virtues). Recalling that discussion, Steinhardt associates the "right-side" temptations with a text from *Screwtape*, the senior devil's letter XXVI to his disciple Wormwood (Steinhardt 272).

I believe C. S. Lewis was also referring to a "right-side" temptation in collection of diabolic letters. The temptation he mentions is trifling but it opens up colossal perspectives:

"The guardian devil" of an ordinary Englishman is urging his "patient" to give up something in a matter that much concerns him: the essentially British matter of tea. The mortal would like to have his tea at 5 P.M., on the porch. His wife and his mother-in-law prefer to have it inside. "Give in, the devil whispers, be humble and kind and unselfish, humour them." Consequently the man will have his tea with them, all the while feeling unhappy and wronged, not able to enjoy his drink, silently cursing both women, who are perfectly aware that they were granted their desire grudgingly and feel their dislike of him rising. The devil exults; he has harmed two others besides his own "patient." (Steinhardt 273).

The text in Steinhardt retains one idea from Lewis's text, but presents a simplified version of the complex relational game between the participants caught in the "Generous Conflict illusion". In the example given by the Romanian author, the husband who gives in to the preferences of his wife and mother-in-law is the victim of the temptation. In Lewis's imaginary scene, the conflict gradually degenerates, since it originates in the following causes: (1) each of the persons involved wishes to sacrifice in order to please the others and (2) each participant declines to be the beneficiary of what it perceives to be

cheap generosity derived from petty motivations. Old resentments brought to bear in such a trivial conflict eventually lead to a disastrous situation. The conflict could have been defused only by an honest exposition of each participant's preferences and by keeping within the perimeter of reason and decency (Lewis, *Screwtape Letters* 133-134).

The difference in perspective between the Lewisian text and the interpretation given by Steinhardt seems to indicate that, at the moment when he was writing his *Diary*, Steinhardt did not have a fresh reading of *The Screwtape Letters* in mind. Besides, this is the only reference to Lewis in *The Diary of Happiness*. To what extent Steinhardt was familiar with other writings of Lewis remains to be determined through the analysis of the former's complete works. A more thorough research of the subject should also give due consideration to the books that are known to have belonged to the Romanian monk (and which are now part of the library of the Rohia monastery). One would not be surprised to find that there are other works of C. S. Lewis among the books of N. Steinhardt.

2.2. A. PLEȘU (1948-)

In the 1970s, the writings of C. S. Lewis caught the attention of another outstanding Romanian intellectual, Andrei Pleșu, who at the time was a doctoral student in the history of art. The young scholar studied in Germany between 1975-1977, by way of a Humboldt scholarship, preparing his thesis on landscape paintings, a work published in 1980 under the title *Pitoresc și melancolie (Picturesque and Melancholy)*. The Lewis works studied by Pleșu were scholarly ones, mainly concerned with the world of the Middle Ages: *The Discarded Image*, *The Allegory of Love* and *Studies in Words*.¹

At the end of the '70s, the aesthetician, poet and art critic Ștefan Nenițescu referred A. Pleșu to another important book, *Surprised by Joy*, particularly remarkable for Lewis's description in it of his conversion, first to theism, and then to Christianity. Nenițescu (1897-1979), roughly 80 years old at that time, was a practising Orthodox much concerned with the subject of conversion and faith in general.² A good friend of Nicolae Titulescu and very active both in the cultural and diplomatic realm, Nenițescu went to England at the end of World War II, being entrusted by Iuliu Maniu with the specific task of informing the British about the Soviet danger. Although he had been warned about the consequences which the agreement between Churchill and Stalin would have for Romania, Nenițescu returned home. Due to the role he played in the attempt to oust the Groza government, he was arrested in 1949 and

¹ Interview with A. Pleșu, president of New Europe College, Bucharest, Oct. 24th, 2013.

² Interview with A. Pleșu, president of NEC, Bucharest, Oct. 24th, 2013.

imprisoned until his reprieve, in 1964. Nenițescu's visit to Great Britain had likely facilitated his access to the writings of C. S. Lewis.¹

A deeper interaction of A. Pleșu with Lewis's thinking occurred during his second sojourn abroad (1982-1983), again as a Humboldt scholar. It was then that he went through all the books he had access to—*Mere Christianity*, *The Problem of Pain*, *Reflections on the Psalms*, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. He found them intelligent, witty, and, most important, trans-denominational. Lewis impressed him because of the rigour he put into his writing. Avoiding doctrinaire positions, Lewis managed to go beyond the narrow dogmatic confines of any particular denomination and engage believers across all denominations. The spiritual kinship between Lewis and Chesterton also played an important role, especially since during his youth Pleșu had taken a great interest in the latter's essays.² As we will see in another section of this study, Pleșu's encounter with the writings of C. S. Lewis was to become instrumental for their diffusion in post-1989 Romanian society.

2.3. VIRGIL NEMOIANU (1940-)

In the 1980s listeners to Radio Free Europe were familiar with a broadcast called "The Intellectual and Religion," produced by Virgil Nemoianu. He had settled in the USA in 1975 and is currently a professor of literature and philosophy at the Catholic University of America, where he has been teaching since 1979. In a volume containing Nemoianu's radio broadcast lectures and addresses there is an article dedicated to C. S. Lewis (Nemoianu 49-51). It is a good general presentation of Lewis, with an emphasis on his conversion (described in *Surprised by Joy*) and his fiction (especially the Narnia novels and the space trilogy).

The informed reader of the material Nemoianu broadcast will probably agree with his general view but not with some of the details.³ For instance, in connection with Lewis' transition from atheism to Christianity, one could hardly agree with Nemoianu that Lewis "experienced a sudden conversion" (Nemoianu 49). On the contrary, Lewis's conversion happened gradually, first from atheism

¹ <http://www.procesulcomunismului.com>, Colecția Cicerone Ionițoiu, section „Victimele terorii comuniste. Arestați, torturați, înțemnițați, uciși. Dicționar N-O”, accessed on Oct. 25th, 2013.

² Interview with A. Pleșu, president of NEC, Bucharest, Oct. 24th, 2013.

³ For instance, if we consider Lewis's academic career, it is natural to speak of "Oxford and Cambridge" in that order, and not, as Nemoianu does, of "Cambridge and Oxford," since Lewis studied and lectured at Oxford until 1955, when he accepted the chair of Mediaeval and Renaissance Literature at Magdalene College, Cambridge. Errors such as "Spencer" (correct: Spenser, p. 49) and "Perelandru" (correct: "Perelandra", p. 51) are probably typing or printing mistakes.

to theism, and then from theism to faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God. Between the two, there was a space of about two years during which Lewis tried to live a religious life in the absence of hope for a future life.¹ Nemoianu's assertions that *Surprised by Joy* represents "a small study" or "a theoretical work" pose another problem. In fact, neither the author's intention, stated in the preface ("The book aims at telling the story of my conversion" [Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, vii]), nor the actual substance of the book justify the idea that Lewis intended it as a theoretical work on the topic of conversion.

Nemoianu also writes that "even though C. S. Lewis never expressed his views on political topics, being content to be a common citizen conforming to the customs and obeying the laws of his English homeland, we can now infer [...] that he firmly rejected both Fascism and Communism" (50). In fact, C. S. Lewis expressed his political views on numerous occasions, and we need not infer his attitude towards Nazism or Communism by resorting to extraneous studies, since we are able to quote him directly. The fragment below is typical of Lewis's view of Communism:

Detestation for any ethic which worships success is one of my chief reasons for disagreeing with most communists. In my experience they tend, when all else fails, to tell me that I ought to forward the revolution because 'it is bound to come'. One dissuaded me from my own position on the shockingly irrelevant ground that if I continued to hold it I should, in good time, be 'mown down'—argued, as a cancer might argue if it could talk, that he must be right because he could kill me (Lewis, *Reply* 69).

As for the idea of Equality, Lewis spoke often about it. The best known essay on this theme is probably the one named "Equality" (Lewis, *Concerns* 17-20). Tangential references to this issue are also to be found in the essay on "Membership":

Equality is for me in the same position as clothes. It is a result of the Fall and the remedy for it. Any attempt to retrace the steps by which we have arrived at egalitarianism and to re-introduce the old authorities on the political level is for me as foolish as it would be to take off our clothes. The Nazi and the Nudist make the same mistake. But it is the naked body, still there beneath the clothes of each one of us, which really lives. It is the hierarchical world, still alive and (very properly) hidden behind a façade of equal citizenship, which is our real concern (Lewis, "Membership" 19-20).

¹ The author's confession from *Reflections on the Psalms*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1958, page 42: "I (...) was allowed for a whole year to believe in God and try – in some stumbling fashion – to obey Him before any belief in the future life was given me."

The relationship between Christianity and politics is briefly discussed by Lewis in a very penetrating article, called “Meditation on the Third Commandment” (Lewis, *God* 196-99). In it he indirectly answers several letters which appeared in *The Guardian* calling for a political movement embodied in the form of a “Christian party.” Fully aware of the inherent difficulties of such an initiative, especially considering his response to a book by Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, Lewis points out that all parties have at bottom the common goals of well-being, safety, and a good balance between order and freedom; but that they differ on the means necessary for attaining them (Lewis, *God* 196). In order to illustrate the perplexities and contradictions which would attend the establishment of a “Christian party,” Lewis envisages the following situation: three devoted Christians can have three completely different political orientations. “Philarchus,” a devout Christian, is convinced that well-being can only come from everyone leading a Christian life, and therefore Christian living must be imposed on everyone by an authoritarian state, which will remove the last remnants of the “liberal infection.” In Philarchus’s opinion, Fascism is not evil in itself but a perverted good, while democracy is a monster whose victory would mean the defeat of Christianity. Such a character would accept help from Fascists, convinced that he and his friends are the leaven which could influence positively the dough of their party. The second character, “Stativus,” is just as devout a Christian. Adducing the Fall as a premise and being convinced that men need to have a minimum control over their fellows, but at the same time determined that God’s demands not be counteracted by Caesar’s, Stativus sees democracy as the only hope for Christian freedom. Furthermore, he is tempted to accept help from the defenders of the capitalist *status quo*, whose commercial and imperial agenda does not retain even the least appearance of theism. The third Christian is “Spartacus,” also a sincere Christian, who fervently condemns wealth, animated by the idea that “the historical Jesus” was betrayed by the apostles, by the Fathers and the Churches. Starting off from the premise that a radical change is needed, Spartacus demands a leftist revolution and is willing to accept help from those on the left who openly declare themselves enemies of God (Lewis, *God* 197).

The readers will have realized by now that the three names represent three different ideologies: Fascism, Conservatism and Communism. How, Lewis is wondering, could the three characters co-exist in a “Christian party”? Following in J. Maritain’s footsteps, he proposes a different path: that of civic responsibility mainly, but not exclusively, expressed in the form of letters to members of Parliament. Another way would be that of conversion: “He who converts his neighbour has performed the most practical Christian-political act of all” (Lewis, *God* 198).

Lewis's reflections on the insidious danger of the "humanitarian theory" of punishment¹ and his essay on pacifism² belong as well in the "politics" category. As for the theme of individual freedom and the relationship between the state and the individual, we find another memorable passage in "Screwtape proposes a toast." Since the following fragment comes from a speech by Screwtape, a "senior devil," we cannot avoid the conclusion that for Lewis the two ideologies highly praised by him are in fact two versions of political devilry:

Hidden in the heart of this striving for Liberty there was also a deep hatred of personal freedom. That invaluable man Rousseau first revealed it. In his perfect democracy, you remember, only the state religion is permitted, slavery is restored, and the individual is told that he has really willed (though he didn't know it) whatever the Government tells him to do. From that starting point, via Hegel (another indispensable propagandist on our side), we easily contrived both the Nazi and the Communist state. Even in England we were pretty successful. I heard the other day that in that country a man could not, without a permit, cut down his own tree with his own axe, make it into planks with his own saw, and use the planks to build a tool shed in his own garden." (Lewis, *Screwtape Toast* 17).

No doubt a much deeper and wider research into Lewis's works would reveal even more reflections on political issues—some still very timely—and would strengthen the conviction that Lewis was not content simply to be a law-abiding citizen of his country. On the contrary, by virtue of his ethical and political acuity, he often publicly drew attention to the fallacies and delusions which can accompany the subtle semantic mutations constantly emerging in discourse on education, freedom, politics, values, and so on.

3. THE RECEPTION OF C. S. LEWIS IN THE ROMANIAN EVANGELICAL SPACE

3.1. *THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE* (*LEUL, VRĂJITOAREA ȘI DULAPUL*, 1977)

I mentioned at the beginning of this study that the first book of Lewis's to be translated into Romanian was *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The edition contains no information about the date or place of publication, but the *terminus*

¹ C.S. Lewis, "The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment", in *God in the Dock. Essays on Theology and Ethics*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1970, p. 287-300.

² C.S. Lewis, "Why I am Not a Pacifist" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. W. Hooper, New York, Macmillan, 1980, p. 33-53.

ad quem is 1977, when one copy arrived in the library of Amfilofie Liubimirescu, a student at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Bucharest.¹ Professor Marius Cruceru from Emanuel Baptist University in Oradea has confirmed to me that he read this book around 1978 and that, at the time, this type of Christian literature was carefully concealed by its owners. The available information implies that the book was translated and distributed by a Romanian Baptist organization based in the USA.² The most striking aspect of this translation is the Romanization of the characters' names: Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy became Petru, Suzana, Costel and Lucica, Mrs. Macready became "doamna Tudor," and Ivy, Margaret and Betty, the maids, were allotted Romanian names as well: Leana, Margareta and Veta.

3.2. *MERE CHRISTIANITY (CREȘTINISMUL REDUS LA ESENȚE, 1987)*

If we were to take an opinion poll among Lewis's faithful readers and ask them which is the first Lewis book they would want to see translated into another language, I suspect that *Mere Christianity* would get the most votes. Baptist pastor Iosif Țon, whose criticism of the Communist regime earned him expulsion from Romania in 1981, made a fundamental contribution to the translation and printing of this book for Romanian readers. Not long after his arrival in the USA, Iosif Țon took over the Societatea Misionară Română (Romanian Missionary Society, Wheaton, Illinois), which was printing and distributing theological books for Romanians behind the Iron Curtain.

Iosif Țon had been a student at Regent's Park College in Oxford (1969-1972), but he only read *Mere Christianity* later, in the '80s, while in the United States. Impressed by Lewis's perspective on Christianity ("not as a solution to go to heaven, but as the plan of the Holy Trinity to make people into God's image")³, he included the book in the editorial program of SMR. The translation was made by Livius Percy and edited by John Tipei. Iosif Țon recalls that the title of the book posed some difficulties, and he eventually opted for *Creștinismul redus la esențe (Christianity Reduced to its Essence)* because he believed that the author's purpose was to present the essence of Christianity.⁴

¹ I owe this information to Dana Sisoiev who has this book in her personal library.

² Dănuț Mănăstireanu (Word Vision România) considers the initiative belonged to Ieremia Hodoroabă (1923-1997), pastor of the Romanian Baptist Church in Paris, editor and radio presenter at TransWorld Radio "Monte Carlo". According to more plausible information, the initiative for translating and publishing the book came from a group of Baptist Christians in the United States, members of congregation in Chicago pastored by Petru Popovici.

³ Letter from Iosif Țon to Emanuel Conțac, Oct. 4th, 2013.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Oct. 4th, 2013.

Before the fall of Communism, SMR was using the services of a Dutch typographer who agreed to print Christian literature destined to be smuggled across the Iron Curtain. Such books, printed in runs of about 3,000 copies, did not usually include all the customary bibliographic information—except for the printing house and year of publication. This was to protect individuals from retaliation by the Communist government. Once printed, the books were distributed to various organizations specializing in the clandestine dissemination of Christian literature within the Communist bloc.

About 3,000 copies of *Creștinismul redus la esențe* were printed in 1987; it was then reprinted in 1991 and 1994. Ten years were to pass before the release of a new version, entitled *Creștinism, pur și simplu (Christianity Pure and Simple)*, Humanitas, 2004).

3.3. *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS (SCRISORILE LUI ZGÂNDĂRILĂ, 1993)*

A first attempt to translate and publish the famous Screwtape Letters was made during the Communist period. In 1987, Baptist pastor Paul Negruț, a former colleague of Iosif Țon in pastoral ministry, entrusted Mirela Rădoi, a member of the Emanuel Baptist Church in Oradea, with the task of translating this book, which was to be published by SMR. Unfortunately, the manuscript never made it to the printing press, mainly because the project proved to be more expensive than estimated (translation rights for such a book cost around \$1,000 US).¹ After Logos Publishers (based in Cluj-Napoca) was established in 1992, its founders, Dănuț Mănăstireanu, Adrian Pastor, and Mirela Rădoi (married name, DeLong) included The Screwtape Letters in their editorial plan. The version prepared for print before 1989 proved impossible to recover, so the initial handwritten draft of the translation was carefully reviewed with the help of Marinela Blaj, a collaborator of the publisher at the time.²

At first the editorial team had in mind several options for translating the name Screwtape, among which were Scaraoțchi, Zgândărică or Zgândărel. Subsequently, Marinela Blaj, who was the book editor, suggested Zgândărilă, a name whose main advantage was that it evoked such well-known Romanian characters as Gerilă, Setilă, Flămânzilă, and Ochilă from a famous short story by Ion Creangă.³ The edition benefited from the talent of graphic artist Marcel Chirnoagă (1930-2008), who drew the illustrations that accompany the text. An amusing anecdote recalls the artist's reaction when Rodica Mocan presented him

¹ Letter from Mirela DeLong (Rădoi) to Emanuel Conțac, Oct. 3rd, 2013.

² Letter from Mirela DeLong (Rădoi) to Emanuel Conțac, Oct. 2nd, 2013.

³ Letter from Mirela DeLong (Rădoi) to Emanuel Conțac, Oct. 2nd, 2013.

with the proposition of collaboration on behalf of the publisher: “Madam, you have found the right man for the job. I specialize in the diabolic.”¹

At that time of great momentum and enthusiasm, Logos printed 10,000 copies of *Screwtape*, far more than the demand that could be expected from the Evangelical market. Moreover, readers who had just thrown off the blanket of Communism could hardly have been expected to appreciate the moral and theological subtleties implied by the senior devil’s 31 letters to his apprentice. Not surprisingly, when *Screwtape* was published by Humanitas in 2003, the interest in the old Logos version revived significantly.

3.4. *OUT OF THE SILENT PLANET (DEPARTE DE PLANETĂ TĂCUTĂ, 1995)*

From the same time (early ’90s) dates the project undertaken by Logos to publish the Space Trilogy. It was a very ambitious project, and sales of the first volume (*Departa de planeta tăcută*, translated by Mirela Rădoi, 1995), of which 5,000 copies were printed, did not meet the expectations of the editors.² Despite the recommendation, on the last page, of “C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, Space Trilogy, part II”, the second volume never got beyond the project stage, and the series has never been completed.

The low interest of the Evangelical market for C. S. Lewis’s writings, the difficulty in finding competent translators, and the obstacles which face editors interested in purchasing rights to their publication explain why so far only one Evangelical printing house in Romania has succeeded in publishing another title of C. S. Lewis.³ The Hypogrammos printing house made a notable attempt by purchasing the translation rights for *Letters to an American Lady*. However, the financial difficulties they encountered in recent years have left the project in an uncertain state.

Any analysis of the reception of C. S. Lewis among Romanian Evangelicals should also consider the dissemination of Lewis’s thinking through other Protestant or Evangelical authors, such as Alister McGrath⁴, Philip Yancey⁵, John Piper⁶, Timothy Keller⁷ or Sheldon Vanauken⁸, as well as J. I. Packer, D. A. Carson, Rick Warren, Norman Geisler, Carl Henry, Ravi

¹ Letter from Dănuț Mănăstireanu to Emanuel Conțac, Oct. 2nd, 2013.

² Letter from Mirela DeLong (Rădoi) to Emanuel Conțac, Oct. 3rd, 2013.

³ C.S. Lewis, *Anatomia unei dureri*, trad. Cornel Țicărat, Oradea, Kerigma, 2014.

⁴ Alister McGrath, *Un nor de martori*, trad. S. Fărcășan, Cluj-Napoca, Logos, 2001.

⁵ Philip Yancey, *Cu sufletul rămas în viață*, trad. A. Horvath, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Aqua Forte, 2008.

⁶ John Piper, *Însetat după Dumnezeu*, trad. N. Grama, Brașov, Neemia, 2006.

⁷ T. Keller, *Argument pentru Dumnezeu*, Oradea, Editura Kerigma, 2013.

⁸ Sheldon Vanauken, *Îndurare aspră*, Oradea, Editura Kerigma, 2008. The book includes 18 letters Lewis wrote to the author.

Zacharias, Lee Strobel, John Ortberg, Josh McDowell and John Stott. Given the limitations of this study, I have chosen to mention only a few representative titles, without proposing an exhaustive presentation of the manner in which Lewis is quoted by these authors.

In recent years the blogosphere has played an important role in the diffusion of the information on C. S. Lewis among Romanian Evangelicals and beyond. A thorough survey of the most visited Evangelical blogs would reveal hundreds of quotations from C. S. Lewis, recurrent references to his works, and announcements of books by or about him published or about to be published.

4. C. S. LEWIS IN SECULAR PUBLISHERS' LISTS

After the fall of Communism A. Pleșu had a decisive role in the publishing by Humanitas of a volume consisting mainly of matter from Lewis's apologetic writings. Three titles whose matter appears within that book— *Despre minuni*, *Cele patru iubiri*, and *Problema durerii* (translated by Sorin Mărculescu and Vlad Russo) were first published in 1997 in the Terra Lucida collection, and republished in 2012, with a new cover. In an edition of 6,500 copies, this "trilogy" remains one of the most popular of C. S. Lewis's works in Romania. Two of them, moreover, were published as individual volumes: *Despre minuni* (*Miracles*) was first printed by Top H in 2001 and was later (2007) included in the *Înțelepciune și credință* list along with *Problema durerii* (*The Problem of Pain*).

On the trail blazed by Andrei Pleșu through the first post-Communist decade, three other important works were soon added to the list of *Înțelepciune și credință*, coordinated by Anca Manolescu: *The Screwtape Letters* (*Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*, transl. by Sorana Corneanu, 2003, 2007, 2010), *The Abolition of Man* (*Desfășurarea omului*, transl. by Petruța-Oana Năiduț, 2004), and *Mere Christianity* (*Creștinism, pur și simplu*, transl. by Dan Rădulescu, 2004). The two-volume anthology edited by Walter Hooper as *The Business of Heaven* (1983) has also been translated into Romanian under the title *Treburile cerești* (transl. by Mirela Adăscăliței, 2005); but perhaps its Romanian presence was overshadowed by the more popular titles. The best-seller by far is *The Screwtape Letters* (*Sfaturile unui diavol bătrân către unul mai tânăr*), with 13,000 copies printed during the past ten years.¹

Romanian readers could become acquainted with Lewis's spiritual journey from the autobiographical *Surprised by Joy*, published in a Romanian version in 2008. Having translated *Surprised by Joy* himself, the author of this study can attest from experience the difficulties and satisfactions that come from translating a work of such high intellectual calibre. Although its popularity has

¹ Letter from Iustina Croitoru (Humanitas) to Emanuel Conțac, Nov. 6th, 2013.

not surpassed that of *The Screwtape Letters* or the trilogy (*Despre minuni, Cele patru iubiri, Problema durerii*), it has been reprinted (2011, 2013; total run: 5,500 copies) and has been reviewed by such critics as Sorin Lavric (“Săgeata bucuriei,” *România Literară* nr. 34, September 2010), Daniel Fărcaș (“Surprins de C. S. Lewis,” August 2009), Corneliu Simuț (*Oglindanet*, 10 February 2010) and Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru (“Disecția unui sentiment,” *Dilemateca*, October 2013).

For the many readers who have rightly wondered why conversion occupies such a limited space in a work subtitled “A conversion story,” I wish to point out that Lewis had presented his intention as clearly as possible in his subtitle “The Shape of My Early Life” — it is no accident that the recounting of formative experiences from his childhood and adolescence fills almost half the book. But since market forces compel publishers to make immediate appeal to as many potential buyers as possible, a somewhat different subtitle implying an account of the process of “conversion” was given to the Romanian version.

More recently, Humanitas has enriched its Lewis series with three more releases: *Fern-seed and Elephants* (*Ferigi și elefanți și alte eseuri despre creștinism*, transl. by myself, 2011); *Reflections on the Psalms* (*Meditații la Psalmi*, transl. by myself, 2013) and *The Great Divorce* (*Marea despărțire*, transl. by A. Macovescu, 2013). The book on the Psalms had a run of 2,000 copies, while the other two were produced in 4,000 copies each.

Screwtape, the most popular of C. S. Lewis’s books in Romanian, has been published both as an audiobook (*Sfaturile...*, read by Mircea Diaconu, 2008) and as an ebook (2012). Lewis’s autobiographical *Surprins de Bucurie*, 2012, has also been released as an ebook. The ten titles published between 1997-2013 (to which *Treburile cerești* should be added) justify the conclusion that Humanitas remains the most important promoter of Lewis’ works in post-Communist Romania.

5. A ROMANIAN MOUTHPIECE FOR LEWIS AND *THE INKLINGS*: PROFESSOR RODICA ALBU

In post-1989, Lewis and his circle of friends known as *The Inklings* found an ardent hermeneut in professor Rodica Albu, faculty member of the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași.¹ A prime example of her labours was the volume *Inklings. Litera și spiritul* (Iași, 2004), which contains excellent introductory materials about Lewis, Tolkien, Williams and Barfield, as well as significant excerpts or full works by the authors in question. Votaries of C. S. Lewis will find between the covers of this book not only a different version of *The Abolition*

¹ R. Albu, “Inklings in Romania”, in *Inklings. Jahrbuch für Literatur und Aesthetik* [Brendow Verlag], No. 24, 2006, pp. 218-221.

of *Man* but also fragments from the space trilogy and the *Chronicles of Narnia* (viz. *The Silver Chair*).

Professor Rodica Albu has given Lewis a pre-eminent place in her research, privileging two of his works: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Abolition of Man*. Her reading, in Communist Romania, of the first *Narnia* volume effectively turned the book into a powerful parable about a repressive regime which sought to impose its absolute and unchallenged control on all spheres of society and even on the mind and consciousness of man itself.¹ Albu amply demonstrated that books have a life of their own, that they grow richer in meaning with every careful reader who contributes his own interpretation to the reception history of that work. Romanian readers will also be interested in Professor Albu's notable article about *The Abolition of Man*, a complex and profound study perceived by many to be Lewis' most insightful book on the dangerous process by which current education helps (perhaps inadvertently) create "men without chests".²

5. CONCLUSIONS

The severe ideological and political constraints that encumbered Romania during the Communist years impeded, but were unable entirely to hinder, the translation of two of C. S. Lewis's books, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (*Leul, vrăjitoarea și dulapul*) and *Mere Christianity* (*Creștinismul redus la esențe*).

Since the 1989 revolution, the editorial activities of the Societatea Misionară Română and Logos Publishers have widened the Romanian reception of works by and about C. S. Lewis, but not to the extent it had when Lewis was made a headliner in the list of Humanitas Printing House. The first years' activities of Logos Publishers suggest that Lewis is too multifaceted an author to appeal to only a single denominational market, while at the same time his cultural range and intellectual rigour make him less appealing than might have been hoped to readers unfamiliar with his kind of theological and philosophical speculation, or are insensitive to the mythic and symbolic echoes in his fiction. Now, fifty years after his death, Lewis's works have permeated a neutral denominational space and drawn to themselves readers from all theological traditions. There is reason to believe that, as new titles are added to the Lewis oeuvre in Romanian, his position as a point of reference will become more firmly recognized, and interest in "the other Lewis" (the author of the space trilogy and

¹ R. Albu, "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe or How a Romanian Adult in the 90s Reads a British Book for Children Written in 1950", in *Inklings. Jahrbuch für Literatur und Ästhetik*, 11. Band, Brendow, 1993, pp. 39-48.

² R. Albu, "Note la 'Abolirea omului' de C.S. Lewis (1943), la început de mileniu", in *Philologica Jassyensia*, vol. II, no. 2, 2006, pp. 9-16.

the literary and historical scholar) will increase. New technologies and formats such as the audiobook and ebook will undoubtedly contribute to enlarging the circle of readers who will discover with delight the clarity and rigour of his argumentation, the penetration of his intellect, and the richness of his imagination.

I cannot conclude this study without drawing the attention of the Romanian readers to the biography written by Alister McGrath¹ (Andreas Idreos Professor of Science and Religion at the University of Oxford) and currently translated into Romanian by Natan Mladin. No doubt, when it is published, it will be of great interest to Lewis fans in Romania.²

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¹ Alister E. McGrath, *C.S. Lewis: A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*, Carol Stream, Ill, Tyndale House Publishers, 2013.

² At the time of the writing of these lines, the translation work was still in progress. According to the information provided by the translator himself, the volume is going to be published either during the autumn of 2014, or the spring of 2015.

³ I am grateful to my friend Teofil Stanciu, who allowed me to take and update the bibliography he wrote and published on the blog <http://sriptorie.wordpress.com/>.

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