

## Family and its Image in Virgil Gheorghiu's Work

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**Abstract:** *Family constituted and still constitutes until today, an important segment of the society. In this research we will try to see how it is reflected its image in the works of one of the most important writers from the Romanian exile, namely Virgil Gheorghiu (1916-1992). Novels with autobiographical content like: The man who was travelling alone, together with the memorial writings, will constitute important sources of our investigation, together with the studies and articles dedicated to him during the time. We will try to emphasize on one side what his family meant to him and on the other, how he saw the family and understood it and its social, cultural and religious role. The research will bring into attention an aspect of the life and the work of the Romanian writer that has not been investigated until now and in the same time, to emphasize the aspects of actuality that can be found there.*

**Keywords:** *family, 25<sup>th</sup> Hour, Communism, education, Romanian exile from France, novel.*

### 1. Introduction

Important writer of the Romanian culture from the French exile, Virgil Gheorghiu passes today through a process of re-discover of his ideas and works<sup>1</sup>, both in the Romanian space, but also in the foreign one. Translated into 40 languages and screened with Anthony Queen as a main character,<sup>2</sup> he was for sure one of the authors who promoted the Romanian culture in Occident and fought against the communist abuses there. In the same time, he managed to valorise in his books, the Romanian culture, its tradition and its ethnographic treasures.<sup>3</sup> For all these reasons, he can be surely considered one of the important Romanian contemporary writers.

Conscious of this fact, we have decided to investigate in the following rows the way how the family is reflected in the works that he wrote. We will focus there on the image that the family had for him and his work and in the same time, on the way how, both as a priest and as a writer, the Romanian understands its value and its meanings.

### 2. Family and its image in Virgil Gheorghiu's work

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to works like: Thierry Gillyboeuf, *Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu – scriitorul calomniat*, Bucharest, Sophia Press, 2019; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Between theology, literature and life: Virgil Gheorghiu and his biography," in *Meta: research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Practical Philosophy*, vol. X (2018), no. 1, p. 252-257; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Conflictul dintre Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu și Monica Lovinescu, reflectat în memorialistica exilului parizian," in *Crisia*, XLVII (2017) p. 183-188; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, Ștefan Josan, Elements of spiritual autobiography in the literary works of Virgil Gheorghiu", in *Research and Science Today*, 1 (2016), no. 1, p. p. 83-88; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Omul din spatele Orei 25. Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu în dosarele Securității," în *Sargetia – Acta Musei Devensis*, Serie nouă, nr. VIII (2017), p. 373-381; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „Virgil Gheorghiu's Literary Activity Reflected in Securitate Archives," *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 149-155.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q\\_cH0zvDGJ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_cH0zvDGJ4), accessed 12. 03. 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „Virgil Gheorghiu, *Dracula în Carpați – Roman inedit*, Editura Sophia, București, 2019”, in *Sebeșul povestit*, VIII (2020), no. 15, p. 37-38.

„ Family and its Image in Virgil Gheorghiu's Work,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 225-231.

The departure point of such a research should surely be considered the memorial writings that the author published, namely the two volumes of them.<sup>4</sup> In the first one, the author speaks about the education that he received from his mother and about aspects that will be later deepened in books like: *Why did they called me Virgil?*<sup>5</sup>, about the way how his father, also evocated in a book, educated him in the spiritual matters, but also about the difficulties of the life of the family of a priest from a small village, that must pass not only thorough the financial challenges, but also thorough social ones, like the change of the calendar.<sup>6</sup> The fact that the family was so poor that in certain moments, the children suffered by hunger, together with other aspects are therefore emphasized there. In the same time, the author insists on the role given by his parents to the education of the children. The eldest of the six brothers<sup>7</sup> will be therefore sent from a school to other in order to receive a good education.

Due to the financial difficulties of the family, he will not be allowed to go to the Seminar and become a priest, but he will have to choose the King's Military College from Chişinău. Without being a point of stop, this place will constitute the one which will allow to the future writer to discover his skills in the literary space and to become known in the world of the letters and writers.

Reading his memorial writings, written somewhere in the end of author's life, one can see how important was the family from him. As it can be seen also from the later letters that he wrote them from France during the exile period,<sup>8</sup> the writer saw his father as a strong model, fact that will determine him later to orient towards the priesthood and his mother as a formative presence. In the same time, for him, family meant not only mother, father, sisters and brothers, but also the grandmother that will help him to continue his military studies and other relatives like his aunt, that was married with a Russian prince.<sup>9</sup> Probably due to the fact that he lived in the exile, fact that will increase the missing feeling that he had about them, probably also for other reasons, he will keep them a very positive image and will always write about his relatives and his parents.

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<sup>4</sup> See: Virgil Gheorghiu, *Memorii – martorul orei 25*, Bucharest, Sophia Press, 2017; Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, *Ispita Libertăţii. Memorii*, Bucharest, Sophia Press, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Virgil Gheorghiu, *Pourquoi m'a-t-on appelé Virgil?*, Monaco Ville, Les Editions du Rocher, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Fact that will be later evocated also in books like *Dracula in Carpathian Mountains*. See: Virgil Gheorghiu, *Dracula in Carpaţi*, Bucharest, Sophia Press, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> As Thierry Gillyboeuf mentions: He is the eldest of six brothers (including four sisters: Elena, Lucia, Florica and Rodica, who died at an early age, and a brother Nicolae, who will also become a priest). His father, Constantin Gheorghiu, born in 1895, studied for eight years at the "Veniamin Costachi" Seminary in Iasi, finishing school even in the year in which the Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip assassinated in Sarajevo Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sofia Chotek. To avoid his son leaving for the front, the young Constantine's mother arranged his marriage. This is how he got married on October 10, 1914 to Maria Scobai, born in 1897, the daughter of a priest from Blebea, and was ordained as a priest in Valea Albă, a few months later.” Thierry Gillyboeuf, *Virgil Gheorghiu – scriitorul calomniat*, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Omul din spatele *Orei 25*. Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu în dosarele Securităţii," p. 374; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Corespondenţa lui Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu cu părinţii săi, reflectată în documentele Securităţii," in *Tabor*, XI (2018), nr. 3, p. 72-76.

<sup>9</sup> Virgil Gheorghiu, *Memorii – martorul orei 25*, p. 269.

The departure to Zagreb, forced by the fact that he married a Jewish lady, namely Ecaterina Burbea Schneck,<sup>10</sup> fact that will create him troubles both with the Legionary Movement and with the racial laws, will determine him to write them. Therefore, in the autobiographical novel entitled: *The man who was travelling alone*, he will emphasize this aspect:

*"When he returned to his office, he began a letter to his father. He never typed letters to Izvor (the native village, our note). He prefers to write them by hand. He only had good news for home. He told them about his life in Zagreb, his literary magazines and all the small events of his existence. As he wrote, he began to smile. He shared with his parents a great victory."<sup>11</sup>*

Although he was far away, the writer was always informed about his parents and their life.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, their complicated situation during the Second World War and later, at the beginning of the Communism, will not be unknown to him. Moreover, their sufferance after his departure, will be also emphasized to him. As it can be seen from the letters that he sent them from Paris, but also from the way how he evocates them in his writings, the writer was deeply attached to his parents. For him, they represented something almost saint, due to the fact that, despite of their poverty, the priest and his wife managed to send him to study and encouraged him in his work as a writer and publisher.

Another dimension of the family that can be found in his memorial writings is the related with his wife. He will fall in love with Ecaterina Burbea Schneck<sup>13</sup> after seeing her defending a woman that was considered a criminal. Shortly after this moment, he will declare his love and will marry her, as he writes in the memories:

*"On July 29, 1939, the Black Tulip and I got married. We knew we couldn't live without each other. On the morning of our wedding, I went to my newspaper. I asked two of my colleagues, whom I found there, Dumitru Banu and Stan, to accompany me to the city. I didn't told them why, it just didn't last long. They accompanied me to the town hall in blue. Each city hall in Bucharest is named after a color. They witnessed our marriage. The mayor was very surprised and happy to receive and marry us. His name was Ispir, he was a boyar from Buciumeni. The village of vineyards and Natalia Negru, wife, in turn of the two unfortunate poets, Iosif and Anghel. We were in a great hurry to get married, because it was July 29, 1939. Exactly thirty days after World War II broke out. It was our wedding present."<sup>14</sup>*

<sup>10</sup> Mirela Drăgoi, „Histoire et Recomposition Identitaire dans les Mémoires de Virgil Gheorghiu”, in *Intercultural communication and literature*, 21 (2014), no. 1, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, *Omul care călătorea singur*, Bucharest, Sophia Press, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> For example, in the same book, he writes: "A few weeks passed. Then others. It simply came to our notice then. Matisi wrote to Izvor through every courier, but never received a reply. One day, one of his letters returned to Zagreb. The Romanian Post had written on the envelope: *The recipient was evacuated from Izvor. The new address is unknown.*

With the letter in his hand, Trajan enters the minister's office.

- Why was my father evacuated from Izvor? asked the minister. I no longer understand anything.

The minister unfolded a map of Romania. He asked her to show him where the Spring was.

- "The Russians are now in northern Moldova," the minister said. Don't you see that the front line passes exactly through the Spring? There are fights in those parts. Right at the Spring. It is normal that the civilian population was evacuated." *Ibidem*, p. 203-204.

<sup>13</sup> Constantin Cubleşan, *Escală în croazieră*, Cluj-Napoca, Grinta Press, 2011, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Virgil Gheorghiu, *Memorii – martorul orei 25*, p. 479.

„Family and its Image in Virgil Gheorghiu's Work,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 225-231.

The fact that she was a Jewish<sup>15</sup> will cause him a lot of troubles, as mentioned previously, will not affect their love. The two ones will remain together until the death and although, as Gheorghiu will mention in a letter to his parents, they will not have children,<sup>16</sup> they will leave together a rather good life. Even at when the writer will be already aged, he will dedicate her books and the couple will travel together all around the world.<sup>17</sup> On the road from Zagreb to Paris, when the two ones will pass thorough the American camp in Heidelberg, one of the most painful moments from their life will be the ones when the two ones will be separated.<sup>18</sup>

The parents and the matrimonial aspects are therefore the main aspects related with the family that can be found in Virgil Gheorghiu's work. They say a lot about the way how he saw them and about the values that were, according to him, defining for the understanding of it. Love, respect, fidelity were the keywords of the understanding of the topic. Moreover, together with terms like mother and father, for him *house* is also related with the idea of family. This is the reason why the writer will be more than scared when he will be sent by the Romanian Army in the notorious campaign against the Russians and will get in contact with some prisoners that have not felt the lack of the house.<sup>19</sup>

The idea of family is also depicted in the works dedicated to the war. In his masterpiece, namely *The 25<sup>th</sup> Hour* Gheorghiu will speak about different families and the way how the war destroyed them. Illustrative is, for example, the confession of a German officer who lost all the members of his family during the conflagration. This aspect determined him to come closer to the idea of nation and to replace in his brain the family with the nation. At the end of the events, when his country will be defeated too and he will haft to lose also this aspect, the only remaining solution will be the suicide:

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<sup>15</sup> „Of Jewish origin, Ecaterina Burbea was born on September 7, 1916 (two days before the birth of Virgil), in Galați, on the right bank of the Danube; she is the daughter of Eleonora Schenk, director and owner of *Galați noi*, the biggest magazine in Lower Moldova, and Ion Burbea, an independent parliamentarian who was chairman of the Danube Commission.” Thierry Gillyboeuf, *Virgil Gheorghiu – scriitorul calomniat*, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Iuliu-Marius Morariu, "Correspondența lui Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu cu părinții săi, reflectată în documentele Securității," 74.

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, for example, as Thierry Gillyboeuf shows: "At the end of 1978, Virgil Gheorghiu and his wife left for Lebanon, in Beirut on fire, at the invitation of a friend. One of them, Father Mansour Labaki, invites him to attend services and accompany the war orphans in the "Foyer of Joy," tells him about his parish in Damour, and convinces him to write a book about Lebanon. Thierry Gillyboeuf, *Virgil Gheorghiu – scriitorul calomniat*, p. 95.

<sup>18</sup> Constantin Virgil Gheorghiu, *Ispita Libertății. Memorii*, p. 308.

<sup>19</sup> "Oh, the appearance of these prisoners, when you start talking to them, is heartbreakingly tragic. Their lives are stripped of the most beautiful things. In the camp where they live, no one sings, hums, prays and dreams of anything. I didn't see anyone crying, or with their eyelashes steaming with melancholy. Everything that happens around them is indifferent. They don't miss home, they don't want to win, they don't want anything. I spend my time sleeping, or talking, for hours, the greatest platitudes. They talk unimportant, stupid things, and I haven't seen a single one, in the twelve hours I've been with them, glancing, tearful or Welsh, over the barbed wire fence. Nowhere, in their ranks, is there any human manifestation." Virgil Gheorghiu, *Ard malurile Nistrului*, Făgăraș, Gea Press, 1993, p. 18.

*"-Now the Fuhrer is dead too! continued he. Germany no longer exists! I lived only for it. When I was young, I also liked horses; but that was a love of youth! All my ideals have died before my eyes, one after another: my wife, my daughter, the Fuhrer and my homeland! Now it's my turn. In half an hour, the Russians will be here. Until they arrive, I would like to fulfill the last duty of my life!*

*Hilda was in tears. She had thought the giant would sleep with her in her bedroom. She thought he would tell her he was hungry, and she would feed him. And then he saw him dressed in a parade uniform! "I'll do whatever you ask me to do!" Do you want to go somewhere first -? she said, looking at his uniform.*

*- I'm not going anywhere! he replied. This is the last path of my earthly life!"<sup>20</sup>*

The idea of family will come again into debate at the end of the war in the context of the arrival of the Russians in the Romanian lands. Then, it will be related with another keyword, namely the protection. Conscious of the moral and social troubles caused by the Red Army, the writer will use his skills in order to condemn their attitude in his books. Therefore, many of the dialogues between the characters of the the book will also face this aspect. There is such an example:

*"You are not a fascist either, Mr. Governor, but I do not think you would agree to stay with your wife for even 24 hours in the Bolshevik occupation zone," Trajan said. Not for political reasons, but for fear of cruelty and terror. I personally do not think you have the courage to enter their area without a uniform and without a strong guard. It's fair to ask us, two defenseless people, why are we running away from the barbarian hordes, armed with the latest model of American automatic rifles?"<sup>21</sup>*

Family is also used by the Romanian writer in the critics of the Communist societies. There, he does not properly speak about the relevance of the social cell in the evolution of the world, but about the way how its misunderstanding can cause damages to the social life. It was notorious in the aforementioned period that in Romania, the rulers were, between 1965 and 1989, Ceaușescu family. In those years, being a relative of the presidential couple constituted a reason strong enough for one to be promoted in the ruling structures. The studies, the competences or all the other elements with an axiological value were not important as soon as this criterion was accomplished. This aspect constituted, in those decades, the cause of some social diseases. Virgil Gheorghiu does not miss the occasion to emphasize it and to speak about the way how it was encountered in his native lands, as part of the complex corruption process that existed. In *God in Paris*, he therefore offers such an example, described in detail:

*"Horodincă did not receive any education for his profession. He is a relative of the president. In kinship lies his only merit. In the Romanian People's Republic, all management positions are entrusted to the president's family. The president's wife is a member of the Academy of Sciences, director of the Institute of Nuclear Physics, president of the Institute of Chemistry. Participates in international meetings as a scientist in atomic physics. He receives the same honors as Einstein, Oppenheimer and von Braun. His scientific training is reduced to a few months of*

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<sup>20</sup> Virgil Gheorghiu, *Ora 25*, Paris and Bucharest, Les Editions du Rocher and Omegapress, 1991, p. 214.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 214.

„ Family and its Image in Virgil Gheorghiu’s Work,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 225-231.

*study at the school of midwives. Horodincea is no more qualified than the president. That's why Baxan wants to get rid of him.*"<sup>22</sup>

Later, in book like *The Spy*<sup>23</sup> or *The Great Exterminator and the Great Orthodox Council*,<sup>24</sup> he will also bring together the two topics, namely the family and the Communism from the Romanian space. This time, he will emphasize the way how Bucharest dictatorial regime used the family as a tool of punishment and as a way to accomplish his tasks. In the first one of them, a spy that claims to be the wife of the man who managed to run away from Romania and become a kind of exiled people in France, comes and manages to help to the death of that man, considered to a danger by the regime. The situation is similar in the second one, when the relatives and the family are used as ways of pressure in order to convince the ones who are against the regime to stop, or to kill them, in case of a refuse.<sup>25</sup> Due to the fact that it is a kind of a leitmotiv, this aspect can be also found in other books, like *The Heidelberg Unknowns*,<sup>26</sup> where another interesting aspect is brought into attention, namely the interest of the Communist countries for the death bodies and their repatriation. In a complex novel, Gheorghiu manages there to present an interesting story, where although the family is not the main topic, it has an important role.

### Conclusion

As it could be seen also in our presentation, family is a topic that can be recurrently found in the work of Virgil Gheorghiu. While in his memories and the autobiographical novels he speaks about his own family (mother, father, sisters and brothers, or about his wife and the relationship with her), in the literary novels, the author emphasizes aspects like the way how the war can destroy the family, the relevance of this category of the relationships for the evolution of the society or the way how the communist society from the Romanian space, but not exclusively,<sup>27</sup> understood and used the family as a tool for their works with political content.

As it could be seen, in his conception, family is related with the idea of home, but also with aspects like love, respect, fidelity, care and other similar ones. In loved with the young Jewish lady called Ecaterina Burbea, the Romanian writer will

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<sup>22</sup> Virgil Gheorghiu, *Dumnezeu la Paris*, Bucharest, Sophia Press, 2016, p. 27-28.

<sup>23</sup> Virgil Gheorghiu, *L'Espionne –Roman*, Paris, Librairie Plon, 1971.

<sup>24</sup> Virgil Gheorghiu, *Marele Exterminator și Marele Sinod Ortodox*, Făgăraș, Agaton Press, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Here, as it is shown in its foreword: "The alarm signal in this novel is about the possibility of using, this time, not the masses, but even the human person, the insignificant, the insignificant, the individual, who according to the novelist has an energy equal to the atomic and can form the basis of a new sociology. The ideological manipulation of this energy of the social atom, which is the individual, can dramatically change the compass head of the eschatological direction, orienting it not biblically towards heaven, but humanistic, towards a land that has assassinated its angels ." Ioan Neculoiu, „Marele Exterminator, sau căderea din itinerarul eshatologic în cel terestru”, in Virgil Gheorghiu, *Marele Exterminator și Marele Sinod Ortodox*, Făgăraș, Agaton Press, 2008, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> Virgil Gheorghiu, *Necunoscuții din Heidelberg*, Bucharest, Sophia Press, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Because, for example, in *The Sacrificies of the Danube*, he also presents the way how the family is understood and threatened, but this time in the Bulgarian context. See: Virgil Gheorghiu, *Sacrificiții Dunării*, Bucharest, Sophia Press, 2020.

marry her, despite of all the risks. He will refuse the formal divorce that could bring him the freedom and the possibility to not lose his job, and the two ones will remain together for many years, until the death of the writer. Moreover, the love between the two of them will increase in the second part of their life and the writer will dedicate her some of his later books. In the same time, due to the fact that they will not have the possibility of the personal meeting due to the fact that he will spend more than a half of his life in the Romanian exile from Paris where he will leave a complex and partially controversial life,<sup>28</sup> his relationship with his parents will know new nuances and his love for them will be expressed thorough the passages that he will dedicate them in his books.

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Neagu Djuvara, *Amintiri din pribegie (1948-1990)*, Bucharest, Humanitas Press, 1996, p. 164-167; Mircea Eliade, *Europa, Asia, America... Corespondență A-H. Volumul 1*, Bucharest, Humanitas Press, 1999, p. 385, p. 441, p. 459, p. 468, p. 481; Afif Hadam, *Harmonies et Conflicts de Valeurs chez Constant Virgil Gheorghiu*, Bucharest, Bucharest University Press, 1996; Sanda Stolojan, *Nori peste Balcoane. Jurnal din Exilul Parisian*, Bucharest, Humanitas Press, 1996, p. 22-23; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, „Opera lui Virgil Gheorghiu, între literatură și autobiografie”, in Ilie Rad (coord.), *Anuarul Colegiului Studențesc de Performanță Academică 2015-2016, nr. 3*, Cluj-Napoca, Cluj University Press, p. 263-271; Iuliu-Marius Morariu, Elemente ale spiritualității ortodoxe în opera literară a lui Virgil Gheorghiu”, in *Symposium*, nr. 23 – "Cultural Transparency and the Loss of Privacy in the Era of Digital Technology: How Is This Shaping Our Becoming and the Ethical Dilemmas Related to It", The Romanian Institute of Orthodox Theology and Spirituality, *New York*, 2016, p. 63-73, for more information about this aspect of his life.

„ Family and its Image in Virgil Gheorghiu’s Work,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 225-231.