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**A LIFE IN THE MIRROR OF DESTINY: CONSTANTIN SCHIFIRNEȚ AND
THE TRAJECTORY OF A ROMANIAN EPOCH *DESTIN ȘI O VIAȚĂ DE
OM [DESTINY AND A LIFE OF A MAN]*.
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CONSTANTIN SCHIFIRNEȚ**

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Abstract

This review argues that *Destiny and a Life of a Man* transforms Constantin Schifirneț's personal trajectory into a sociological lens on Romania from late communism through transition. The volume shows how the village functions as a formative matrix, how family labour cultivates habitus, and how schooling anchors an ethic of rigour. It clarifies the scientific mandate and constraints of CCPT, situates a corpus of "Research Reports" within applied social diagnosis, and traces the author's subsequent academic vocation. Micro-histories – 1968, the 1977 earthquake, Chernobyl – serve as empirical vignettes of everyday life under pressure. Stylistically, the prose balances literary clarity and analytical precision. The result is an intellectual memoir that doubles as a methodological lesson in assembling memory, documents, and field notes as evidence for Romanian sociology.

Keywords: intellectual memoir, Romanian sociology, CCPT, tendential modernity, micro-history.

Destin și o viață de om [Destiny and a Life of a Man] is a dense and well-balanced work in which autobiography becomes material for a sociology of Romania in depth. With unadorned lucidity, Constantin Schifirneț assumes the dual role of witness and interpreter of an era. The volume is an intellectual memoir

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in which an evocative tone is interwoven with analytical rigour, avoiding pathos while privileging the social relevance of lived detail. Its distinctive merit lies in converting a personal trajectory into a map of collective meanings.

Stylistically, the narrator maintains a sober register with measured lyrical accents; methodologically, each biographical fragment functions as a case study of Romanian society – from the peasant world of childhood to the institutional meanders of late communism and the post-1989 transition.

Village and family: the formative matrix

The opening chapters, devoted to the author's native village Bahna (Neamț County), refuse any idyllic postcard. The village is presented as a historical and moral matrix, a pole of existential and epistemic orientation. The reflections converge toward a broader thesis on the resilience of the *răzeș* (yeoman) community and on the fraught relationship between tradition and modernization. The village "owes nothing to any political regime" and is treated as a reliable reservoir of labour rather than a genuine interlocutor of policy. Toponymy, relief, landholding history, and local "small archaeologies" are mobilised as indices of how communities conserve a way of being even when pushed toward change. Nostalgia for ripe pears or long evenings in the farmyard is constantly tempered by a diagnosis of the historically tense relation between the rural world and the state.

Within this matrix, family and early work become the primary school of character. The formula "I had a happy childhood working" encapsulates a habitus formed through repetitive household tasks, a home moral economy, and small certainties in times of scarcity. Resilience is not presented as a heroic pose but as a learned routine: guarding threshed wheat at six years old, having little time to "roam through the village", and sharing the burden of domestic responsibility. Family correspondence is re-read as a document of everyday life: worries, health advice, saving practices, and calls to dignity. Home is resemanticised as a space of safety and moral orientation.

School, vocation, and the CCPT laboratory

The portraits of teachers at the "George Bacovia" High School in Bacău are narratively vivid and pedagogically instructive. They illustrate an ethic of earned authority and exacting standards as a form of respect for students. The episode with teacher Adrian Olinic, who firmly corrects the confusion between *s-au* and *sau*, becomes a founding moment in the ethic of rigour: from that point on, writing correctly is not just a technical skill but a moral obligation. Similar patterns appear with historian Dumitru Zaharia, whose grading style pushes the young student to improve.

Student life in Iași completes the tableau of intellectual apprenticeship, marked by the tensions of 1968 and by a demanding system of state exams. Schifirneț evokes

a climate in which authentic thinking is sought under pressure, not celebrated in comfort. Some professors are open to his tentative questions; others are not. This uneven but formative environment prepares the way for his later work in applied social research.

One of the volume's central contributions is its clarification of the role of the Center for Research on Youth Issues (CCPT). Schifirneț carefully corrects post-1989 misunderstandings: CCPT functioned under the Ministry of Youth, not under the direct authority of the Communist Youth Central Committee. The book restores CCPT to its proper institutional place – as a research team working with empirical methods, samples, and reports – while also documenting the restrictions that tightened especially after 1984. The tone is not exculpatory but factual: the aim is to show how critical inquiry persisted, within limits, and how the Center's outputs remain valuable for understanding youth behaviour in the last decades of communism.

Research reports, concepts, and debates

The section on “Research Reports” functions as both a thematic inventory and a methodological map. The studies on rural-urban migration, socio-professional integration, cultural consumption, values, and aspirations constitute an empirical laboratory for an entire generation of Romanian sociologists. Schifirneț reconstructs the logic of these reports and their public utility, while maintaining an analytical distance that avoids self-glorification. The reports are treated as documents of their time and as tools for contemporary youth policy scholarship.

Equally important is the self-mapping of the author's scientific work, from *Generație și cultură* (1985) to later developments on “forms without substance” and tendential modernity. Polar categories such as “classical culture / modern culture” and “autochthonous / universal” are discussed as analytical devices for capturing interferences, delays, and desynchronisations in Romanian modernisation. Engagements with critics and interlocutors are recorded in a sober tone. When polemics appear, they are documented rather than theatrical; the goal is to restore context and let texts speak, not to settle scores.

Micro-histories and narrative method

A distinct merit of the book is its use of lived micro-histories as a social chronicle of the 1970s-1990s. The invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 is recounted from the perspective of a young witness on a train, amid tense remarks and diffuse fear. The earthquake of March 4, 1977, appears through the signs of urban panic and the bureaucratic absurdity of parade-style mobilisation. Chernobyl enters the household via a modest manual of precautions addressed to parents. These scenes do not seek dramatic effect; they exemplify a method of micro-history in which the social is deposited in gestures, routines, and small documents.

The narrative also includes external itineraries – working visits, scholarly exchanges, and cultural impressions – that place Romania in a broader comparative frame. The result is a consciousness trained to see the country not as a closed universe but as part of wider intellectual and institutional circuits.

Style and contribution

Schifirneț's prose is smooth and classically clear. It uses technical terms sparingly, without sacrificing conceptual sharpness. The literary and academic registers nourish each other: discreet childhood lyricism, the gravity of research pages, and the measured tone of public recollection converge in a coherent voice. Methodologically, the book offers a lesson in montage: memory, correspondence, field notes, and research reports are assembled into a narrative device that respects the truth of situations rather than bending them to an a posteriori thesis.

In this sense, *Destin și o viață de om* is more than an autobiography. It is a lucid chronicle of Romania in the second half of the twentieth century and during the early decades of post-communist transition. It is also a testament to the sociological method of moving from personal contingency to social diagnosis, and a plea for rigour and probity in research and public life. Through the village as a formative matrix, the family as a school of character, intellectual apprenticeship in high school and university, the CCPT laboratory, university teaching, conceptual debate, and lived micro-histories, the book offers a living archive. For Romanian sociology, it stands as both a document of an epoch and a didactic resource for younger generations of researchers.

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