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**Arșavir Acterian
Doctoral Dissertation**

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The generation of '27 was the most glorified in the Romanian history of literature and competes with no other. Unfortunately, not every member of this generation is known to the public. The most representative are well-known both nationally and abroad: Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Eugen Ionesco and some other. Among those who had suffered in the communist prisons we can mention: Petre Tutea and Constantin Noica. Some of the less-known to the public are Acterian brothers, Ionel Jianu and the list can go on. The members of the generation had set high cultural goals, some gained international fame while others were put in prisons by the Communists.

The generation of '27 was made up of young talented artists having interests in different fields: economy, philosophy, literature and others. It was a generation of tremendous talent and creativity. It also was an exceptional generation of people who may not exist ever again. Many revisit those times with nostalgia from a social, economical and political point of view wondering about the possibility of having it back.

An important feature of the generation was its complete originality of writing and involvement in all aspects of culture. Their existentialism helped us see a different side of the Romanian culture. The young artists did not want themselves to be compared to their predecessors out of vanity.

The fact that Arșavir Acterian was part of this generation offers him credit for his cultural value. Being always worried about the others, helping his mother and sister when the two needed him and living in harsh conditions made Acterian satisfied just to write in his diary in lack of time for anything else related to art and creation. In the meantime, having the communists come and rule the country meant such a tragedy for Acterian and his fellow companions of the generation who did not leave the country.

This generation was different from the previous generations since it could concentrate on the cultural dimension only. The main objective of the country, which was having a united country, named as „Romania Mare” was fulfilled, as a consequence the youth could focus on the cultural and artistic matters.

The young artists and their ultimate wish to succeed and make themselves a name in the international cultural world had to be observed. Many of them were spending time in libraries trying to gain more knowledge, to improve their skills and become better.

The acknowledgement eventually came because of the honesty in their beliefs. They were united by the single goal of succeeding to impose the Romanian culture where it belonged.

They strongly believed in originality and originality means creation. They did not avoid the mysticism as they were obviously interested in it but avoided politics at first.

Over the time this generation had different names such as: the orthodox generation, the generation of the 30's, and the last one which is known today and was given by Dan C. Mihăilescu – the generation of "27.

In this Doctoral Dissertation my main focus is to discuss one of the less-known artists of his generation Arșavir Acterian. The Acterian family was known for three persons: Arșavir, Jeny and Haig.

The present paper is structured in three chapters and presents a short description of the generation of "27, the life and articles of Arșavir Acterian and the opinions of some of the persons who knew him as well as an interview with his best friend Bedros Horasangian.

The first chapter explains some facts about the generation of '27 and biographical data about Arșavir Acterian. Without a doubt this generation had been the creation of Nae Ionescu. Keeping him apart from the Royal Camarila forced these young men to follow him to Legionarism.

Arșavir Acterian chose The Legionary Movement in 1937, although he had been written in the movements magazine for years. The reason why he joined this group came after a sad event that took place during the Civil Spanish War when Vasile Marin and Ion Moța, two young legionars were killed. Later on this decision of joining the group would not at all be beneficial to his carrier, moreover it would put him to prison.

Chapter two offers some of the most representative articles written by Arșavir Acterian showing the progress of his written work during the inter-war period.

Following his debut in the high school magazine "Spiru Haret" from Bucharest named "Vlăstarul" Arșavir Acterian writes for different newspapers and starting from 1937 his articles are strongly legionary. Arșavir Acterian wrote many articles using different pen-names and because of that some of the articles can hardly be identified as his.

Next chapter, number three, has two distinct parts. One shows the others opinions on Arșavir Acterian, the way he was seen by them and the second part deals with the exchange of letters between Arșavir Acterian and Emil Cioran on one hand and Lucian Boz on the other hand.

The paper ends with a presentation of the magazine “Ultima Oră” where Arșavir Acterian made his debut as a journalist.

Arșavir Acterian led a simple life helping the others around him and putting himself in the second place.

ACTERIAN, Arșavir born in Sept. 18, 1907 Constanta – died in Sept. 17, 1997, Bucharest was a publicist and memorialist. His father, Aram Acterian, was an accountant and had launched himself into doing commerce with cereals. His mother, Haiganus, (b. Benlian) came to Dobrogea from Kayseri, Turkey.



Fig. 1.4. Arșavir Acterian

Source: istoriiregasite.wordpress.com

Due to some circumstances both families of his mother and father come to our country and settle here. Aram and Haiganuș had three children: Haig, Arșavir and Jeny.

Haig Acterian was born in March 5 1904, Arșavir was born three years later in Sept. 18, 1907 and Jeny Acterian in June 22, 1916.

1.1.1 The stages of Arșavir’s life

There are many stages in Arșavir’s life.

The first one would be the educational one 1907-1933.

He goes to the Evangelica School in his home town. After graduating the primary school he attended the “Spiru Haret” High school from Bucharest which was also attended by his brother Haig. Having this information we assume that the Acterians moved to Bucharest in 1917.

Arșavir Acterian was supposed to first attend the High school at the age of 18 and four years later he takes the leaving certificate. Arșavir goes to school later than normal because the WWI.

Some of the colleagues Arșavir had were: Niculescu Radu- Mislea, Potra Gheorghe, Brezeanu (Brezianu) Barbu, Noica Constantin, Axente Nelu, Teodorescu Nicolae, Vasilescu – Valjean(Valjan), Nicu Ionescu Anton.



Fig. 1.5. Memory from Sixth grade from “Spiru Haret” High school from 1926

Source: cutiacuvechituri.wordpress.com

And some of the teachers: Nicodim Locusteanu – Latin, Dimitrie Papadopol – German, Iosif Frollo – French, D. Focsa – Cosmography, Boian- Physical Education.

Some of Acterian’s colleagues had become famous writers, such as: Constantin Noica, Barbu Brezianu or Potra Gheorghe. Another famous colleague was Radu Sighireanu, a promising poet who died young of tuberculosis.

Speaking about the professors who had a great impact upon Acterian, we can name Grigore Moisil’s father – Constantin Moisil, Academician and Numismatist. Another professor was Ion Barbu, the pen name of Dan Barbilian, teacher of mathematics and Locusteanu, the Latin teacher.

A group of students together with Acterian started publishing articles in the High school magazine and the leader was nobody else but Mircea Eliade. Constantin Noica was also publishing poems under the pen name of A.C. Ion.

In 1927 Mircea Eliade published “Itinerariul spiritual”, the manifesto of the generation of “27. The group of young writers is forming and they are looking for ways of expressing the cultural goal. In 1928 at the age of 21 Acterian makes his debut in the High school magazine named “Vlăstarul” with the collaboration of Haig Acterian and Mircea Eliade.

In 1928 together with Barbu Brezianu and Constantin Noica Acterian starts collaboration for the newspaper “Ultima oră”. The second page of the newspaper was dedicated to the culture section. The chief of the culture section was Petru Comanescu who entitled the young writers to be in charge of it. In one issue of the newspaper the writers even wrote a report about “Craii de Curtea-Veche” by Mateiu Caragiale.

In another issue, the young writers published an interview with Alexandru Davila and brought him into the spotlight. That year, Alexandru Davila was awarded the National Prize for Literature, probably due to the attention he was given recently to his work by the young writers in the newspaper.

“Then, after graduating, together with Arșavir and Dinu Noica we were asked to be part of the culture section of “Ultima oră”. We also were occasionally in charge with paying tribute to different personalities. Knowing that, we chose to sit down with Alexandru Davila, in his humble flat who told us all about his past and some stories about Vlaicu Vodă. The article came out on March 2, 1929. That year the drama writer Alexandru Davila was awarded “The National Prize for Literature and died on October 20. We were proud to think that the award might have had something to do with our article in “Ultima oră”- this is what G. Călinescu wrote in his History of Romanian Literature.

In 1929 Acterian attended the courses of the Law School which he graduated in 1933. During this time he continues writing articles for newspapers. After graduation he becomes assistant of Anibal Teodorescu, a law professor hesitating between law and journalism. After working for the newspaper “Ultima oră”, Acterian moves to another newspaper entitled “Vremea”.

In 1929 Acterian falls in love with A. a mysterious lady whose identity was not disclosed, but the relationship comes to an end only after two years. It seems Acterian was a loner and he prefers being by himself.

The second stage is 1933–1937.

Emil Botta and some of his friends bring into existence “Corabia cu ratați” a battle between generations that took place during 1935 – 1936. Among the members there were: Arșavir Acterian (Emil Botta’s friend), Luca Dumitrescu, Ovid Marinescu, Corneliu Temensky, Ghiță Soare. This group of young writers was in good terms with Emil Cioran and

Eugen Ionescu who were out of “Corabia cu ratati” (the Boat of losers) greeted by Emil Botta with these words: “O sive jeunesse”.

These young men didn’t consider themselves to be “losers” but their intention was to criticize the snobbish attitude.

During this second period Acterian publishes articles in “Idea Românească”, but they are not extremist articles.

His third stage comes 1937 – 1949.

1937 is the year of his first legionary article being under the influence of Vasile Marin and Ion Moța deaths on the Spanish battlefield. The two heroes were killed in Majadahonda, Spain while fighting together with General Francisco Franco against the socialists, the communists and the anarchists. Spanish Civil War took place between July 17, 1936 and April 1, 1939.



Fig. 1.6. Arșavir Acterian

Source: www.wikipedia.ro

Acterian turns to the Legionary movement. In 1937 he joined the legionary group “Idea Românească”. He did not attend the meetings when Acterian needed to join the army, otherwise Acterian took part at all the meetings of the group. The group was active 1937 – 1944.

In 1941 the Legionary group tried to take over the country by dismissing Ion Antonescu and the legionary attack took place January 21-23, 1941. Arșavir was not involved in it as he was at home taking care of his ill mother.

In 1943 Arşavir's brother Haig Acterian aged 39, died on the battlefield of WWII. He was also involved in the Legionary movement. Acterian's mother died the same year, too.

In 1946 the Legionary group is reactivated until 1949 when all the members are arrested following a slip of information.

The fourth stage comes 1949 – 1953.

These are the imprisonment years in the Communist regime that he did not talk about.

The fifth stage is 1953 – 1959.

Arşavir leads a modest life taking different jobs inferior to his qualification. Between the two imprisonment periods he makes a living out of being a bookshop salesman, antiquary salesman, statistician for the Blood Transfusion Centre in Bucharest.

It was a difficult period of time in which Acterian was also taking care of his sister who was suffering from a serious medical condition. Acterian stood by his sister until 1958 when she died.

The sixth stage comes between the 1959 – 1964 imprisonment. He was sent to prison in the case of Noica – Pillat and was released on the basis of a special decree law in 1964. This kind of lawsuit during the communist era was decided by the communists and not by the legal system of the country. An important role was held by the Securitate. The charges brought in the case of Noica – Pillat are ridiculous from the today's point of view, but they were considered very serious back then. The ones who were considered dangerous for the regime were the intellectuals and the communists wanted to make sure that they are kept silent.

The brightest intellectuals who did not leave the country were brought to the so-called justice and were sent to prison without committing any crime. All the well-known intellectuals were imprisoned for long periods of time. If they could have chosen to live abroad, they would have led different lives. They would have been internationally known just like Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran. Arşavir Acterian could have been just like them.

What is interesting about the lawsuit is that many of the defendants did not know each other, even though they were part of the same group writing the history together.

After five months of being in custody, Arşavir Acterian was investigated and the lawsuit which lasted only two days started in February 24, 1960. The target was to exterminate the group of intellectual writers, 23 in total, whose only fault was to have read and shared books written by Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran.

Mircea Eliade states in June 10, 1960: "Virgil Ierunca wrote me that Mariette Sadova was arrested for taking to the country from Paris books by Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran. I

am horrified at the thought that I was responsible for it. Mariana Parlier told me she had seen in 1959 in Romania that *Foret interdite* had been lent for 100 lei. Marietta Sadova also told me that Șerban Cioculescu was happy for it being my best novel and at the same time the best Romanian novel.



Fig. 1.7. Arșavir Acterian and Marietta Sadova together with friends

Source: www.zf.ro

On March 1, 1960 twenty- five of the defendants were charged to 6 – 25 years of imprisonment and also 10 years of community service. The punishment of the Noica – Pillat group amounted to 268 years.

This lawsuit is known under the name of the “mystical- legionary intellectuals lawsuit” although some defendants were anti-legionary: Alexandru Paleologu and Dinu Pillat. (IICCMER).

As a conclusion it may be said that the communist regime wanted to see the entire well – known intellectuals behind bars, no matter their previous beliefs. Even though not all the members were legionars, they were said to be, and they were all going to share the same fate that of being convicted.

Another paradox of the lawsuit is represented by the duplicity of the communists who used Marietta Sadova to bring into the country books by Emil Cioran and Mircea Eliade as Constanta Crăciun suggested her to do and after that Marietta Sadova is convicted for illegally bringing into the country books written by legionary writers.

The communist history presents these facts as changes necessary to be brought by the new regime. The freedom of the intellectuals was turned into terror while Gheorghiu Dej tried to maintain himself as a leader. Starting with 1957 more and more intellectuals are being arrested and it all comes to an end with the Noica – Pillat group.(IICCMER)

The representatives of the Romanian Communist Party had the goal to promote the Romanian culture if it would support its political beliefs. Needless to say is that it was impossible for the intellectuals to support the party. Constanța Crăciun, Culture Minister in 1956 – 1960 and Pavel Țugui from the Culture Departament asked Marietta Sadova and George Calboreanu to go to Paris with the actors from the National Theatre of Bucharest with the request of contacting Eliade , Cioran and Ionescu. These three writers were asked to support the Communist Party from Romania. When coming back home, Marietta Sadova brought to the country some books of the famous writers: “Ispita de a exista” and “ Scrisoare către un prieten din departare” by Emil Cioran, “Mituri și simboluri”, “Pădurea interzisă” and “Mituri eternei reîntoarceri” by Mircea Eliade.

“Ispita de a exista” by Cioran was left on Constanța Crăciun’s desk and the rest of the books were shared by the intellectuals of those days. Bringing forbidden books in the country and letting them circle among her friends was one count of the accusation for Marietta Sadova.

The first of the group to be arrested was Constantin Noica on December 11, 1958. The lawsuit started on February 24, 1960 and Arșavir Acterian was arrested on September 12, 1959. After being investigated Acterian was guilty of the accusations together with Conatantin Noica, Sandu Lazarescu, Gh. Florian, Constantin Ranetti, Vidrascu Emanoil, Marietta Sadova, Alexandru Paleologu, Nicu Steinhardt, Beatrice Strelisker.

Handing forbidden books by Arșavir Acterian to Dinu Pillat was an enormous crime. Being an antiquarian Acterian had sold books by Cioran or Eliade. He was also talking bad about the regime and all the above were incriminating him in the eyes of the regime supporters.

In 1958 Acterian was handed “Scrisoare către un prieten de departe” by Al. Paleologu and he highly recommended it.

Acterian was arrested for a second time on Sept.12 1959, convicted to 18 years of hard work and freed on July 30, 1964.

The seventh stage was 1964 – 1989.

After being freed Acterian is monitored by the Securitate and he leads a simple modest life.

In his own file CNSAS R 41665 and SRI 74187 we can observe that Acterian was talked about with the name of Bălănescu Gabriel.

There is also a Report dated August 4, 1965 saying that ACTERIAN ARȘAVIR – NAZARET should be registered at Serv. “C” as being indecipherable when asked to be agent. This is approved.

The eighth stage and the last one was between 1990 – 1997.

Acterian succeeds in publishing his brother’s work “Cealaltă parte a vieții noastre” and his sister’s “Jurnalul unei ființe greu de mulțumit”.

Last but not least he manages to publish his own works “Jurnalul unui pseudo-filosof”, “Cum am devenit creștin” and “ Despre mirare”. After publishing the works they are highly acclaimed.

The motif of his work has always been his constant wonder.

Arșavir Acterian died in 1997 and lived his life for the others getting used to the hardships and the isolation of his own.

The generation ’27 was made up of a group of hard working young men active in different fields: economics, philosophy, literature, and so on. It was a generation of talented and creative men.

Arșavir Acterian was part of this generation. He graduated the Law School but he was very into journalism, he was fascinated about Professor Nae Ionescu and his charismatic personality, he was also attracted by philosophy although Acterian did not create his own philosophical system. The generation built a special relationship with Mihail Sebastian and Mircea Eliade.

It was a generation that wanted to acclaim its status and to introduce itself internationally. Members of the generation who stayed in the country suffered terror and imprisonment losing their freedom of expression even after being released from prison. The ones who succeeded to leave the country couldn’t come back for fear of not losing their freedom.

The generation ’27 dreamed about building a solid base for culture and introducing the Romanian culture on the International stage. Some writers of the period succeeded to make themselves known internationally: Eliade, Ionescu, Cioran.

The legacy of Arșavir Acterian is made up his memories about the ‘27, portraits and different points of view.

There are different stages in Acterian’s life.

Arșavir Acterian has Armenian origins, even though he had never spoken the language. He attended the Law school and was fascinated about Professor Nae Ionescu. Acterian was highly influenced by his ideas and he will pay a high price for them. Acterian was also influenced by his brother Haig together with his wife Marietta Sadova who were active members of the legionary movement. Acterian led a simple modest life:

Education stage between 1907 – 1933. A long but important stage in his evolution.

Second stage between 1933 – 1937. Writing articles for newspapers and magazines, including “Axa”.

Third stage between 1937 – 1949 Arșavir becomes a legionary taking part at their meetings.

Fourth stage between 1949 – 1953 has little information on Acterian’s life.

Fifth stage between his first parole and the second arrest with the Noica – Pillat group.

Sixth stage is the imprisonment with the Noica – Pillat group

Seventh stage is between 1964 – 1989 Acterian had different minor jobs.

Eighth stage is between 1990 – 1997 Acterian tries to make for the lost time and publishes his siblings’ and his own works.

Arșavir Acterian had a prodigious inter-war work, but most of it was published under impossible to detect various pen-names. There are some representative articles that can be identified as being his. The writer did not succeed to collect all his articles in one individual work to be published, but he witnessed having some books come out.

Acterian did not equal the literary value of Cioran and Eliade, but left us his supreme legacy. Acterian was less known to the public but he was a distinct member of the ’27 generation. He led a reclusive life and had put the other’s well being first. He had empathy for human sufferings and never lost his hope. At first he did not trust in God but changed all that and turned into a Christian.

Acterian comes from a family with cultural interest and along with Haig and Jeny left their legacy to the next generations. He made it possible for his two siblings to have their works published posthumously. Acterian was good friends with Cioran, Eliade and Ionescu, who lived in exile and C. Noica and the rest of the group who did not live the country. He also change letter with Emil Cioran or Lucian Boz.

We are left with another point of view over that period.

The generation ’27 has to be known as a total, not only by the members that left the country in order to gain fame. We should also pay attention to those who remained here and

suffered the consequences for it. Arşavir Acterian is still unknown to the public and the goal of this dissertation is to bring him closer to the people.

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