ROMANIAN LITERARY HISTORY
AT A CROSSROADS

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REVIEWS

ROMANIAN LITERARY HISTORY AT A CROSSROADS: MIHAI IOVĂNEL'S *HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN LITERATURE: 1990-2020* AND THE CULTURAL-MATERIALIST AND TRANSNATIONAL TURN IN LITERARY STUDIES

DAIANA GÂRDAN[1], EMANUEL MODOC[2], CHRISTIAN MORARU[3]

As intellectual projects, literary histories hold a particular significance in Romanian culture; they recover authors and relegate them to anonymity, make and break canons, and promote and undermine ideologies and political agendas that reach far beyond literature and the aesthetic. "Literaturocentric," as has been described by some, this culture has treasured literary historiography. To this very day, the greatest aspiration of most Romanian critics is to write a history of national literature—of entire Romanian literature. In certain quarters, literary histories published during the first half of the previous century are still subject to a cult of sorts. The genre, its illustrations, and the reactions to them

[1] **Daiana GÂRDAN** is Assistant researcher with Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Faculty of Letters and Arts. She obtained her PhD from the Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University in 2022 with a dissertation titled *A Reevaluation of Romanian Literary Modernity: The Novel as Quantitative Data*. Her current research interests include modern and comparative literature, digital humanities, and transnational studies. Email: daiana.gardan@ulbsibiu.ro; alexandra.modoc@ubbcluj.ro.

[2] **Emanuel MODOC** is Researcher with Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Faculty of Letters and Arts. He obtained his PhD from the Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University in 2020 with a dissertation titled *The Avant-garde Networks of East-Central Europe*. His current research interests include digital humanities, modern literary history, and theory. Email: emanuel.modoc@ubbcluj.ro.

[3] **Christian MORARU** is Class of 1949 Distinguished Professor in the Humanities and Professor of English at University of North Carolina, Greensboro. He specializes in contemporary American fiction, critical theory, and world literature with emphasis on international postmodernism and its post-Cold War developments and successors, as well as on the relations between globalism and culture across several national traditions in the modern era. He is the author and editor of thirteen books. His recent publications include monographs such as *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary* (University of Michigan Press, 2011) and *Reading for the Planet: Toward a Geomethodology* (University of Michigan Press, 2015). He is the editor of *Postcommunism, Postmodernism, and the Global Imagination* (Columbia University Press / EEM Series, 2009), as well as coeditor of *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century* (Northwestern University Press, 2015), *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2018), *Francophone Literature as World Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2020), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of World Theory* (2021), and *Theory in the "Post" Era: A Vocabulary for the Twenty-First-Century Conceptual Commons* (Bloomsbury, 2021). His new monograph *Flat Aesthetics: American Fiction in the Contemporary Era* is forthcoming from Bloomsbury (2022). Email: c_moraru@uncg.edu.

appear to suggest that in Romania, perhaps more so than elsewhere, literary history speaks to the country's ongoing wrestling with self-representation, to fantasies and anxieties of collective identity. This accounts for the remarkable proliferation of this critical mode and for its survival into a century that has otherwise witnessed the crisis and dearth of this form of literary scholarship. Be that as it may, one thing is clear: Romanian literary histories do not just describe a segment of culture; they are culturally descriptive and performative. They are a culture in and of themselves. They serve both as efforts to explain complex intersections between language, ideologies, and literary change and as self-referential tools for accumulating cultural capital in the interrelated fields of literature and its study.

The recent publication of *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020* by Mihai Iovănel has already sent shockwaves through the Romanian academe, raising key issues about literary historiography and its aesthetic and political stakes. As the first post-1989 history of contemporary Romanian literature, the volume raises and answers a range of fundamental questions on the literary canon, value criteria, contemporaneity, ideology, politics, gender, nationhood, and methodology. Iovănel's *History* conveys a desire specific to any endeavor dealing with contemporary historiography, which is to speak with the living, as one might paraphrase Stephen Greenblatt. This special-topic issue of *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Philologia* seeks to examine the defining moments of this dialogue and, more broadly, the accomplishments and challenges of this event-book over and against the backdrop of recent national and international developments in literary-cultural studies, chiefly in literary history.

Western literary historiography has taken a particular turn over the last few decades, becoming the domain of collective, transnational efforts while striving for an objectivity not available, apparently, to solitary endeavors. In this context, Iovănel's literary history may seem at first glance to resemble more traditional historiographical undertakings. However, in his effort to transgress the national limitations inherent to any conventional literary history, Iovănel has opted for an ideological and political reading of Romanian literature. Moreover, in the concluding chapter, he argues for a transnational history of Romanian literature that pays particular attention to the intercultural networks tying national literature into other literary cultures, far and near, as well as for a "transnational canon." Iovănel's plea for a better marked relationality linking up Romanian literature and the world echoes other recent scholarly projects such as *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2018) while also engaging in dialogue with the national critical tradition—notably, the title of the volume is an homage of sorts to Eugen Lovinescu's literary history, which was published in the 1920s.

In a deliberately unconventional way, the first part of our thematic issue gathers responses to a questionnaire put together by Emanuel Modoc and Cosmin Borza. Pertaining to the past, present, and future of literary history and raising issues of periodization, canonicity, identity, and contemporaneity, among others, the questions have yielded thought-provoking considerations poised to enrich the transnational dialogue in which Romanian criticism, literary history, and literary theory have participated with increased vigor of late. Answering Modoc and Borza's questions are nationally and internationally recognized literary and cultural critics, theorists, and comparatists such as Stephen Burn, Robert Eaglestone, Mihai Iovănel, Keith Mitchell, Brian Ó Conchubhair, Patrick O'Donnell, Daniel O'Gorman, Eve Patten, Samah Selim, Mohammed Senoussi, Rūta Šlapkauskaité, Andrei Terian, Galin Tihanov, and Bertrand Westphal.

The second part of our issue offers a sheaf of articles that variously engage with Mihai Iovănel's *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature* and more generally with the discipline of literary history and its recent morphings and predicaments. This section opens with Christian Moraru's answer to the question about where literary history may be going after postmodernism. His essay is followed by yet another compelling question posed by Andreea Mironescu in her article about the notion of generation, a crucial concept for Romanian literary historiography until recently, and this term's role in new, transnational histories of literary production and in criticism broadly. Mironescu shows that literary periodization is not just a functional instrument of contrast but also a vehicle of legitimizing and preserving the methodological leverage of periodization itself. Next, Grațiela Benga's two-pronged approach also takes up the idea of literary periodization while dwelling, not unlike most of the following contributions, on the "ideological ramifications" of Iovănel's history.

In the essay following Benga's, Andreea Mîrț analyzes the cross-peripheral relation between Romanian literature and its neighboring literatures and the play this complex dynamic gets in Iovănel's *History*. Similarly interested in the transnational dimension of literary history, Mîrț's article revolves around the effects this new perspective can have on notions and critical practices centered on canon, canonicity, status anxiety, and cultural capital. Using an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates literary and social studies, Mihaela Vancea's paper highlights, after that, the social function of Iovănel's new take on literary history. In turn, Larisa Prodan's essay discusses the *History*'s strategies of de- and trans-nationalizing Romanian contemporary literature. In a critical reading of Iovănel's book, Daniel Clinci takes issue with several theoretical aspects on which, he contends, Iovănel could have spent more time so as to unpack their implications and deal with the problems they present in Romanian context.

Focusing on the premises of Iovănel's *History*, Anca Socaci's article investigates what she calls the eclectic character of the *History*, highlighting the limits of a project that strives to move away from the national historiographical tradition while retaining some of its features. A less orthodox take on the subject is Alexandru Matei's paper, which focuses on two authorship sides or dimensions that play out in Iovănel's *History*: the critic and the writer. Matei scrutinizes the former through the author's own use of Althusser's concept of "aleatory materialism" and tackles the latter from the standpoint of a "poetics" of literary history. Finally, Alex Ciorogar's paper analyzes, in a similar vein, the connection between literary history and authorship, commenting on how one modulates the other. This segment of the issue closes with several reviews of titles covering a problematic relevant to our focus.

STEPHEN BURN[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: Near the start of Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016), Cora, the runaway slave, is almost captured by some opportunistic pig hunters. An untidy scuffle ensues:

> She was taken unawares but the moment he laid hands on her person, her blood quickened. The boy yanked Cora to the ground. She rolled over and bashed her head against a stump. He scrambled to her, pinning her. Her blood was hot. (60)

Whitehead plays this scene, as he does much of the novel, for its traditional dramatic and affective potential—the reader is ushered into a close and protective identification with Cora—but its narrative momentum conceals the subtlety of his art. That the escaped slave is defined by her blood while her movements are controlled by her assailant (she is *taken*, *yanked*, *pinned*) in a passage that climaxes with a wound inflicted by a tree, is layered in multiple meanings. Cora's physical struggle is, in this moment, curtailed by the brutal bash against a tree, just as the fact that she's in this situation at all has been dictated by the bloodlines of her family tree: the genealogical arbitrariness across multiple generations, over which the individual has no control, and that saw her born in the American South. Just as the felled tree terminates in a stump, so, for a short while, it seems Cora's branch of the family tree will come to an abrupt end in this struggle.

On one level, this *is* literally literary history: the representation of the accumulation of past moments as realized in a present rendered through literary means: narrative design, artful indirection, the clever condensation of Whitehead's figurative language. It is both a national history—consider the loaded resonance of the verb *yank*ed in this description of Cora's journey toward a mythical "north"—and a transnational account, sensitive to the global

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[1] **Stephen J. BURN** is Professor of Contemporary American Literature at the University of Glasgow. He is the author or editor of eight books, the most recent of which is the two-volume *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Fiction: 1980-2020* (edited with Patrick O'Donnell and Lesley Larkin). He is currently completing a book entitled *Neurofiction: The Mind of Contemporary American Fiction*. Email: Stephen.Burn@glasgow.ac.uk.

flow of European power on the American institution of slavery. But while it is obviously not the kind of record keeping that critics normally have in mind when they apply the label, I begin with it, here, to highlight the often unexamined peculiarity of the term *literary history* that persists through the various critiques of its practice. If *literary history* is not the literary representation of the past, and is presumably also not the representations of professional historians' activity in literature (to stick with recent American novels we might have the fictional historians Harold Silver, from A.M. Homes's *May We Be Forgiven* [2012], and Ruben Blum, from Joshua Cohen's *The Netanyahus* [2021], in this category), then our conventional understanding of the label has the terms the wrong way round: not *literary history* but the *history of the literary*, a reversal whose grammatical construction is more honest about the passivity of the literary object under investigation. From this perspective, the literary text is like Cora: stunned into submission by the heft of the tree that produced her; the kinds of questions that might be asked of her constrained by the limits of the frame that pins her in a fixed place and time.

This is not an encouraging image, and it is surely the rigid, predictable, genealogical constraints to which critics of conventional literary history object. Where a literary text about history might surprise, take imaginative leaps, or wriggle free of linearity, histories of the literary, these arguments run, reinforce established structures and follow the same familiar steps from past to present. But if Whitehead is telling us something about historical determinism in Cora's pig hunter scuffle, then it's worth noting that he immediately follows this scene with a passage that extends but also complicates the tree metaphor. As Cora reflects on her position, Whitehead writes:

> From the trunk of their scheme, choices and decisions sprouted like branches and shoots. If they had turned the girl back at the swamp. If they had taken a deeper route around the farms. If Cora had taken the rear and been the one grabbed by two men (60-61).

Viewed graphically, the family tree's deterministic history is a triangle, with earliest ancestors at the apex, and the individual—who suffers the consequences of accumulated history—at its base. But this passage flips the diagram, and the trunk and branches it maps now reflect the sequence of conditional statements that outline a decision tree. The graphic is inverted, and the individual is now at the head of the branching offshoots—the triangle's apex—as speculative alternative histories proliferate, depending on minor contingencies, to provide its base. In the context of the novel, Whitehead's pairing of the family tree and the decision tree reflects the two divergent subgenres that are synthesized in *The Underground Railroad*'s hybrid form: the neo-slave narrative that fills out a relatively fixed history, and the speculative novel that imagines alternative pathways through time's multifarious corridors. In the larger context

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of the literary history this hybrid creates, we might read the overlapping triangle shapes as suggesting the interrelationship between the two modes of conceptualizing time: that is, the apparently deterministic, linear path from a deeper past to the present is itself contingent on a sequence of individual choices; and yet, once choices are made, the breadth of available options narrow. Depending on the genealogist, then, a conventional tree-like history of the literary reveals certain things even as it obscures others: it might abstract lines of influence, follow the evolution of narrative devices, trace the "weak" structure of writer networks, or highlight the institutional engines of literary production.

Some critiques of such histories' traditional scope emphasise their supposedly outmoded reliance on linearity, drawing from Einsteinian physics to argue that linear time is misleading because it is an arbitrary human construct. This objection strikes me as less problematic than it may at first seem, since literary texts—unlike, say, the workings of the cosmos—are, of course, also human constructs, but also because linearity means different things depending on the scale of magnification. Just as the Coastline Measurement Problem dictates that radically different measurements will be produced depending on the scale adopted in measuring a coastline, so what linear succession (or temporal proximity, or cause and effect) means in a diagram varies according to scale. At a relatively close level of magnification, then, a mapping of literature's institutional history—say, Mark McGurl's *The Program Era* (2009)—might make its microfocus the classroom interactions between individual teacher or textbook and apprentice writer. Zooming out much more dramatically, Franco Moretti's abstract models for following the evolution of narrative devices and genres in *Graphs Maps Trees* (2005) can eliminate the individuality of the single text or author in its quantitative account of time's longer passage. Neither would be my preferred model for tracing a history of the literary (my preference, for what it's worth, would draw from neither a genealogical tree nor Einsteinian relativity, but from Huttonian geology), but their diversity, and imaginative approach, belie charges of conservatism. These kinds of maps can be productive not just for what their level of magnification reveals, but also for the target they present to other scholars to productively rail against their limitations and omissions. To return to Whitehead's metaphor, what ultimately matters is not the shape of the tree or how its pruned, but the density and diversity of life in the forest: how many different trees are available for cross comparison.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: As someone who works primarily on contemporary fiction, I wouldn't want to broach this topic without acknowledging Theodore Martin's lucid account of why "the contemporary is not a period" (2), or Giorgio Agamben's gnomic pronouncements on the slipperiness of who is or is not a contemporary. But, in larger terms, the key influences on my thinking about the limitations of periods are Wai Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents* (2006), and Eric Hayot's "Against Periodization" (2011). If Dimock's text is important for its concrete demonstration of how literary criticism can work without the safety net of national literary periods (to extend the metaphor of the family tree from my first answer, this is to draw the tree and then fold the paper to produce unusual juxtapositions), Hayot's significance lies in abstraction: his overarching exploration of the problems that stem from the fact that periods are "untheorized" (744), and the grim truth of his more throwaway observation that period logics (the unvarying narrative of emergence, peak, decline, etc.) are simply "not very interesting" (745). But I think there are two additional qualifications, or problems of periodization that intersect with the contemporary field, that I would add to Hayot's position.

First, Hayot suggests that as we get closer to the present, "periods get shorter," and he attributes this temporal condensation to "chronological narcissism," floating the possibility that "the entire literary profession results from a self-regarding love for our historical present" (746). Looking back at the last 50 years, my sense is that this is too linear an account of what happens to the period as it approaches the horizon of contemporaneity, and that what we see is less a series of shortening periods and more a massive proliferation of overlapping movements. Thomas Carlyle may have worried in 1841 that "ists and isms are rather a growing weariness," but he surely wasn't ready for the onslaught of neo-, new-, post-, digi-, meta-, sur-, and alt- labels that have joined the steady supply of new -ists and -isms in recent decades. In part, this terminological excess accurately reflects the density and diversity of literary production around the millennium, a time when, as Ben Lerner writes in *Leaving the Atocha Station* (2011), "the air was alive less with the excitement of a period than with the excitement of periodization" (140). The scope of literary production at such a time threatens to exceed the explanatory power or elastic reach of current period labels. But it also reflects the feedback loops that institutional periodization has created at time when the university is the site where aspiring writers learn their literary history whilst they learn to write literature: periodization, then, becomes the way that emerging writers understand and marshal the logic of their own careers (there is probably no clearer example than David Foster Wallace's self-canonization through essays such as "Fictional Futures" [1988] and "E Unibus Pluram" [1993]), and, in more self-reflexive fictions, becomes a topic of literature itself (John Barth's "The End: An Introduction" [1996] strikes me as an equally powerful meditation on literature and institutional time as you'll find in any

extant scholarship). Problematic as it is, the periodization of literature begins to matter, then, because the institution is the site of literary production as much as it is of literary history's production.

Closely related to this, is my second observation about periodization and contemporary literature, which is that much of the slipperiness of periodization stems from the elision of moments and movements. The former are the concrete temporal anchors that provide the building blocks of periods; the latter are dominated by an artistic personality, or an aesthetic. The proliferation of labels over the last fifty years is a catalogue of movements that aspire to be moments, but by their sheer plenitude these labels become self-cancelling; we might understand the literary works that fall under each umbrella with reference to the way a movement absorbs the logic of the period, but the incompatibility of so many divergent energies (minimalist, maximalist, metamodern) means that these sub-labels threaten to be unperiodizable.

Zooming out from the contemporary makes this contrast clearer. The Victorian period in British literature, even as it raises thorny questions about national and imperial assumptions, seems to me to be erected on sufficiently concrete moments that it merits the classification of period on purely temporal grounds. Modernism, by contrast, has been the focus of so much definitional debate because it reflects a movement—really a spectrum of positions, depending on who defines the term's boundaries, and which figures are drawn into the foreground. From its early canonization around the Eliot-Joyce-Pound axis, its membership, focus, and geographical boundaries have been drawn back to the mid-nineteenth century, and forward to consume all of twentieth-century literature and beyond in various appeals to neomodernism, or under the almost definitionally empty label "long modernism." The muddy waters surrounding modernism's period status thus over spill, polluting the periods that surround it.

ROBERT EAGLESTONE[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: I'm not sure it is the most conservative form of literary study: I think all forms of literary study might have more progressive or more conservative modes. However, I see where this question is coming from.

Nobody and nothing can stop obsolescence: that's just time passing.

But conservatism? Some thoughts. Learn from works of literature: they are always cross-fertilizing, drawing on other things, looking outside their own patch. Learn too from more experimental and challenging historians: what if you look at it this way, or that way? Keep an eye out for powerful contemporary movements (e.g. Decolonise the discipline) and pay attention to minorities. Be aware that geographies and times crisscross each other. The best recent literary history I have read, the *Cambridge History of Welsh Literature*, edited by Geraint Evans and Helen Fulton, does some of these really well, perhaps because it is a history of a literature in two languages, it's already aware of diversity.

A part of me thinks: a literary history is a kind of gathering. Gatherings may have a range of different principles—I think one should be free to experiment with those principles.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

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[1] **Robert EAGLESTONE** is Professor of Contemporary Literature and Thought at Royal Holloway, University of London. He works on contemporary literature and literary theory, contemporary philosophy and on Holocaust and Genocide studies. He is the author of eight books, including *The Broken Voice: Reading Post-Holocaust Literature* (Oxford UP, 2017), *Literature: Why it matters* (Polity, 2019) and *Truth and Wonder: a literary introduction to Plato and Aristotle* (Routledge 2022). He is the editor or co-editor of ten further books, including *Brexit and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2018) and *The Routledge Companion to Twenty First Century Literary Fiction* (Routledge, 2019). His work has been translated into seven languages. Email: R.Eaglestone@rhul.ac.uk.

A: Yes, like all aspects of intellectual culture, literary history can become a 'glass bead game' of its own, with its own rules and preoccupations. I think this can be avoided to some extent. First, literary history has to be aware of wider currents in literary studies, intellectual work and culture as a whole. These will shape that history quite as much as that history shapes them (by, say, recovering a writer). Second, literary history needs to be self-reflective both as a practice and in its representation to others: why I am writing *this* history rather than *that* one? Why *this* writer? Why this writer *now*? This means making cases in public, and for the public, as well as for scholars. A good example of this in the UK context is Corinne Fowler's book *Green Unpleasant Land: Creative Responses to Rural England's Colonial Connections* (2020 Peepal Tree Press). Not only is it written in a clear idiom, but it reshapes (roughly) the pastoral mode in light of imperial and slave-owning history. Further, each writer makes their own literary genealogy.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: This deceptively simple question gets at the heart of a key, unanswered and perhaps unanswerable question in literary studies: the question that opposes historicism to formalism or context to aesthetics. So, periodization matters in one way because that is the language of the academy (and increasingly so: literary studies and the humanities are in a very historicist moment). Periods create a way for different disciplines to share ideas and arguments; they are easily recognizable more widely. In this way they matter. However, of course, they also obscure longer and shorter processes, less recognized areas and so on. And they might, too, work against the aesthetic (through the claim that 'you cannot understand this without the context' when of course you can, but just not as a historian). And periods also abstract particular texts into a longer historical story. So do they still matter? Yes. Should they? Perhaps a bit less than they do.

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: Again, a really hard question. There are lots of accounts of this (like Agamben's) and no one is really able to agree. Of course 'now' is shaped by 'then' and 'here' is shaped by 'elsewhere'. My answer is, sadly, a teaching one rather than a theoretical one. One game I play is to ask the year, the students look at me as if I am an idiot,

but once I point out that dates are different (say, 1444 in the Muslim calendar is also 2022), things look different. And then, on my 'Ideas in contemporary fiction' course, no novel is more than 10 years old. Think of yourself at 19. Does a book or album or game that came out when you were 9 feel contemporary? Of course, my contemporary is not yours, my 'key dates' both personally and communally are not shared by you. So we have to constantly negotiate this.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: I don't have a view on this. If an individual wants to write a literary history, why should we stop them? If a research group does, that's fine too. Would the latter be more diverse than the former?

MIHAI IOVĂNEL[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: I do not believe conservatism is intrinsic to literary historiography. Eugen Lovinescu's literary histories (1926-1929)—to invoke the most important Romanian contributions—are far from conservative. Directed against the fetishization of tradition, their theoretical starting points are still hard to assimilate by some Romanian cultural institutions to this day. The Romanian Academy is one such institution despite its eagerness to appoint Lovinescu as Member of Honor within its ranks after the 1989 regime change. Nonetheless, it is true that literary history oftentimes ends up playing a conservative role on account of its own history, which is longer and more indebted to the past than that of other forms of literary research. After all, as is well known, what is initially fresh and innovative becomes the object of consecration once it has been ratified and canonized by cultural structures and institutions.

What can be done to counteract this mainly unintentional effect? What I personally did in my *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature* was to supplement the historiographic component throughout with a reflection on *historiography* itself, that is, with an overarching theory that points to and discusses the limitations and risks of such an undertaking.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

[1] **Mihai IOVĂNEL** (b. 1979) earned his PhD from the University of Bucharest and is currently Senior Researcher at the "G. Călinescu" Institute of Literary History and Theory of the Romanian Academy. He wrote 70 articles for the *General Dictionary of the Romanian Literature* (7 vols., 2004-2009) and was one of the editors of the "Dictionary of Romanian Literature" (2 vols., 2012). He also co-authored the *Chronology of Romanian Literary Life: 1944-1964* (10 vols., 2010-2013). He co-edited the *General Dictionary of the Romanian Literature*, 2nd edition (8 vols. 2016-2021). Books: *Evreul improbabil. Mihai Sebastian: o monografie ideologică* (The Improbable Jew. Mihail Sebastian: An Ideological Monograph) (2012); *Roman polițist* (Detective Novel) (2015); *Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc* (The Ideologies of the Romanian Post-Communist Literature) (2017), *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990-2020* (The History of the Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020 (2021). Email: mihai.iovanel@gmail.com.

A: Indeed, literary histories can become a culture in and of themselves. They undergo a process resembling that of novels. Because the initial context of their emergence is difficult to preserve in cultural memory, novels and literary histories are eventually approached with nearly no regard for their original ideological, social, and political backdrops. They end up becoming false friends, as it were. This inevitably leads to distortions in the way they are understood and employed, hence the importance of historical readings that attempt to retrieve otherwise lost historical contexts.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: Given that my *History* is one of *contemporary* literature, periodization plays a lesser role in it than in histories covering a broader time span. However, this does not mean that I do not periodize at all. For instance, I felt compelled to address the apparent paradox that the roots of "the contemporary" in Romania are to be found both in the early 1980s—when communism was still alive and kicking—and during the late 1980s, more exactly in December of 1989, when the communist regime was overthrown by a popular revolution.

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: Contemporary Romanian literature has long ceased to be a national literature exclusively. It most likely never was, during the past two centuries, *only* a national literature. But today's literature is less local than ever. We are living in a period when the English language and Anglophone literature exert a powerful influence on all the other literatures in the world, so powerful, indeed, that the Anglo-American cultural space has become the locus where they meet and mutually influence each other. For example, a Romanian reader will read a Bulgarian author rather through an English-language intermediary than in the original Bulgarian or in a Romanian translation. Admittedly, the temporalities making up contemporaneity across the globe are not yet perfectly synchronized or unified. Neither are they in the United States for that matter. What someone interested in the academic debates in North America discovers is a very rich and diverse cultural scene, with numerous conversations taking place simultaneously. On the other hand, the ever-more pervasive role of platforms such as Amazon—

which, as Mark McGurl shows in *Everything and Less: The Novel in the Age of Amazon* (2021), already redraws the rules of literature more efficiently than any academic institution—will probably contribute to a worldwide increase in uniformity.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: In principle, I have nothing against literary histories written by a single author—it would be hypocritical of me, as I have just published my *History*. But I believe that the increasingly more complex available datasets, both from a quantitative and a qualitative point of view, will gradually become too difficult to analyze just by one critic. Without casting doubt on the *legitimacy* of such solo enterprises, I tend to believe that their *feasibility* will become—if it has not already—a real challenge.

KEITH MITCHELL[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: One of the primary advances that literary history as an ideal and a practice can do is to become far more diverse than perhaps what it currently is. What I mean by this is that at the national, local, and regional level, literary history needs to be more inclusive in highlighting underrepresented writers and intellectuals. If we're looking at periodization, within the field that I teach—American literature—I always include many diverse, underrepresented voices. I do so not only because of the importance of representation. I do so to emphasize that these underrepresented voices are *always* in dialogue with those writers who comprise the American literary canon.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: Yes, they absolutely can become a culture within themselves; and unfortunately, they can sometimes become a closed culture in which underrepresented voices are excluded. Identity is very important in the construction of literary canons; however, those scholars and intellectual who hold the keys to the kingdom often are unable to understand the importance of mining various voices who have gone out of favor. For example, I just read an article on the rise and decline of teaching Edna St. Vincent Millay's poetry in literature classes; that she has been consigned to the dustbin of literary history. I am hoping that with a newly

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[1] **Keith MITCHELL** is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. His primary area of specialization is literatures of the African Diaspora, including African American, West Indian, and Afro-Canadian. He co-edited the collection, *After the Pain: New Essays on Gayl Jones* and he has co-edited two collections of essays on Percival Everett: *Perspectives on Percival Everett* (2013) and *Percival Everett: Writing Other/Wise* (2014). Currently, he is working on a monograph on Black literature and the Vietnam War. He has presented papers and published essays on James Baldwin, Percival Everett, Toni Morrison, Afua Cooper, Jesmyn Ward, and Keith S. Wilson, among others. Email: Keith_Mitchell@uml.edu.

published collection of her diary entries that her work will come back into favor and that literature professors will begin to teach her extraordinary work again. However, this kind of thing is far for the course in literary studies, regardless of a writer's race or gender. For example, it took many decades for important American writers like Herman Melville to come back into favor after he published *Moby Dick*. Likewise, Gloria Naylor is one of the most important Black women writers of 1980s and 90s, but her brilliant work is not taught nearly as much as it had been in past decades. Certainly, her work and others who have been "forgotten" needs to be.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: I think periodization does still matter. However, I also recognize that it is constructed. I often raise questions in my American literature classes regarding distinctions among traditionally demarcated literary periods. For example, when I introduce American postmodernism to my students, I use specific texts to get students to see not only perhaps the (constructed) differences among the periods but also on a pragmatic level, many of the students at my university go on to teach high school and middle school English. Students' teacher certification exams (MTELs) emphasize literary periodization and the courses these students will eventually teach also emphasize literary periodization. Therefore, as a teacher and mentor, I feel that it is my obligation to ensure that they have an excellent understanding of American literary history and its periodization. Nevertheless, I do teach them strategies to make periodization less structured by teaching them how to work around certain strictures inherent in periodization. For example, the first few weeks of class, I'll have students read several foundational texts by early colonial American writers, including Captain John Smith, William Bradford, Anne Bradstreet, and Phillis Wheatley, among numerous others. Then, towards the end of the course, we'll read Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy*, which is a "postmodern" text that is set in the colonial period. So, we not only discuss intertextuality but ways to break away from the rigidity inherent in periodization. My objective is to show them that writers and these so-called American literary periods are often in dialogue.

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: Perhaps there needs to be less emphasis on national literatures that tend to silo texts as belonging to a specific country as opposed to the world. We are all globally connected and engaged in one way or another, as are writers around the world. One of things we should all have noticed in contemporary literature is references to all kinds of new technologies in contemporary literature. I also think we are seeing an uptick in historiographic metafictional novels that are set in the past but that also commenting on our contemporary condition.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: I don't believe that literary histories should be the domain of research collectives. These research collectives would, I feel, become gatekeepers to what they might see as "legitimate histories" as opposed to so-called illegitimate histories—usually histories of silenced or underrepresented voices. And even if these research collectives consisted of a coterie of liked-minded, underrepresented individuals, I imagine that they could just as easily fall into the trap of excluding dissenting ideas and voices that have a stake in presenting counter narratives to their understanding of so-called "legitimate histories."

BRIAN Ó CONCHUBHAIR[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: Literary historians have grappled with this challenge since at least the early 1960s, a time when revolution was blowing in the wind, as demands for individual rights and freedoms came to the fore in the United States and on European campuses. In a 1963 essay entitled 'Is Literary History Obsolete?' *College English* (Vol. 24, No. 5) Robert E. Spiller addressed this question in the context of what was then an exciting and emerging 'New criticism.' His rebuttal, some six decades later, merits consideration. There is, he contends, a process of cross-breeding between two or more kinds of history. Events in one area of human experience have a habit of growing out of conditions in other areas. He cites, as examples: the French revolution and *A Tale of Two Cities*, and American whaling and *Moby Dick*. Similarly, he argues, significant historical events relate to one or more key personalities whose thoughts and actions precipitated it: battles are always associated with generals (Washington, Wellington or Lee); political events with statesmen (Gladstone, Webster, Bismarck) and changes in the history of thought with thinkers (Locke, Darwin or Marx). Spiller expressed concerns at aesthetic, rhetorical and linguistic analysis dominating basic college textbooks and required courses to the near exclusion of the survey or background course. Such a trend was becoming so prevalent that any suggestion of a historical reference was, he observed, considered 'distracting, superficial, even at times (it would almost seem) immoral.' He would not have fared well in the intervening years.

[1] **Brian Ó CONCHUBHAIR** is an Associate Professor of Irish Language and Literature at the University of Notre Dame and a fellow of the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies, The Nanovic Institue for European Studies, and the Kellogg Institute for International Studies. He has served as Director of the Center for the Study of Languages & Cultures (2013-2020); Executive Director of the IRISH Seminar (2011-2013), and President of the American Conference for Irish Studies (2015-2017). His writings include an award-winning monograph on the intellectual history of the Irish Revival entitled *Fin de Siècle na Gaeilge: Darwin, An Athbheochan agus Smaointeoireacht na hEorpa*. Recent publications include chapters in *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, *The Oxford History of Ireland*, *The Oxford History of the Irish Book*, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre* and *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Fiction*. His full-length biography of Flann O'Brien/Myles na Gopaleen will appear in 2023. Email: Brian.OConchubhair.1@nd.edu.

Cultural Theory is now so entrenched that history literary courses seem antiquarian if not antediluvian. Yet, his warning that "Research in literature had become what Professor Lowes of Harvard once called, 'Learning more and more about less and less,'" holds some merit. Professors have long despaired of freshman writing skills, but more alarming is the growing disinclination of undergraduates to read large amounts of primary material in the American university system. The norm would now appear to be a short story or two per week rather than a collection per week.

More recently, David Simpson, writing in a special issue of *SubStance* in 1999, identified the challenges literary history must surmount to be relevant. 'Faced with a generation inclined to believe in an end to history, the task of historians of all kinds is first of all one of preservation. Literary historians are especially pressured because of the subsistence of "literature" within an ethos of presence and presentism whose effect is always to dissolve the historical into the immediate. Given the general disposition of literary criticism toward advocacy, prophecy, and testimony, even of chaos itself, literary history enacted under the banner of antiquarianism, skepticism and hesitation may not win many converts.' Whatever else the 21st century has thus far taught us from 9/11 to Brexit, and the Russian war on Ukraine, history is neither dead nor ended. History is as relevant as ever. In a time when what were once considered constitutional rights can be denied, the need for Literary history and the training of students and scholars in the craft and skills of literary history is as essential as ever. Cultural studies, as Simpson argues, appeals partly by the veneer of relevance it provides; 'it allows discussion of the here and now, and about the experience of everyone and not just that of the devotees of a high literacy based in the reading of complex written texts.' This presentism is perhaps the most poisonous chalice on offer to academic scholarship. Without pulling any punches, Simpson all but damns cultural studies. 'Leavened by the familiar postmodern notion of the end of history (in the liberal version) or its redundancy for a new global culture of spatial simultaneity (in the more common leftist-anarchist version), much of cultural studies has no need for history, which tends to appear, if it appears at all, in parodic or reductive form as a history of some uncontested hegemony (orientalism, sexism, homophobia, Eurocentrism, and so on) which it is the critic's task to expunge from the present by the fierce light of radical intelligence." The role of the literary historian in a minoritized language, I believe, is somewhat different. In such cases the literary history is unwritten or only partially written; thus, the literary historian has both the opportunity and obligation to produce a narrative that benefits from the cultural battles fought in the 1970s and 1980s. Such literary histories need to be aware of the role and presence of those uncontested hegemonies which

Simpson named, and produce a literary history that recognizes and addresses them. As scholarship and academic culture expands and evolves, our understanding of the past alters and adapts. Literary History is never done, but must be constantly written and rewritten and challenged and interrogated from what was omitted and elided.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* rehearses how the fictional construction of a "homogenous national audience" offers to the consolidating multitude of individuals a model of sharing and mutual existence in modern, "homogeneous, and empty time" (37). I think the question here may have different connotations and reverberations if asked of a major, dominant language rather than a minoritized, endangered language. In the case of the former, the literary history is often well documented, well established and stable—in fact it may well be interrogated for what it omitted, diminished or elided. In the case of the latter, however, work of the literary historian is in many cases on-going, in as much as the first narrative is still to be written or edited. The literary historian may be the first to access certain archives, to address certain topics and, in that regard, the canon has yet to be formed. The Irish bardic tradition is a case in point as the incomplete manuscript tradition available to us offers little insight to date on the issue of gender. Thus, the work of Máirín Nic Eoin amongst others is critical not only in addressing the literary history but of addressing the gender issue in the process. Similarly, the work of Philip O'Leary, via his four-volume literary history of modern Irish-language literature, is less an account of who influenced whom, but an intellectual history wherein literature—fictional and non-fictional—serves to illuminate the cultural, political and linguistic debates that dominate the period and recreates that republic of letters. No less so, it is in the work of Regina Uí Chollatáin as regards the history of Irish-language journalism and Pádraig Ó Siadhail in Irish-language theatre that the foundations are laid for future scholars to construct arguments, analyze aesthetics and perform all the many preoccupations that attract current scholars. How much poorer would our understanding of Irish-language literature and journalism be without the essays and letters of Séamus Mac Grianna, edited in various volumes by Nollaig Mac Congail? How much better our understanding of Máirtín Ó Cadhain due to Gearóidín Ní Laighléis's archival work on the state

publisher? The dismissal of literary history—bibliographies, biographies, catalogues—is a luxury that minoritized language can neither afford nor indeed possess. Such work is essential in creating the conditions for further scholarship. Yes, the internet and the digitization of sources has made such work easier and more readily available, but primarily in the major global languages; the concern for digitizing archival materials of minoritized languages remains a minor concern.

And perhaps this feature may be one of the great strengths of literary history as part of the broader humanities, the very act of challenging, repositioning and remaking the literary canon—if you accept such canons—artificial but convenient constructions that they are. It is through the act of retrieval and discovery—the skill the literary historian performs—that forgotten and discarded voices and texts can be resurrected and placed in the conversation. The literary historian may be the guardian of the canon, but he/she is also the makeover guru.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: Chronological boundaries, no more than class times are a necessary evil: necessary for administrative and pedagogic purposes, but problematic when applied over-zealously or over-rigorously. Authors, unfortunately, live on past centuries' ends, and are often inconveniently born before or after famous battles that define geopolitics. They live, learn and evolve. As political, cultural, linguistic, and environmental events occur, they respond and react. A text may be linked to a date of composition, but its author had a life before and afterwards in which she wrote other texts. The problem arises when we forget the randomness and artificial nature of such boundaries; they are artificial constructions, often based on historically contingent assumptions. The Irish Famine of 1845 is the typical start point for modern Ireland and as seen as the point when the Irish-language is no longer relevant for discussion, but Irish-speakers lived and spoke, sang and danced, composed and critiqued long after the famine of 1845-47. The 1st January 1801 Act of Union serves as a convenient period boundary, but bears much less literary or cultural freight. Periodization certainly matters. It matters in that it sets the narrative and allows for the inclusion and/or exclusion of certain events. It allows for a different set of lenses throughout which to study and understand the topic at hand. In

minoritized languages, the periodization of the dominant or colonial culture often serves to distort or disguise key features of cultural energy or political thought. In terms of modern Irish literature, the establishment of An tOireachtas literary festival in 1898 is of greater significance than the foundation of the Society of the Preservation of the Irish Language, the Gaelic Union or the Gaelic League, but it is the dates associated with those organizations that marks the beginning of the Revival period.

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: Poorly. Should scholars concern themselves with it? Should they bow to the pressure of 'contemporaneity'? In many ways this is a pressure not only to be relevant but to be relevant to the present moment and the latest news cycle, to produce work which suits the latest podcast, topical affairs radio/TV program, etc. in which the academic exists to facilitate the radio/TV researcher and publicize the university brand. Should a two-minute appearance as a talking head on a major news channel outweigh publications and traditional scholarship? What is contemporaneous in the first world/global north may be very different to Bangladesh. The issues animating the United States in the post-Trump insurrection moment are very different from those in Ukraine, Belarus and post-Brexit Britain. To attempt to connect one's work to the immediate, to be trendy and turned-on, contemporary and controversial is a temptation, but the best literary criticism, and scholarship, is dispassionate, achieved slowly and carefully, and does not respond to the changing fortunes of politics and popular culture. Such writing is the proven province of journalism. The biographies of Volodymyr Zelenskyy and histories of Ukraine that popular publishers race to issue serve the current need and market appetite for immediate knowledge while the craft of literary history requires access to archives, notes, interviews, letters and so forth, not to mention proficiency in Ukranian and Russian.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: Writing the day after the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v Wade, the topic of legitimacy is timely and troubling. By whom is legitimacy granted and how is it gambled away? As long as the single-author monograph is the coin of the academic realm, as it is in the North American corporate university sector, it is not only legitimate but the lone and single recognized form of legitimacy.

Scientists are better disposed, indeed trained and acculturated, to cooperation, team work and collaboration. Humanists are not. As long as the model for doctorate training consists of an apprentice in a hierarchical relationship with his/her supervisor and embedded in an adversarial combative relationship with his/her peers, the model is unlikely to change. With doctoral candidates required to identify a new, original thesis question or topic and to work as an individual for three to six years establishing the 'correctness' of their thesis over all pre-existing and current ideas, the situation will not change. Indeed, such a culture breeds competition and increases rancor in departments. Of course, collaboration makes sense: it offers so much, and it addresses so many weaknesses. In a North American academy where multilingualism is in retreat, collective research teams are better equipped to deal with multilingual archives and texts. Collectives offer opportunities to address gender and racial issues and stereotypes. As the co-editor of a recent project involving some 25 contributors, I worked intentionally to match historians with literary critics, males with females, and scholars from different backgrounds and origins to create situations wherein scholars were forced into dialogue with one and other, where the assumptions of one discipline were challenged by another. The payoff in such projects is often not in the publication at hand, but in subsequent publications, where the results of thought and reflection bear fruit. The downside of such large-scale research collectives is the challenge in project management: keeping a diverse cohort of scholars on track and on time and ensuring continuity and standardization across the project as well as playing the role or peacemaker.

PATRICK O'DONNELL[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: The first thing to recall in addressing this matter is the wide recognition amongst historians that any historical account is a narrative, with specific and identifiable narrative investments and agendas. When it comes to literary history, the question of method is an interesting one, since encounters between history and romance, or the imagined and the factual are foundational elements of the very subject being considered; there is no escaping the "meta" dimension (a narrative about narratives) of literary history. What might be perceived as the anachronistic bent of many older literary histories may be due to a reliance on "methods" that simply replicate received canonical investments instead of challenging them. But this, I suggest, is an incorrect perception: even fairly traditional literary histories, such as the multivolume *Oxford History of English Literature*—those large tomes that proceeded century by century through eight hundred years of literary production in national space that changed considerably over that time—did not merely repeat canonical history, for in many cases, they in fact *made* the canon as they unearthed heretofore ignored works or promoted a specific set of works as being more important than others. And there are shelves-full of literary histories and anthologies which purposely set out to radically reshape the canon as received through the likes of the *Oxford History*. The issue then, for me, is not whether a literary history is conservative or not— it is inevitably conservative in that it is engaging in some form of canon-formation, even if it is a new one—but whether or not it openly engages with its equally inherent radicality in actively reshaping the canon and recognizing its own historical investments and agendas.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored,

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[1] **Patrick O'DONNELL** is Professor Emeritus of Twentieth and Twenty-First Century British and American Literature at Michigan State University. He has authored and edited over a dozen books on modern and contemporary fiction, including, most recently, *The American Novel Now: Contemporary American Fiction 1980-Present*; *A Temporary Future: The Fiction of David Mitchell*; *Knowing It When You See It: Henry James/Cinema*; and, with Stephen Burn and Lesley Larkin, *The Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Fiction: 1980-2020*. Email: pod@msu.edu.

and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: I assume the question refers to the tendency of many literary histories to be written based on assumptions about or investments in the generation of national identities, or ethnic identities, or identity as related to gender or class. This question holds true as well for anthologies, encyclopedias, handbooks, etc.—the whole realm of "reference" works—that lay any claim to surveying a certain territory at some level of comprehensiveness or representation. I wouldn't call identity as such a preoccupation of all of these, but it is true that they are all concerned with materializing the existence of identifiable elements that are critical to the claim that a specific subset of works are more relevant than others to the historical process or time-frame being considered. To the extent that a given literary history accomplishes this work successfully it establishes its own authority, at least in a sheerly professional or institutional sense. But I'd like to open up this question a little by suggesting that literary histories and canons are being made in the digital age well outside the confines of any professional or academic culture and authority. There are now open platforms for the construction of canons and histories available to anyone who wishes to participate in, for example, the Amazon review system, or the Goodreads platform. Since literary histories have always been built upon the foundation of the marketplace, now that the marketplace can, as it were, express itself through a million different anonymous or non-anonymous identities, it will be interesting to see what new senses of literary history emerge via these fractal networks.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: I'm pulled in a couple of different directions with this question: first, it seems that people *like* to think in terms of periods, centuries, millennia, etc. We do it all the time so that it is a kind of cultural habit that allows us to "package" or get our collective heads around the amorphous mass of reality. And most have developed a healthy skepticism around the total accuracy of any kind of period formation, to the extent that any formation of this kind becomes a fundamentally self-questioning (What is modernism? Did postmodernism actually exist, and if

it did, is it over? When does the long eighteenth century begin and end? Etc.) We know that periodization of any kind poses its own deconstructive questions, yet we still insist on organizing a lot of our thinking around generations and periods and centuries and nations such that doing so must be accomplishing something for us beyond mere self-legitimation. So periodization does continue to matter, but perhaps in different and varying senses over time. Again, I think it is a matter of recognizing investments and making those operational. When my colleagues Lesley Larkin, Stephen Burn and I set out to organize the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary American Fiction, 1980-2020*, just published by Wiley-Blackwell (apologies for the self-advertisement, but it serves as a convenient example), our purpose was both to recognize important imaginative work that had been produced during this period and bring to light newer work by younger writers that has not received a lot of attention in venues like literary encyclopedias. We knew from the outset that even at two volumes, one million words, and over 250 contributors, the *Encyclopedia* would be selective and would automatically exclude hundreds of authors and topics that we would like to have included were there infinite time and space available to us. And from the outset, by positing the very title of the work and the framework it entailed, we knew we were putting into question the primary elements of period, nation and genre, but in doing so, we stressed with contributors (many of them intentionally recruited from an international cast of specialists that might challenge a strictly nationalist perspective) the necessity of using questions about these contexts, and many others, in developing their entries. The goal in this case was to open up these questions to readers rather than close them down with some claim that the project was comprehensive or representational.

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: This is to ask the question, "what is contemporaneity"—one which I am not sure I am equipped to answer, since the answer is so dependent on one's intellectual experience over time. But I think one aspect of contemporaneity of which I am particularly aware is that of belatedness, the sense that we are always a couple of steps behind the present, catching glimpses of it, but never catching up with it. The sense of belatedness renders a different relation to past, present, and future, and thus to our sense of history, since the history of belatedness registers the present as what has already occurred but is only recognized as a probability in the near future. This is very closely related, of course, to the temporalities of globalism, which occur as "instantaneous" phenomenon, i.e., the sense that we are all connected to each other and the

world moment to moment, nanosecond to nanosecond, via digital networks. Combine this with the growing sense that we are all connected *only* by digital networks, and history of all kinds then becomes transcriptional, analogical, and endless. Clearly, this contemporaneity, if and as it exists, will result in history of an entirely different kind.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: For the most part, literary histories already have become the domain of collectives. There will continue to be histories written by individual authors (for example, Steven Moore's phenomenal *The Novel: An Alternative History*, which stands uncompleted at two large volumes) but I think they will be increasingly rare. Now and in the future, I believe, the most important and influential histories will be the result of collective efforts, such as the *1619 Project* which has generated so much interest and controversy in the US. Its effect has already begun to be felt in the teaching of American history in public schools, and wherever one lands in the controversy surrounding it, the teaching of history in the US already has, will, and should be changed dramatically because of it. Singularity is not the future of the writing of history of any kind, including literary history.

DANIEL O'GORMAN[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: I would not describe myself as a literary historian and have at times actively resisted this approach in my own work, in line with influential recent arguments made by the likes of Eric Hayot and Susan Stanford Friedman, both of whom I have discussed with my students in class. Having said that, I don't think that literary histories are necessarily *inherently* conservative. What the recent, period-sceptic approaches to historical scholarship have shown, crucially, is that there are other ways of organising literary study that produce different insights and enable access to different forms of knowledge, including insights into forms of knowledge and experience that would have been marginalised by traditional forms of literary history (hence the perception that literary history is an outmoded and politically conservative form).

However, while these recent critiques of periodisation have exposed the *limitations* of this approach, as well as a conservatism that inevitably results from many decades worth of literary historical scholarship being dominated by white middle-class men, I would tentatively suggest that literary history as a methodology can continue to have value, including value that might be seen as more radical or progressive in nature, if it is applied in innovative ways. One need only look at the formation of alternative literary histories—feminist, queer, POC—to see that the act of tracing historical lineages can help to visualize and solidify important counter narratives to the status quo. I say this with the important caveat that in some cases, these alternative histories, or temporalities, themselves overtly resist periodicity, so I accept that there are complexities here. Generally speaking, though, literary histories in the plural, whose centres of control sit firmly within the communities these histories are intended to represent, can function as vital alternative mappings of the world.

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[1] **Daniel O'GORMAN** is Vice Chancellor Research Fellow in English Literature at Oxford Brookes University. He specialises in contemporary literature, with a focus on global literary responses to terrorism, counterterrorism and space. Daniel is the author of *Fictions of the War on Terror: Difference and the Transnational 9/11 Novel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) and co-editor, with Robert Eaglestone, of *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction* (Abingdon: Routledge 2019). He is currently finishing a BA/Leverhulme funded collaborative research project called 'Beyond Concrete: Everyday Space in Gaza', with RIBA-nominated architect Salem Al-Qudwa (Harvard). Email: dogorman@brookes.ac.uk.

Of course, literary history as an approach continues to have major limitations, as any approach does, but an open-minded version to literary history, especially one that accounts for the ways in which different histories can overlap and interact with each other (as well as the differences and polyphonies that will inevitably exist within the same literary histories) can sit alongside more overtly radical approaches as a useful tool for tracing influences and nascent traditions. They can do this in a way that helps to construct a narrative about what is going on in a part of the world, for a particular group of people, at a particular moment in time. In this sense, literary histories do not have to be limited to place but can instead be built around literary scenes or styles: the internet and an evolving global literary marketplace have ensured that spheres of influence are no longer tied to nation, locality or region in the same way that they arguably once were.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: Yes, and I think that this is usually an example of literary histories at their worst. As with any kind of historical methodology, literary history is at its best when it is treated as an approach—or a tool—for understanding the relationships between certain groups of texts over time, rather than as an empirical or monolithic entity in its own right. Just as Bourdieu was right to encourage scepticism towards notions of 'distinction' derived from a perceived sense of ownership of, or gatekeeping over, the field cultural production, in my view it is healthy to maintain a similar wariness about what it is, exactly, that is going on in terms of the instrumentalisation of history in relation to *power*, when a particular strand of literary history attains the status of cultural capital in its own right. Historical approaches should help us to understand the sociological processes involved in their own formation, rather than attempting to hide these processes. As soon as that understanding starts to become overshadowed by a commodification of historical knowledge, the historical process begins to lose its value as a public good and instead effectively begins to be privatised, in the sense that the historical knowledge it enables becomes a means for a select group of gatekeepers to signify their ownership over this knowledge.

By saying this, I don't mean to do down the value of expertise: of course, there will always be small groups of historians who have greater knowledge of a particular history than others. Likewise, there will also be instances, especially in the case of alternative or minority histories, in which the question of ownership is politicised in important ways: it is important, for instance, for

ownership of LGBTQI+ literary histories to be in the hands of LGBTQI+ people. My point is that this is a different sort of ownership to the privatising ownership of a cultural elite, whether in the form of a careerist academic, a heteropatriarchal canon, or a marketing strategy that tries hard to sell book X to customers who are fans of bestselling authors Y and Z ('if you liked that, you'll love this!').

It is possible for ownership to be public in the sense that this ownership is geared towards the benefit of the people involved. As long as historicisation is used as a self-reflective methodology rather than a commodity in its own right, then this kind of ownership is possible and can even be genuinely progressive, politically. There has been a critical turn against identity studies in certain sections of literary and critical theory in recent years, but recent upturns in movements like BLM and transgender rights show that identity remains as important as ever and need not be antithetical to more structural or materialist approaches. The two sometimes go hand-in-hand, and literary histories—when done well—can help to articulate this connection.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: As I've mentioned already, I'm not a literary historian, and I find myself here in the odd position of defending it to some degree, despite being completely on board with the many legitimate criticisms to which it has recently been subjected: without doubt, it is an approach that has been guilty of commodifying periods in the conservative ways that the questions in this Q&A so far have identified. Moreover, it is depressing that in the academic job market, so many jobs in literary studies continue to be predicated so specifically upon period in a way that actively encourages applicants to frame themselves in these conservative terms: 'Lecturer in Nineteenth Century Literature', 'Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature' etc. (Periodicity is also often implicit in job titles that don't overtly mention it, such as those focused on World Literature or Postcolonial Literature). In PhD research training sessions, students are often told that combining periods or places can be a strength, and I totally agree with this from a research perspective (I do it myself), but when it comes to job applications, this sort of approach can sometimes make it hard for hiring panels to justify your 'fit' with the advertised profile.

Ultimately, however, I don't think that the response to this conservatism should be to put literary history in straightforward competition with other approaches: different approaches can exist alongside each other and productively complement each other. While it is right to question the limitations of the historiographical approach as it has been traditionally practised, I don't think it is

of that much benefit to anyone to throw the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak. Just because I tend to resist the worst aspects of periodisation in my own work, this doesn't mean that I believe the literary historical approach is somehow completely redundant. The impulse in academia, at the moment, to frame methodologies as being in fierce competition with each other is arguably a slightly worrying reflection of the neoliberal model of competition that is currently reshaping institutions and is ultimately antithetical to the open-minded, collaborative inquiry that academic research is supposed to be about.

Yes, we should continue working to find new ways of organising literary study, or even subjecting the academic impulse to 'organise', itself, to scrutiny. But the fact is that periodicity continues to hold a huge sway in the cultural imaginary, and that is largely down to the efforts of cultural critics—understood in the broadest sense, from giants like Eliot and the Bloom all the way through to Gen Z bloggers and BookTokers—for whom the confluence of time and space offered within the boundaries of a 'moment' or a 'period', fictitious as it may be, has remained an alluring method for conceptualising the dissemination of ideas between texts. In my opinion, decentering and destabilising literary history is more important than dismantling it. The latter is impossible, anyway: the big literary periods we have all been taught about at school and university are not going to disappear from the cultural consciousness anytime soon.

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: In our Introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Twenty-First Century Literary Fiction,* Robert Eaglestone and I responded to this question by drawing on Teju Cole and Judith Butler, both of whom have written in different ways about the limits of the contemporary, and about its relativity. In his globetrotting photograph/prose-poem travelogue, *Blind Spot*, Cole reflects upon his travels by saying that 'What is interesting is to find … the less obvious differences of texture: the signs, the markings, the assemblages, the things hiding in plain sight in each city or landscape' (2017, 200). He mentions these differences as an important qualification to a broader point that he makes about the 'continuity' between different global cities, which are connected with and reflect each other in their diversity (2017, 200). Difference and sameness, between such cities, start to blend together as categories. For Cole, the global contemporary is something that is shared, to some degree, between the world's urban centres. Butler, meanwhile, makes a similar point about the contemporary being limited by geography, only placing a greater emphasis on regional power than on urban centres: the contemporary is a temporal category, and 'temporality is organized along spatial lines' (2009, 101). What is considered contemporary within Western culture is not necessarily going to be experienced as such outside of it.

Both Cole and Butler are, of course, making versions of a claim that was popularized in cultural criticism around a decade ago by Giorgio Agamben, when in his essay, 'What is the Contemporary?', he influentially wrote that 'Contemporariness is … a singular relationship with one's own time, which adheres to it and, at the same time, keeps a distance from it' (2011, 11). That is, we are contemporary with those with whom we share a temporality: we share a habitation of that temporality, while also perceiving it from slightly different angles, hence breaking it down into a multitude of smaller temporalities, which shift around and change as we move through our lives. As Robert and I mention in out Introduction to the *Routledge Companion*, the literary critic Lionel Ruffel articulates a version of this idea nicely in his book, *Brouhaha: Worlds of the Contemporary*, when he writes that the contemporary 'feels more like a concordance of temporalities than a single time, a concordance that is also more subjective that collective: it's not postulating that a single, unique, unified present is shared by the community but rather that what the community shares is a subjectivized polychronicity' (2018, 178).

In the opening lecture of the 'Contemporary Literature' module that I convene at Oxford Brookes University, I unpack Ruffel's idea of a 'subjectivized polychronicity' for my students by asking them to imagine that they are sitting in the front row of an IMAX cinema, from which point it's not possible to see the whole screen without moving their heads around (I borrowed this metaphor from a similar passage in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*). I tell the students that they can all see only a small section of the screen clearly at any one time, and that if they get out of their seats and press theirs face right up against the screen, they'll start to see the picture breaking up into little colourful pixels. This is what studying the contemporary is like: it's sometimes hard to see the bigger picture when we're so immersed in the picture ourselves. And that's why I emphasise to them that seminar discussion is particularly important on a module about contemporary culture: individually, they're all only looking at their tiny part of the screen, but by talking to each other, they'll be able to start joining the dots to see the bigger picture. I think this metaphor is useful beyond the seminar, too. It's now a truism to say that the contemporary world is increasingly fragmented along partisan lines: perhaps more genuine communication between different factions, as opposed to rhetorical point-scoring, might provide a first step towards a way out some of the huge global challenges that affect us all: racial capitalism, disease, climate breakdown. Again, of course, such conversations are inflected by power, and as such place a particular onus on those in positions of relative privilege to listen and change.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: I would question how useful it is to frame this question in terms of 'legitimacy'. Given what we know about the way histories are made and how partial they necessarily are, it is clearly no longer legitimate for a single literary historian to present their own work as the 'definitive' version. However, if a literary history by a single author is framed as just that—*a* literary history, or a subjective part of a bigger conversation—then there is nothing wrong with that and there is no reason why it can't continue to have value as one form amongst many in contemporary debates.

Obviously, collectives are generally useful in this regard, as they necessarily encourage this sort of conversation, but of course collectives can themselves sometimes end up perpetuating the same sorts of historical oversights to which an individual historian might fall prey, especially if they are made up of researchers from similar backgrounds and with similar worldviews. Having said that, partiality is not a bad thing in and of itself: a working-class collective, or a feminist/LGBTQI+ collective, or an indigenous rights collective must necessarily be partial in its research aims, in order to represent the interests of those whose histories that have traditionally been marginalised within mainstream scholarship. So yes, when it comes to literary histories, collectives can generally offer fuller and more multifaceted accounts than individual historians, as long as they are able to remain self-reflective about their own collective subjectivities. Likewise, individual historians can benefit greatly from being members of a collective.

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EVE PATTEN[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: At the high point of its evolution, say at the end of the nineteenth century when George Saintsbury published *A Short History of English Literature* (which of course, was anything *but* short), the genre of the literary history was unashamedly conservative, dedicated to the bolstering of national identity, political outlook, culture and tradition, in a mode that defined the thinking of most European nations. Literary history was 'monumental', in Nietzsche's sense of that term: it was dedicated to the solidification of the past and its enshrinement in the narratives of the present. And rightly, this kind of monumentalism has been challenged, not just in our own time but throughout the twentieth century. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren were writing about 'the fall of literary history' back in the early 1940s (*Theory of Literature*, 1942), as the devastation of the Second World War undermined any sense of a collective or shared European narrative of cultural progress. At that time, many critics would have agreed, I expect, that this critical method would not survive the aesthetic and geo-political reorientations of the post-war decades.

But nation-based literary history, we have to acknowledge, *has* survived, with some commentators struggling to identify the reasons for this resilience. 'In the C21st globalized, multinational, and diasporic world, how can we explain the continuing appeal, not only of the single-nation/single-ethnicity focus of literary histories, but also, of its familiar teleogical model, deployed even by those writing the new literary histories based on race, gender, sexual choice', Linda Hutcheon and Mario J. Valdez ask in the introduction to their thoughtful edited volume, *Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory* (2002). And literary history has survived not only the reformations of society that followed the Second World War, but also the academic and pedagogical bombardments

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[1] **Eve PATTEN** is Professor of English at Trinity College, Dublin, and Director of the Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute. Her recent books include, as editor, *Irish Literature in Transition, 1940-1980* (Cambridge UP, 2020), and as author, *Ireland, Revolution, and the English Modernist Imagination* (Oxford UP, 2022). She worked for the British Council in Romania from 1993 to 1996. Email: epatten@tcd.ie.

which have followed since: the backlash against the Leavisite 'canon', the backlash against modernism, the assaults of deconstruction, the barring of the Dead White Males, and the continuing decolonization of the university curriculum.

Literary histories continue to give shape to our comprehension of the literary field, and continue to do this—despite globalization—in predominantly national terms. *The Oxford English Literary History*, for example, ably steered by general editor Jonathan Bate, keeps producing new individual volumes and remains perhaps the defining series of its type. I use it regularly and benefit from the sense of a traditional framework as a reliable hinterland to the random shifts in taste of the literary foreground. And for those who attempt to take on the global remit, there has been great success too—I'm so impressed by Debjani Ganguly's management of what seemed impossible, in her superb editing of *The Cambridge History of World Literature*, published recently in 2021.

What Ganguly's work also shows is that literary history, as a genre, has not remained static. Over the last few years I have witnessed its development through my own engagement with the form, as a volume editor for the *Irish Literature in Transition* series, published by Cambridge under the general editorship of Claire Connolly and Marjorie Howes. The mode and ideology of Irish literary history is obviously different to an English canonical counterpart, but may have useful things in common with Romanian narratives. In this case, the idea of 'transition' in the title for the six volume series, ambitiously surveying the period from 1700 to 2020, signals the intention to move beyond a linear, top-down narrative of continuity and influence—something which has never been straightforward in Irish writing anyway—and to emphasise instead, the discontinuities, fractures, and fault-lines which have shaped an Irish literary experience over four centuries. This was a literary history that aimed to swap monumentalism for misinheritances, and teleology for unpredictability. A literary history that enfolded 'histories' (and 'herstories' and increasingly 'theirstories') within itself.

A key addition in this series was the focus beyond national boundaries to the 'elsewheres' of Irish writing, in the US, Europe, and even Asia, with a responsible shift of focus to the diasporic and extra-territorial contexts of Irish literary culture and history—an experience that Romanian literary culture undoubtedly shares. In fact I note a similar welcome emphasis in new Romanian histories, specifically the focus on the 'transnational geolocations' of the modernist era, in Martin, Moraru and Terian (eds.), *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (2018). This expansion beyond fossilised national definitions has been instructive, even paradigmatic here, giving us a means of moving on from a literary history that defines our culture in terms of the 'minor' and 'peripheral', by restoring the broader European, transatlantic and indeed, global conversations in which Irish writing has shared.

It has also relaxed—to some degree—the grip of what can be very compromising political outlines (by which I mean rigid postcolonial and nationalist outlines) that blind us to the full picture of our own literary inheritance. This accommodating spatial expansionism is evident in recent books such as Joe Cleary's *The Irish Expatriate Novel in Late Capitalist Globalization* (2021), and is being taken up in rigorous literary and cultural history by Irish academics based in central and Eastern Europe, including Aidan O'Malley at the University of Rijeka, Croatia, for example, whose forthcoming study of Irish literary debates in the context of mid C20th Europe will further undermine the prevailing insularity of Irish literary history.

I would add that this spatial redefinition is not critical opportunism but a response to major changes in literary history methodology over the past few years. Irish writing has benefited from substantial realignments thanks to the results of digitization and newly available archives. While the Irish national canon is still heralded by the giants, Joyce, Yeats, and Beckett, fresh generations of students and critics have turned to lesser-known figures, including many brilliant but neglected women writers, and to alternative genres, including middlebrow and popular formats. There has been an enriching attention paid to material culture in the form of print and publishing history, which has also helped to adjust the boundaries of a national narrative. And crucially, the sense of the nation itself, the bedrock for literary history, has collapsed under pressure from new and exciting transnational models, following influential thinkers such as Pascale Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters* (originally published 1999), or from the game-changing readings of archipelagic and regional studies critics. Nicholas Allen's *Ireland, Literature, and the Coast* (2021) is a notably productive reading of modern Irish writing through modes of fluidity, porosity, oceanic network and extra-territorial connection.

Crucially then, a postcolonial Irish literary history conventionally mobilized by rigid oppositionality to a British tradition has given way to a mobile and provisional set of identities, and to the recognition that an Irish writing has emerged in the wider context of European, global, transatlantic or transnational alliances and hybridities, including the close-at-hand context of British hybridity, which I explore in my own work. So a transitional literary history, in this case, has evolved in tandem with a global confidence and a recognition of spatial or diasporic landscapes.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: There is no doubt that literary histories do, and should, become subject to critical review and deconstruction. Their alliance with the project of national identity formation calls them into immediate question, while their necessary patterns of exclusion and canonization have to be interrogated. The Irish example is salutory here. In early 1990s, against the volatile backdrop of the continuing Troubles in Northern Ireland, the publication of the initial three-volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, compiled under general editor Seamus Deane, provided a version of Irish literary history that many saw as being yoked to a singular Irish male nationalist identity, and that excluded both female and Protestant unionist voices, in particular. But the controversy that ensued captured the public imagination, well beyond the normal remit of a literary publication, and perhaps sensitized a younger generation of critics to the dangers of literary monumentalism. No-one wants to repeat that exercise. There is no doubt that the *Field Day* volumes anthologized a lot of good and sometimes obscure material, and provided expert critical contexts, alignments, and historical narratives, but overall the enterprise was swamped by the weight of its own ideological agenda. And yes, doctoral theses and books have been written on the project and what the whole saga meant for Irish culture and politics, so it did become a culture in and of itself, in that respect.

Certain weaknesses or hangovers have beset an Irish literary history as a legacy of national 'identity parades' in the past. For me, some of these are bound up with issues of genre. In its post-Revival, post-Yeats evolution, concepts of an Irish canon remained heavily invested in poetry, theatre, and the short story as supposedly 'national' art forms, with a companion critical downgrading of the novel (with the obvious and erratic exception of *Ulysses*). According to the set narrative, the realist novel was seen as the 'poor relation' of the Irish literary family, a genre that didn't fit a non-bourgeois, non-industrial population. Irish society, plundered and damaged by the colonial experience, was too 'thin', it was argued, to sustain a Charles Dickens or George Eliot. Ireland's literary history was skewed as a result of several influential readings in this vein, and it is only recently that the novel genre has been allowed to tell the 'national story' and to illuminate the plurality and polyphony of Irish society, with the recent publication of the multi-authored *Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Fiction* (2021), edited by Liam Harte, an example of substantial and purposeful generic recovery. The Irish novel is now, arguably, the grounding genre for a solid Irish literary history, and the strength of contemporary Irish fiction, in the work of writers such as Kevin Power, Sara Baume, Caitriona Lally and Sally Rooney, endorses that evolution.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: This is such a good question. The short answer is yes, periodization helps to frame our thinking. Again, to turn to Ireland as an example, our current focus on the 'decade of centenaries', the past ten years of reflection on the troubled founding of the new independent state a hundred years ago, has prompted critical interest in themes of memory, post-traumatic experience, and national recovery. There are periods of our modern history when literature appears to speak clearly to social experience: the mass emigrations from Ireland in the 1950s, for example, provided a cradle for a literature of diaspora and exile, while the Northern Irish Civil Rights protest era and then the Troubles, after 1970 and up to the IRA ceasefires of the mid 1990s, are categorically a defining context of a new vein of highly politicised and responsive creativity. In the same way, Irish literary history looks usefully to the Celtic Tiger era of economic expansion as marking a sea-change in cultural sensibility. For Mihai Iovanel, in the new *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*, there is a clear rationale in working from 1990 to the present to indicate a paradigm shift—even if it was a slow and sometimes faltering shift—in Romanian literary and social life after the fall of Ceaucescu in 1989. In British writing, the catastrophe of the Brexit vote in 2016 may prove to be similar temporal marker for writers and critics.

But inevitably such alignments produce artificial literary landscapes, and skewed perspectives. They will always exclude meaningful continuities and inheritances. I think back to W.B. Yeats, and how he downgraded the entire nineteenth century in his influential introduction to the *Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1936), or of how the deaths of Yeats, Joyce and Woolf, so close together, give a convenient but flawed sense of the end of modernism happening neatly in 1940. We all know that the impulse to parcel up workable segments of literary history is driven by teleology and hindsight, but we continue to practice this, all the same. It makes the unwieldiness of the cultural and political past manageable.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: There has to be room for both approaches. The collaborative, multi-authored approach allows for a variety of expertise and a wide coverage. The experience of working with the large team that created the Cambridge *Irish Literature in Transition* series showed me that literary history benefits from critical multi-focalism, even at the risk of repetitions and overlaps. But if I reflect on works that have stayed with me throughout my academic career, they are very often single-author studies. Valentine Cunningham's *British Writers of the Thirties*, first published in 1988, answers both this question and the previous one: I doubt it can ever be bettered as a literary account of a decade. Malcolm Bradbury's *The Modern British Novel* (1993) offers the same level of individual authority, and thematic continuity, across a vast sweep of post-war fiction. For those interested in writing in Ireland, Seamus Deane's *A Short History of Irish Literature* (1986) is a further example of an individual author with complete command over the pertinent cultural and ideological narratives of an era, and of a literary history that establishes trust with the reader in a way that multi-authored studies often fail to achieve. Even when there are quirks and preferences, the right author will still carry the reader along with the tide of a historical evolution: Randall Stevenson's *The Last of England*, which is the 12th volume of the *Oxford English Literary History*, covering the period from 1960 to 2000, is full of unexpected turns, provocations, and idiosyncracies, but it is exactly that individuality of approach that gives the study its energy and character. A research collective may give a fuller, more detailed profile, but a single author can tell a story.

SAMAH SELIM[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: I don't think anyone really does traditional, canon-based literary history anymore in the wake of late 20th century post-structuralist and new historicist approaches. In the 21st century there has been a broad move away from national paradigms of literary history towards systems theory and comparativist methodologies that foreground the horizontal circulation of texts across linguistic and/or spatial and temporal borders, and hence work to undermine both the Eurocentrism and elitism embedded in comparative and national literary studies. World literature studies and translation studies have been the fields most implicated in this renovation of literary history. Narratology and comparative poetics offer useful tools for examining the history of traveling genres. Fabulous new collaborative initiatives like OCCT's Prismatic Translation project deploy the translated work of literature as the productive site of multiple literary histories plotted across diverse geographies, languages and traditions. Moreover, in my own work overall I am very much inclined to agree with critics like Eric Hayot that a concern with the present should frame the way we go about investigating the past.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: Very much so, but this is mainly true in relation to academic culture and university curricula. I think that outside these narrow cultural enterprise zones,

[1] **Samah SELIM** is a scholar and an award-winning translator of Arabic literature. She is the author of *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt 1880-1985* (Routledge, 2004) and *Popular Fiction, Translation and the Nahda in Egypt* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019). Her most recent translation is Arwa Salih's *The Stillborn: Notebooks of a Woman from the Student Movement Generation in Egypt* (Seagull Books, 2018). Selim teaches at Rutgers University's Department of African, Middle Eastern and South Asian Languages and Literatures. Email: sselim@amesall.rutgers.edu.

the question of identity can and should be defined by historical thinking involving much broader—more genuinely experimental and less policed—areas of creative media. I'm thinking here of popular musical cultures for example, jazz or hiphop, and the ways in which these go about constructing fluid and openly sourced performative traditions and historical repertoires that bring together image, sound and both the written and spoken word.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: I do think periodization still matters, but only as an open-ended and self-conscious revisionist process that centers an ecumenical and experimental view of locations and temporalities. I recently participated in a workshop on "the literary 1980s" in the Maghreb and Middle East. One of the central and ultimately most productive problematics of the workshop turned out to be the whole question of the utility of periodization as a heuristic exercise for thinking precisely about the present, which in the Arab world, since the revolutions of 2011, is organized around the recursive trope of 'failure' that arrives in the contemporary moment via the historical trauma of 1967. In other words, how do our locations in the present moment (spatial and temporal) ultimately shape the way we periodize? And can we challenge and expand our understanding of the present moment by shifting and reframing these historical and spatial categories?

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: Until recently contemporaneity was understood in Eurocentric terms. The concept of 'development' as applied to what used to be called 'the periphery' largely foreclosed the possibility of the contemporary—as concept and as experience—for non-European societies, which were perceived to move through time in the 'always after' of modernization and dependency. It used to be very difficult to write about Egypt, for example, as occupying the same space of contemporaneity as France; to make the claim in other words that the modern—whether one is talking about political economic structures or literary genres—is a horizontal temporality rather than a vertical and hierarchical one. I think the synchronous, interconnected global revolts of 2011 changed this essentially colonial episteme for good by demonstrating the political and cultural power of contemporaneity in action.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: In general, I think collaboration should be the norm rather than the exception in the humanities. Literary history has much to benefit from collective research. One example is the Prismatic Translation project I mentioned earlier, which is run by a collective housed at Oxford University. In my 2019 book I discussed how digitization can enable the kind of collective and even crowd-sourced historical research that could rescue the crumbling archive from the oblivion to which it is surely headed. Nevertheless, the vast majority of literary histories are still single-authored and I have no problem with that either. I owe a great debt to some of these in my own work, of course. I'd also like to mention here that there is a great deal of pleasure to be had from reading what we can and should think of as the *genre* of literary history. Older literary histories can and should be read as literary and historical documents in their own right.

MOHAMMED SENOUSSI[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: Indeed, there is no consensus among scholars on the necessity of literary histories. The way we appreciate and perceive literature changes over time; that is why there is no agreement about the rules of literary historiography. Perception, interpretation and reception of literature changes from one culture to another and one generation to another; therefore, we can write different histories about the same work. Borrowing Sartre's famous quote "*existence precedes essence*," literature and literary history are always in the process of becoming. Literature is not something that exists but something that becomes.

Furthermore, literary history writers must refashion the way they write because modern literature is heavily loaded with ideologies. In other words, literary historiography must shift its focus of the 'literariness' of the text to the politics of the text. For instance, shall we simply define Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as the first modernist work, i.e., defining the novella and explaining its form and techniques? Or shall we discuss its functionalities? Conrad for some literary historians is a giant of English literature, but for other critics is a bloody racist. So, what history shall we write?

Indeed, literary history remains a hard genre. As an Algerian scholar, I believe that literary history writing is necessary for all cultures and nations as they need a register for their cultural productions. We need to keep literary history up to date. There are countries like my country, Algeria, that do not have up-to-date statistics on how many literary productions and critical works are published each year. I have never encountered a literary historical encyclopedia of Algerian literature even though our literary history can be traced back to the second century AD with the publication of the first known novel in world history entitled *The Golden Ass* by the Numidian Latin-language author Apuleius. I believe it is the job of universities, the ministry of culture and research centers to

[1] **Mohammed SENOUSSI** is a senior lecturer at the Department of Letters and English Language, University of M'sila, Algeria. He is also the head of the scientific committee at the English department. His research interests include literature with relation to politics, terrorism, African and Middle Eastern communities, culture and language. He is the author of five articles that tackle the problematic relationship between literature, dictatorship, immigration and terrorism. Email: mohammed.senoussi@univ-msila.dz.

refashion literary history writing taking advantage of technology. Digitization nowadays can help create a literary map or a literary encyclopedia in which different literary genres, movements and works can be readily thought about, studied, and examined. I believe that digitization and statistics can help refashion literary history writing. There are floods of narratives being published each year, and while we try to devour past texts in the hope of charting and mapping them, the shadows of futurity are cast upon us. We need technology. In a word, applying algorithmic methods, quantitative and technological tools will transform this genre into 'digital literary history.' Indeed, it is high time to refashion this genre of literary historical analysis proving that numbers, literature and history are not opposites.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: Yes, literary history is preoccupied with identity that is among the most important formative experiences of human history itself. I cannot think of an author who writes without an identity, culture, or ideology. Authors do not write on a cloud detached from the socio-historical and cultural realities that surround them. The politics of writing literary histories thus reveals that the act of writing itself is turning into a culture, a tradition, and a discourse. Let us say a German writing his history for instance will glorify his literature, we may say he is not interested of 'what is German literature' but 'what is the German nation'. An African will defend his national culture and literature against colonial legacies, an Irishman will celebrate his Irishness, a feminist will advocate women's voices and gender equality. Therefore, literary history turns into a tool to enhance national culture, identity, and ideologies. We thus shall have as many histories as literary cultures.

Besides, literary history writing in that case can borrow from ethno-linguistics and socio-linguistics. In short, borrowing Frantz Fanon's words, I can call this endeavor of charting histories of literary cultures as the whole body of efforts made by a people in a sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence via literature.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy

than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: As I said before, authors do not write on a cloud detached from the socio-historical context that surrounds the act of writing and reading. It is difficult to avoid the relationship between text and context. Even literature that reflects individual lives does intersect with governments, monarchies, bureaucracies, wars, plagues and so forth. The authority of literary periodization as a diachronic model used by anthologies where there is a beginning and an end is epitomized in the comparison and contrast between literary periods and movements. In other words, a literary anthology has to start somewhere and end somewhere, but what makes literary history approaches different from those of history departments is comparison and contrast. For example, I can discuss new literary histories such as post-9/11 literature. How the 9/11 attacks changed the lives of so many people around the world. How literature responded to the so-called war on terror. I, therefore, divided literary history using one of the most important events in the new millennium. We may call this new literary period the Age of Terror. So, we are creating a new literary period.

The problem is that, as you pointed out in the first question, this is a conservative old-fashioned method. I believe we can develop new methods of reasoning better than following linear concepts of time, drawing boundaries, beginning and ends. One can disagree with temporal boundaries used here, notably that modern literature is built on multi-layered and multi-dimensional concepts of time. We as scholars can reject this authority of periodization by focusing on the logical change and development of literature rather than the chronological change. Again, this takes me back to the first question, where I highlighted the importance of digital technological tools that may offer new methods of studying gradual continuous changes of literature.

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: In fact, the contemporary or contemporaneity is a word that suffers from semantic ambiguous usage. What is the 'contemporary'? Is it a type of art that comes after modernism? Can we call the art we produce now: post post post-modern? I am interested here in the application of the word in a global context. I do not think all nations are familiar with modernist principles; modernism as a way of thinking and as philosophy is absent in many third world countries. We cannot reach contemporaneity skipping other stages. As an Algerian scholar, I assure you that modernism is nothing but a metaphorical concept that has no

real presence in my country. Modernism is synonymous here with secularism, cultural imperialism and even blasphemy. The Algerian individual fails to cope with modernist ideas. He is living a constant conflict between several binaries, notably the past and the future, the progressive and the reactionary. Therefore, contemporaneity in that case is nothing but a word that describes the actual moment, it is stripped from its philosophical epistemological meanings. The Algerian is living in the past, he glorifies his past and wishes to revive it because of his failure to create a present contemporary identity. His present is declining, his future is degenerating. His present is not a good birthplace for modernist ideas. So, what history shall we write about him? Shall we write about his past only since he is stuck in it? His past is an obstacle for his present and future. It is like he is living in a museum of old glories; he is not trying to create and invent his own heritage. He cannot break with the past. He lives on the crossroads of cultures and times, he is fragmented. In short, we only possess and own modern products and contemporary items like smartphones, cars and others; however, our mindsets reside in the past. I believe art and literary historians will find themselves in a crisis on how to deal with such contemporaneity.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: Before answering this question, I want to say that there is literary chaos in Algeria. Publication is turning into business par-excellence. Anyone can pay a publishing house to publish his work. They do not care about the scientific or artistic value of the work. As a result, there are floods of poor-quality published poems, novels and stories; houses of publications turn into printing shops, nothing more, nothing less. They make dough from these so-called writers obsessed with fame. In well-established publishing houses, they pay you for your ideas. They have reading committees and strict editors. If this was the case here, no one would publish. So, as literary historians, how are we going to choose selected works as representatives of their time? How to select the best novels, criticisms and poems in the midst of this chaos? Is the selection procedure objective? Shall one single person do it or is it collective? Is it the job of research centers, universities and research teams to write literary history? It must become a domain of collective research. It is becoming a huge work that single authors cannot handle. To achieve objectivity, collective research is better.

RŪTA ŠLAPKAUSKAITĖ[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: Framed as it is, the question may be read as appealing to ideas about agency—personal, disciplinary, and institutional—in the appraisal of cultural forms as objects of critical scholarship, especially the study of literature. But the guiding assumption about the nature of literary history or histories, as simultaneously an endangered and a dominant academic species in critical humanities, is itself worthy of consideration. The convergence of our sense of the outdatedness of teaching and studying literary history, on the one hand, and its entrenchment in institutional practices, on the other, it seems to me, has a structure of the uncanny in that it captures the intellectual and affective resonance of our current moment at the same time as it throws us back to critiques of postmodern sensibility, with Jean-François Lyotard diagnosing the postmodern condition as a disillusionment with grand narratives, Fredric Jameson lamenting the "weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality" (1991, 6), and Francis Fukuyama declaring the end of history consequent upon the victory of liberal democracy over the Soviet totalitarian regime. Yet, as the twenty-first century unfolds into its third decade, a number of these observations recede into doubt, whether through the durability of intellectually reflexive forms of art, like the historical novel (think of Linda Hutcheon's reasoning about historiographic metafiction), or modes of entertainment, like genre fictions and blockbuster movies and TV series, or newly emerging geopolitical horizons of precarity, like global warming, international terrorism, racial, social, and climate injustice, nuclear imperialism, and war. There's a haunting feeling that we have seen this before and one wonders if history has come back as a farce or as Feste's prophecy in *Twelfth Night* about "the whirligig of time" which "brings in his revenges" (5.1.374).

[1] **Rūta ŠLAPKAUSKAITĖ** is an Associate Professor of English literature at Vilnius University, Lithuania. Her research interests include Canadian and Australian literature, neo-Victorianism, and environmental humanities. Among her recent publications are "An Ecology of the Hewn in Susan Vreeland's *The Forest Lover*" in a collective monograph *The Northern Forests* co-published by the University of Tartu and Montreal's Imaginaire Nord, "The He(A)rt of the Witness: Remembering Australian Prisoners of War in Richard Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*" in *Anglica: An International Journal of English Studies*, and "Precariousness, kinship and care: Becoming human in Clare Cameron's *The Last Neanderthal*" in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature.* Email: ruta.slapkauskaite@flf.vu.lt.

In so far as the study of literary texts involves bringing to presence horizons that exceed the seemingly given and contemporary, reading and writing always engage with the temporality of aesthetic being realized through a hermeneutic performance of what in *Truth and Method* Hans-Georg Gadamer calls "a transformation into the true" (2012, 112). Seen this way, historical horizon is shown to inhere in the ontological structures of literature itself, submitting the temporal alienness of aesthetic forms as "a task for consciousness and an achievement that is demanded of it" (124), which guides interpretation into a merging of horizons as a premise of hermeneutic understanding. Literature, as Gadamer reminds us, exists not "as the dead remnant of alienated being, left over for a later time as simultaneous with its experiential reality", but as "a function of being intellectually preserved and handed down" (154), which is to say as an act of signification originating in the past that solicits the interpretive attention of the present. From a hermeneutic perspective, then, making sense of literature "brings its hidden history into every age" (154), recasting contemporaneity as a grasp of the full presence of meaning embodied by the modes of being we call art.

At the heart of the hermeneutic conception of reading as an intersubjective experience, of course, is the notion of tradition, which reinscribes as intellectual proximity that which would otherwise remain a historical distance in the interpretive consciousness' attempts to understand literature as "a historically effected event" (Gadamer 2012, 299). The dynamic nature of understanding in this reasoning reinforces the idea that tradition, rather than being "a permanent precondition" (293) or a cognitive monolith of critical orthodoxies, is "a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated" (291). History, in this trajectory of thought, bears both on the subjectivity of the interpreter and the subject matter of interpretation, entangled as they are in the hermeneutic circle of familiarity and strangeness. Arguably, what this means for the study of literary texts is that our aesthetic epistemologies must accommodate a sense of the past as "a positive and productive condition enabling understanding" (297) if we are to account for the hermeneutic situatedness of all of our interpretations.

But how do we account for our historical situatedness in the epoch of the Anthropocene and against its horizon of ecological disruptions? In narrower and more practical terms, how do we approach the institutional narratives of literary history, whose symbolic capital, as Christine L. Marran demonstrates in *Ecology Without Culture: Aesthetics for a Toxic World*, largely derives from erasing the historicity of the biotic world and employing culturally sanctioned biotropes "to perform human value" (2017, 11)? For Gadamer, "To be historically means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete" (2012, 301) and the ethical stakes of this epistemological open-endedness seem to rise ever higher with the ongoing increase in global environmental precarity. Given the multiscalar terms of reference the Anthropocene brings into operation, our historical

moment seems particularly mindful of literature's capacity to lay bare the "multivalent traffic between matter and ideas", which Jennifer Wenzel calls "the disposition of nature" (2020, 3), encompassing both how humans understand nature and how they make use of it. Attention to formal choices in discourse, Wenzel argues, can boost a mode of reflexivity that performs "reading for the planet" as "a dynamic process of rescaling" (2), which rethinks the alignments between literature, history, environmental activism, the climate system, and the whole planet. Inclined toward the angle of environmental humanities, the discourse of literary history, too, has the potential to put its epistemological incompleteness and institutional tenacity into the service of critical thinking that encourages and enables us to heed planetary imperatives and "stay with the trouble" (Haraway 2016).

This certainly seems to be Wai Chee Dimock's view in *Weak Planet*: *Literature and Assisted Survival*, where she observes that "Literary history has yet to be seen as a mediating network of this sort: imperfect and incessant. Seen that way, as a nonsovereign field weakly durable because continually crowdsourced, it offers one of the best examples of redress as an incremental process, never finished because never without new input" (2020, 7). The conceptual promise of this approach springs from Dimock's thinking about literary history's witnessing of vulnerability as a shared ontological condition, which not only rescales and decenters human historical experience, but also redistributes agency in the domain of authorship, where "it bears the imprint of the nonhuman as well as the human" (2020, 4), and institutional practice, where attentiveness to precarity can forge new ties of solidarity against the dominant ethos of utility, the tiredness of old models, and inherited structures of power. Read against the light of the *long durée*, as Dimock does in *Through Other Continents. American Literature Across Deep Time*, literature "throw[s] into relief trajectories and connections that might otherwise have been obscured" (2006, 4), with the *deep time* of the planet Earth closing in on the hubris of human sovereignty and calling for renewed commitments to the ethics of kinship and "collateral resilience" (2020, 12). "Faced with the impending catastrophes of the twenty-first century", Dimock's argument insists, "literature offers many options, including the counterintuitive one of going forward by reaching back, giving the present a prehistory, an archive notable for its granulity and depth" (2020, 6). Rather than entering the institutional dialectic of *obsolescence/conservatism*, then, perhaps a more viable and sustainable option for the discourse of literary history is to draw on the host of excellent work in the environmental humanities, like that of Kate Rigby, Simon Estok, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Steve Mentz, and Catriona Sandilands, to reinvigorate and recalibrate the very terms of intellectual engagement through which literary texts and cultural practices are situated in "an incremental lifeline" (Dimock 2020, 174) of the cultural ecology of risk, extinction, and persistence?

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: I could begin with an unnecessary reiteration of the verdict of postcolonial criticism, which emphasizes the social constructedness of literary canons as sites of ideological conflicts, complicities, and contradictions, while also admitting to being fascinated by Harold Bloom's trust in the aesthetic transparency of canonicity as "a mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated, or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange" (1994, 3). But I am more interested in how our thinking about canons furnishes troubling links to ideas about tradition and inheritance, especially as they figure in the context of institutional practices and their critiques. Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins*, a book-length study of the impact of neoliberal governance on university culture, and Sara Ahmed's *What's the Use?*, a more recent critical examination of utility and meritocracy in institutional life, provide some of the most thought-provoking insights that gauge my own ambivalence towards canon-making.

The crux of Readings' take on the *canon* pertains to how he distinguishes it from *tradition*, enveloping both categories in his arguments about the ongoing crisis of contemporary culture as "the immanent principle in terms of which knowledge within the University is organized" (1999, 87). In his account, the structuring force of the notion of the *canon* has a specifically American inflection, derived from the revolutionary ethos of a republican democracy, in whose eyes the hereditary weight of *tradition* casts into doubt the whole enterprise of democratic choice. Contrasting F.R. Leavis's emphasis on *tradition* in literary scholarship in the UK to the American New Critics' aversion to historicity and commitment to treating "the artwork as essentially autonomous, capable of evoking a response without extraneous information to guide interpretation" (1999, 84), Readings shows how the latter disposition gave rise "to arguments about the canon precisely because the canon is, in fact, the surreptitious smuggling of *historical* continuity into the study of supposedly discrete and autonomous artworks" (84). The appeal of the *canon* as opposed to *tradition*, the argument continues, rides on its link to the will of the people, who are posited as the ultimate agents of culture to be studied, cultivated, and inculcated as a vehicle of "a national cultural identity" (85). However, under the aegis of neoliberal governance, which promotes the corporate image of what Readings calls the University of Excellence over the Enlightenment legacy of the University of Culture, the notion of the *canon* can lay claims neither to the unifying idea of the

nation-state nor to a coherence of cultural instruction nor to the metonymic promise of their aesthetic effects. Culture itself, for Readings, has lost its meaning and become "dereferentialized" (99). Conceived as a market site of simultaneous production of knowledge and delivery of services, the University of Excellence—which sadly is the academic home for most of us—dispenses with the social contract that used to bind educational institutions to individual passage through time and intellectual thought and instead masquerades "efficient knowledge" (163) as thought, erasing in the process the ethical pull of reciprocity that binds the university's administrators, academics, and students in a network of mutual obligations and accountability. I cannot help but echo Readings' poignant observation that in a university which operates as a transnational corporation the culture wars and revisions of canons are but a bureaucratic technique of sidetracking our attention away from the breakdown of culture's internal relations and communicational circuits to the discursive proliferation of "efficient knowledge" (163), in which literature competes with all the other forms of cultural production. Keyed to the logic of market economy, what relevance, other than instrumental, can the idea of the *canon* or *tradition* have for the study of literature?

The crisis of the function of the canon Readings highlighted in American academic culture in the 1990s, unfortunately, remains a symptom of the recalcitrance of the utilitarian calculus by virtue of which universities today continue to promote "education for profit-making" rather than "education for a more inclusive type of citizenship" (Nussbaum 2010, 7), replacing the civic notion of the common good, which relies on thinking as a social practice, with a market ideal of knowledge production, which steers academic performance towards "maximizing the welfare of consumers" (Sandel 2021, 227). The critical reflections of Martha Nussbaum and Michael Sandel, both of whom I cite to support Readings' reasoning, bring us back to the issue of values at the basis not only of our thinking about the formation of literary canons and traditions, but also about the conceptual scope of democratic culture and the work we expect it to carry out. Nussbaum's defense of the usefulness of a humanities education makes a good point in arguing that "Citizens cannot relate well to the complex world around them by factual knowledge and logic alone" (2010, 95). But if literary canons and traditions are to be conceived only as institutional knowledge hinging on the reproduction of inherited forms and practices, then it is hardly surprising that they end up transmitting the ethos of utility disguised as the imperative of excellence. Sara Ahmed's critical examination of utility as university policy offers some remarkably profound insights into the conceptual contradictions of meritocracy as a principle of social justice. An important part of her argument stems from observing the ways in which the idea of use follows

a circular logic, whereby what is in use in institutional settings gets conflated and confused with what is or may be useful, so that attempts at revision and diversification amount to commodification and/or repetitive strains of "wall work", which is to say "scratching the surface; scratching at the surface" of institutional screens (Ahmed 2019, 151) that reinstate the "gap between what is given expression as intention and what is being done" (148). Ahmed's term for such masquerade of axiological praxis is "nonperformativity" (153), a structure of in/activity employed to foreclose expected effects, which also ensures the alignment of use/fulness with the usual, resulting in a metalepsis of use as inheritance to be passed on as an institutional norm and injunction. For as the scholar deftly observes, "An inheritance not only can be *what* you receive but can be a matter of *how* you are received" (165).

Lest we think that concerns over the cultural work of inheritance as a practice of alienation stay within the ambit of social representation in university contexts, Ahmed also troubles the conception of discursive tradition as a mode of inheritance enacted through the use of "citational paths" (2019, 168), which summon up the referential system of competence at the same time as they reproduce the silences that police the boundaries of academic excellence. Tethered to a strong view of the canon or tradition as a regime of value that preserves the *status quo*, studying literature foregoes any possibility of critical intervention on terms other than those procured through the well-trodden tracks of "institutional funneling" (185). Seen this way, the weight of inheritance becomes a gift of power, citational as much as social: "To be trained within a discipline is to learn to follow a citational path: certain work does not have to be regarded because it does not come into view if you follow a path, which means work can be discarded without deliberation" (168). To be sure, Ahmed is not arguing against the practice of citing, which is pivotal to the ethical sharing of research, but in calling attention to the normative bias of citational paths, she demonstrates how institutions function as "container technologies", "a way of holding things or holding onto things" (170), where inherited structures and habits institute restrictions that shape both the subjectivities confronting them and the work they elicit. In a utilitarian conception of education, such restrictions speak the language of meritocracy, all the while keeping from view the system's use of selection as a mode of assistance given only to those who fit the inherited requirements. Consequently, in discourse as in institutional life, not to follow the well-trodden path is to become a misfit: "The more we use the more used terms, the more we are aligned; we are going the same way others are going. If you tried to deviate, to change direction, you would get in the way of other people's motions" (195).

Is there a way to counteract institutional resistance to change and the corporate hijacking of revisionary impulse? In Ahmed's view, "To build an alternative university requires crafting different routes from what is behind us: the fainter trails, the less used paths…it takes willed work not to reproduce an inheritance, not to create the same old shape" (2019, 196). In Readings' terms, it calls for the cultivation of an ethics of "dissensus" (1999, 187), whose communal dynamics derive from reciprocal obligations "that we cannot finally understand" (188) rather than any position of social authority. Perhaps thinking of canons as weak epistemologies, provisionally *weak canons*, is one way in which literary scholarship could galvanize the stretching and puncturing of institutional walls that systematize thought as disciplinary enclosures and manage subjectivities which are given access to the inner sanctum? Could a *weak canon*, organized around the principle of contingency and continuous correction, do more justice to the fallacies of cultural memory as well as institutional constraints and recover some of Readings' vision of a symbiosis of culture and canon as endlessly open to revision and committed to ethical growth?

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: The writer Elias Canetti has once observed that the human preoccupation with chronology traces the mobility of their desire, wherein the "recurrence of the days, whose names they are conscious of, gives them security" (1979, 43). This is one way of saying, I suppose, that however limiting in their conceptual work, the categories on which we rely in the ordering of life and experience are indispensable to our efforts to understand the world and our place in it. In this respect, periodization in literary history is no exception. This is not to say that it should not be seen as problematic. The tendency of chronological brackets to collapse into each other, together with the mercurial character of such designations as neoclassical, Baroque, Augustan, or early modern, are symptomatic of the logic of metalepsis that runs through the inventory of historical categories, making them prone to revisions of dominant narratives of literary history. Yet there is a value to periodization in terms of how it helps us structure the cumulative process of change, particularly as it draws parallels between geology and social history, making it possible for humanities scholars to align the accretion and erosion of meaning with the larger uncertainties of planetary order.

Dimock's work in *Through Other Continents* and Tobias Menely's *Climate and the Making of Worlds* are good examples of the recent attempts in critical humanities to move beyond the vernacular understanding of periodization into an analytical praxis which connects discursive formations to "the planet's multitudinous life" (Dimock 2006, 3). For Dimock, the lack of categorical rigour in the term *genre*, especially, offers a means to remap the domain of literature as "a phenomenal field of contextually induced parallels" (74), where aesthetic forms are linked through kinship rather than lineage, reconstituting literary history as "a fractal model of looping: a model of recursive kinship" (86), with "coils of words" bearing the weight of the "coils of time" (92) in the interactive fabric of signs, scales, conventions, and their transformations. Built on the model of "fractal geometry", which "spills over onto several scales at once" (75), this architecture of poetic filiations effectively puts periodization in abeyance, highlighting the incompleteness of historical paradigms and the "animating hybridity" of "the classifying process itself" (91). The loops and layers of kinship that keep the cartography of meaning amenable to ever new threads of connection are commensurate with the principle of change. As Dimock points out, "That is why literature has a *history* to begin with. This history is not the story of a single genre, and can never be told using only one. Nor can it can [*sic*] be told as the story of a single language, a single chronology, a single territorial jurisdiction, for it is the scattering and mixing of genres that make literary history an exemplary instance of human history, which is to say, multipath, multiloci, multilingual" (91).

Menely's reading of seventeenth - and eighteenth-century English poetry through the lens of what he calls "the climatological unconscious" (2021, 3) is a similar conceptual push against "the inadequacy of received forms of inquiry" (1) in the epoch of the Anthropocene, itself a contentious term of periodization. Pressed up against the unfolding planetary catastrophe, his interpretations single out poetry as a site of energy transactions between micro-ecologies of private imaginations and macro-ecologies of the Earth system, which nourish the poetic register of geohistorical worldmaking. For Menely, "Poetry offers an archive of geohistory because poems formalize the activity of making as a transformative redirection of planetary energy" (15). The sense of periodization is key to this conception of geohistorical poetics because the poems studied in *Climate and the Making of Worlds* are anchored in "a particular phase of planetary history, the latter half of the Little Ice Age" (6), whose impact on social infrastructures accelerated the growth of industrialization, merchant capitalism, and imperial expansion as structural solutions to climate anxiety. Importantly, however, rather than seeing literary history as "simply 'embedded in specific historical occasions'", Menely recognizes all poetic work as a stratified

composition of time's pressures, "an archive of endurance and incipience" (16). Against the idea of periodization as a logic of disruption and departure Menely measures the principle of sedimentation, whereby "[a]ny text preserves, revitalizes, and refigures symbolic material inherited from earlier phases of history in its weave of allusions and generic affiliations [...]" (16). The ethical upshot of this reasoning recalls Steve Mentz's use of composture as an ecological metaphor for the logic of recycling organizing the volatility of cultural forms: "This vision imagines history as a comingling and fecund process, a fertilizing combination of the living and the dead. History as we encounter it in texts and representations is shot through with multiple temporalities" (2015, x). It is this alluvial flow of time into which Canetti taps when he thinks about the interlocking structures of literary history: "It is certain that nothing comes about without great paragons. But their works are also paralyzing: the deeper one grasps them, i.e. the more gifted one is, the more convinced one becomes that they are not to be reached. Experience, however, proves the opposite. Modern literature came into being *despite* the overwhelming model of Antiquity" (1979, 51).

I am not using this as an argument against periodization in literary history; my modest hope is only to call attention to the conceptual and creative possibilities, as made manifest in the instances I have touched upon, of expanding chronology to include the nonhuman experience of time in the frame of planetary enmeshment. Thinking of periodization as sedimented "routes of transit" (Dimock 2006, 3) may bring a stronger awareness of our institutional orthodoxies that cast literature as a domain of human sovereignty rather than "the home of nonstandard space and time" that it is (4).

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: As a literary scholar who has recently turned to the field of environmental humanities, my instinct is to think of our historical moment as a violent collision of referential points, a kind of metaleptic implosion, where our understanding of social processes must take into consideration the multiple scales of human entanglement in the nonhuman environment and its consequences for the planet. For example, the geopolitical implications of the war in Ukraine, which presses into being the volatility of precarity as contemporaneity's material and political condition, exceed the social and political domain, plummeting the whole world into an energy crisis that demands transnational ecological solutions incompatible with the current imperatives of corporate globalization and neoliberal economy. Yet the media coverage of the war hardly cares to

examine the complex, often invisible, links between the destruction and abuse of human life, state institutions, social relations, and the hazardous impact the war has on the nonhuman environment by way of production of waste, toxicity, contamination, and other forms of fast annihilation and "slow violence" (Nixon 2011). In this respect, the short-term solutions adopted by most Western democracies, old and new, with the emphasis placed on salvaging the economic order, seem to reinforce Wendy Brown's incisive observations about the ascendency of neoliberal rationality, which "disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities – even where money is not at issue – and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*" (2015, 31).

Part of the consequence of the incursion of war into the democratic imaginary of twenty-first-century Europe has to do with casting in relief the limitations of both our conceptual vocabularies and practical strategies in negotiating the relation between the *planetary* and the *global*. Dipesh Chakrabarty's theorizing of how this tension bears on the current climate predicament strikes me as particularly resonant. In weighing in on the breakdown, caused by anthropogenic climate change, of the long-held epistemological separation of human and natural history, his essay "The Climate of History: Four Theses" alerts us to the material-semiotic interlocking of *deep* and *shallow* time, the *planetary* and the *global*, in a way that "appeals to our sense of human universals while challenging at the same time our capacity for historical understanding" (2009, 201). Resisting the temptation to dichotomize, which aligns the *global* with the human-made and human-centric and the *planetary* with that which exceeds the human and refers to the geobiological history of the Earth system, Chakrabarty shows us how both categories operate as human constructs, whose onto-epistemic relationality in the fold of the Anthropocene impels us to look for new forms of attention and action. The planet, in his reasoning, emerges from globalization, where the more we use the environment for power and profit the more we encounter the perspective of the deep history of the Earth. As Chakrabarty puts it, "The geologic now of the Anthropocene has become entangled with the now of human history" (2009, 212). This intersectional dialectic recalls Gayatri Spivak's point about how the human position *vis à vis* the planet must concede an impasse wherein alterity constitutes subjectivity from within as much as from without: "The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan" (Spivak 2003, 72).

From an environmental humanities' point of view, our perception of the planet's alterity has as many implications for critical thought as for political

praxis, magnifying as it does the moral dilemmas of social and environmental crises as parochially and provincially human. Stranded on the cusp between the *global* and the *planetary*, as Chakrabarty shows, human geological agency does not square easily with their political agency, raising difficult questions about the material dissemination of the effects of global warming and the global distribution of the responsibility for it, especially if we agree that the Anthropocene "has been an unintended consequence of human choices" (Chakrabarty 2009, 210), a calamity we "have stumbled into…through industrial civilization" (217). What the ethical contingencies in Chakrabarty's Anthropocene historiography bring to surface, I would argue, is the concatenation of the crises in global politics, planetary wellbeing, and human subjectivity, all scaled up to the demands of a phenomenology that keys the politics of war and peace to the environmental dialectic of extinction and survival. The human stakes of this conceptualization are raised through "species thinking" (213), an onto-epistemic structure through which the essay problematizes the implications of the ideas of singularity and universality for our understanding of human social activity and "the general history of life" (219). At issue here is the differential nature of personhood, which Chakrabarty finds inhospitable to the experience of biological universality. The observation merits a lengthier quote: "We humans never experience ourselves as a species. We can only intellectually comprehend or infer the existence of the human species but never experience it as such. There could be no phenomenology of us as a species. Even if we were to emotionally identify with a word like *mankind,* we would not know what being a species is, for, in species history, humans are only an instance of the concept species as indeed would be any other life form. But one never experiences being a concept" (220). This is a profound, though potentially problematic, insight, which deserves a more thorough analysis than the one I can give it here. For one thing, its emphasis on partiality recalls the critical consensus in environmental humanities on how the climate emergency manifests itself through different and geographically dispersed effects so that we do not experience it as a unitary phenomenon, but only as synecdochic traces of the time out of joint. On the more hopeful side of the argument, however, I locate the recent surge of the literary imagination that has brought into being a spate of Anthropocene fictions (e.g. Laura Jean McKay's *The Animals in That Country*) and poetry (e.g. Adam Dickinson's *Anatomic*), cli-fi novels (e.g. Diane Cook's *The New Wilderness*), the aesthetics of the new weird (Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation*), eco-comedy (e.g. Will Self's *The Book of Dave*), comics (e.g. Vincent Perriot's *Negalyod*), fantasy (e.g. N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy), and horror, all of which intensify the significance of the ongoing critical debate over the *global* and the *planetary*. Political praxis is yet to catch up with the commitments of critical thought, but I hope it is not beyond possibility.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: This seems to me a question that is both straightforward and complex at the same time. Or perhaps it calls for both types of answer. In straightforward terms, I read it as an issue of authorial freedom and agency, in which case placing any constraints on or injunctions against single authorship of literary history invokes a disciplinary measure that oversteps the mandate of the very discipline of literary history which the writing subject interiorizes and conveys through its writing. Rejecting the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author would sideline the institutional and social complexity of authorship expertly examined in Michel Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" in favour of a less nuanced, possibly more naïve, conception of subjectivity as incapable of stepping outside of individual cognitive space and taking stock of the historical forces that shaped different cultural imaginaries. But why should we think that historiographic accounts like Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands*, Margaret MacMillan's *War*, or Niall Ferguson's *Doom*, all penned by single authors, are more reliable hermeneutic efforts than anything written by a literary historian? Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon*, to rehearse my earlier example, cross-hatches a range of historical contexts and subjective views as it traces the formation of the idea of the canon in Western literature, but its single authorship does not lessen the book's scholarly insight and cultural gravitas, does it? Peter Ackroyd's ambition in *Albion* to sail through the seas of the English literary imagination is similarly vast, yet no less legitimate, or indeed admirable, for being guided by a single steersman.

      The more complex angle of answering this question involves thinking about writing literary history as archival work, on account of which the act and event of writing become subject to ethical judgment and responsibility not shared by the writers of fiction. Jacques Derrida's theorizing about the archive guides my own thinking about the nature and scope of this analytical work that aims to stage meaning as a dialogue between the past and the present. A key idea I borrow from his essay "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression" is the notion of the archive as an impasse of memory conceived through the material consignation, preservation, and interpretation of the past in the broadest sense. In this conception of the archive as "the place of originary and structural breakdown of the said memory" (Derrida 1995, 14), the archons, those responsible for archival work, are granted hermeneutic responsibility not only to save memory from (self)destruction, but also to engage in explanation, commentary, and other forms of repetition, which make the archive paradoxically both "hypomnesic"

and "archiviolithic" (14). Writers of literary history, I would argue, are likewise exposed to this "archive fever" (14), in whose wake they acquire hermeneutic authority through the distributed agency of mnemonic traces and voices, presences and absences, which extend the boundaries of individual horizons towards the cultural experiences of other times and places. In so far as the phenomenon of language testifies to our apprehension that the human subject never coincides with itself, I do not see any particular reason to grant epistemic or moral privilege to multiple over single authorship in the discourse of literary history. Availability of multiple options, it seems to me, is not only a democratic principle of civic responsibility, but also a hermeneutic safeguard against *le mal d'archive*, which turns memory work against itself in all feats of interpretation, whether multi- or single-authored.

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ANDREI TERIAN[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: If by "literary history" we refer to the traditional—and hence somewhat canonical—form of literary historiography as genre, i.e., the study of literature from an evolutionary, teleological, and ethnocentric standpoint, for which works authored between 1830 and 1945 serve as models (from, let's say, Georg Gottfried Gervinus to Albert Thibaudet), then this form has undoubtedly been one of the most conservative in the entire history of modern literary criticism, considering the fact that it has almost entirely refused to alter its goals, methodology, and rhetoric for over a century. But I do not consider this to hold true for the literary histories published after the Second World War as well. On the contrary, following a "crisis" lasting for nearly half a century, during which all its theoretical building blocks have been scrutinized and questioned, literary history seems to have made a powerful comeback in the past decades, both as discipline and as genre. Moreover, I tend to believe that it currently represents the most innovative segment in literary studies—, that it is in any case more innovative than individual articles, or monographs, the main source of critical innovation in the second half of the 20th century. And this fact is quite understandable: the very skepticism that had plagued it for decades on end made it so that literary history became one of the most experimental genres within literary studies after the year 2000. Past the threshold of the new millennium, it tested not only its object of study (extending the very definition of "literature" and offering numerous alternatives to the insistent predilection for the "national") and its methodology beyond every conceivable limit (going through all contemporary theories, frameworks, and analytical procedures, from computational criticism and intermedial studies to feminism and postcolonial studies), but also what

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[1] **Andrei TERIAN** is Professor of Romanian literature in the Department of Romance Studies at the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. His specialties are twentieth- and twenty-first century Romanian literature, cultural theory, the history of modern criticism, and comparative and world literature. He has published numerous essays in Romanian and international journals such as *Textual Practice*, *Life Writing*, *Slovo*, *CLCWeb – Comparative Literature and Culture*, *World Literature Studies*, *Interlitteraria*, *ALEA: Estudos Neolatinos*, *Primerjalna književnost*, etc. His latest books include the coedited volumes *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2018) and *Theory in the "Post" Era* (Bloomsbury, 2021). He is currently the PI of the ERC Consolidator Grant "A Transnational History of Romanian Literature" (2021–2026). Email: andrei.terian@ulbsibiu.ro.

seemed to be its core determinant: the factor of time (thereby replacing chronology with other ways of arranging its material, such as the geographic/ spatial one). Therefore, in the 21st century, literary history is nothing short of a revolutionary genre—and this seems to be the most convincing retort the old discipline could have made to her detractors.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: Literary histories have always been "a culture in and of themselves," and this was the case in all literatures, both in those considered—in lack of better terms— "central" or "major," and in those regarded as "peripheral" or "minor." Between the most representative works of Francesco de Sanctis, Gustave Lanson, and George Saintsbury, on the one hand, and those of Boyan Penev, F. O. Mathiessen and G. Călinescu, on the other, only the context is different, whereas the function and overall rhetoric are the same: they all aim to present—if not, in fact, to secretly "create"—the literary Pantheon of their cultures, the organic coherence of their national traditions, the ethnic originality of their own literatures. The specific difference resides in the fact that some cultures felt compelled to renounce, especially following World War II, this nationalist-triumphalist rhetoric, while others still struggle with it. However, the aforementioned turn from this rhetoric did not automatically lead to the dissolution of that "culture in and of themselves." On the contrary, we could argue that the abandonment of nationalist illusions more clearly revealed the functions of literary history in each cultural system; renouncing its ethnocentric mythology, the discipline was now forced to finally lay bare its premises, methods, and objectives. In fact, I think that this has always been the true role played by literary history within a cultural system: it never "created" canons, traditions, or literatures (despite some critics' canon-building self-deception) but has always contributed, however inadvertently, to uncovering the ideological practices and premises governing a certain cultural system. Every literary history entails, even without addressing it directly, a debate on the "structure," "value," and the "role/ function/ destiny" of a certain literature, and this fact alone is important enough for its "culture."

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: I think that, despite their evident issues, periods and periodization cannot be eliminated from literary history altogether. There are two reasons for this. First, the very nature of "periods" implies the existence of historical "thresholds," namely that certain moments and events distinguish themselves from others from a qualitative standpoint, therefore enclosing "periods" and "epochs." Naturally, the process of drawing the "thresholds" and "epochs" is oftentimes done according to the ideological agenda of the broader group to which the literary historian belongs or, worse yet, according to his own idiosyncratic agenda. Yet, identifying such practices should only stimulate us further in discovering and suggesting "thresholds" and "epochs" that are more scientifically substantiated. Conversely, the abolition of all such "thresholds" and "epochs" would imply accepting the thesis that all moments and events are equally relevant (or irrelevant) from a historiographic point of view, and that it is impossible to establish a hierarchy among historical events. Furthermore, this would mean that any historical selection of events is equally (il)legitimate as any other, which would equate to the dissolution of history—and implicitly also of literary history—as discipline. Second, literary periods are necessary also because they, as "worlds of history," legitimize and facilitate correlations and comparisons among certain authors, works, events, or literary processes. For instance, defining and enclosing "The Interwar Era" or "The Modernist Era" reveals why we are somehow obliged to correlate—and perhaps even to compare—Joyce with Kafka, but not necessarily Kafka with Shakespeare or Joyce with Dostoevsky. On the other hand, literary periods are a stark reminder that time does not pass in a homogeneous flow across the globe and therefore impel us to draw out new connections which contributes to the deepening of our historical knowledge. For example, is the "world" in which the Romanian chronicler Ion Neculce (1672–1745) lived the same as that of Montesquieu (1689–1755), or rather similar to that of Geoffroi de Villehardouin (1150–1212/ 1218) or Jean Froissart (1337–1410)? I will not attempt to provide here an answer to this question, but it seems clear to me that it should preoccupy every historian of Romanian literature.

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: If a period is, as I stated before, a "historical world," then in order to trace the outlines of contemporaneity, I think we should ask ourselves as to when, in fact, "our world," i.e., the one we currently live in, begins. Obviously, the answer can be nothing but subjective, given the likelihood that older generations of critics will argue that 1945 or 1968 were moments that fundamentally altered the face of the world. No doubt they were, yet contemporaneity should be defined by the *last* (i.e., most recent) event that ushered in a fundamental change in the world. However, things are debatable even in this case, because "our world" is not

transformed all at once, through a happy convergence of all contributing factors, but rather unevenly, through unexpected and uncorrelated mutations taking place in politics, technology, economy, culture, etc. For example, from a technological point of view, I think we could safely argue that "our era" is primarily characterized by the expansion of the Internet and virtual medium generally. This means going back to 1989, when Tim Berners-Lee, then employed at CERN, invented the World Wide Web. This milestone is, indeed, extremely convenient from the standpoint of geopolitics, as it corresponds to the end of the Cold War, and it is likely that it will be employed for a long time to signal the beginning of "contemporaneity." However, I can't help but wonder whether our world is still the post-Cold War, unipolar, open world set on a seemingly inevitable path towards liberal democracy, as it appeared to us in the 1990s or even the early 2000s. To me, it seems obvious that it is not the case. Because, even if it does not necessarily herald a new Cold War, the Russo-Ukrainian War, combined with the undermining of international law under the pressure of various authoritarian regimes and new isolationist policies, shows us that "our world" is no longer the one we grew familiar with after 1990. Therefore, I argue that our contemporaneity began on February 24, 2022, whether we like it or not and regardless of what it will ultimately bring forth.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: For nearly two centuries, most literary histories were written by single authors, hence their legitimacy no longer requires any further demonstration. The issue at hand in the contemporary period, however, concerns the competence of these authors, more precisely the odds that a single scholar can successfully cover objects of study involving eras, genres, and styles that are sometimes extremely varied and whose understanding requires specialized knowledge. Under these conditions, the success of a literary history written by a single author is often inversely proportional to the extent of its subject. In order to illustrate this point, it is enough to compare the almost flawless compactness of Mihai Iovănel's *Istoria literaturii române contemporane 1990–2020* (History of Contemporary Romanian Literature 1990–2020, 2021) with the superficiality underlying numerous chapters of Nicolae Manolescu's *Istoria critică a literaturii române* (Critical History of Romanian Literature, 2008/ 2019). Therefore, the risk of dilettantism lurks in any ambitious literary history project conceived by a single author. But this does not mean that collective histories are exempt from dangers of this sort. The most serious of all, of course, concerns the risk of internal collapse faced by projects articulated on voices and perspectives that are too different from each other. In conclusion, shallowness and incoherence are the Scylla and Charybdis that contemporary literary histories must choose between. And I could not say I prefer one over the other.

GALIN TIHANOV[1]

Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?

A: It seems to me imperative to come to terms with the fact that literary histories are a product of modernity; they typically begin as national accounts of cultural uniqueness, more often presumed than real. Early in the 19th century there appear the first macroregional literary histories, e.g. that by Sismondi, who is today best remembered as an economist and a social thinker; he wrote a history in several volumes of what he called "the South of Europe," essentially a panoramic (and mosaic) history of the literatures in the Romance languages (but not of Romanian literature). How do we move onwards from the strictures imposed by the birthmarks of modernity with its teleological rationale? I have written briefly on this in an article on the challenges literary history faces in the 21st century.[2] Today, I would add the following: literary history has to navigate the new concerns of anthropocentrism and, more widely, of a post-humanist world; without this, it would struggle to perform a meaningful role beyond a cultural space confined and fuelled by national(ist) agendas.

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[1] **Galin TIHANOV** is George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature at Queen Mary University of London, having previously held teaching positions at the University of Manchester and visiting appointments at Yale University, Peking University and the Higher School of Economics (Moscow), among others. He is the author and (co)editor of sixteen books, having widely published on comparative literature and cultural history, with a focus on Russian, German, and Central- and East-European literature and intellectual history. Currently, his research is centered around world literature, cosmopolitanism, and exile. His recent publications include *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory: Regimes of Relevance in Russia and Beyond* (Stanford University Press, 2019) and *A Companion to the Works of Hermann Broch* (Camden House, 2019). Tihanov is Honorary President of the ICLA Committee on Literary Theory and member of the Advisory Board and the Executive Committee of the Institute for World Literature at Harvard University. He is currently completing a contracted monograph titled *Cosmopolitanism: A Very Short Introduction for Oxford University Press*. Email: g.tihanov@qmul.ac.uk.

[2] "The Future of Literary History: Three Challenges in the 21st Century," *Primerjalna književnost*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2008): 65-72 [Romanian translation: "Viitorul istoriei literare: trei provocari pentru secolul XXI," *Analele Universitatii Bucuresti*, Vol. 57 (2008): 89-96; Slovene translation: "Prihodnost literarne zgodovine: trije izzivi 21. stoletja," in *Primerjalna književnost v 20. stoletju in Anton Ocvirk*, edited by D. Dolinar and M. Juvan, Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, ZRC SAZU (2008): 325-32; Hungarian translation: "Az irodalomtörténet jövője: Három kihívás a 21. században," *Korunk*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (2012): 49-54, translated by T. Scheibner; Spanish translation: "El futuro de la historia literaria: tres desafíos en el siglo XXI," *Criterios*, Vol. 48 (2013): 811-19, translated by D. Navarro].

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: Culture is a habitus of organizing the world that surrounds us by (re)producing conventions of knowledge and communication. If the question concerns literary histories more specifically, this is perhaps a question of whether the writing of literary history is a specific form of introducing and sustaining such a habitus. I am not sure it still is; for it to be such a form, it has to have an impact beyond a narrower circle of specialists, which is very difficult, nay impossible, in the present intellectual climate. If literary history as a practice does not attain an impact beyond the guild, it could at best claim to be a form of subculture, of which there are so many today, and so few that engage in dialogue with one another. Furthermore, I am not convinced that literary histories still command the power to build and protect canons; even within the national space, there is no longer a single canon, as various social groups rightfully demand that they be given a place in the curriculum and in the wider public sphere.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: There have been some good arguments, formulated recently by others, in favour of periodization, its pragmatic use value, and its ineluctability. But I hasten to add that periodization is a cultural product, and as such it has only very limited validity beyond the culture whose perceptions of time and the ways time flows it reflects. Suffice it to point to the never-ending conversation amongst mediaevalists about the absence of this appellation (and the period it refers to) in non-European cultures (and the profound differences that result from this in how one defines novelty and continuity); or to the polemics—at least since the 1920s, particularly active since the 1960s and now, on whether or not the Renaissance is a universally applicable designation. There were those who thought that the Renaissance is a label that captures both a period and a wider type of a cultural situation of renewal of the present by turning to the resources of the past; Konrad would thus chart a rather peculiar trajectory for

the Renaissance, beginning in China in the 8th century AD, then travelling to the Middle East, and only much later arriving in Europe (Italy and the European North). The same is true, to a lesser degree, of the conversations about Romanticism as a dual category that harnesses a particular sense of time break but also an enduring (rather acute in its Romantic articulation) dichotomy between two different regimes of relevance literature and the arts experience, those of autonomy and heteronomy; this dichotomy (sometimes rethought as a dialectic) recurs beyond the decades (in total, if we also count the experience of Eastern Europe and other parts of the world, perhaps the century) occupied by Romanticism proper. But we don't need to go beyond Europe to realize that periodizations cannot hold universal validity. Spanish literature would be dogged by tribulation over the absence of a proper Enlightenment phase; Russian literature by a similar anxiety over the absence of a Renaissance. In other words, periodizations are instruments of capturing and making sense of the ways time flows by constructing scenarios about change and identity that are exemplified by (usually canonical) products of creative writing across larger chronological segments; and these instruments are always conditioned by various cultural (less so economic) factors that are much more local than literary history is prepared to concede.

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: As evidence of non-negotiable diversity. Whether a history of contemporary literature is at all possible is a question of how we understand 'history' in 'literary history'. We still operate on the premise that history is about taking stock by creating temporal distance from the objects we analyse (this is the Hegelian approach to history, which remains resilient despite the many forceful objections levelled at it). In that sense, history and theory (through the canon) are intimately linked. It is the crisis of theory that was then legible in the crisis of the canon, which in turn has affected the way in which we think of literary history. All this means that we should be bolder in embracing contemporary writing as a legitimate subject for literary historians; globally, but also within the national cultural space, there is hardly a better way to come to terms with the diversity and incommensurability that mark not just the production, but also the consumption (and that also means the interpretation) of literature today.

Q: How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?

A: There is a deeper paradox to the fact that national literary histories, ever since the 18th century, would be written by single authors (Warton; Gervinus, De Sanctis, etc.); this is perhaps the ultimate discrepancy at the heart of this project: a scholar who ends up speaking about, and in favour of, the nation (or being even misheard by his contemporaries as speaking on its behalf). But this is not to say that a collective history would do much better. Collective enterprises in the humanities are usually the result of a compromise, methodologically speaking. If a history is to be coherent as a collective endeavour, it would have to reflect in the end the views of its lead editors (thus overwriting individual points of view); this is at least my experience with working on the prize-winning and oft-cited *History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond* (2011) that Evgeny Dobrenko and I steered to completion.

BERTRAND WESTPHAL[1]

***Q: Literary history, be it national, local, or regional, is perhaps the most
conservative form of literary study, with many claiming that the method is
outmoded. What can literary histories do to overcome both the risk of
obsolescence and their inherent conservatism?***

A: In itself, your question seems to call for an unequivocal answer. It is as if
literary history, perceived at a local, in other words national or regional level,
were systematically marked by conservatism and, thereby, doomed to inexorable
obsolescence. This is both absolutely true and eminently debatable. It all depends
on the issues and the methods underlying its development. It seems to me that
everything that pertains to literary history would benefit from being explicitly
and systematically situated in a context, whether geographical or historical—
because this context is never self-evident: it is itself the subject of a narrative.

This was valid for romantic historians of literature and continues to be
valid for authors of literary histories today. How will they be perceived in fifty
years? Or even in twenty years? Even tomorrow, as everything is going so fast?
Being contemporary never counts for legitimation. There is no literary history
in the singular. There are only literary histories that fit into each other, according
to a logic combining stratigraphy (diachronic depth), assembly (methodology),
adjustment (reduction of the plural). Literary history is a complex and heterogeneous
device, whereas for many it would constitute a homogeneous, irrefutable block. But
to speak of it as if the notion had been established forever would be tantamount to
a serious mistake. Like any story with a historical scope, literary history is a long-
term one, even though the passage of time may be obscured. Moreover, this
obliteration is not necessarily deliberate. It's just that, as we are often prisoners
of our routine and subject to a kind of cultural inertia, sometimes relayed by
institutions, we take things for what they are supposed to be, once and for all.

This is particularly true in the area that interests us here. The origin of
literary history has almost always responded to nationalist imperatives that
have fueled a conservative, even ultra-conservative discourse. As we know, the
rise of literary history is complementary to that of the nation and therefore of

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[1] **Bertrand WESTPHAL** is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Limoges,
France. The founder of geocriticism, he specializes in world literature and the exchanges
between artistic and literary cartographies. His latest publications include *La Géocritique. Réel,
fiction, espace* (2007, translated in 2011 as *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*), *Le Monde
plausible. Espace, lieu, carte* (2011, translated in 2013 as *A Plausible World. A Geocritical Approach
to Space, Place, and Maps*), *La cage des méridiens. Le roman et l'art contemporain face à la globalisation*
(2016), and *Atlas des égarements. Etudes géocritiques* (2019). Email: bertrand.westphal@wanadoo.fr.

language. It is useless to return to the close link that literature, the dominant (official) language, the central power and the narrative of its history (that of literature) have and continue to maintain. I will limit myself to giving a single, well-known example. In 1634-1635, in France, if Richelieu promoted the French Academy, it was... well, it is up to you to choose the answer!... 1) in order to protect an assembly of essentially Parisian writers or 2) to better control the booming theater scene. Since then, the august institution has continued to watch over the linguistic doxa[2] and, more marginally, over the hazards of national literary history. Language, literature, nation... So many questions involving the prestige of a certain community... However, as the late Pascale Casanova reminded us, in *La langue mondiale. Traduction et domination* (2015), prestige and prestidigitation find their common etymon in the Latin *praestigium*. There is a kind of 'power based on illusion'[3] in any quest for prestige. This is indeed the problem that literary history must face when it is very closely associated with an objective of valorisation. The quest for national prestige undoubtedly peaked in Europe during the Romantic era, if only, once again, we can reduce Romanticism to a singular... Literary history experienced a veritable boom under the pressure of new nations, Germany in the lead, but not exclusively.

To come back to your question, it is a matter of knowing, first of all, whether literary history today has been able to get rid of the intellectual and political influence so tenacious of the Schlegel brothers, even of Novalis, or just to mention somebody else, of Désiré Nisard. It is then a question of verifying that it has been able to revoke in doubt its "mission" of builder of the cultural pillars of the nation. We remember that this mission had become clearer while writers, revealing themselves to be anthropologists *ante litteram*, endowed their respective countries with an anthology of national/nationalist epic stories. I am thinking in particular of the *Kalevala*, composed by Elias Lönnrot from a selection of scraps collected from the Karelian skalds in northern Finland, using a selective technique analogous to that of romantic literary histories. To the marvelously epic tale which combined the rise of the nation and narration (according to the beautiful formula of Homi Bhabha), there was of course a corresponding hagiographic literary history. Finally, it is a question of wondering if this one knew how to depart from the processes which accompanied its emergence under romanticism. It will be noted that the Goethian *Weltliteratur* did not escape this conservative whirlwind either. Did Goethe really open his thought to India, Persia and China, all three matrices of written epics? Yes, and that's already very good, except that Goethe had concluded his tirade with a eulogy of eternal Greece, of which Hölderlin

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[2] See website of the Académie française, "Aperçu historique": "The members called themselves 'académistes', then 'académiciens' from February 12, 1635. They had to concern themselves with the purity of the language and make it capable of the highest eloquence" (https://www.academie-francaise.fr/linstitution/apercu-histoire, consulted on 2022.06.29).

[3] Pascale Casanova, *La langue mondiale. Traduction et domination*, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 10.

had hinted shortly before that it would have found its true heir in Germany. Much later, Aamir Mufti points out that this beginning of planetary openness, which soon found a strong relay in European colonialism, also resulted... in a fence. The constitution of the local canon, in India, for example, had been totally governed by the colonizer, promoter of a literary history that did not belong to him, with the help of local notables won over to his cause.[4]

A literary history perpetuating this tradition would indeed be obsolete and conservative, not to say nationalist and/or neo-colonial. It would be insular in a way. It would present itself as an island completely lost in the midst of our planetary and diasporic history and geography. So what to do, especially since this somewhat archaic approach finally seems quite outdated today? Why not think more in terms of scale? Why not leave the island and make literary history tend towards the archipelagic, so dear to Edouard Glissant? Because, as we know, the archipelago is both a rather homogeneous whole in its relationship to the mainland, with which it always interacts, and heterogeneous in its internal articulations. Archipelagic, literary history ceases to be singular to become a singular plural, an oxymoron that I appreciate and which suits it rather well, it seems to me. In short, the problem lies less in literary history per se than in our approach to it.

Q: Literary histories are known for their preoccupation with identity. Canons are made or broken by them, ideologies are affirmed or restored, and writers are recovered or left out. As intellectual enterprises that hold a certain authority over a segment of culture, can they become a culture in and of themselves?

A: It all depends on what level you are at. Are we talking about literary history perceived as the expression of an international, national or regional doxa or of a specific volume examining the literary history of a given entity? In the latter case, we can estimate that the study can influence the perception of the literary history of this entity, even call it into question, but it seems difficult to me to think that it will be able to modify it completely, revolutionize it. At the very least, its critical reception will have to allow its integration into the mental landscape of its recipients. That takes time. To stick to the example of the canon, the establishment of which is one of the induced corollaries of the historiographical enterprise, we note that its evolution is progressive. To tell the truth, it turns out to be rather cautious, even conservative. We come back to what we were saying earlier.

Today, things certainly tend to accelerate. Do you remember the protesters on the Stanford campus who, in the second half of the 1980s, demanded that the reading lists imposed on them be changed? They won their case: the literary

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4 See Aamir Mufti, *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2016.

history they would be taught would henceforth include the expression of minority discourses. Well, it could look like a revolution. In reality, it reflected above all, with a delay, the evolution of all a society. The literary canon, as it had been conceived within the American education system, was quite simply out of step by about twenty years with the achievements obtained from the 1960s (Civil Rights Act, and all the subsequent conquests). A new acceleration has been occurring for some years, now. It particularly concerns continental Europe, which often lags behind the English-speaking world, and consists of bringing the canon and the representation of literary history into line with the expectations of society. I am thinking in particular of the inclusion of female corpora in literary anthologies. Does this action produce culture for all that? Rather, it seems to me that it gradually—and finally—integrates cultural data that have become indisputable at a society scale.

Literary history is supposed to stem, as I recalled earlier, from the credo of a community. As soon as it covers a collective scope, it does not, strictly speaking, create culture, but rather reflects a culture that achieves consensus. And, as we have just seen, it often reacts with a delay that could be qualified as culpable to the new social imperatives. This is quite paradoxical—or perhaps not, because after all, literary history sometimes adopts an institutional, eminently official character. Insofar as it reflects the vision of a community, it tends to remain in tune with it. However, staying in phase means testing the waters with a certain caution, reacting with a delay. Consider the conditions that govern the writing of school textbooks. In general, their authors and authors all feel the same burning desire: to introduce novelty, to refocus discourses that have been marginalized for too long, in short, to contribute to energizing literary history... Can they? Not always, and even quite rarely, because there is a good chance that the institution supervising their work (publishers, educational bodies, etc.) is lagging behind them and holding them back.

All this is hardly exciting, but the fact remains that, even if the forces present are disproportionate, the effort must be continued. We are still witnessing a form of interaction that will move the barrel and enrich the identity palette of the community concerned. Moreover, studying how literary history evolves also gives us an instructive lesson in what is meant by literature as time goes by. Failing to create a culture, literary history legitimizes new variations of the creative process and reinterprets the concept of (official) culture. What about cultural studies? Take for example the case of manga. Personally, I have never considered them. You will want to be careful not to call me a snob, because I am particularly open to Italian trash films from the years 1960-1975, in particular, with regard to which manga would almost pass for Shakespearean sonnets! It is rather for lack of taste that I abandon the eats. That's it, for me, but that's not the case for the majority of students who work with me, especially since manga are particularly

popular in France. Am I then going to ignore manga? Of course not, because in doing so I would be avoiding what most students read when they really have a choice of what to read. No offense to some, *Ghost in the Shell* by Masamune Shirow and its various animated avatars are very often better known and appreciated by French students than *Les Chants de Maldoror* or *Finnegan's Wake*. I will therefore strive to integrate it into my personal culture while waiting for it to be integrated into literary history. When, sooner or later, this has happened, we will admit that the definition of literature will have changed and that this evolution in itself reflects new cultural modalities shared by the whole of society.

Q: For literary histories, literary periods are, first and foremost, instruments of contrast and vehicles of legitimization. Oftentimes, periodization speaks more of literary historiography's status anxiety and disciplinary autonomy than of their function in describing and investigating literary histories. Does periodization still matter beyond preserving the authority of periodization itself?

A: In itself, your question advances a form of answer that I share, in many respects. It questions the methodological validity of a literary history whose arrangement would be based on institutionalized chronological divisions. This leads to a double questioning related to the epistemological foundations of an established—not to say sanctuarized—period and, more generally, to the principle governing a periodic approach. I believe that, to try to provide an answer, it is necessary to add a geographical parameter to the reflection, because, once again, it is difficult to separate the temporal framework from the spatial framework. There is no temporal absolute, locally isolable, as the periodizations relayed by traditional school textbooks, even traditionalist, and a certain number of academic essays suggest.

　　　To be convinced of this, it suffices to compare the periodizations that circulate at the international level. At the end of a confrontation of this kind, one can only take note of the heterogeneity of literary history. Take the case of Spain, where the periodizations correspond to very precisely dated generations: thus those of 98 (Unamuno, Valle-Inclán, …) and 27 (García Lorca, Cernuda, …). 1898 referred to the crisis that had erupted following the defeat suffered by Spain against the United States in the context of the colonial wars of the time, while 1927 sanctioned the recent emergence of the Spanish artistic avant-gardes. Do these periods have a real impact outside the country? To a small extent, because they reproduce an idiosyncrasy whose geographical scope is restricted. Ultimately, they even have an unfortunate side effect, because they contribute to isolating, or even insularizing, Spanish literary history from the European or Latin American literatures of the time. This kind of example is likely to be identified in almost all national versions of literary history.

Moreover, as long as periodizations are perceived in an international dimension, we quickly realize that they yield to changes of scale. If I asked my students to locate the beginnings of romanticism, they would probably mention the name of Chateaubriand. It is of him that French literary history has made the "first romantic," even though sometimes there is a reference to the "precursor" André Chénier, guillotined in 1794—for having condemned revolutionary Jacobinism, while also condemning royalism… what textbooks generally forget to specify! Of course, if a colleague asked the same question in Germany or the United Kingdom, the answer would change completely, as would the dating of the period, which would thereby lose its value as a local absolute. What would be the response in the Czech Republic or Bulgaria? Was Karel Hynek Mácha a Czech romantic, he who succumbed to a disease at a very young age after having published *Máj* in 1836? Was Khristo Botev another romantic, he who died in battle during the Bulgarian uprising against the Ottomans in 1876? Perhaps both of them were romantics, after all and after so many so-called "official" romantics. So what is romanticism? Ultimately? Difficult to answer, it seems to me. Would it be at best the crystallization of a Hegelian *Zeitgeist* or *Weltgeist*? When did it take place? There, the answer is simpler: it took *place*! Each place indeed cultivates its own version, its own periodization, without realizing that, in doing so, it relativizes the scope of what it wishes to establish and, in the best of cases, fetishizes the local culture. It's a bit like the story of this man "who thought he'd find his sword by marking the place where it had fallen on the hull of the boat,"[5] except that the boat moves, like the water that supports it, and that of boats, there are many.

In order for a periodization to retain a value other than that which consists in defending, as you have underlined, its own authority, it is appropriate that we meditate on the spatio-temporal articulation that it proposes, according to a dynamic of which I already noticed it had to be archipelagic. It does not simply "periodize"; in a way, it "spatio-periodizes." It is never self-evident, but is relative to a geo-cultural environment and applicable on a certain scale which can be local, national, international, continental or planetary. What would we say, on a planetary scale, of romanticism? In the same logic, we will start by asking whether the very concept of periodization is extendable to the entire planet. In other words, do all the cultures in the world rely on periodizations? Is it a universal concept? Nothing is less sure. It seems to me that in China, while canonical works are perfectly identified and defined, literature is periodized according to the same

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[5] In English: Chu Tien-Hsin, *The Old Capital: A Novel from Taipeh* [1997], translated from the Chinese (Taiwan) by Howard Goldblatt, New York, Columbia UP, 2007. Yet, the excerpt, above, has been translated in English by Bertrand Westphal from the French translation: *Ancienne Capitale*, transl. Angel Pino and Isabelle Rabut, Arles, Actes Sud, 2022, p. 93.

dynastic criteria that apply to its political history. A question specific to chronological perception also arises. Periods of time are not apprehended in a uniform way everywhere. In the West, the "periods" now flow at the rate of a frenetic acceleration that Paul Virilio described as a dromological drift.[6] Postmodernism was definitely very brief. It led, it is said, to post-postmodernism, before switching to the posthuman. Half a century at most will have sufficed to pile up such a periodic strata. In China again, the periods seem more stabilized because the socio-cultural time is conceived in a different way. It is permissible to quote a text which would be considered ancient in Europe without being considered misinformed, quite simply because the authority of the source persists for a longer time stretch. All of this is part of what we will call *polychrony*. At an instant T in history, in heterogeneous spaces, the vision of time and its passage are also heterogeneous. Consequently, yes, literary periods should be handled with the greatest caution, except to end up with approximations that are more a matter of stereotype than of literary theory.

Q: How is contemporaneity, as a historiographic milestone, negotiated in a global context?

A: Considering what has just been said, I am tempted to answer you that in the singular the contemporary declension of the global does not exist. On the surface of the planet, we share neither the same temporal modalities (polychrony) nor the same rhythms (polyrhythm). In a way, the concept of contemporary is an oversimplification. It corresponds to a desperate effort of simultaneous global representation of planetary cultures, according to a privileged point of view (the observer's). It is maintained as before we maintained the fire of the hearth around which we gathered to tell stories. We are not necessarily contemporary with others, because, after all, who sets the temporal benchmark? Who is contemporary with whom? At most, one is *concomitant* with others. We co-exist within the same abstract temporal matrix which is part of a heterogeneous duration where the markers are innumerable. The question is also to know if, at the very least, we are contemporary with ourselves! As you will rightly tax me as a sophist, I hasten to quote someone who, for me, has long embodied the figure of a master thinker. In this era torn between a thirst for certainty and an increased awareness of the scope of uncertainty, there are still a few: I believe that Giorgio Agamben is one of them. He writes: "Contemporaneo non è colui che cerca di coincidere e adeguarsi al suo tempo, ma chi aderisce a esso attraverso una sfasatura e un anacronismo,"[7] in other words: "A contemporary is not someone

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[6] See Paul Virilio, *L'Horizon négatif : essai de dromoscopie*, Paris, Galilée, 1984 (in English: *Negative Horizon: An Essay in Dromoscopy*, transl. Michael Degener, London, Continuum, 2005).

[7] Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos'è il contemporaneo?*, Rome, Nottempo, 2008, back cover.

who seeks to coincide and conform to his time, but the one who adheres to it through a phase shift and an anachronism." It seems to me that Agamben's proposal suits our purpose very well and allows us to get back on our feet. By its nature, as we have seen several times during this interview, literary history is out of step with the moment in which it unfolds. It is written after the fact—like any story, you might say. However, it has a particularity: it draws up an inventory of an aesthetic production which is essentially based on representation, but what is representation if not a re-presentation, a presentification? Let us not forget that the epic founding texts of Mediterranean literature did not even tolerate contemporaneity between the content of the story and the topicality of its recipients, as Mikhail Bakhtin has shown very well. One has the impression that a double shift characterizes the genealogy of literary history. It is therefore in its phase shift and its inevitable anachronism that it manifests its contemporaneity.

Well, let's break there with the sophisms, although they are very useful: they prove to us that we have to remain cautious in the handling of the tools of interpretation of the world. It is that we are constantly watched by ethnocentric reflexes likely to blind us. This is why it is necessary to imagine a flexible articulation between what we commonly call the contemporary and, even more questionably, the global. Rather than the global, I believe moreover that it would be a question of speaking of planetary, a term which points to cultural diversity and relationality, at a respectable distance from the homogenizing drifts of the global. Once again, let us invoke an archipelagic view of literary history. Instead of homologating a forced amalgam of island type, it inspires a relationship in diversity. It will combine respect for the local with the potential residing in arrangements on a larger scale, possibly on a global scale. Ideally, the planet is a vast archipelago where no island is called upon to exercise hegemonic power and where no declination of the contemporary overhangs another *a priori*. In politics, this equitable approach is unfortunately utopian, which does not mean that it cannot serve as a model for a possible future, because it is not a question of sinking into radical skepticism. On the other hand, whether in a literary history essay or in a textbook, such an approach is conceivable and even highly desirable, even when the literary universe, perceived in its entirety and in all its materiality, is never independent of economics and politics, as evidenced by the asymmetrical density and patronage of libraries and bookstores, sometimes dissuasive manufacturing costs, access to the publishing market that is profoundly heterogeneous and unfair, among other issues.

On a national level, all this could result in the articulation between a traditional corpus and a corpus located at the extremities of the "plateau," in the Deleuzian sense of the term, whether in the direction of the microscopic (the regional level, with its linguistic variability) or the macroscopic (the international, even planetary level, included in a diasporic and nomadic dynamic, in a Deleuzian

sense once again). This also manifests itself in the combination and reconciliation of non-homogeneous temporal perceptions, in other words by taking into account the disparity of the contemporary.

Q: *How do you comment on the legitimacy of literary histories written by a single author? Should literary histories become the domain of research collectives?*

A: I would gladly answer you that the question of legitimacy is relative to the intimate history of each and every one of us. Let's completely change the domain… but not the topic! There's a lot of talk about tennis these days, as the Wimbledon finals are coming up. And journalists wonder who was the best player of all time (the question should also be asked for women, but, in fact, the sports press does not really support gender parity). Federer? Djokovic? Nadal? Who knows? What if it was another one? Because our propensity for chronocentrism pushes us to forget older exploits, or to underestimate them. Here is what Sari, an anonymous commentator, wrote in the forum of *L'Equipe*, the French sports daily: "Well… A piece in the jukebox! History is told by human beings. Everyone will have their feelings about who marked tennis for them. For example, I was more marked by Connors and McEnroe than by Federer/Nadal/Djokovic. The digital era only sees through figures, statistics. Tennis is not lines of code. Life is not an algorithm."[8] Wise answer, I think. Wise also because it insists on the relativity of the canon seen as a jukebox. How to define it, calculate it? Who can decline it? Want my opinion? Well, here it is: for me, the greatest contemporary writer, whose life was too short, is David Foster Wallace. Why? Because, precisely, he knew how to combine literature and tennis, bordering on the sublime. You have to read Wallace when he talks about Federer, his own windy competitions in the Midwest or an epic match of the obscure but endearing Michael Joyce against Andre Agassi! Should it have been an author or a collective of authors who pointed out to me the importance of Wallace? What does it matter, after all! What matters is that Wallace matters to me. And this "me," in different ways, is to be multiplied *ad infinitum*, by as many people as there are readers. In literature, as in tennis, there is an inseparable relationship between official history and personal canon. By the way, I forgot to tell you that for me the greatest male tennis player was and remains Björn Borg and the greatest female player Serena Williams. And you, what is your opinion? In sports, the personal canon is often built during adolescence. In literature, a little later, but not always… School readings

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8 *L'Equipe Numérique*, "Stefan Edberg: 'The history books will remember the one who has the most Grand Slams'", 2022.07.08, commentary by Sari, at 12:08 p.m. (https://www.lequipe.fr/Tennis/Actualites/Stefan-edberg-les-livres-d-histoire-retiendront-celui-qui-aura-le-plus-de-grands-chelems/1342415, consulted on 2022.07.08)

are fundamental and, therefore, so are textbooks, as well as the literary stories that feed them.

Can one write a literary history alone? Should it be written as a team? I do not believe that there is a rule, because in both cases we will find solutions while being confronted with insurmountable obstacles. Could literary history be written objectively? I do not believe it one second. I even wonder if it is not by recognizing the part of subjectivity in any enterprise of this kind that we will achieve the most significant degree of objectivity. Let's take the case of a team... How is it formed? According to what founding principles? We are well aware that in the literary field the functioning of collectives has nothing to do with that of teams of hard scientists, where the distribution of tasks is carried out according to much more specific skills and for a result that is easier to target, even if it may prove impossible to achieve. Furthermore, there is the problem of financing such structures. Literature researchers, who are generally professionals, are accustomed to working on a fictitious voluntary basis; they are indeed paid to do so even if no one really forces them to do so. On the other hand, as soon as they call on skills outside the academia, they come up against the question of remuneration, which is always tricky to deal with, even on a strictly accounting level. At Columbia, then at Stanford, Franco Moretti had managed to build large teams to feed the statistics of Distant Reading, but he had budgets almost inaccessible in Europe. Moreover, all this collective work ended up being put through the mill with a single standardizing gaze, his own. Is this a hindrance? Yes, in a sense. Not in the other, because, subjectivity for subjectivity, this work was underpinned by a methodological homogeneity that was easy to decipher and therefore honest in itself. In short, a team makes it possible to articulate more varied skills, but not absolute ones, especially when one deploys on the perimeter of World Literature. Yet, this same team will depend on a directing authority as well on the scientific level as on the economic plan. As for the individual, if he is necessarily less competent, he will apply a methodology that is easier to identify. Paradoxically, it is in its undeniable subjectivity that his work will lend itself to a more objective reading. Basically, the reader then knows who and what they are dealing with!

To conclude, let me tell you that there is one point, in this case, that is almost never mentioned, especially on a transnational and interlinguistic level: it is that of translation. How many literary history essays are translated? and even, more generally, how many literary theory essays? It would be so instructive to be able to compare linguistically diverse productions through translations. They would enrich our point of view—and it is indeed this immeasurable variability that we need in a world that wants to be transnational but where so many entities turn in on themselves.

WORLD HISTORY, LITERARY HISTORY: POSTMODERNISM AND AFTER

CHRISTIAN MORARU[1]

ABSTRACT. *World History, Literary History: Postmodernism and After.* The basic question Christian Moraru raises in his contribution is about the direction in which literary history and criticism overall may be going after postmodernism. Moraru's answer, or guess, is that literary-cultural scholarship, along with the humanities at large, would probably have to adjust to shifts in the world "out there." As Moraru contends, our profession is already doing its best to catch up epistemologically with an increasingly *strong* planetary ontology, that is, with how the world most known to us—the finite planet—is and presents itself in the twenty-first century. Key here, he argues, is the lexicon and planetary phenomenology of "presentation" or *presencing*, rather, of an overwhelming coming into presence of that which is scattered all around us and we have been exploiting, overusing, polluting, discarding, or disregarding during the Anthropocene. In his essay, the critic attends to this resurgent presence and to what it means for literature and its historical cycles now that one of these—postmodernism—is basically complete. He does so obliquely, through a couple of marginalia to David Foster Wallace's 1996 meganovel *Infinite Jest*.

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[1] **Christian MORARU** is Class of 1949 Distinguished Professor in the Humanities and Professor of English at University of North Carolina, Greensboro. He specializes in contemporary American fiction, critical theory, and world literature with emphasis on international postmodernism and its post-Cold War developments and successors, as well as on the relations between globalism and culture across several national traditions in the modern era. He is the author and editor of thirteen books. His recent publications include monographs such as *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary* (University of Michigan Press, 2011) and *Reading for the Planet: Toward a Geomethodology* (University of Michigan Press, 2015). He is the editor of *Postcommunism, Postmodernism, and the Global Imagination* (Columbia University Press / EEM Series, 2009), as well as coeditor of *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century* (Northwestern University Press, 2015), *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2018), *Francophone Literature as World Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2020), *The Bloomsbury Handbook of World Theory* (2021), and *Theory in the "Post" Era: A Vocabulary for the Twenty-First-Century Conceptual Commons* (Bloomsbury, 2021). His new monograph *Flat Aesthetics: American Fiction in the Contemporary Era* is forthcoming from Bloomsbury (2022). Email: c_moraru@uncg.edu.

REZUMAT. *Istoria lumii, istoria literaturii: Postmodernismul și dincolo de acesta.* Principala întrebare pe care Christian Moraru o ridică în contribuția sa se referă la direcția criticii și istoriei literare după postmodernism. Răspunsul (sau intuiția) lui Moraru este aceea că literatura de specialitate din domeniu și disciplinele umaniste în general se vor vedea nevoite să se regleze la schimbările care au loc în lumea materială din afara lor. Așa cum afirmă autorul, profesia noastră face deja tot ce poate să țină pasul cu o ontologie planetară din ce în ce mai puternic marcată, sau, mai bine zis, cu felul în care lumea – planeta ca realitate înconjurătoare finită—ni se înfățișează în secolul al XXI-lea. Vitale, aici, spune el, sunt lexiconul și fenomenologia planetare ale „prezentării" sau *prezentificării*, mai bine zis, ale unei intensificări a prezenței copleșitoare a ceea ce este împrăștiat în jurul nostru și care a fost exploatat, suprauzat, poluat, aruncat și desconsiderat în timpul antropocenului. În articolul său, criticul abordează această prezență recurentă și semnificația sa pentru literatură și ciclurile istorice, acum că unul dintre acestea— postmodernismul—se află la sfârșit. Autorul analizează oblic aceste lucruri prin câteva glose pe marginea megaromanului *Infinite Jest* pe care David Foster Wallace l-a publicat în 1996.

Cuvinte-cheie: *istoriografie literară, critică, postmodernism, post-postmodernism, prezență, epistemiologie, ontologie puternică, David Foster Wallace, Infinite Jest, Trumpism, geofobie, antropocen,* après-garde

Where is literary history going after postmodernism? It is probably headed where the world itself is. More to the point, literary-cultural history and our profession generally are doing their best to catch up epistemologically with an increasingly strong planetary ontology, that is, with how the world most known to us—the finite planet—is and presents itself in the twenty-first century. Key here is the lexicon and planetary phenomenology of "presentation" or *presencing*, rather, of an overwhelming coming into presence of that which is scattered all around us and we have been exploiting, overusing, polluting, discarding, or disregarding during the Anthropocene. In what follows, I will attend to this resurgent presence and to what it means for literature and its historical cycles, now that one of these—postmodernism—is basically complete. I will do so obliquely, through a couple of marginalia to David Foster Wallace's 1996 meganovel *Infinite Jest*.

Why Wallace and why this book? Well, for one thing, *Infinite Jest* is, with Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, published in 1997, perhaps the most important novel to come out in English and possibly in the entire Anglophone world since Thomas Pynchon's 1973 *Gravity's Rainbow*. For another, Wallace's 1,079 pages novel is a major document of the post-Cold War zeitgeist. Specifically, in Wallace's oeuvre, and primarily in this book more than anywhere else, postmodernism reaches a crisis, a turning point. Furthermore, in Wallace, and also more emphatically than in other authors, U. S. or not, the postmodern struggles to shed its skin in hopes of becoming something else, more attuned to the post-Cold War era, something more *direct* and more politically effective (Wallace 1996, 740). This morphing is a broader process taking place on both sides of the Atlantic. Basically, what we are dealing with is a transition, still incomplete, out of the postmodern paradigm as well as out of a certain way of understanding and doing literary and cultural history.

To clarify what I mean, I will extrapolate from the imaginary of presence and presence-derived aesthetic in *Infinite Jest*. The first half of my paper sketches out the basic cultural-historical and theoretical parameters of presence. Explaining how this problematics shapes Wallace's novel, the second is more analytic. It ultimately claims that a whole array of cultural, political, and bodily routines from consumption, waste management, substance abuse, and recovery therefrom to sports, games, public speaking, and moviemaking are keyed in the book not only to ominous, absence- and destruction-prone "recursivity" but also to opening up, inside and against its ever-reiterated cycles, of spaces, moments, or, as Wallace writes, "flashes" of something else, non-repetitive, intensely alive, singularly present, beautiful, and, yes, perhaps, post-postmodern—in brief, what I determine as the *contemporary aesthetic and politics of presence*.[2] Note too, that what interests me here as far as politics go is chiefly *the geopolitical*. I will pursue, then, Wallace's geopolitical project with reference to what might be called "Trumpism," that is, Wallace's anticipations of Donald J. Trump's war on reality, on things undeniably real, factual, and present, and to postmodernism's delicate self-positioning with respect to such things and to their political—and, again, *geopolitical*—ramifications.

Now, many of the questions reorienting critical debates at the dawn of the twenty-first century are riffs on the Ur-interrogation formulated by Bruno Latour in the title of his influential 2004 article "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." A much-discussed epistemological about-face, Latour's recent scholarship does speak to a growing preoccupation with the ever-vexed "facts," "truth," "reality," "the real thing,"

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[2] For an extensive discussion of "recursivity" in *Infinite Jest*, see Hayles (1999, 675-697).

"authenticity," and other subthemes of what I would call the *presence paradigm*. Such issues have brought together scores of critics: former Derrideans like Gianni Vattimo and Maurizio Ferraris in Italy, a metaphysician of the post-Alain Badiou era such as Quentin Meillassoux in France, Ian Bogost, Graham Harman, and many other "new materialists" in the United States, and so forth. Presence, then, that which appears to be materially, palpably, and verifiable present, immediate, urgent, and unambiguously *here* in its eloquent proximity and incontrovertible reality, has been focusing a lot of recent work in critical theory, philosophy, and the arts. Most notably, the spectacular proliferation of reflection and of aesthetic practices around this umbrella-term under which "facts," "truths," and the like seek shelter represents a response to ontological developments defining our contemporary world and ultimately the contemporary itself after the Cold War. This world is so remarkably and so unambiguously *present* to more and more of us in its sometimes shocking, calamitous manifestations no matter where we are in it that it has acquired "epochalist" relevance, differentiating, that is, our time from earlier epochs. In my 2011 book *Cosmodernism*, I have referred to the post-Berlin Wall years as the "late-global era," or the "new contemporary." During these three odd decades, the world has filled with itself its planetary container, as it were, to such an alarming level and threatens to brim over with such a fury that the extensity and intensity of the world's being, of its *being-here, present*, "in our face"—this overwhelming and imperious omnipresence of the world—has accrued historically definitional, "periodizing" force. To put it otherwise: *how* the world is proves not only ontologically but also historically matchless, or at least distinctive enough. Pushing against our own raids on the environment in the Anthropocene and the ever-thickening of global webs of commerce, data, culture, language, and overall human interface, the world is now "crowding in" on *us*. It abuts on us with a resolve that articulates and elucidates—oftentimes negatively—our *when* by locating our present in cultural time and thus shedding light on the meaning of contemporaneousness. This meaning is therefore inseparable of the "how," of the way the contemporary world feels, looks, and acts.

On one side, then, this presence is an objective reality "out there"—the world itself. This world is present in the twenty-first century with an ontological vengeance. Thus, it delivers a set of undeniable facts, a presence—ecological and otherwise—that trumps, as Latourians would quip, any environmental, economic, interpretive, rhetorical, or aesthetic handling and representation of its reality and of reality generally in a form that *would take anything away* from the blunt presentness of this materially, intellectually, and ethically uncircumventable actuality. On the other side, the side of that *form* itself, of the world's treatment in art, philosophy, and "theory" broadly, one must consider three interrelated aspects.

The first is that the dominant aesthetic and ideological paradigm of the past half-century, postmodernism, arose by dint of sophisticated discourse "games" played with this reality and its representation history, whether we talk about jocular-ironic, differential-intertextual-quotational renditions in the Jacques Derrida-Umberto Eco-John Barth line, various "constructionisms," "relativisms," and "fictionalisms" in cultural theory and literary practice, or other aesthetic approaches striving to "deconstruct" *what is* and thereby reveal it as ideology, simulacrum, rhetorical effect, trace, infinite semiosis, meaning deferral, lack, absence, and so on.

The second is this: whether postmodernism, poststructuralism of various stripes, and a vast segment of cultural and identity studies may or may not be reducible to this epistemological police sketch, their arguably "weak," "constructionist" ontology does not seem best suited to capture the stronger and stronger ontology of presence brought forward by the contemporary world sometimes in the catastrophically salient mode of one major economic, natural, or political disaster after another following the fall of the Berlin Wall. I would dismiss here again, as I have done in the past, the notion of an ahistorical and antirealist postmodernism. But, and this is the third thing worth mentioning in this context, even if this ontology were appositely "strong," it would still not have made up for the overall weakening, since the end of the Cold War, of postmodernism and of the rest of the language games-based cultural model.

Accelerating this retreat and compounding contextually the predicament of the postmodern in the third millennium are the electoral revival of populism and the rise of TV reality as well as news media as "show," "production," and ultimately *unreality*. The consequences for the actually existing world are well known: in *Infinite Jest* and the real U. S. alike, the President—an entertainer (a singer) and a con artist on so many levels—has hummed his way into the highest office, and "experialism"—rather than "imperialism"—has been variously implemented via a slew of Brexits. Undergirding populist rhetoric throughout the Euroatlantic zone over the last decade or so, the ebb of "reality," of what counts as "real" in culture, has often been blamed on the "pomo-poco-poststruct complex" and on the "deconstruction" of various grand narratives—Marxist teleology, the talking cure, archaic notions of class, gender, sexuality, etc.—an operation said complex and the larger critical culture of suspicion surrounding it are deemed to have carried out or sponsored.

At any rate, in his preface to the English translation of Ferraris's *Manifesto del nuovo realismo*, Harman concurs with Ferraris, who thinks that "postmodern relativism has reached its logical outcome in right-wing populism" (Ferraris 2014, x). Postmodernism's "complicity" with assorted rhetors moonlighting as Holocaust deniers, neoliberal free marketers, Brexitarians, Trumpists, Berlusconians,

i tutti quanti is such a stretch that I will not bother to refute it here. That said, the second point made earlier stands: the presence set forth by a struggling, polluted, overly exploited, overpopulated, and evermore interconnected world calls for an apposite aesthetic of presence, an aesthetic that, by and large, is bound to go against the grain of the postmodern aesthetic of indirectness, allusiveness, multiple encoding, and self-reflexivity. In asserting itself, that presence expresses an immediacy. This immediacy, this being-thereness declines, generally speaking, to operate as sign, representation, or material stand-in for something else underneath it; nor does this presence is "reenchanting" in its main thrust, for it does not call on "us" to "transcend" it, to comment on it, perhaps ironically, to reach beyond it, whether toward a perpetually retreating signified or in the opposite but otherwise cognate direction of a "culturally situated" interpreter, a subject needed to make sense of what exactly is rendered present in this presence. Instead, deconstruction, at one end, cultural analysis, at the other, and postmodernism as a modality of aesthetic practice all around do just this: they transcend presence again and again, substituting its "being there"—de-presencing or absencing it—in its very reading as palimpsest, intertext, linguistic ploy, and other similar constructions dependent one way or the other on the reader, viewer, the human witness, and, more broadly, the human.

Because the world is so present, so in-your-face no matter where you are, there is no way out, no way to opt out of its embrace, to step out if its hyperpresence. In fact, looking obsessively for an outside, for a safely separated-off "out there" and for its others on whom to dump our own parochial anxieties, insecurities, and impurities, real and imaginary, makes for anachronistic and patently unethical behavior in this world. All the same, such an outside, hole, or Wallace-like "Concavity" in the world continuum provides the pivotal *topos* of a rhetoric that, in the Trump administration and in *Infinite Jest*, in the Gentle White House alike, serves as a vehicle for a conspicuously nationalist-populist anti-globalization overreaction.[3] In effect, this is precisely what Wallace's "experialism" represents: a *neo*imperialist backlash against a world whose ontological condition and unprecedented presence qua world, as a single *worlded* world, in a quasi-Heideggerian sense, force us all to be and collaborate with another to tackle problems whose scope is of necessity planetary and whose solutions, accordingly, cannot be solely national, let alone nationalist, isolationist, and otherwise self-centered.

Following from the inevitable co-presence of people, peoples, and animate and inanimate entities in the overly present contemporary world, "interdependence" is another undeniable fact—a logic of planetarity, as I define

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3 On populism in *Infinite Jest*, also see Doyle (2018, 259-270).

it in *Cosmodernism* and in its sequel, my 2015 book *Reading for the Planet*. And yet the antiphrastic rhetoric of unreality has retooled interdependence into its de facto opposite. James Orin Incandenza, a moviemaker among other things, is a central figure in *Infinite Jest*, and his earlier—let's say, "postmodern"—cinematic poetics often took up in the novel the "parodic device of mixing real and fake news-summary cartridges" to the point where real and fake would swap places and official parlance flips interdependence over and deploys it to push a brazenly autarchic agenda (Wallace 1996, 391). Interdependence is now, of course, celebrated during Interdependence Day nationally, one might say O.N.A.N. istically (O.N.A.N. is the acronym for the post-U. S. organization of North American nations). As such, interdependence is "our" primary, supremely advertised *national* value. Thus, with an eerily prescient anti-ironic irony, interdependence in Wallace signifies its contrary. This happens according to a twisted, geopolitically narcissistic imaginary. In this imaginary, being with the world becomes, illogically enough, license to *hollow it out* by purporting to opt out of its interconnectedness either by shamelessly engaging in what O.N.A.N.'s Secretary of State himself calls "ecological gerrymandering" (Wallace 1996, 403) or by the "dissolution of NATO" (Gentle's phrase), which, as Canadian Prime Minister hastens to add, implies that the EU countries would have to "pay for their own defendings henceforth" (Wallace 1996, 385).

Such Trumpian moments abound in Mario Incandenza's "untitled" film. This is a filmed puppet-show, actually, "which really started out just as a kids' adaptation of *The ONANtiad*, a four-piece of tendentiously anticonfluential political parody long since dismissed as minor Incandenza by his late father's archivists" (Wallace 1996, 380-381). Granted, both Himself (James Orin Incandenza) and Mario are particular to the real- and fake-news bricolage and, more broadly, to the disjointed poetics of "anticonfluentialism."[4] But Wallace makes it clear that the son presses into service such a modus operandi with a nod at the *auteur*'s work so as to *enhance* intercinematically—counterintuitive as it may seem—the post-parodic (post-postmodern?) distance between the "original" (quotation marks de rigueur, of course) and the "openly jejune version" (Wallace 1996, 385). This interval, we shall see momentarily, is not only external to Himself's work but, as Joelle van Dyne notices, also internal to it and, I would argue, to postmodernism broadly as well. Notably, post-postmodern artists such as late Incandenza, Mario, and their less-then-fictional counterparts, Wallace included, would steadily widen this discontinuity or gap in postmodernism itself to make room for another aesthetic. On this account, Wallace is a true "late" or twilight postmodern.

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[4] One of *Infinite Jest*'s tongue-in-cheek coinages, "anticonfluentialism" is concisely but comprehensively defined by Bell and Dowling (2005, 221).

At once coterminous and discrete, commensal and adversarial with respect to the postmodern corpus off which it fed in the first place, this is an aesthetic of presence that needs to be grasped along neoformalist lines, as suggested earlier. In other words, its domain encompasses traditionally conceived form such as that of a James Incandenza "anticonfluential" movie or the post-ironic, post-self-conscious, post-fragmented form Joelle gets a glimpse of in the same film, but also the material form of the world, as mentioned earlier. This "geoformation," scheme, or subsystem is literally and characteristically one of interdependence—or, one might say, "confluential"—in the contemporary era, and neither Trumpism nor Croonerism can do anything about. If not in so many words and despite the hyperbolic evidence the novel adduces to the contrary, the author does recognize this world reality, which surely warrants dwelling at length on "global Wallace."[5] But, much like DeLillo, Thomas Pynchon, and other U. S. postmoderns so consequential to his craft and worldview, this global Wallace asserts himself, in *Infinite Jest* and elsewhere, through a commentary on American thematics and reflexes. This is why critics like Lee Konstantinou ultimately concede that there is no contradiction in Wallace between the American and worldly thrusts and, what is more, that these vectors necessarily merge in a rebuttal of U. S. parochialism and isolationism, reflexes that do not define the "national character" but do flare up periodically to show the world an ugly American face (Konstantinou 2013, 83-84). Alongside what Wallace designates, apropos of Mario's nonplused E. T. A. Canadian audience, as the "American penchant for absolution via irony"—which Wallace consistently diagnoses as a self-complacency symptom—jingoism, protectionism, experialism, and other neopopulist symptoms are facets of the same *habitus* and therefore targets of the same critique (Wallace 1996, 385).

Cultural, political, and geopolitical, this habitus is also, and perhaps more than anything else, aesthetic. In fact, Gentle's Clean United States Party's platform "has been totally up-front about seeing American renewal as an essentially aesthetic affair" (Wallace 1996, 383). I propose we take the Party at its word. Lethally magnified in the "Entertainment" the A.F.R. sadomasochistic terrorists are searching for, this aesthetic is endogenous, ingrown, self-repetitive and otherwise O.N.A.N.istically self-gratifying, and mal-formed—indeed, "bad form" in more ways than one. Deliberately endorsed by Gentle and Trump, it pertains to a certain aspect, "gestalt," or configuration of the country and of the world, a figure—again, a *schema*—whose contour is, in this case, an effect of populist rhetoric's scheming figuration of the United States as well as of the country's place in the bigger world. Making America great again or, more modestly, "renewing America," as Gentle says, notoriously entails "swamp

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[5] See Thompson (2017, 5).

draining" or, in the same pseudoenvironmental lingo smacking of fascist fantasies of national purity and mandated decontamination, "cleaning up"—perchance sterilizing—the country and its culture. These forms or, better yet, the form they all have in common is supposed to be antiseptic internally and externally. They are expected to keep the world at bay and thus geopolitically discrete, cut off from and thereby quarantining other presumably contagious forms, and acting as a de-formation of this world, variously eroding and dirtying it, emptying it out, voiding it of various contents, instruments, and international agreements of word togetherness under the overarching cloak of the insane sanitization rhetoric. *Because* this geophobic rhetoric reigns supreme—and because, once more, it all comes down, inside and outside fiction, to a rhetoric of form, of a putatively beautiful, wholesome, untainted, germ-free form—Gentle is right to claim that his program is aesthetic. By the same token though, this program finds itself in the crosshairs of Wallace's own critique, which, for the same reason, operates aesthetically—hence the political affordances of the aesthetic of presence. For, much like Gentle's historically recognizable aestheticizing of politics and, I might add, of geopolitics as well overflows the time-honored jurisdiction of art criticism, Wallaces's "confluential" counter-aesthetic of presence covers, in response, a whole set of trans-aesthetic practices from movie directing, tennis, and other games to make-believe and geopolitical affairs, as I have already insisted.

Wallace's reader may remember that, in Mario's film, Gentle replies to the Canadian Prime Minister's kneejerk references to the "smaller world" with his own, irony-tinged clichés such as "We're interdependent. We're cheek to jowl," but only as a "segue" to an "entr'acte, with *continent* squeezed in for *world* in 'It's a Small World After All,' which enjambment doesn't do the rhythm section of doo-wopping cabinet girls a bit of good, but does usher in the start of a whole new era" (Wallace 1996, 386). Gent(i)le aesthetics signals the onset of a novel continental order, but this order's interdependent syntax—North America's own enjambment—is another bad form. Not only is it an experialist deformation of the continent, but it also contravenes to the bigger, actually existing planetary geoformation, eating as it does into the world presence through a plethora of maneuvers allegorizing or effectively setting off withdrawal, decoupling, depleting, carving out, lack or lacking, absence and various "absencing" rites leading to it, and so on. Most significantly, all of these are fundamentally *recurrent* in nature, variously enacting obsessive-compulsive reiterations that inform—better yet, deform—private and public, individual and collective, material and fantasmatic, productive and consumptive, lucrative and leisurely, literally minded and literary American life. Whether we talk about waste management, drug addiction and AA-type of recovery programs, sports, language, postmodern literature, film stuck in their cerebral "meta," self-

mirroring mode, or the repeat epitome—the Entertainment itself—the defining metabolisms of American bodies and body politic are recursive and terminally so. For they are poised to use us up as *we* use and overuse them in the arch-modality of drug abuse. In that, they move, and move us, deathward, like DeLillo's plots or, closer to *Infinite Jest* and to the matter at hand, like in what DeLillo also describes, in his 1997 essay "The Power of History," as the addictive, nauseating, depersonalizing, and "de-presencing" drive of cable networks' "serial replays" of a botched bank heist caught on camera. "[I]f you view the tape often enough," writes DeLillo, "it tends to transform you, to make you a passive variation of the armed robber in his warped act of consumption. It is another set of images for you to want and need and get sick of and need nonetheless, and it separates you from the reality that beats ever more softly in the diminishing world outside the tape" (DeLillo 1997).

If, in retrospect, postmodernism's neo-avant-garde ambition has been to expose the cultural-ideological fabric of reality so as to disabuse us of any naively realist delusions, Mario's, Himself's, and ultimately Wallace's own *après-garde* art *overdoes the postmodern*, overdoses on the disabuse and thus repeats paroxistically postmodern self-conscious repetitiveness to expose its onto-aesthetic shortcomings and possibly reconnect us with reality and ultimately with ourselves, problematic and intricate as reality and people are bound to forever remain.[6] Tightly and multifarously integrated, the symbolically paronymous Enfield Tennis Academy and Ennet House make up in effect for the same site of Wallace's highly complex, truly contemporary post-post-modern aesthetic. This is a place where, for human subjects, their bodies, and the world's body alike, the biomental apparatuses of reproductive behavior are rewired so as to enable, as anticipated earlier, alternate instances and styles of productive life and meaningful, more "sober," outward-projected, worldly relationships with others and reality. Bent on retrieving the world and human reality threatened by a jadedly ironic rhetoric of absence and disengagement in which postmodern critique "confluences" with the Gentile-Trumpist geopolitics of chauvinist reentrenchment, the aesthetic in question is, to reiterate, one of presence. Parasitically on the postmodern, this aesthetic opens its host up to the world by reconditioning postmodernism's innate intertextuality and overall relatedness as reality-, human life-, environment-, and planet-oriented nexus.

This aesthetic is twice confluentialist. On one side, it can be isolationist neither on the individual nor at the social, national—let alone international—level. On the other, it sets out to analogously join the human subject and reality back together by making both more real, more present in and of themselves and

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6 On the *après-garde*, a Wallace coinage, which has been in use in European and U. S. art and literary criticism, see *Infinite Jest* (1996, 64, 788, 947, etc.).

to each other, by restoring their ontological dignity. On both, subtly dovetailing accounts, the Eschaton game plays a key role (Wallace 1996, 321-342). First, the game shows that the world map is nothing like Gentle's worldview. Interdependence of world communities, countries, and territories does exist, and, be it beneficial or, as it comes across in the game, destructive, it is nevertheless real and must be managed. Second, and apropos of "territory," the world as real place and this place's representation are discrepant, asymmetric ontologies. This is another wink, if not a jab, at postmodernism, its Borgesian inheritance, and realistic deficiencies. At the same time, the "ontological confusion" that has players target each other not as players but *as real people* and prompts Michael Pemulis's irate peroration on the map-territory antinomy has at least the merit of dramatizing the no less real, mutual inscription of the local and the world (Wallace 1996, 333-334). As the ludic principle breaks down and the game comes to a grinding halt, the two orders mesh more and more, with the macro world telescoped into the micro world of repurposed tennis courts and, vice versa, the courts *qua* game board, the E. T. A., and the United States with them, woven into the world texture. This happens, though, as the players assert their presence by ending the contest, exiting its pretend world, and becoming or re-becoming real rather than automata set in motion by impersonal rules whose application is monitored by a computer software. And third, the doomsday game and its conspicuously repetitive pantomime constitute the make-believe hinge on which two *realia*—two undeniably palpable facts of life—coarticulate, confluence. One is tennis, for there would be no ballistic exchanges without tennis balls and the ability of lobbing them with pro accuracy. The other is geopolitics. Ideally, they should be both "confluential" and, as such, mutually isomorphic, and the reader will remember that the "Show" actors and actresses are globe-trotters, world citizens, in a sense. But, needless to say, world Armageddon's mutual assured destruction is anything but confluential, the kind of interdependence we want. Equally recursive in its endlessly repetitive drills, tennis too risks remaining non-confluential unless Schtitt's theory of athletic self-transcendence pans out. Schtitt's name makes one think of a number of things, including the repetitive "t"s in it, but let me just point up, for now, the overarching yet complex logic of repetition enforced at E.T.A. intra- and extra-curricularly with an authoritarianism smacking of popular representations of Nazi "analism" and terrorist obstinacy (E.T.A. also alludes to ETA, the Basque separatist organization).

As far as tennis goes, it is noteworthy that the Academy produces top-performing players capable of hitting, à la Stan Smith, the same shot mechanically, uniformly, passionlessly, and unflappably, almost *disappearing* in the flawless and flawlessly repeated mechanics of the stroke (Wallace 1996, 110). But if they

disappear on this "plateau," if they give themselves to "repetition. First last always," as Jim Troeltsch also lectures them, this is not to absence themselves but to resurface wholly present and fully themselves, to *recover* their presence, much like Wallace himself rehashes postmodernism with a vengeance, "ODs" on it, to recover on a higher, less ironic plateau of performance (Wallace 1996, 118).

This is not postmodernism anymore; it is hyper- or post-postmodernism. But neither in tennis nor in literature does this recovery obtain in the accumulative temporality of rehearsal of the same technique. Honing form into perfection "until you can do it without thinking about it" (Wallace 1996, 118) and thinking "about it" has stopped or, more likely, has confluenced with— etymologically, has flown with and into—the body to become corporeal, body in action, "muscle memory," "it," doing all this, I say, is the steppingstone for the quantum leap of self-presence and tennis-court self-realization; similarly, discarding the "meta," "cerebral" "postmodern" posturing and even the "post-postmodern" affectation, which are identified *expressis verbis* in *Infinite Jest*, clears the deck for another confluentialist literary performance and resets the clock of contemporary aesthetics (Wallace 1996, 141-142).

Blind and robotic reprise, repetition of the same, cancelling the world out inside the small cycle of sameness—all this can kill you as an addict, tennis player, movie director, writer, citizen, and polity. But, as Troeltch stresses, the sequential time of repetition can also accrue under certain circumstances in which "mindless," unassuming, non-posturing drilling seems to be key, another temporality to it. This temporality is kairotic, eventful, propitious, and genuinely contemporary. It is an other to merely repetitive chronology, a productive *newness* in the heart of reproductive nowness, a surplus similar to the *differential* quality Gilles Deleuze theorizes by drawing from Søren Kierkegaard (Deleuze 2017). This time is also a space: the space or spaces, moments, and flashes that lift the curse of recursiveness—of drug use, of monotonous baseline rallies, of ever-reiterated "meta" gimmicks in postmodernism, of same old, same old *Simpsons* rip-offs—to make room for presence. This space-making, this topo-poesis is an aesthetic protocol. In tennis, Wallace himself describes it in painstaking detail as a "[Roger] Federer moment," one of magic and genius, of ecstatics and aesthetics, of sheer beauty different from anything occurring during drills (Wallace 2016, 119). In this moment, Federer is fully present, in "flesh" and in a different dimension running through his body thanks of a temporality surging during, and disrupting, the time of that forehand or backhand "consistency" intensely rehearsed in practice.

In the same instant, Federer also produces something *different*. He does not repeat anything anymore. Nor does he *think* about it—which "thinking," in Wallace's tennis and literary worlds, is *over*thinking and represses "feeling," acting "naturally, innovatively, and therefore ends up reproducing the intensely

rehearsed, the cliché, thus "absencing" the thinker in the act of repetition. Overcoming this de-presencing and affectless effect of rationalization is exactly what James Incandenza's father teaches his son by urging him to achieve "[t]otal physicality. No revving head. Complete presence" like the spinning body of a tennis ball coming at you, a situation that makes us so much part of the world, so "environamental"—"[f]urniture of the world," says Incandenza Sr., that "our absence" becomes inconceivable (Wallace 1996, 160, 168). A somewhat less scarier figure than Himself's parent, Schtitt professes the same, post-Cartesian tennis philosophy. Its key point is to fuse body and mind by suturing the inhibiting mechanical-cerebral divide in the moment of the tennis stroke, but also to translate into worldly behavior, into a non-adversarial recognition of the opponent, of the other, because, declares Schtitt, the "second[-order] world" of sportsmanship is a training for and a laboratory of first-order world "citizenship" (Wallace 1996, 459). So does Hal, Wallace's alter ego, who "seems now almost to hit the corners without thinking about it," for he *is* in the moment now or in its spatial equivalent, the Zone (Wallace 1996, 260). So does Don Gately by not letting his "head" overrationalize," by also "living completely In The Moment in what the AA calls *The Present*," the time of presence, not in the re-instantiated past of an addiction that simply adds one past instance to another to defer the redemptive new time of different behavior, of the new as a qualitatively distinct now. So does Himself in the endlessly and sterilely self-reduplicating *The Medusa v. the Odalisque* movie. The film turns out no less lethal than the self-mirrorings caused by A. R. F. terrorists on itself self-repeating New New England's highways. And yet the movie nests, Joelle tells us, "little flashes of something more than cold hip technical abstraction the sensuous presence of the thing an emotional thrust an unironic, almost *moral* thesis" as the referenced Bernini "statue's stasis *presented* the theoretical subject as the emotional effect—self-forgetting as the Grail *presented* the self-forgetting of alcohol as inferior to religion/art" and attuned to Schtitt's "mediated transcendence of the self" (Wallace 1996, 742). And so does Wallace himself throughout *Infinite Jest*, which re-presents postmodernism as the template and dawn of a new art.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

GENERATIONS, CONTEMPORANEITY, AND INTERSECTIONALITY IN LITERARY HISTORY

ANDREEA MIRONESCU[1]

ABSTRACT. *Generations, Contemporaneity, and Intersectionality in Literary History.*[2] While several traditional concepts of literary history, including literary periods, periodization itself, and genre, have been recently put into question and reframed in transnational, cross-temporal, and transdisciplinary ways, the notion of generation has received much less attention. At the same time, in various branches of cultural studies, and even more prominently in sociology, the problem of generations has taken center stage once again. In this article, the critic takes as her departure point Mihai Iovănel's 2021 *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020* to discuss how the generational operator could be employed in post-Cold War literary history. Mironescu argues that a transversal and intersectional integration of generation into contemporary literary criticism could ensure a better understanding of intra- and transgenerational dynamics in terms of self-representations and group narratives, inclusions and exclusions, as well as gender and literary affiliations.

Keywords: generation, generationality, literary history, postcommunism, intersectionality

REZUMAT. *Generaţii, contemporaneitate şi intersecţionalitate în istoria literară.* Dacă diverse concepte tradiţionale ale istoriei literare, precum perioadele literare (şi conceptul însuşi de periodizare) sau genurile literare au fost, în ultima vreme, chestionate critic şi regândite în contexte transnaţionale, cross-temporale şi transdisciplinare, noţiunea de generaţie a primit mult mai puţină atenţie din partea criticilor. În acelaşi timp, în diferite subdomenii ale studiilor

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[1] **Andreea MIRONESCU** is Senior Researcher at the Institute of Interdisciplinary Research – Department of Social Sciences and Humanities of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi. Her scholarly interests cover Romanian modernism, literary history, and memory and postmemory studies with emphasis of Communism. Email: andreea.mironescu@uaic.ro.

culturale, şi, mai pregnant, în sociologie, problema generaţiilor a recâştigat o nouă actualitate. În acest articol Mironescu ia ca punct de plecare *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990-2020* (2021), pentru a discuta cum operatorul generaţional poate fi utilizat în istoria literară de după sfârşitul Războiului Rece. Ea susţine că o integrare transversală şi intersecţională a noţiunii de generaţie în critica literară contemporană poate duce la o mai corectă înţelegere a dinamicii intra- şi transgeneraţionale în ceea ce priveşte autoreprezentările şi naraţiunile de grup, includerile şi excluderile, afilierile literare sau de gen.

Cuvinte-cheie: generaţie, generaţionalitate, istorie literară, postcomunism, intersecţionalitate

Surprisingly, despite the momentum of the millennials' generation in various parts of the global literary ecosystem, *generation* does not seem to be a fashionable concept in today's literary historiography. Some critics call it "a fiction" "created out of discourse," a construct that, due to its lack of precision, is liable to generate "false thinking about literary development and history" (Hentea 2013, 583-584). Like other classic operators of literary history, generation dates back to the origins of the discipline itself. However, while several traditional concepts of literary studies, including literary periods, periodization itself, and genre, have been recently put into question and reframed in transnational, cross-temporal, and transdisciplinary ways, the notion of generation has received much less attention from the practitioners of the field. Instead, in cultural studies, memory studies, youth studies, but especially in sociology, the concept was, in the last century and particularly over the last two decades, revisited, reframed, and updated. In this context, it is not surprising that a claim such as "Generation deserves to be put on the agenda of the 'new' literary history," from a 2014 article published in the *New Literary History* journal, has been made by a literary and memory studies scholar like Astrid Erll (2014, 385). And yet, how can the concept of generation keep up with world literature studies and its new cartographies, such as transnational, transregional, transcontinental, global, etc.? Could generation, a notion so closely tied to an age group as well as to a particular historical and spatial context, function as a "transconcept," to quote Eric Hayot's term (2011, 740), one able to account for the new intersectional and "worlded" configurations of national literatures in the planetary ecosystem? To my mind, the answer is affirmative. It is enough to think about the new vocabulary of the concept, which speaks, in the post-colonial context, of transregional and global generations, as well as about second/third generation(s), or about Susan Suleiman's notion, the "1. 5 generation" (2002), coined in relation to children born

during the Holocaust, but further applied in postsocialist studies, not to mention Marianne Hirsch's already classicized term "post-generation" (2012). In the same vein, one could mention, in the narrower field of literary studies, the rise of the "9/11 Generation" as a critical concept.

In what follows, I will explore the potential of the generational operator to reform literary history after the Cold War, taking as a starting point Mihai Iovănel's *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990-2020* (*History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020*), published in Romania in 2021. Specifically, I will look into how Iovănel, a member of the millennial generation, employs this notion biographically and methodologically. My aim is to respond to the following questions: How does Iovănel relate to his own generation of critics, poets, and prose writers? What is the place and role of the generation as an instrument of critical narrative, compared to other Romanian literary histories? How important is for Iovănel the dynamic of generations in postcommunist cultural space and what kind of narrative does that dynamic generate? And finally, what alternative scenarios of Romanian literary history might one discover through an intersectional approach of generations?

Generation as method

Starting with the new millennium, and perhaps most notably with Alexei Yurchak's 2005 book *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, a new vocabulary emerged in Eastern European and global postsocialist studies, employing notions like "generation of the end," "the last generation" (of Socialism, Yugoslavia or the GDR), but also, and especially referring to the postsocialist transition, "generation of transformation" (Artwińska and Mrozik 2020, 18-19). Although from the sociological point of view, these generations are far from being homogenous in terms of age, or, in Karl Mannheim's words, in terms of "temporal location"—for instance, Yurchak refers to the generation that matures in the last three decades of socialism—it is nonetheless true that this body of scholarship indicated what may be termed as a "generational turn," both methodologically and biographically. This turn is more present with the members of the millennial generation, those who were born roughly during the last two decades of the Cold War in this part of the globe. More precisely, the last children of the socialist regimes spanning Eastern and Central Europe have built a methodological discourse based in many ways on this generational experience, and at the same time they have explored collaborative and creative forms of research based on individual and generational memory, among which auto-ethnography (Lenart-Cheng and Luca 2018) and collective autobiography (Zin and Gannon 2022). In addition

to their orientation towards experience and affect in the study of postsocialism/postcommunism, these studies have generated a transnational reframing of generation, on the one hand, and a critical questioning of the notion, on the other hand. For instance, while suggesting that generation is an intersectional concept, Anna Artwínska and Agniezska Mrozik point out that the notion is also a "slippery" one. If it is perceived as a homogenous unit, "it blurs a lot of tensions and conflicts of class, gender, ethnic, or sexual nature within groups that declare themselves as generational communities" (Artwińska and Mrozik 2020, 13).

Still, while generation proves a multifunctional concept for periodizing the history of Eastern and Central Europe, as Artwińska and Mrozik argue, the same cannot be said about the revival of this concept in literary studies in general and in literary history in particular, both in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. And recent criticisms of periodization as the foundation of literary history made by critics such as Eric Hayot (2011) and Susan Stanford Friedman (2019), among others, most likely play an important role here: like eras and currents, literary generations are among the traditional tools for ordering chronologically literary phenomena. However, nowadays, after the deconstruction of the very notion of periodization, the role of literary tools is no longer, or should not be, that of dividing the literary ecosystem into successive "slices." With an eye to Hayot's article referenced above, the question I ask is whether and how generation can become a "transperiodizing concept" (2011, 742)? Not only is the answer yes, but this, I would add, is already happening in literary studies, particularly through the interdisciplinary integration of the notion of generation from classical sociology, as defined in the 1920s by Karl Mannheim. True, in literary history "the term 'generation' acquired a sociological dimension in the nineteenth century," as Marius Hentea notes, a "change in meaning" that occurred "across a number of fields, including history, literature and politics" (2013, 571). However, this change in meaning, as Hentea implies, has remained without epistemological value in 19th and 20th century West European literary historiography. Instead, the sociological turn manifests itself, to my mind, quite strongly in contemporary criticism and literary theory, and the (Mannheimian) concept of generation plays a key role in this process. To give only one particular example, in his chapter "Generation" from *Literature Now: Key Terms and Methods for Literary History* (Bru and de Bruyn 2016), Julian Hanna relies heavily on Mannheim and Pierre Bourdieu (along with recent theorists of popular culture) to reshape the concept and give it a new applicability in the global literary system.

As Erll notes in her 2014 article quoted above, *generationality* is an important notion in the discussion on literary generations. The term refers, on

the one hand, to the "generational identity," but on the other hand, Erll suggests, it has much to do with the "fundamental constructedness" of this identity, that is always dependent on cultural practices (Erll 2014, 387). "Generationality is produced in the act of representation," and, perhaps more importantly, in the act of group representations; at the same time, it is dependent on cultural and social practices (Erll 2014, 391). In Romanian literary historiography, the issue of generations, with a nod to Mannheim, is generally disconnected from the social context, which played a decisive role in the work of the German sociologist (Mannheim 1972). The notion is used primarily as a chronological operator, also designating an object of study (generations of writers and critics) and less as a dispositif to which the author of the critical narrative belongs. This is why the generational engagement of various Romanian critics is usually understood in terms of affinities and solidarities—more often than not conceived within a masculinist frame of thought[3]—and also critical action, while the extra-literary factors that determine these affinities and the homogenous, often homosocial structure of a literary generation are not subjected to critical reflection.[4]

All this has led to an institutionalization of generations as an authoritative operator in Romanian criticism, one generation especially subjecting themselves to such a self-institutionalization. Although the writers belonging to the generation of the 1980s appear in the collective mind as very good self-promoters, given both their challenging attitude towards the 1960s generation, as well as their numerous group self-portrayals and anthologies[5], the writers and critics of the 1960s have dominated the decades up to 1990 and are very important players in postcommunism also, overshadowing institutionally both the 1980s generation and the millennial generation. They are still influential in cultural politics, as directors of cultural magazines such as *România literară*, leaders and key-members in powerful cultural organizations such as the Union of Writers in Romania and the Romanian Academy. In Mannheimian terms, they are a "strategic generation," one that "conservatively attempts to retain control over social and cultural resources" (Turner 2002, 44),[6] ever since they secured a strategic position in the literary field in the decade of their debut, during the Romanian political and cultural Thaw, through their promotion of aesthetic autonomy. The 1960s generation's struggle to remain relevant in the contemporary literary system is mirrored in Nicolae Manolescu's 2008 *Istoria*

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[3] See for instance Iovănel and Moraru (2019).

[4] A sociological approach to the dynamics of literary generations under communism comes from millennial critic Ioana Macrea-Toma. See Macrea-Toma (2009).

[5] See, for instance, Gheorghe Crăciun (1999) and Mircea Cărtărescu (1999), to which Iovănel dedicates a critical subchapter, unveiling precisely the strategies through which Cărtărescu aims to bring the 1980s generation to the forefront of the (post)communist cultural field.

[6] See also Macrea-Toma (2009), especially the chapter "Critics and the problem of 'generation'."

critică a literaturii romîne: 5 secole de literatură (*Critical History of Romanian Literature: 5 centuries of literature*). Manolescu is perhaps the most influential critic of the 1960s generation and his *Critical History* offers a privileged position to this literary group, although not overtly. The book relies on the concept of generation, without conceptualizing or questioning it, in order to delineate the systemic movements of the national literary history. However, the generational narrative created by Manolescu is not to be found in the macro-structure of the book, where several "post-Maiorescu"[7] generations succeed each other, in a struggle for "aesthetic autonomy" in different eras and under different political regimes, but instead in its microstructure, where one can read an unconcealed plea for the generation of critics to which Manolescu himself belongs. This can be verified in an editorial published recently in *România literară*, where the critic demonstrates the numerical and qualitative importance (the figures are the result of a careful selection, he notes) of the 1960s generation in Romanian literary criticism. Thus, in Manolescu's own counting, there are 39 critics who made their name in the 1960s and were indexed in his *Critical History*, compared to just 8 names belonging to the 1980s generation (Manolescu 2022). Surprisingly (or not), there isn't a single millennial critic that Manolescu deemed worthy of being included in his 2022 synopsis.

At this point, it is worth questioning how does Iovănel tackle in his *History* all these issues (the crisis of periodization in global literary studies, generations as poles of power in local literary history, as well as the surge of generationality and the critical questioning of the concept in postsocialist/postcommunist studies)? Before proceeding any further, I must note that Iovănel's 2021 book is the first and, for now, the only history dedicated to postcommunist literature in Romania and, possibly, in the East-Central European space[8] (along with Cristina Modreanu's 2020 book *The History of Romanian Theatre from Communism to Capitalism*), and its reception is still an ongoing, tumultuous process. While critic Christian Moraru labelled the *History* as an "event," as meant by Alain Badiou (Moraru 2021), the book also encountered criticism among the members of the various generations that are active in the contemporary Romanian space. These criticisms generally had two causes: the

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7   Titu Maiorescu was the most influential critic in the 19th century, projected afterwards as the symbol of cultural authority in Romanian literary historiography. However, in his *History* Iovănel draws a different filiation of autochthonous criticism, founded by Maiorescu's main opponent, C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea.

8   There are notable and innovative histories of the entire East-Central European space, such as the multi-volume *History of the literary cultures of East-Central Europe* (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2004-2010) and *Columbia Literary History of Eastern Europe since 1945* (Segel 2008), which are marginally interested in the postcommunist period. Just like Manolescu's *History*, they all end with only a chapter dedicated to postcommunism.

fact that the volume is polemical in relation to traditional literary historiography and its nationalist, essayistic and escapist character, driven by the principle of the "autonomy of the aesthetic," and Iovănel's option for an approach to the literary ecosystem from the angle of post-Marxist materialism. In doing so, Iovănel, a critic close to the intellectual left in Romania, perfectly illustrates the social and trans-aesthetic turn (Mironescu and Mironescu 2019) in contemporary Romanian criticism.

Against the backdrop of the crisis of periodization in literary history, Iovănel's solution to this problem becomes particularly interesting, given that the subject matter of the book covers a period of three decades in which important, in some cases even systemic, mutations took place in Romania. It is significant, from this point of view, that his volume opens with a "Brief history of postcommunism," in the form of a chronological and synthetic picture that eludes almost entirely the literary element, offering instead an excellent bird's eye view of the mutations occurring at political, economic, social and ideological levels: the adoption of a democratic regime, the privatization of the industrial and, partly, of the cultural heritage (publishing houses, magazines), the country's integration into NATO and the EU, the explosion of Romanian labour migration in the European Community space, the financial crisis of 2008 and the rise of the neoliberal ideology, the birth of a culture of (sometimes politically instrumented) civic protests, but also the rise of media technologies, all of which decisively influenced and modified cultural practices over the last 30 years. The same type of "exterior" periodization, dictated by historical and political contexts, seems to be used in Eugen Negrici's synthesis *Literatura română sub comunism* (*Romanian Literature under Communism*) (2019), but the difference between the two models is radical: while Negrici sees the evolution of literature to resemble the defence reaction of an organism under attack, for Iovănel it is the social and material practices that influence the changes in the postcommunist literary field. In the same vein, the first part of the volume, "The evolution of ideologies," has relatively little to do with literature *per se*, Iovănel's approach being centred instead on the context—but not on the historical context, the classic frame of traditional literary historiography, except only to a small extent—focusing instead mainly on the conditionings, opportunities and material practices of the literary field. Conversely, in the third and fourth parts, respectively "The evolution of fiction" and "The evolution of poetry," Iovănel's method changes, and the critic chooses a genealogical approach to the "evolution" of fiction, respectively poetry, in postcommunism. To this end, the critic establishes several transgenerational typologies within the two literary genres, and afterwards studies their metamorphoses at a generational level.

Generationality and intersectionality

Himself a prominent member of the millennial generation, Iovănel employs, directly or indirectly, his generational membership and position, both in the frame of his *History* and in the interviews given about the book.[9] Right from the introduction, Iovănel invokes the autobiographical character of his *History*, which "comes from countless chance encounters with certain books" and which the critic associates with Louis Althusser's "materialist philosophy of randomness and contingency."[10] This goes to say that Iovănel does not employ here a generational, but rather a procedural argument; his biographic approach is not a method, but a disclaimer. Even so, through his claim Iovănel differentiates himself from the model of the objective critic who judges literary phenomena as aesthetically autonomous, which is the dominant model in local literary historiography. Although throughout the book millennial writers and critics are more often than others subject to a generational narration, Iovănel avoids the assumption of an intragenerational perspective, in terms of the position he himself occupies in the literary system, as well as at the methodological level. "Contrary to what I had believed for a long time, as I was conditioned by my belonging to my own generation, that of the 2000s," the critic states, "while writing this book I was forced to note that the mobility of literary forms is transgenerational."[11] Next, the critic argues that, while he "do[es] not bracket the issue of generations," which he sees as "a useful chronological marker," he "additionally find[s] in realism an operator capable of transgenerationally suggesting the common reference—the writers's relation to reality through a set of theoretical and rhetorical conventions."[12]

A first thing that can be noted here is that, even though literary forms are transgenerational, their realisations are *also*, or *primarily*, generational, and this is verified, I argue, especially in the case of postcommunist literature, where the break between the two eras, between *before* and *after*, have further deepened the generational divide not only at the social level, but also in the

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[9] A similar claim (and disclaimer) is made by Cristina Modreanu (2020), who is also a member of the millennial generation. Modreanu's generational engagement is, however, more present throughout the book than Iovănel's.

[10] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The original Romanian reads: "vine din atâtea și atâtea întâlniri întâmplătoare cu o carte" (Iovănel 2021, 13); "filozofi[a] materialist a aleatoriului și contingenței" (12).

[11] "Contrar a ce crezusem multă vreme condiționat de apartenența la propria mea generație, cea douămiistă, scriind această carte am fost forțat să constat că mobilitatea formelor literare este transgenerațională" (Iovănel 2021, 11).

[12] "nu pun[e] în paranteză problema generațiilor"; "marker chronologic util"; "găsind suplimentar în realism un operator capabil să sugereze transgenerational referința comună" (Iovănel 2021, 11).

literary field. As I have already noted, in the historical, social and cultural space of postcommunism, the writers that had made their debut during the 1960s, the writers of the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the generation of the 2000s are, at least since the beginning of the new millennium, contemporaries. But within this contemporaneity, intra-generational common points (concerning institutional insertion, promotion strategies, group self-representations, and generational poetics) are stronger, I argue, than transgenerational literary filiations.

However, even without performing a transversal integration of the generational operator in his *History*, Iovănel is surprisingly attentive to intra- and inter-generational dynamics. On the other hand, although the social context in which writers belonging to a generational shift is most of the time implied or even carefully dismantled, the only subsection of the book explicitly dedicated to "Generational dynamics" resorts to framing from the perspective of literary historiography, in connection with the so-called "internal revisions" of the canon. Starting from the observation that, after 1989, "the substance of the canon does not change radically," although "the generational subject […] tries to monopolize the scene"[13] the critic assembles a press file of the debates regarding coagulation and affirmation in cultural magazines—and less in the cultural space *per se*—of new generations, that of the 1990s, during the first postcommunist decades, and that of the 2000s, at the beginning of the new millennium. This is also the section where the use of the term "generation" has the highest density in the entire book. However, in the two chapters in which he traces the evolution of prose and poetry, Iovănel explicitly abandons the use of the concept of *generation*, replacing it with the more neutral "wave."

Of course, generational and intra-/transgenerational dynamics in the literary system are more complex and ambiguous than they may appear at first glance. But there is another important aspect here. Especially if we stop looking at it within the framework of literary history *stricto sensu*, this dynamic reveals a struggle that takes place outside the canon made and remade in the pages of cultural magazines, a competition in which, as Bryan S. Turner observes, "generations, like competitive status groups and classes, enter into a field of social struggle because the transmission of social resources through time is not entirely regulated by law and is necessarily characterized by conflict" (2002, 44). In no historical period, I would add, has this struggle been so complex as in postcommunism, a battleground where three distinct and influent generations, that of the 1960s, that of the 1980s and, since the mid-2000s, the millennial generation, are competing for resources.

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[13] "substanța canonului nu se schimbă radical"; subiectul generațional […] încearcă să monopolizeze scena" (Iovănel 2021, 168).

Returning to the typologies proposed by Iovănel within the two main literary genres, poetry and prose, and to the writers he selects in order to exemplify these typologies, it is fairly clear that they have a generational character. Let us take prose fiction as an example. Whereas "postmodern metarealism" is a typical formula for both the writers of the eighties and of the nineties, "miserabilist realism" finds its representatives almost exclusively among the members of the 1990s generation, and "capitalist realism" is an even more markedly generational formula, being reserved almost exclusively for writers who debuted in the first years of the new millennium. But even within the 2000s generation, which asserted itself *en bloc*, simultaneously in prose and poetry, and advanced several coherent group poetics, the retro-active establishment of different literary genealogies within the national literary history may prove less productive than identifying some "generational" forms and genres. One case in point is, I suggest, the coming-of-age (auto)fiction, a subgenre that has some points in common with the *Bildungsroman* emerging in Western Europe "in the late eighteenth century, around the time that the generation began to take on a sociological meaning" (Hentea 2013, 572). However, the generational character of postcommunist, often autofictional, coming-of-age novels exploring the heroes'/authors' childhood during communism and their maturing during the transitional years is more pronounced than that of the *Bildungsroman*, given the fact that it is practiced by millennial prose writers born, with some exceptions, in the last two decades of socialism, among which Radu Pavel Gheo, Bogdan Alexandru Stănescu, Florin Lăzărescu, Florin Irimia, Ioana Nicolaie, and Diana Bădica.

In the same vein, it is more likely that between the millennial male and women poets that Iovănel includes in the dynamics of various typological models, such as neo-expressionism (Ruxandra Novac, Claudiu Komartin, Teodor Dună) and biographical minimalism (Elena Vlădăreanu, Dan Sociu) there are more affinities than there are between them and their precursors from previous generations, a fact that Iovănel himself states several times in his book. In addition, the gender factor plays an important role here, which, however, remains less visible in the framework of an evolution of literary forms. For example, Novac and Vlădăreanu have more in common, through their poetry with biographical, social and political accents, than do Novac and Komartin. It is equally true that the two millennial women poets share more poetic features than each of them shares with their common precursor, Angela Marinescu (b. 1949), despite her influence on the millennial poets. Moreover, this drive to establish trans-generational correspondences between literary forms leads Iovănel, a critic who is usually attentive to gender representations and labels, to implicitly characterize Simona Popescu twice as a feminine Cărtărescu of her

own generation: "*Exuvii* (1997) by Simona Popescu is an *Orbitor* without the part of a metaphysical thriller through which Mircea Cărtărescu energises his autobiographical material,"[14] and "Generation 90 aspires to produce its own *Levant* through *Lucrări in verde sau Pledoaria mea pentru poezie* by Simona Popescu."[15] An intersectional approach to Generation 2000 and the dynamics of literary forms in the last half century would present an evolution at least partially different from that depicted by the *History* discussed here.

For example, one thing left unnoticed would be that transgenerational influences, as they emerge in the evolutionary template presented by Iovănel, occur almost exclusively on male and female lines, but the meaning of affiliation is different in each of the two situations. Thus, while male literary filiations, even when they are made in a spirit of rebellion against the national literary tradition, most often remain in the canonical area, by adhering to prestigious models[16] (true, among Romanian millennial male poets there are also examples that contradict this model), affiliations on the female line are rarer and have a polemical character. For women poets, literary affiliations are aware of their gender-marked character and express solidarity with what is marginal or non-existent in the canon made by men, and it is no coincidence that poets like Vlădăreanu, Medeea Iancu or Miruna Vlada have repeatedly emphasized that they resented the lack of women writers in the school canon, which was formative for them in their teenage years.

To do justice to Iovănel and to his – in many aspects pioneering – critical enterprise, I must emphasise that he is the first Romanian literary historian to propose a systemic intersectional approach to the domestic literary field, in terms of (trans)nationality, gender and gender identity, race and class. Transnationality—in the guise of series of Moldovan writers, Romanian born writers, exile, academic and literary diaspora—is the most obvious and best integrated device throughout the book, at several level. In regard to the other categories mentioned above, they are approached synthetically in the chapter "Resistance Points"; at the same time, the manifestations of racism, misogyny, classism in various individual critical and literary discourses are repeatedly highlighted and denounced. Still, the subsequent sections on LGBT+, race and subcultures, to name but a few, are oftentimes focused on their literary representations in "dominant," canonical literary works and cultural discourses.

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[14] "*Exuvii* de Simona Popescu este un *Orbitor* fără partea de thriller metafizic prin care Mircea Cărtărescu își dinamiza materialul autobiografic" (Iovănel 2021, 395).

[15] "Generația 90 aspiră să dea și ea un *Levant* prin *Lucrări în verde sau Pledoaria mea pentru poezie* de Simona Popescu" (Iovănel 2021, 527).

[16] For an analysis on how the Western canon is integrated in Iovănel's book, see Borza (2021, 123-127).

Furthermore, the fact that these categories are labelled as "resistance points" to the mainstream cultural field and featured in autonomous and lateral subchapters may be seen as reinforcing their subalternity. Of course, there are exceptions to this treatment, for instance the place awarded to Adrian Schiop's autofictional novels, in which the author openly reveals his homosexuality, but the role of the marginal in the generational dynamics of the millennial writers could have received more attention, given the fact that millennials are probably the first generation sensitive to these issues.

In concluding, I am not arguing that Iovănel should have deployed the genealogy of literary forms in favour of a generational, Mannheim-inspired, perspective, although such an angle could have served the critic's (post)Marxist-leaning vision better. I am pleading, instead, for an introduction of the concept of generation and of the dynamics it enters in postcommunist literary history, and especially in the history of contemporary literature. Such a move would have, I believe, two distinct advantages. First, in Iovănel's particular case, a better problematization of the dynamics of literary forms from a generational perspective would have reduced the hiatus between the first two parts of the book, written from a visibly more "materialist" perspective, and the following two, in which the presentation of the evolution of literary forms is less attached to the social context. Secondly, without necessarily conceiving the history of contemporary Romanian literature as a Darwinian struggle for resources (although, in part, it is that too), the generational perspective could shed light on issues such as the construction of self-representations and group narratives, inclusions and exclusions at the level of generational units or in the poetics of its members, intra- and trans-generational gender dynamics. In other words, it would reveal the whole hidden part (because almost undiscussed until now) of what traditional literary history has called and still calls, with an escapist term, "generations of creation." Along with a concept like "autonomy of the aesthetic," the idea of "generations of creation," a notion originally coined by Tudor Vianu and still persistent in the critical *vulgata*, rightfully needs to be deconstructed, as Iovănel does in his *History* precisely through the materialist approach of the continuum that we call Romanian literature. At the same time, there is urgent need for a critique of the concept of generation from an intersectional perspective that would shed light on how generationality is produced in terms of ethnicity, gender, and nationality. Such a critical approach, already present in the scholarship and literature of many millennial and post-millennial writers and researchers, would also help increase the awareness of these generations' position in the national and global literary systems, as well as in today's world.

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RAMIFICATIONS OF IDEOLOGY:
MAPPING CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN LITERATURE

GRAŢIELA BENGA-ŢUŢUIANU[1]

ABSTRACT. *Ramifications of Ideology: Mapping Contemporary Romanian Literature.* After outlining the mutations occurring in the background of literary histories, the analysis that follows shows, by focusing on the relevance of periodization in literary history, that, covering several decades as it does, Mihai Iovănel's *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020* works out open filiations and parallelisms that extend a time interval of contrasts and continuities. In his effort to assign another dimension to literary history through alliances with disciplines that cross a critically structured and metacritically developed literary area, Iovănel attempts to make literary history more permeable. Thus, a section of his work investigates how *The History…* reacts, from the post-Marxist materialism viewpoint, to the particularities determined by the transition from one cultural pattern to another. That segment examines conceptual and methodological ramifications, identifies lineages or vulnerabilities, and shows that the existence of an area of intersection between literary history and memory transforms *The History…* into a narrative. Finally, another part of the book is dedicated to demonstrating that what Benga-Ţuţuianu calls an "objectifying" approach can meet blind spots that prove relevant for the recontextualization of literary production and for sketching out a type of cosmopolitan imagery—a springboard to the discussion about world literature. Nevertheless, the arguments summed up in the last segment of the book prove unequivocally that Iovănel's *History* is a turning point in Romanian literary historiography.

Keywords: materialism, temporality, transfer, periphery, world literature

[1] **Graţiela BENGA-ŢUŢUIANU** is a scientific researcher at the "Titu Maiorescu" Institute (Timişoara), which is affiliated with the Romanian Academy. She has published a number of volumes of literary criticism including *Reţeaua. Poezia românească a anilor 2000* (*The Network: Romanian Poetry after the 2000s*). Her research focuses on the history of Romanian literature, the literature of exile, and Central and East European literatures. Email: gratielabenga@yahoo.com.

REZUMAT. *Ramificaţiile ideologiei: cartografierea literaturii române contemporane*. După schiţarea mutaţiilor petrecute în backgroundul istoriilor literare, analiza concentrată pe (i)relevanţa periodizării în istoria literară arată că, deşi e cuprinsă între limitele unei periodizări închise, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane. 1990-2020* recurge la filiaţii şi paralelisme deschise care amplifică un interval temporal al contrastelor şi continuităţilor. Pe direcţia creşterii permeabilităţii istoriei literare se înscrie şi efortul lui Iovănel de a-i atribui o altă dimensiune, prin alianţe disciplinare care străbat un spaţiu literar structurat critic şi desfăşurat metacritic. O altă secţiune a lucrării investighează modul în care *Istoria...* răspunde (din perspectiva materialismului post-marxist) particularităţilor determinate de tranziţia de la un model cultural la altul. Examinează ramificaţii conceptuale şi metodologice, identifică ascendenţe sau vulnerabilităţi şi arată că existenţa unei zone de intersecţie între istorie literară şi memorie transformă *Istoria...* într-o naraţiune. În fine, un segment e dedicat demonstrării faptului că abordarea obiectivantă poate întâlni *blind spots* care se dovedesc relevante pentru recontextualizarea producţiei literare şi pentru schiţarea unui imaginar cosmopolit – un punct de plecare în discuţia despre literatura globală. Cu toate acestea, argumentele sintetizate în ultima parte a lucrării arată, fără echivoc, că *Istoria...* lui Iovănel fixează un punct de cotitură în istoriografia literară românească.

Cuvinte-cheie: *materialism, temporalitate, transfer, periferie, literatura lumii*

Over the year that has passed since the publication of Mihai Iovănel's *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020*, the positions taken up by Romanian critics in traditional academic venues and scholarly modes of argumentation have been followed by acrimonious online debates. However, the vociferous reception of the book has not covered the entire literary scene. In some corners, opinions have been exchanged in a measured tone. Through this cautious withdrawal, an attempt has been made to avoid the ideological labelling of those involved in the discussions. The natural interest shown in any *history of literature* has sometimes been mistaken for the adherence to the same set of ideas. As the subject of this paper is not to study the attitudes generated by the relation to the increase or decrease of personal prestige (depending on the interest in Iovănel's work), I only note how the publication of a *history* causes twists and turns that are visible on the surface of a literary field[2] where underground dislocations (consequences of intellectual strategies that mask prejudices and reshape methodologies) are difficult to measure.

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[2] I use this concept as it was defined by Pierre Bourdieu in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Stanford University Press, 1996.

The following lines continue the debate over *The History*… and try to demonstrate that Mihai Iovănel's work is a narrative that sums up conceptual renegotiations and ramifications, epistemic turns and unequal emphases laid on the (trans)national interactions that contemporary Romanian literature provocatively includes.

Considerations on the Histories of Literature

A reflection on the history of literature cannot elude the various forms it has taken over the centuries. Outlined at the end of the 18th century and extended to the first decades of the 20th century, national beliefs found a generous field of projection in the history of literature. Literature established a certain possessive determiner: it became "our literature." This restrictive and defining identification was derived from the understanding of culture in the sense assigned to it by German Romanticism, along with the identification of the "national genius" (*Volksgeist*) in Herder's *Another Philosophy of History* (1774). The German philosopher underlined the inadequacy of subjecting facts to judgments built around ideal patterns and he pointed out that norms were, in turn, the products of certain types of genesis and contexts. With the formulation of this principle, the appreciation of regional specificity and diversity began to replace the universal values. In short, everything that is human is intrinsically linked to the history of its own place and time. A prerogative of humankind, the word (which, as we know, makes up the corpus of literature, but at the same time embodies the experience of the subject who writes) also belongs to history—or rather, a *certain* history designed by a type of reason that is historical in itself.

Given the absence of a solid tradition of national literature[3] and the unequivocal lack of professionalism of literary criticism in the second half of the 19th century, the history of "our literature" was inherently out of phase with the West. Perceived as the core of the history of literature, tradition as identified beyond the stakes of folklore—which Marianne Mesnil discovers in the shaping of a national identity, by underlining the distinction from the Other, and in major political desiderata (Mesnil 1997, 26)—held the attention of Nicolae Iorga, Sextil Pușcariu, Nicolae Cartojan and G. Călinescu. As they conceived them, the histories of "our literature" went beyond the rigid frames of the didactic-canonical works, to take on the aura of national projects "which assume, explicitly or

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[3] The "pașoptiști" (the Forty-Eighters) were greatly concerned with developing the national literature. Vasile Alecsandri's acid letters, for example, echo Herder's conception of the local spirit, language and literature. For details, see V. Alecsandri, "Către Alexandru Hurmuzaki," Mircești, 20 April 1868 (Alecsandri 1982, 352).

implicitly, the task of imagining the coherence, the old age, the continuity, the autarchy and especially the *identity potential* of a literature that became aware of itself only in the 19th century."[4] Of all the histories of the first half of the 20th century, that of G. Călinescu became the absolute example of the continuity of literary tradition and, at the same time, it functioned as a model of critical exercise. As has been demonstrated (cf. Martin 1981, 209-223), the objective of proving that there exists a Romanian tradition extended organically to the present day has been achieved by capitalising on tradition from the present perspective, the recourse to involvement, adhesion, fragmentary critique (in search for favourable angles) and anticipatory, retroactive analogies leading to "regressive assimilation from a distance."[5]

Looking at G. Călinescu's work as a means of establishing the discourse of a history of literature (not as an object of worship), it is but natural to wonder to what extent it can still be relevant today, especially within the international academic field. At the time it was written, *The History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present* responded to an unfortunate political situation and tried to ensure the stability of literary tradition (which was marked on the map of cultural values) as a counterweight to the volatile social and historical phenomena, consequently operating in contexts that focused on the national principle (with its nationalist extension, resumed in the 1980s). Today, its relevance is reduced primarily to a cultural perimeter sensitive to the issue of identity (yet unresponsive to secondary identities). On the international literary market, its impact is definitely undermined by 1) the distance in time, as the period after the fourth decade of the last century is not covered, and 2) the discrepancy between the current methods of organisation/approach and those used by G. Călinescu, who was reluctant to using socio-cultural insertions and faithful to the monographic principle.[6] As for the exemplary function of G. Călinescu's *History*…, it results not only from the finality of the critical approach, but also from the authority it acquired. Despite all the differences that separate them (perspective, method, criteria, form, style), the *histories* that followed the work G. Călinescu published in 1941 share the attraction towards synthesis and the power that postulating principles and establishing hierarchies—acts of symbolic domination (in Bourdieu's terms) bestowed upon them.

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[4] Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine. The original Romanian reads: "care îşi asumă, explicit ori implicit, sarcina de a imagina coerenţa, vechimea, continuitatea, autarhia şi mai ales potenţialul identitar al unei literaturi care a devenit conştientă de sine abia în secolul al XIX-lea" (Creţu 2021).

[5] "asimilare regresivă la distanţă" (Martin 1981, 223).

[6] Starting from the translation of G. Călinescu's *History* into English, in 1988, Andrei Terian summarizes the shortcomings of the work and concludes that "for a foreign reader, this work resembles an arrangement of figures in an empty space" (Terian 2013, 8).

Although manifested with variable force, ideological and social control proved its persistence. E. Lovinescu had conceived his *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature* in an age when the traditional elites still preserved their domination in Europe,[7] on a social background that had brought culture closer to politics. The transition from Lovinescu's *History*, reflected through a liberal lens, to the national specificity with which G. Călinescu concluded his work *en fanfare* can be reduced to a change in understanding the self—from self-sufficient totality to being a part of a whole (named by terms and phrases that suggest the spirit of a place: *Volksgeist*, "spirit of the nation," "local soul" etc.). The anti-liberal discourse of the second half of the 20th century, whose extensions and ramifications cover much of today's market of ideas, led to the narrowing and consolidation of the ideological pattern used in literary studies—both in the broader effort to rethink the social determinations of literature and its social function, and in the structure of a narrative (re)construction that responds to interrogations that are circumscribed by fixations. Regardless of the ideological matrix from which it is extracted, the limited and rectifying rhetoric cannot encompass, with its instruments, the whole web of determinations that refine literature.

Chronological Boundaries and Historical Defiance

The relevance of periodization in today's literary studies has been questioned in terms of both mathematical abstraction and the premise that the authority of literature depends on its ability to particularise ages inaccurately determined in time, placing them in contrast to each other. Ted Underwood's plea to maintain periodization even under the unpredictable attacks of new methods and disciplines revolves around the organising principle of historical contrast, a central element in gaining the prestige of Anglo-Saxon literary culture. Consolidating the position of Digital Humanities, for instance, does not necessarily entail giving up periodization, because "as long as we intend to dramatize historical difference, some system of chronological boundaries will remain inevitable" (Underwood 2013, 171).

Mihai Iovănel's *History of the Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020* focuses on the literary period after 1989, without detaching it from the broader picture of literature. On the contrary, the references made to the fertile 1980s or, with enough precision, the 1970s or even further back in time (the chapter about *Postmodern Metarealism* includes references to Slavici's novel *Mara*) make history try to explain a system and outline its evolution, not just

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[7] For details, see Mayer (1981).

provide a succession of still snapshots. The comparative investigation, carried out vertically, does not stop at the borders of Romanian literature, but relies on an analytical intervention through which works by Romanian and foreign writers (sometimes separated by many decades) reveal shared conventions and distinct solutions. This is the case of Petru Cimpoeşu's *Story of the Great Brigand*, mirrored by Stanisław Lem's *Investigation*. Rooted within the limits of *closed periodization*, 1990-2020 (which may lead to an academic dispute over the realia-nominalia relation), Iovănel's *History…* recourses to *open filiations and parallelisms* that extend the time interval and enter a universal area—even in the chapters preceding the one about *Transnational Specificity*.

Iovănel ascribes the attempts of resynchronisation with Western narrative formulas (through the Nouveau Roman, magic realism and postmodernism) to the relativization of realism or to the metarealism that is outlined in Mircea Horia Simionescu's prose that is "close to Borges"[8] and integrated systemically by the "optzecişti" (the '80s generation of writers), who gave it the shape of metafiction. Iovănel's *History…* draws attention to the fact that the "optzecişti" "maintain a relationship of suspicion not so much with reality [...] as with the method of the old omniscient and totalising realism,"[9] a formulation I consider partially similar to Fredric Jameson's core of ideas that can be summed up by the amnesia of a postmodernity that has forgotten to think historically (Cf. Jameson 1991, 69, *passim*).

Although Iovănel redefines the relationship between contrast and continuity (by paying close attention to social mechanisms and gradual changes) historically, he encounters blind spots and additional difficulties when he considers disciplinary perimeters and time limits. However, such obstacles do not lead to the disappearance of periodiation. Instead, they can contribute to making literary history "more permeable to other disciplines" (Cf. Underwood 2013, 171). This is also the direction of Iovănel's effort to provide literary history with another dimension, through methodological and disciplinary alliances that cross a literary space that is structured critically and developed metacritically.

To put it differently, Iovănel's *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature* crosses national borders and chronological limits to engage in a dialogue with world literature (an area in which Iovănel has already practised his critical skills through his essay "Temporal Webs of World Literature: Rebranding Games and Global Relevance after the Second World War – Mircea Eliade, E. M. Cioran, Eugène Ionesco"). In this direction, it highlights the particularities of the Romanian culture that, very soon after 1989, experienced the openness to the

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[8] "apropiată de Borges" (Iovănel 2021, 355).
[9] "Optzeciştii întreţin un raport de suspiciune nu atât cu realitatea [...], cât cu metoda vechiului realism omniscient şi totalizator" (Iovănel 2021, 357).

past, which facilitated the recovery of several writers banned under the communist regime. In this sense, Iovănel argues against H. R. Patapievici's principle of cultural export and highlights a series of exceptions that weaken the hypothesis of the "isomorphic functioning of cultural temporality"[10] on which the former president of the Romanian Cultural Institute relied. Metaphorically illustrated by the passengers who catch or do not catch a train (an extension of the image Althusser uses when describing the materialist philosopher, a fragment Iovănel uses at the beginning of his work), the argumentation is given from a position that amends Pascale Casanova's theory of the uniform and rectilinear nature of the evolution of the relation between centres and peripheries, conditioned by a time whose point of reference is "the Greenwich meridian of literature" (Casanova 2007, 432). In his *History…*, Iovănel partially misquotes Casanova, using a debatable conceptual deviation: he replaces "the structure of world space" (Casanova 2007, 432) with "the structure of literary space."[11]

In the case of Romanian literature, the possibility is noted that the time gap "should be short-circuited by individual innovation" (Iovănel 2021, 661), as was the situation with Tristan Tzara. However, since the individual leap from a peripheral system is inefficient without knowing the coordinates of the central system that are ready to capitalize on it, Iovănel raises the issue of unequal exchange and, correlatively, that of a transfer underlying anti-mimetic innovation. It is the right time for the author of *The History…* to drop a reference to Franco Moretti and take a trip in "deep time"—a concept theorised by Wai Chee Dimock, who bases her vision on the expansion of national geography, on "irregular duration and extension […] each occasioned by a different tie, and each loosening up the chronology and geography of the nation" (Dimock 2008, 4). To sum things up, Dimock's theory opposes the idea of homogeneous identity claimed by traditional literary studies, and Iovănel's examples are illustrative of the variations induced by the changeable nature of the socio-political, economic and ideological macrocontext (Vintilă Horia, Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian) and demonstrate that "[t]emporality is a milieu that must be explored and taken into account alongside the spatial milieu. […] The variations of the international literary stock exchange […] legitimize the view of globalization as *recursive globalisation* (emphasis in original), as a non-uniform space-time process, which, not involving a state of perpetual motion, requires periodic reproduction to continue."[12] Through the theoretical observations it provides,

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[10] "ipoteza unei funcționări izomorfe a temporalității cultural" (Iovănel 2021, 659).

[11] "structura spațiului literar" (Iovănel 2021, 661).

[12] "Temporalitatea reprezintă așadar un mediu care trebuie explorat și luat în calcul alături de factorul spațial. […] Variațiile bursei internaționale de valori literare […] legitimează privirea globalizării ca globalizare recursivă, ca proces spațio-temporal neuniform, care, nefiind un perpetuum mobile, are nevoie de o reproducere periodică pentru a continua" (Iovănel 2021, 663-4.

the chapter about *Spaces and Temporalities* constitutes, in my opinion, an irradiating nucleus that spreads the meaning of duration in the Romanian literary history. Consequently, a new map with flexible spatial limits and temporal boundaries, moving farther and farther away, replaces the traditional rigid map of the history of literature. To underline the fact that Iovănel rethinks national literature beyond the borders of a state, Snejana Ung borrows Mario J. Valdés' concept of "node" that "intersects with other nodes in a network" (Ung 2021, 17).

Concepts, Peculiarities, Products: A Sort of Narrative

In his *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*, Mihai Iovănel seems to react, indirectly, to Andrei Terian's reproaches to Călinescu's *History*. The micromonographs (unequal in size and accuracy, which in itself hides a form of hierarchy) are no longer ordered in a deserted space, but in the mobile landscape of the *evolution of ideology*. Iovănel's *History…* makes a compromise between ideological criticism and monographic tradition, assembled with a methodological and epistemological instrument that provides the material with undoubted novelty. Comments that cover *ad nauseam* a whole range of positions—from enthusiastic approval (with variable doses of arguments or emotional connections) to more or less sweetened rejection have already been made about the post-Marxist angle from which Mihai Iovănel writes his *History…* There have also been conceptual controversies and taxonomy-related disputes, which this paper does not repeat.[13]

Briefly, Mihai Iovănel's *History…*, although close to Lovinescu's work in structure, follows the *evolution of ideologies* immediately after outlining the political history after 1990. (The absence of the adjective "literary," which appeared in Lovinescu's *History…*, suggests the interest of the author, who at first expels aesthetics from his analysis, only to return to it in the second part of his work.) The integration of literature into the body of ideological movements is followed by the inspection of the material conditions, the survey of the power relations in the literary field, the inventory of cultural theories and myths, the presentation of critical directions and the outline of "theories and positions" (the insufficiently motivated presence of postcolonialism is surprising); in the second half of his work, the author returns to literature, examining it as a direct consequence of the described milieu. In my opinion, this kind of approach is welcome, as after 1990 the entire literary field, from power relations and the impact of literature on society to literary and reception strategies, changed.

Mihai Iovănel's has shown an appetite for the inventory of the dynamic cultural background through the lens of ideological criticism at least since 2017,

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[13] For details, see *Observator cultural*, no. 1067 (2021) and *Transilvania*, no. 7-8 (2021).

when he published *The Ideologies of Romanian Post-Communist Literature*. The analysis of the ambiguous meanings of ideology led Iovănel to the definition given by Louis Althusser, who discusses ideology from the perspective of the continuity between theory and practice. Along these lines, despite the weakness perpetuated by the illusory and allusive nature of ideology, he proclaims the relevance of this concept in the debates on post-communism (Iovănel 2021, 12-14).

Based on post-Marxist ideology and operating with concepts explained in *The Ideologies...*, *The History of the Contemporary Romanian Literature* is a set of systemic and synthetic changing consequences of the social dynamics that has preceded and accompanied them. It is a post-Marxist polemical reply to the Romanian criticism of the last decades, designed to oppose both the propagandistic configuration (implied during the communist years) and the fluctuation between the autonomy of the aesthetic and the ethnicistic aura. While the theoretical link between Mihai Iovănel's two works relies on a concept (a "point of resistance") and Louis Althusser's vision on the materialism of contingency,[14] the bridges between them are visible at the discursive level: *The Ideologies...* and *The History of Literature...* share segments and syntagmatic overlaps that consolidate their common ground. The author does not hide that he recycles material. In *Acknowledgements*, after the *Introductory Note*, he confesses that *The History...* recovers, to varying degrees, articles from the *General Dictionary of Romanian Literature* (DGRL), reviews and essays published in various periodicals in the past fifteen years and, evidently, a large part of *The Ideologies...*

Besides the difficulty of analysing a literature in progress, characterised by permanent bifurcations, deviations and redimensioning, the development of a history of contemporary literature is complicated in the case of Romania, whose marginal position determines distinct processes, variations and reactions on the unstable map of world literature. The series of particularities includes the transition from the cultural model imposed by a totalitarian political regime, in which the immutable communist theses were intertwined with nationalist rhetoric and the cult of personality, to a cultural model that called itself neoliberal and neoconservative at the same time. As Iovănel's *History* shows, this transition is subordinated to the fluctuation between stability and instability. Or between *homeostasis* and *entropy*.

The fragmentation and the destructive recomposition of society are reflected in a literary field whose evolution (institutional, conceptual, epistemological, mythographic etc.) reveals an impasse and "points of resistance" —a concept meant to sum up "systemic reasons" and to identify precisely the nexus of such systemic difficulties that both communist and post-communist

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[14] The works Iovănel quotes are mainly Althusser (1995 and 2006).

writers encounter, although they negotiated the poetic influence of their predecessors (Iovănel 2021, 273). Borrowed from Stanisław Lem,[15] introduced in Chapter 1 of *The Ideologies…* and then in *The History…*, this concept is directly related to the creative block experienced by the writers who evolved in a system of negative conditioning and who, in post-communism, find themselves in the situation of discovering their own points of resistance in a "heuristic effort deprived of the generous financing that communism provided for the cultural system."[16] With the mention that the author's laudatory conclusion regarding the financing of the cultural system during the communist period remains debatable unless accompanied by nuances that clarify the writers' belonging to the system (and unless the differences resulting from obedience, ambiguity and nonconformism are specified), I note that Iovănel's *History…* reveals the fluid interaction between literature and the points of resistance that can turn the confrontation with the strength of the material into a convenient use of the formula.

As far as the points of resistance are concerned, I can identify a theoretical affiliation and a lack of terminological flexibility in Stanisław Lem's line. On the one hand, the former is the legacy of the Frankfurt School of Thought, which (although developed from Marxist roots) looked critically at the entire dialectical mechanism and doubted the synthetic solutioning of contradictions. In other words, dialectical tension can give way to conventional softening, pliable after a pattern that neo-Marxism labels as bourgeois. On the other hand, Iovănel's critical perspective does not extend to the ideology he assumes and from which he derives, in turn, a position of power. However, Althusser, the thinker on whose work Mihai Iovănel bases his theoretical construction, was also the theorist of the purity of the concept,[17] and his epistemological contribution developed mainly on rejecting the idea of a guarantee (which, by its nature, is ideological) and on the distinction between the real object and the object of knowledge. From this point of view, the author of *The History…* detaches himself from Althusser's position, as his work, taken in its entirety, raises a problem of adequacy to the object of knowledge. It would have been expected that all ideologies should fall into this category, instead of one of them being privileged as a guarantee of objectification.

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[15] Iovănel is a declared admirer of SF literature; therefore, his recourse to a concept suggested by the well-known Polish writer does not come as a surprise.

[16] "travaliu euristic lipsit de finanțarea generoasă pe care comunismul o asigurase sistemului cultural" (Iovănel 2021, 273).

[17] In a comprehensive study on Althusser, François Matheron writes: "purity of the concept: not the product of an empirical purification, which would subsequently only demand to return to reality, but a concept situated in an adequate relationship to an object of knowledge produced by theoretical labour" (508).

The points of resistance (which concentrate multiple conditions integrated in the institution of literature) lead the critical discourse in its double (ideological and literary) openness, but they lose their ability when they reach the territory of ambivalences, which is refractory to ideological over determination. In addition to this shortcoming, there would be a leap towards a figural potential that would coagulate the mobility of metamorphoses. Layers of flexible matter are gathered on the complicated twists of a plane on which the points of resistance are projected, placing the geometry not only under the sign of multifunctionality, but also of the coexistences that determine unpredictable changes on the vertical line of the literary system.

In an article that tests the (dis)advantages of the points of resistance, to which he prefers the regimes of relevance outlined by Tihanov,[18] Doris Mironescu identifies in their systematic multifunctionality (maintained by intersectional and parallel action) items that bring it closer to Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory. The researcher from Iași finds a legitimate function in Even-Zohar theory, by outlining a theoretical framework necessary "to discuss the systemic interferences that define a literary period, post-communism, still insufficiently conceptualized" (Mironescu 2021, 113). I consider this suggestion justified, but I would like to make two observations: unlike Mironescu, the Israeli theorist, in his recent studies, avoids using the term "context" and defines literary work through its interactions with a cultural milieu (viewed as a whole) for which prefers the concept of "repertoire." More precisely, by "repertoire" Even-Zohar means a system of individual items and symbolic patterns,[19] either spontaneous or deliberate, which involves a sum of internal processes, as well as imports and transfers. The symbolic model is defined as a structure in use within the wider society and adopted individually. Even-Zohar bases the connection between the social generation of the repertoire and the processes of internalisation on Bourdieu's theory of habitus, but catches our eye is the theoretical framework of the "repertoire," which encompasses the area of cultural memory. Any activity or action, any physical or semiotic "object" can be seen as a "product" of a repertoire (Even-Zohar 1997, 27), which, via interactions with other individual items or symbolic models, highlights similarities and differences that, in turn, point out contradictory types of cultural memory.

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[18] "The disadvantage of the points of resistance theory is its fatal concreteness, the impossibility of generalization, as long as the points of resistance can be defined only [...] starting from concrete cases. Iovănel's theory favours a horizontal perspective of the literary system, which shares Tihanov's idea of competitive plurality, but adds an important nuance, i.e. the emphasis on systematic parallel multifunctionalities, because the different institutional, epistemological, ecological etc. points of resistance operate simultaneously and intersectively" (Mironescu 2021, 109).

[19] To put it simply, the symbolic model is defined as "that pre-knowledge according to which the event is interpreted" (Even-Zohar 1997, 22).

Much has been said about literature as a repository of national and/or cultural memory, but this assimilation concerns me here strictly in relation to the following question: to what extent is Iovănel's *History…* a form of preserving cultural memory, in an age when the history of literature has lost its ability to preserve national memory in an institutionalized manner? The retrospective angle from which the history of literature has been explored has shown that nations have (re)invented an identity in the matrix of "imagined communities."[20] Nevertheless, not only identity, but also tradition can be invented, given that "all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion" (Hobsbawn 2014, 12). By repeatedly showing that literature cannot be understood by dissociating it from history (which determines the assertion of the retrospective nature of the literary field), Iovănel critically opposes the autonomy of the work, leaves the national literature paradigm and marches through the market of the current metaliterary ideas (Iovănel 2021, 664).

However, with all its incongruity in relation to the national literature, contemporary Romanian literature does not exclude a cultural mechanism that can determine the degree of resistance of the tradition in the configuration of a collective narrative. By its polemical position towards the tradition of literary history and within the limits of theoretical reflection that overshadows the national memory, Iovănel's work maps a space from where the nostalgia of memory was evacuated and replaced by cultural memory. Cultural memory also results from the network of continuities and oppositions that integrates the poetics of different ages of literature (the '80s and the next decades) or the same age (the poetry of the 2000s, for example). The history of literature has turned into an essential space of theoretical reflection (in a time that has moved away from theory) and a laboratory for testing research procedures, in which the methods "find their ultimate application" (Bru, De Bruyn, and Delville 2016, 1). The common points of *literary history and memory* turn Iovănel's *History…* into a *narrative*—reinforced by temporalities, spaces, characters and causal relations (Cf. Kalman 2000, 123)—in which an admirable amount of information is absorbed, although the result is fragmentary sociologically and literarily in the first two parts, and flawed analytically in Part Three and Four.

In Search of Truth: A Transregional Approach

I will point out that the objectifying approach is not equivalent to overcoming some blind spots that, when explored, would have served, on the

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[20] National or community identity is a mental construct refreshed by the feeling of belonging to an *imagined political community* whose imaginary nature is given by the impossibility of a construction based on direct interpersonal relationships (Cf. Anderson 2006, 15).

one hand, to recontextualize literary production and the circulation of books (before and after 1989) and, on the other, to highlight the cosmopolitan imagination[21] that constitutes the platform of world literature.

The over 60-year history of the "Pavel Dan" literary group in Timişoara is illustrative for the changes in the stakes of such groups in a totalitarian society (itself with many emphasis shifts from the Cultural Revolution indicated in the July Theses[22] to the nationalism of the '80s) or in the ambiguous transition to democracy. The evolution of the longest-lived and still active Romanian literary group reflects the inconstancy of the sociability networks and the mistrust of the symbolic power poles in times that, for different reasons, favoured tensions instead of stimulating convergences. Attempts to build and support dialogues (between the province and the centre) on the literary scene have existed since the times when legitimation was done collectively, through group contributions, in periodicals or volumes. In the spring of 1977, when the literary group "Cenaclul de luni" was beginning to take shape, the "Amfiteatru" periodical published texts by members of "Pavel Dan" from Timişoara. Of these, Ion Monoran was published in "Amfiteatru" several times (between 1978 and 1988), and his poetics was suggested as a possible precursor of the "opzecişti" generation.[23] An innovative aesthetic movement with a polemical attitude towards both the official literary matrix and the modernist aesthetics coagulated around Monoran, Mircea Bârsilă and Adrian Derlea. About "Monodersilism," a movement to which the entire "Pavel Dan" literary group adhered in the '80s, only a few people still speak today: Cornel Ungureanu, Viorel Marineasa and Eugen Bunaru.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the cohesion of the group was stimulated not so much by the similarities of the professional path, as by the existence of an underground, ethical force field configured around the non-ideological literary

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[21] The concept was developed by Gerard Delanty in *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[22] This is the name given to the speech that Nicolae Ceauşescu gave before the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party on July 6, 1971: *Proposed measures for the improvement of political-ideological activity of the Marxist-Leninist education of party members, of all working people.*

[23] "Monoran's poetry breathes the air of the Eighties Generation without being epigonic. Apparently paradoxical, my statement covers a reality: many of the authors who will join this wave sooner or later are, in fact, mere emulators of their congeners... With the exception of Monoran [...] who develops his own first-rate literary consciousness (following a completely different path than the members of the "Cenaclul de Luni" group). He feels the pulse of literature, he understands its sources very early on, and he is, spontaneously and synthetically, intertextual, self-referential, biographical, transitive [...] at the same time—from the very beginning, even before these trends become imperative" (Ciotloş 2014). A whole chapter is dedicated to Monoran in Ciotloş (2021, 286-298).

nucleus. The underground trajectory[24] of the group surfaced in December 1989, when young writers from "Pavel Dan" were at the forefront of the Revolution (Ion Monoran,[25] Petru Ilieşu, Vasile Popovici, Daniel Vighi). Naturally, after 1990, the group underwent a number of changes—new leaders, new generations of writers. Nevertheless, "Pavel Dan" remained a space for forging artistic consciousness and understanding the dynamics of the literary field, on the flexible coordinates of the group's aura and cohesion and individual proficiency. Moni Stănilă, Tudor Crețu, Alexandru Potcoavă, Ana Pușcașu, Alexandru Higyed began to legitimize themselves within this group and dialogues were started with representative poets of the last decades (Ioan Es. Pop, Doina Ioanid, Ruxandra Novac, Elena Vlădăreanu, Oana Cătălina Ninu, V. Leac, Răzvan Țupa, Miruna Vlada).

Consequently, although Iovănel's *History…* signals the disappearance of some established literary groups (Junimea, Universitas) and the emergence of others (Litere 2000, Euridice, Nepotu' lui Thoreau, Institutul Blecher, Zona Nouă), also dedicating several pages to SF literary groups,[26] it leaves out (as does DGLR) a group with over six decades of continuous activity, during which it consolidated itself as a hub in the mechanism of cultural memory—which comprises not only discourses, but also epistemes. Literary history and cultural memory intersect due to the possibility of simultaneous examination (in synchrony and diachrony), to which the fact that they leave behind value judgments (often canonically cemented) is added. Unfortunately, "Pavel Dan" lacked the university roots that would have ensured it both the continuity[27] and the high calibre that Mircea Martin, Nicolae Manolescu or Ion Pop offered to the literary groups in Bucharest or Cluj, but a just exploration of its history is relevant: 1) for the study of the impact of the transition from the restrictive conditions of an ideologically suffocated literary field to new contexts in which literary practices are influenced by other types of limitations; 2) for the confrontation between literature understood as a heteronomous, respectively, an autonomous fact (with ethical-aesthetic positions that challenged the ideological constraints); 3) for the recomposition of significant literary genealogies; 4) for the survey of the lasting institutional structures, of their interaction, from which

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[24] For the anti-system orientation of the literary group, see Marineasa (2019 a, 17-20), and Bunaru (2021).

[25] Monoran died in 1993, before his first printed volume appeared. Marineasa gives excerpts from the Securitate dossier on Ion Monoran (interrogated and kept under surveillance since the '70s) Marineasa (2019 b, 276-280).

[26] Iovănel also mentions the "H.G. Wells" SF group of Timişoara, established in 1969. Viorel Marineasa was a member of the group in the '60s and then its coordinator from 1974 to 1990.

[27] For short periods of time, "Pavel Dan" evolved under the spiritual tutelage of Marcel Pop-Corniş, Cornel Ungureanu, Livius Ciocârlie.

the post-1989 literature was produced; 5) for the discussion about deepening the cleavages in the Romanian literary field, the multiple causes of which (including partial solidarity and reconfiguration of the positions of power in the literary field) would deserve a special debate.

Some notes in the second half of Iovănel's *History…* require more extensive analysis, but without inflamed assertions and fatalism. In the absence of clarifications, summary judgements will remain ambiguous. In the following, I examine a label used in the *Evolution of Fiction*, although connecting the *Posthuman Dispersion* (integrated in the *Evolution of Poetry*) with world literature seems equally necessary to me.

An author of a significant novel mentioned on Iovănel's List is Radu Pavel Gheo, who (even though mentioned in the pages about paraliterature) appears mainly in the section about *Points of Resistance* and that on *Capitalist Realism*. In the former, Gheo appears under the title *Regionalii* (*The Provincials*) (although this writer from Timisoara is the only one labelled in this section)— a title justified by those "regional tensions, well-seasoned from the viewpoint of race and class"[28] problematized in *Disco Titanic*, a novel in which one of the characters, Vlad, raises the issue of an autonomous Banat. Starting from two quotes about this issue, the author of *The History…* reviews the amoral biography of a character who, having seen the ravages of the ex-Yugoslav war, ends up "questioning his own clichés about the Banat Republic."[29]

As far as I am concerned, the regional issue is not reduced to the tensions that pervade the narrative discourse. In fact, Vlad's singular opinion reflects its imbalance in relation to the aspirations of the people of Banat.[30] Suggestive for this character's process of transformation (but without being its cause), the issue of Banat's autonomy appears as an isolated reminiscence of a historical fact. Given that it is not a topical matter and especially that it occupies only the second place in the character's evolution, it becomes inoperative when one tries to legitimize it as a taxonomic criterion.

The regional issue in *Disco Titanic* is, however, a completely different one and it is more difficult to follow than the tensions on the surface. The novel

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[28] "tensiuni regionale, bine condimentate rasist şi clasist" (Iovănel 2021, 335).

[29] "să-şi interogheze propriile clişee despre Republica Banat" (Iovănel 2021, 337).

[30] 1918 was a complicated year for Banat. The Banat Republic was proposed by Dr. Otto Roth and Albert Bartha, after the Budapest meeting of the Hungarian political leaders, who were trying to find solutions for the perpetuation of the Hungarian influence in the region. On October 31, Otto Roth proclaimed the Banat Republic and declared that it remained attached to the new Hungarian government. The leaders of the Romanians left the meeting and formed a Council led by Dr. Aurel Cosma, who publicly stated that he did not accept Dr. Otto Roth's proposal. When the Hungarian army withdrew north of Mureş (based on the Belgrade Convention), Serbian military units entered Banat, occupying Timisoara. In 1919, Banat was divided between Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

reconstructs a space of major traumas: having borders that do not match the national ones, Gheo's Banat bears the imprint of Central-European paradoxes impregnated by the dialectical balance between order and dissolution, between creative energy and disintegration. I will focus on two elements that support this hypothesis. One acts at the level of narrative organisation, the other at that of creating a distinct atmosphere.

First, the combination of realism and fantastic in *Disco Titanic* and *Good Night, Children!* is part of the narrative tradition of some prose writers, who, against the background of a long history of fixing borders, combine lucidity and irrationality, reality and myth, until any distinction between them is lost. In discussing the novels focused on the way historical trauma is recorded at the juncture of individual experience and rigid discourse, we may survey some novels published by the Romanian Sorin Titel or other significant Eastern and Central European writers. In *Four-Fingered People*, the Serbian Miodrag Bulatović draws the mythical-reverberant face of the demonic and rewrites the relationship between power and submission, between the process of forming and that of de-forming. A story of the underground, with anti-heroes whose anti-path dynamites topographies and stereotypes (of involvement, action and evolution), *Four-Fingered People* establishes absences (father, country, identity, integrity) and gives successive re-definitions of the peripheries. *Landscape Painted with Tea*, a novel by Milorad Pavić (a Serbian of Croatian origin) is also placed between history and myth, reuniting contradictions and complementarities. In the story of the failed architect, who designs shadowless buildings (as his son Nikola calls them), but later becomes the owner of a pharmaceutical concern, Pavić overturns reality, extracts an archetypal core and reinterprets it according to his own vision of knowledge. *Primeval and Other Times*, a novel by Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk, is not just the story of an ambivalent place, but also the evocation of certain types of housing. More specifically, it highlights how a place (the centre, the periphery, the house, the body) is viewed from within. But each man's "time" becomes a place, inaugurating a type of personal topography in which space and time, reality and dream are intertwined in the dazzling naturalness of inaccuracy.

Second, from Gheo's novels one can extract a well-defined space of an interval, of a provisional state that feeds the ethos of expectation (as an epistemic, ethical, and political resettlement in dynamics). From different positions, with incongruous attitudes, the protagonists of the two novels live in a "state of exception"[31]—that of expectation and urgency. As defined by Giorgio Agamben, exile involves exclusion and, at the same time, inclusion. More specifically, it

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[31] By "state of exception" I mean the state of being exiled, with all its Messianic substance, in line with Agamben (2008).

involves the power to maintain a relationship with something that is supposed to lack any kind of relationship (Cf. Agamben 2006, 92).

It should be clear that Gheo's novels have a more appropriate place in the Central-European narrative structure (that exposes the link between fragility and power against the background of the clash between structural and historical trauma)[32] and the "deep time"-oriented network than among the "provincials" (who are interested in the false problem of a dated autonomy) or among the representatives of the "capitalist realism."[33] I would add that the common points of the above-mentioned novels (also understood as "figurative mapping")[34] leave behind the succession of national genealogy and put contemporary Romanian literature on the comprehensive map of the world literary space. Besides its oppositions, the world literary space reveals a *continuum* (Cf. Casanova 2007, 109) that entitles us to redefine "our literature," pushing its limits further to the horizon. Indeed, *The History...* could have explored more deeply how contemporary Romanian literature rethinks Europe and integrates into world literature. The conceptual frame of the last part of Iovănel's work still requires exercises of finesse both in the *Evolution of Fiction* (as I have shown in the case of Gheo's novels) and in the *Evolution of Poetry*, where especially the post-human parade requires transnational extensions. Finally, the themes and the narrative strategies used by Gheo and the other mentioned writers (as well as other Eastern and Central-European novelists) increase the chance that literary experience has to provide "an unexpected input for current policy-making" (D'Haen 2009, 9) that the European community needs so badly.

At any rate, despite its authoritarian yet unsubstantiated assertions and the discrepancy between the transcanonical postulate and the composition of representative lists (which, in the absence of conceptual clarifications, mix the ideological pattern with the aesthetic filter), Iovănel's *History...* remains, from my point of view, a significant work for at least four reasons. The first concerns the coagulation of an explanatory narrative of contemporary Romanian literature, which other literary historians have failed to do in recent decades. The second is the *assumption* of the ideological perspective, with all the (positive and negative) consequences that arise from here. The third derives from the conceptual and

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[32] Dominick LaCapra distinguishes the "structural trauma" (transhistorical ruptures, decodable through psychoanalysis: "adoption of language," "separation from the mother" etc.) from the "historical trauma" (radical historical ruptures that generate collective traumatic experiences). For details, see LaCapra (2004).

[33] Mihai Iovănel's insufficient argumentation for selecting this concept borrowed from Mark Fisher is pointed out by Cobuz (2021, 119-120).

[34] The "figurative mapping" concept is explained by Miller Hillis (1995, 19, passim). He adds: "The story traces out diachronically the movement of the characters from house to house, and from time to time, as the crisscross of their relationships gradually creates an imaginary space" (19).

informational mechanism that reinforces the transcanonical vision. Finally, the fourth lies in the transnational extensions, which anchor *The History…* in the current literary research area. These are sufficient arguments to state that Iovănel's work sets a turning point in Romanian literary history. From now on, whatever will be written within the flexible perimeter of literary history will be related, from one angle or another, to this work.

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PERIPHERAL INTERACTIONS IN MIHAI IOVĂNEL'S
HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN LITERATURE: 1990-2020

ANDREEA MÎRȚ[1]

ABSTRACT. *Peripheral Interaction in Mihai Iovănel's History of Contemporary Romanian Literature. 1990–2020.* The overall purpose of this contribution is to assess the impact the use of examples from "marginal" literatures has on the transnational mapping of contemporary Romanian literature undertaken by Mihai Iovănel in his recent *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020*. Thus, the article aims to discuss the interconnections between contemporary Romanian literature and other peripheral literatures in the *History*. The author uses, Mîrț argues, the Western canon strategically to show how local literary production has been incorporated into the global literary circuit. Starting from the polysystem theory of Even-Zohar (1990), the article discusses the relationship between *static* and *dynamic* canonicity. The paper notes that in Iovănel's project, the *center–periphery* and *canonical–non-canonical* dichotomies are complicated by the use of examples from other marginal spaces and, respectively, by the integration of paraliteratures in discourse. In terms of patterns or external influences, the Western canon's presence in contemporary Romanian literature supplemented by literary and cultural material from Central and East European literature. In mapping local literary production, Iovănel takes into account Bessarabian literature as well.

Keywords: Central and Eastern European literature, Bessarabian literature, Western canon, dynamic canon, transnational

REZUMAT. *Interacțiuni periferice în Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990-2020 de Mihai Iovănel*. Articolul îşi propune să discute (inter)conexiunile dintre literatura română şi alte literaturi periferice în *Istoria literaturii române*

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[1] **Andreea MÎRȚ** received an MA degree in Romanian Literary Studies in 2022 from the Faculty of Letters of Babeş-Bolyai University. Her interests include contemporary Romanian literature, postmodernism and translation studies. Email: andreea.mirt@stud.ubbcluj.ro.

contemporane. 1990-2020 de Mihai Iovănel. Autorul recurge la canonul occidental în mod strategic, pentru integrarea producției literare locale în circuitul literar global, iar pornind de la teoria polisistemului (Even-Zohar), articolul discută raportul dintre canonicitatea *statică* şi *dinamică*. În proiectul lui Iovănel, dihotomiile centru–periferie, canonic–non-canonic sunt depăşite prin recursul la exemple din alte spaţii marginale şi, respectiv, prin integrarea paraliteraturilor. Dacă în ceea ce priveşte modelul sau influenţele externe, canonul occidental este completat cu referinţe din literatura central şi est-europeană, în cartografierea producţiei locale, Iovănel integrează şi literatura basarabeană. Scopul articolului este să interogheze dacă recursul la alte literaturi marginale, adică la un canon global dinamic, poate avea efecte în cartografierea transnaţională a literaturii române contemporane.

Cuvinte-cheie: *literatura central şi est-europeană, literatură din Basarabia, canon occidental, canon dinamic, transnaţional*

A contemporary literary history raises a number of issues regarding the relationship between a national and a global canon, the negotiations between imported and exported literary forms and, last but not least, the questioning of methodology. Mihai Iovănel's *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature. 1990-2020* seems, at first sight, to oppose the new trends in Western literary historiography, which focus more on distant-reading and digital approaches.[2] However, in Iovănel's project, national limitations are constantly questioned, most of the literary phenomena discussed being related to the Western canon. According to Cosmin Borza,

> Iovănel constantly builds the cultural profile of contemporary Romanian literature through the global network in which he tries and sometimes manages to integrate himself, respectively by showing that, starting with the 2000 generation, Romanian writers have defined themselves mainly in relation to external models, invalidating any the possibility of reinvigorating inertial-organicist historiographical approaches, legitimized by the closed circuit of intra-national comparisons.[3]

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[2] For further reading see Bode (2018, 17-36).

[3] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The original Romanian reads: "[Mihai Iovănel] construieşte constant profilul cultural al literaturii române contemporane prin intermediul reţelei globale în care încearcă şi, câteodată, reuşeşte să se integreze, respectiv prin constatarea faptului că, începând cu generaţia 2000, scriitori locali se definesc preponderent în relaţie cu modele externe, invalidând orice posibilitate de revigorare a demersurilor istoriografice inerţial-organiciste, legitimate prin circuitul închis al comparaţiilor intra-naţionale" (Borza 2021, 124).

This approach is also a polemical reaction to the way leading twentieth-century literary historians, such as George Călinescu and Eugen Lovinescu, relate to foreign literatures. As Alex Goldiş points out, "twentieth-century Romanian and East-European literary historiography more largely have remained markedly indebted to the nineteenth-century Herderian imperative that rendered the genre a 'reflection' of, and thus an argument for, the 'national soul'" (2018, 98). For example, Călinescu practiced a "policy of minimizing and, sometimes, even negating external influences on modern Romanian literature" (Terian 2009, 290), in a performative discourse, which built a compensatory narrative to the inferiority complexes of Romanian literature. In this sense, Iovănel's *History…* aims not to justify and legitimize contemporary literature on the map of world literature from a central-nationalist perspective, but to question the relations between center and margin, systems, and emerging institutions that have influenced the literature of the last three decades.

However, the Western canon to which Iovănel appeals is not a "stable" unity. The idea of the external canon, which interacts with Romanian literature, can be discussed from the perspective of the polysystem. Even-Zohar defines a polysystem as "the network of relations that is hypothesized to obtain between a number of activities called 'literary', and consequently these activities themselves observed via that network" (1990, 28). In Iovănel's *History…*, the external canon is constituted by the relation with other factors from the polysystem of the literary field, such as the institutions, the market, the translation policies, the consumers (readers), etc. In this sense, one cannot speak of a *static* canonicity, but of a *dynamic* one. Even-Zohar identifies the former as occurring when "a certain text is accepted as a finalized product and inserted into a set of sanctified texts literature (culture) wants to preserve" (19), while what "may be called dynamic canonicity" refers to "a certain literary model manag[ing] to establish itself as a productive principle in the system through the latter's repertoire" (19). As Christian Moraru points out, this "is a tome for postcommunist and post-postmodern times—once again, a work on literary and historical transformation and also itself transformative in the sense that, to put it plainly, doing Romanian literary history in the wake of Iovănel's *History* cannot be what it had been before it" (Moraru 2021, 2). It becomes clear that such a book could not be more receptive to the symptoms of literary theory and historiography specific to post-communism and post-postmodernism. One of these is the democratization of the canon. Therefore, the following section will highlight the external literary references used by Mihai Iovănel and the role they have in discussing the "transnational specificity" of Romanian contemporary literature. On the one hand, external references that serve as points of comparison include examples from other peripheral areas, such as Central and Eastern European literature.

On the other hand, Bessarabian literature is also integrated in the discussion about "global connectivity," but from a transnational perspective. The use of other peripheral literatures as terms of comparison for local production poses questions about the possibilities of interaction between them.

The (Im)Possibility of a Central and East European Literary Network

Discussing the relation of Romanian literature to Western models, Iovănel points out that "for Romanians, whose general culture framework is predicated on predominantly Western references, the lack of reciprocity of the West regarding the knowledge of Romania is still a sensible subject."[4] He shows the absurdity of this attitude, because the Romanian culture "suddenly ignores the cultures of neighboring countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, etc."[5] In fact, Iovănel highlights the lack of interactions and connections between the literatures in the Central and Eastern European literary field. In the introduction to *History of the literary cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctures and Disjunctures in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, the editors defined a need "for reconsidering literary history from a regional angle" because "[i]n East-Central Europe, a region poised at the crossroads of its history, not only literature, but the political culture itself will benefit from a rethinking that emphasizes transnational interactions" (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2004, 2). The question is whether such crossroads and intersections from this geocultural space can also be problematized in a history of contemporary Romanian literature aimed at a local readership.

In the Romanian cultural field, the discussion about Central Europe gained ground around the 2000s, with projects such as The Third Europe Group [A treia Europă], which popularized (through publications and other cultural projects) Central European literature and culture.[6] They resumed, to a certain extent, the famous discussions on this topic from the 80s, when Milan Kundera, Czesław Miłosz and others had begun to speak about the separation of Eastern Europe from Western Europe, accusing the West of leaving "Central Europe" (largely the territories that had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) under the rule of communism. The Timișoara-based group brought these debates back into discussion, in order to recover the discourses (from the West) to

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[4] "[P]entru români, ai căror parametri de cultură generală presupun preponderent referințe occidentale, lipsa de reciprocitate a Vestului în ce privește cunoașterea României a rămas un subiect lezant" (Iovănel 2021, 647).

[5] "[cultura română] ignoră senin culturile unor țări vecine ca Bulgaria, Serbia, Croația, Slovenia, Ungaria, Cehia, Slovacia etc." (Iovănel 2021, 647).

[6] For further reading see Ungureanu (2002).

which the Romanian culture had not had access before the fall of communism. These attempts represented a strategy for the integration of Romanian literature within a "global connectivity" network, which occurred after the fall of communism. But, as Iovănel notes in his volume,

> cultural integration is as difficult as socio-political integration. The number of discussions after 1989 on the "Europeanness of Romanian literature" reveals a complex related to the obsession of not being perceived "only" as Balkan (or not European enough), but also a disinterest in too "peripheral" cultures, such as those of Hungary or Bulgaria. The imperative to transfer this obsession into a real form is one of the invariables that cross the entire post-communist cultural field, from primitive nationalists to the pro-European intellectual elite.[7]

Despite the attempts to integrate Romanian literature in this circuit, there is no real regional interconnectivity, visible in current cultural policies. A telling example is the translation market: after 1989, Romanian publishing houses have oriented themselves after the patterns of Anglo-Saxon or French literary production, without paying attention to neighboring literatures. The effect is that the most important point of reference in the Romanian literary field remains the Western canon. In his project, Iovănel implicitly shows how policies to promote a possible (inter)connection between Central European and Romanian literature are, in fact, dysfunctional. A transnational map of Central and Eastern European literature cannot be drawn. There are no significant cultural dynamics or direct exchanges. However, the "global" canon used by Iovănel as a reference point is not "purely" Western. There are references to Central and Eastern European literature, albeit without being integrated in a homogeneous geocultural structure. Due to the reference to writers from other peripheral spaces, the external canon in *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature* is a *dynamic* one.

As Cosmin Borza points out, the reference to an external (Western) canon is one of the strategies that Iovănel uses to legitimize certain paraliterary genres in the discussion about the evolution of the Romanian literary field in the last three decades (Borza 2021, 124). Among the writers representing the

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[7] "integrarea culturală este însă un proces la fel de dificil precum integrarea sociopolitică. Cantitatea discuțiilor de după 1989 privind 'europenitatea literaturii române' trădează un complex legat de obsesia de a nu fi percepuți 'doar' ca balcanici (sau nu suficient de europeni), dar și dezinteresul pentru vecinii prea 'periferici', de felul Ungariei sau Bulgariei. Imperativul transferării acestei obsesii într-o formă reală reprezintă una dintre invariabilele care traversează întregul câmp cultural postcomunist, de la naționaliștii primitivi până la elita intelectuală pro-europeană" (Iovănel 2021, 649-650).

Central and Eastern European space the most frequently mentioned is Stanisław Lem. However, he is a point of reference for his position in the field of world literature and not as a representative of Polish literature, in particular, or of Central European Literature, in general. His name is evoked when Iovănel defines the "points of resistance" of the Romanian post-communist literary field, which "aim to identify precisely the nexuses of such systemic difficulties that both communist and post-communist writers go through, even as they have to negotiate the poetic influence of their predecessors."[8] Iovănel quotes Lem's 1981 essay "Metafansia: The Possibilities of Science Fiction," in which the argument is that systems of restraint are important conditionings for a writer. Otherwise, when there are no conditioning points, there is a crisis of creativity. Without necessarily being invoked as a theoretical authority, but rather as "source of inspiration," Lem's name is relevant in the discussion about the transition from resistance points in communism to post-communism (the Polish writer being representative of both periods).

In another section of the book, Petru Cimpoeșu's intertextual strategies are compared to those of Lem, who "uses the conventions of the detective novel to problematize and overcome them" (Iovănel 2021, 383). Then, Lem is named among the classics of SF literature, Iovănel outlining some Romanian writers who are inspired by the writings of the Polish author. Obviously, Lem, as a classic author of SF literature, is mentioned as part of a global, *de*-nationalized canon. This proves that the influence system is not dichotomous, from Central Europe to the Romanian literary field and vice versa but mediated by a third factor: reception on the Western market. The global circuit involves the entry of an author from the periphery first on the global (Western) stage and then back into a peripheral culture, at a considerable temporal distance. This may cause the annulment of "national specificity" to the detriment of the so-called "universality" of *world literature*.

Another example is Mircea Cărtărescu's position on the transnational literary map. He is mentioned among other important names from Central and Eastern Europe: "In addition to Pamuk, authors such as the Czech Jáchym Topol (*Sestra*, 1994), the Polish Olga Tokarczuk, the Serbian David Albahari (*Leeches*, 2005) and others are part of the transnational *hub* of which Cărtărescu is a part of."[9] This is not about a possible regional transnational network that produces

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[8] "urmărește să identifice tocmai nexurile unor astfel de dificultăți sistemice prin care trec atât scriitori formați în comunism, cât și cei formați în postcomunism, dar care au de negoiciat influența în materie de poetică a predecesorilor" (Iovănel 2021, 273).

[9] "În hub-ul transnațional din care Cărtărescu este o piesă mai fac parte, în afară de Pamuk, autori precum cehul Jáchym Topol (*Sestra*, 1994), poloneza Olga Tokarczuk, sârbul David Albahari (*Leeches*, 2005) ș. a." (Iovănel 2021, 675).

direct reciprocal influences, especially since some of the writers mentioned are not even translated into Romanian, so there was no reception in the local field of literature. The fact that they come from the same geographical area is merely a coincidence. What all authors have in common is the fact that they represent minor literatures. Similar strategies can also be identified in their literary evolution, which allowed them to be integrated in and to assert themselves on the global literary market. As for their writings, they can be framed within the postmodernist paradigm, without direct interactions and influences connecting these authors. The literary systems from which these writers come can only interact indirectly, through an intermediate factor: the Western market. This proves the lack of a direct interconnection between Romanian literature and Central and Eastern European literatures. In this sense, the Western canon used by Iovănel to explain Cărtărescu's position in this network is a dynamic one: authors from peripheral literatures supplement references and writers from the Anglo-Saxon space, provided that they are already integrated in the international circuit of literature.

It is telling that references to Central and Eastern European writers can be subsumed into two categories: SF or postmodern literature. On the one hand, this shows that these two literary forms are the most frequently exported and well received in world literature. On the other hand, it can be assumed that the writers from this geocultural space opt for the same strategies in constructing their position on the global stage.

The Intra-National Circuit: Bessarabian Literature in Iovănel's *History*

Iovănel discusses the case of Bessarabian literature in the section about "global connectivity" from the chapter on "transnational specificity." However, this is not seen from an "ethnocentric" perspective, but as a nodal point at the confluence of several literatures:

> To these forms of import, can be added those focused on Bessarabia, the main territory outside Romania where the Romanian language is spoken. A relevant and complex example from a geostrategic point of view is Emilian Galaicu-Păun's work, situated at the intersection of several political, cultural and linguistic intertextualities: Romanian peripheral literature, French central literature and Soviet / Russian literature.[10]

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[10] "Acestor forme de import-recuperator le pot fi adăugate cele având ca obiect Basarabia, principalul teritoriu din afara României unde se foloseşte limba română. Un exemplu relevant şi complex din punct de vedere geostrategic este acela al literaturii lui Emilian Galaicu-Păun, aflată la intersecţia mai multor intertextualităţi politice, culturale şi lingvistice: literatura periferică română, literatura centrală franceză şi literatura sovietică/rusă" (Iovănel 2021, 655).

The mention of Emilian Galaicu-Păun is relevant for presenting the specificity of Bessarabian literature. This writer is discussed both for his metafictional prose and for his poetry, framed in the "nineties generation," but specific for its hermeticism and intertextuality. As in Cărtărescu's case, the literary techniques of Emilian Galaicu-Păun can be subsumed to postmodernism. In his case, the intertextual filter is also "global" (656), the positive reception is due to the way he operates with various intertexts, from Apollinaire to Ilarie Voronca or Paul Celan. Therefore, it is significant that the reception of a Bessarabian poet is also mediated by a "Western canon," recognizable in his text. His use of intertextuality suggests that the Romanian literary field, like the global one, is more open to importing postmodern literary forms. At the same time, the literary strategies that a writer from Bessarabia can use to gain a favorable position in the literary circuit (Romanian and then, global) are also suggested.

The discussion of Bessarabian literature shows that the contemporary literary "canon" is a *dynamic* one, open especially to recoveries, as in the case of diasporic literatures. Bringing this literature into discussion is a pretext to notice the current relations between Romanian and Bessarabian literature. How does the latter relate to Romanian literature? Is Romanian literary field still a point of reference and mediation to the global literary scene (as it happens, for example, in the case of Tatiana Țîbuleac's literature)? Iovănel's project does not offer a broader perspective on the literature of this region (apart from Emilian Galaicu-Păun, only a few mentions appear). This is largely due to the lack of a regional network and a stronger interaction between Romanian and Bessarabian literature. As in the case of other peripheral literatures, the Romanian literary field is rather ignorant about the literature across the Prut (proof that too few works of literary history have discussed it so far and, up to Iovănel, not through a "transnational" perspective). Thus, the way Bessarabian literature is dealt with in *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature. 1990-2020* shows that cultural and literary interconnections between the two Romanian and Bessarabian literary fields tend to be accidental. Although both literatures are written in the same language and they have a peripheral position, there is no real systematic dialogue between literary directions, formulas, models, etc. The intra-national connection established between the two spaces is possible, therefore, through postmodern formulas and constant negotiations of positions in the literary field.

While external references have a strategic role in legitimizing the discourse on certain movements, directions, and literary genres in the Romanian literary field, the idea of the canon itself, it bears pointing out in closing, becomes problematic for Mihai Iovănel's *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature 1990-2020.* The integration of heterogeneous references from the East-Central

European space and the discussion of Bessarabian literature from a transnational perspective show the methodological change operated by the author. On the one hand, the openness to a democratic external canon also implicitly shows the status of peripheral literatures: without direct (inter) connections or relationships, the dialogue between them is mediated by the global market. On the other hand, in order to reach a "transnational specificity" of Romanian literature, a dynamic external canon generates in turn a *dynamic local canon*, and only through this dynamism can "global connectivity" be created with other (central or peripheral) cultures.

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TOWARDS A DECENTRALIZED LITERATURE

MIHAELA VANCEA[1]

ABSTRACT. *Towards a Decentralized Literature.* The purpose of this paper is to discuss how the *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature* by Mihai Iovănel opens new paths both in interpreting literature and towards understanding Romanian cultural identity at large. In this sense, "transnational specificity," as Iovănel calls it, becomes a most resourceful field that allows, as Vancea shows, important insights into national and global identity in the context of significant technological developments. In the same vein, Vancea draws from Daniel David's work on the psychology of the Romanian people to highlight new cultural aspects that could lead to changes in literature. At the same time, the paper tries to bring humanities closer to the perspectives that the Web3 phenomenon announce.

Keywords: cultural identity, decentralized literature, Web3, literary history, NFT

REZUMAT. *Către o literatură descentralizată.* Scopul acestei lucrări este de a evidenția modul în care *Istoria Literaturii Române Contemporane* scrisă de Mihai Iovănel deschide noi căi de interpretare a literaturii, dar și a identității culturale. Specificul transnațional devine în acest sens un teren ofertant care permite deschiderea unei discuții mai largi cu privire la identitatea noastră națională și globală în contextul profundei dezvoltări tehnologice. În acest sens, voi completa exemplele menționate de criticul literar cu studiul lui Daniel David despre psihologia poporului român pentru a evidenția noi puncte vulnerabile care ar putea să determine schimbări în viitorul apropiat al literaturii. Totodată, lucrarea încearcă să apropie umanioarele de perspectivele pe care le aduce în viitor fenomenul Web3.

Cuvinte-cheie: identitate culturală, literatura descentralizată, Web3, istorie literară, NFT

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[1] **Mihaela VANCEA** is a Ph.D. candidate at Faculty of Science and Letters, UMFST (University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science, and Technology of Târgu Mureș) where she is conducting research on the topic of "Writers with double identity." Her interests involve contemporary Romanian literature, cultural identity, Romanian literary theory and criticism, World Literature theories, and transnational and quantitative studies. She contributes to *Vatra* magazine. Email: ioanamvnc@gmail.com.

As has been pointed out, the authority of critics and literary historians is decreasing in front of the unstoppable force of the internet, where virtually anyone can create literature-related content. True, the longstanding tradition of critical culture goes on, as evidenced by almost all magazines in print, which dedicate a section to the latest books. Such sections are relevant as long as its practitioners remain relevant in ideas and do not fall prey to ideological discourse. In fact, criticism is the foundation of theoretical studies, and through its constant interaction with the most current texts, certain patterns become visible. The background and exercise of literary criticism played an important role in the making of the *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature* written by Mihai Iovănel. In relation to the literary field, the decentralization phenomenon evolves around the loss of critics' authority in front of the larger public. Masses do not search for academic criticism anymore in the context of the freedom of quick and facile content social media offers. Nowadays, writers can easily access their public without depending on the bad review in a cultural magazine. The pandemic accelerated the transition to the online environment while technology became a decisive factor in changing the dynamics in the literary field. At the moment, audiences without specialized cultural background represent a decisive factor in establishing whether a book deserves attention or not, solely on their reading experience. The unexperienced reader of whom Umberto Eco talked in *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* has achieved a sort of authority through social media networks such as YouTube, Goodreads, and others. A one-star rating on Goodreads weighs more in this environment than a solid, argumentative review in an online magazine. Therefore, critics' authority is replaced by the ordinary readers' opinions for whom things are simple and either like or dislike a book. Moreover, the writers have seriously taken the role of a PR and promote themselves intensely on their social media pages, which is not a negative aspect as it shows their independence in relation to criticism.

Nevertheless, a history of contemporary literature is of great impact in times of dispersed content. Mihai Iovănel's volume is in sync with Western methodologies and theoretical directions in terms of feminism, gender rights, even psychoanalysis. Such landmarks are reviving the ways of thinking about contemporary literary history, especially in the context of profound socio-cultural changes. Even the subject of identity reaches new highs in the final part of his *History*, as cultural identity is correlated with the World Literature. Moreover, the title of his fifth part "Towards a transnational identity" comes as a reaction to G. Călinescu ending of *History of Romanian Literature* (Iovănel 2021, 11), that positions the literary history in a shifting position, embracing the approach of the transnational paradigm.

Representations of National Identity

In his volume, Mihai Iovănel not only refreshes the idea of contemporary Romanian literature but also explores new patterns in literary research that open a dialogue with the international space, based on the idea that a scholar must engage with the outer world. For the final part, the literary historian focuses his discourse on the world-systems theory bringing to discussion names of the pioneers in the field such as Pascale Casanova or Franco Moretti. Contemporary literary history is a bond to identify the national identity under the auspices of World Literature and transnational studies. This approach does not involve eliminating the national identity even if the author questions it in various cases, linking it to the self-mirroring of our identity as well as the perspectives of outsiders upon us. A first official step for integrating Romanian literature into a transnational circuit was already taken through the collective project coordinated by editors Christian Moraru, Mircea Martin, and Andrei Terian. The national attribute is sustainable as long as it involves international dialogue. The methodologies highlighted by the volume *Romanian Literature as World Literature* announced in this way changes in the future writings on literary history. The contemporary history published by Mihai Iovănel represents a fluctuating ground that announces changes of direction.

Relevant to this matter are the final chapters of the volume as they focus on the global shift in literary theories and literature. Therefore, the first aspect brought into discussion is related to the way an individual, local or foreigner, decides to represent a country. At a first glance, the chapter on *Transnational maps (Hărți transnaționale)* seems to be poorly developed having only a few examples that illustrate a unidirectional perspective on the artistic representations of Romania abroad. The critic offers two examples from cinema referring to *Gypsy Jigsaw* (2000) and *6 Bullets* (2012). Although a welcomed approach, sketching the Romanian portrait using interdisciplinary angles requires more contextualization. From a cinematic perspective regarding the national peculiarities, Doru Pop asks a crucial question in his essay "An analysis of Romanians' self-image in contemporary cinematographic representations": "whether movies 'damage' our image or 'improve' it?" (Pop 138). To answer this question, he invokes the convention of *falsity* stated by Gilles Deleuze that refers to the natural relation between this principle and a film's production (145). This means that while the producers aim to be as convincing as possible, they might use various storytelling strategies to make the viewers fall for the story with the risk of altering reality. In this sense, Doru Pop argues that the reinterpretation of history is a frequent practice in cinematography. He gives the example of Robert

Zemeki's movie *Forrest Gump* (2004), where the main character seems to cross the paths of various prominent figures of the recent past (John Lennon, Martin Luther King Jr., JFK, Elvis Presley). Nowadays, Netflix seems to invade people's screens with various movies that are adaptations of history or social events. The reality is often highly distorted in many ways, but viewers accept the pact of falsity in favor of narrative and emotion. For example, the series of *Bridgerton* (2020) created by Chris van Dusen or *Inventing Anna* (2022), created by Shonda Rhimes, are two very catchy examples that won the spectators' hearts on one side and created controversy on the other. While pleading for a non-racist past, *Bridgerton* depicts the diversification of London's high society characters with the risk of being inaccurate and debated in many American and British newspapers such as *New York Times*, *The Nation, The Guardian, The Observer*, and many others. Likewise, the miniseries of Shonda Rhimes tell the story of Anna Delvey, a Russian immigrant that proves to be a con artist whose story is inspired from real events. However, important aspects of reality are changed to fit the plot better such as the fictionalization of New York magazine into *Manhattan* magazine (Peg 2022) and even the destiny of the main character, who in the real-life ends up in prison. Nonetheless, the producer addresses the spectator with a captivating disclaimer every time an episode begins; this message aligns with Deleuze's falsity hypothesis (Deleuze 126): "This whole story is completely true, except for all the parts that are totally made up." Although they might seem non-academic or commercial examples, these examples are only a few compared to the multitude of films and TV series on the market. Not to mention that the genre of the film plays an essential role in the producer's decision to use certain peculiarities of a culture. *The Bloom Brothers* (2008), a comedy directed by Rian Johnson, uses the Romanian landmark, Peleş Castle, as the main shooting location of the film, where the castle represents the inheritance of wealthy Penelope. However, the truth regarding the location's origins is drastically changed in the story being placed in New Jersey. Therefore, in cinematography, the reality is often a tool used to keep the viewer hooked. The way Romania is depicted in the afore-mentioned movies is also part of the convention of *falsity*.

Coming back to the examples given by the literary critic, they are rather drawing a narrow picture of the foreign perspective upon the Romanian culture. His categorical assumptions on how Romanians see themselves in the eyes of the others (647) focus also on the writings of the Romanian-Swiss author Cătălin Dorian Florescu who uses the rural local background as an exotic attraction for the foreigner reader. Mihai Iovănel assumes that not even Romanian citizens can offer a real, authentic image of the country as they

choose to focus only on its unfavorable aspects of it. Despite that, the singular case of Cătălin Dorian Florescu does not encompass an expanding range of perspectives, especially because the writer declares in various interviews that he especially comes to Romania as a source of inspiration. His focus on the rural space with its rituals, people, and habits comes from an intrinsic need of being in contact with this genuine lifestyle and the magical stories it brings. Being born in the city made him curious about the dynamics of villages, and he tends to add a magical realism vibe over this background, focusing on the exotic imaginary. Here the exotism is designed to impress the foreigner reader who is not familiar with the evoked experiences that are almost inexistent in the Western urban landscape: "to counteract what is missing from life in the urban landscape of the West" (Ioanid 2018). I would say that his approach to diving into the eccentric situation has similarities to Radu Țuculescu's drama plays. For example, there is a noticeable tendency to equate embarrassing, disastrous, situations to a dark humor type of comic in situations that reveal subsidiary cultural aspects. In theater more than in prose, such approaches are desired and searched for by the public as they are catchy, and they invite the audience to laugh. Țuculescu's bet is with the absurd situations and a great example in this sense is the play *O balegă în mijlocul drumului*, a play that had its debut in Prague in 2017. It is a comedy about a semi-paralyzed man taken to the streets by Violeta, his girlfriend, who is fed up with him. In the beginning, the other villagers are ashamed of her, but the paralytic's appearance in the middle of the road becomes profitable later due to the vigilance of Dodo and the Mayor. They see in the disabled an opportunity for agritourist and a chance to European funds. Finally, the paralytic becomes the source of tourism development in a random Romanian village. Iovănel was right to question the ways local artists choose to represent their country in writing as most references are based on country stereotypes and extreme generalization. The reality is that we are living in a mixed territory and our national identity is segregated into two almost equal masses. On one side we have the idyllic depictions of Romania, with its villages and colorful people, on the other side, contemporary Romania seems to enter the digital competitiveness at a global level. According to IMD World Digital Competitiveness Ranking in 2021, the country was ranked 50th in the world, a score that links the national brand to technology. Our past continues to work upon the present, where people are living deeply contrasting realities. It is either the rural landscape depicted by the writers or the technological boom that led to the growth of the corporate area. No matter how great the development of IT, even in the eyes of a foreign writer, their experience compared to other places seems to be, above all, an autochthonous one. It seems

that the lasting tradition of mystical Romanian spirituality, that Lucian Blaga defined as a spiritual matrix of a place (Blaga, 30), still has its relevance.

In this context of the cultural negotiation phenomenon, Tara Skurtu's volume of poems *The Amoeba Game* (2018) represents a significant example. This volume treats the theme of identity through autobiographical poems that take place chronologically, evoking her childhood memories in America and going as far as the moment of making contact with the Romanian space. Tara Skurtu has a double literary identity, an American and a Romanian one. The latter is gained through her experiences as she is currently based in Romania, where she first arrived in 2013 after receiving the Robert Pinsky Scholarship for Poetry. She remained in Romania after being granted two more Fulbright scholarships. The last part of the above-mentioned volume evokes her experience in this foreign country while the stylistic register changes drastically and the atmosphere becomes claustrophobic. She feels stuck in her boyfriend's village "walking a chicken on a leash" (the poem *Scara Richter, București*). Skurtu looks at everything with fantastic curiosity: the stuffed cabbage (*sarmale*), the pile of polenta with cream cheese, the fried brain (*creier pane*), in front of which nostalgia for "home" is almost non-existent. I would say that such a unique perspective refreshes the landscape of Romanian poetry precisely because it comes with the eye of the foreigner, the outsider who focuses on everything that finds defining for this space.

A Mixed-Bag "Auto-Stereotype"

All the examples discussed above attempt to offer an insight into identifying the specifics of our nation. The term identity, so often used, represents such a large spectrum of meanings as it is not something tangible. Anything can be placed under this word or in correlation with it: national, international, Western, Eastern identity—maybe it has also become a preference of sociologists to capture in words a few something so consistent. The frequency of the word began to grow once the term ideology, generally identified with Marxist theories, was replaced in favor of others that do not carry political content within them:

> More than any other concept, 'identity' is almost universally regarded as capable of accounting for the direction of the unprecedented social change that has hit our Identity as an Ideology planet. Moreover, this popularity quickly extended beyond academia to politics, economy, culture, the advertising industry, and many other spheres of everyday life. 'Identity' has become more popular than any other social concept. (Malešević 2)

In 1907 Dimitrie Drăghicescu tried to highlight the general directions of what he called the "Romanian Soul" (1907, 19) in order to express the importance of knowing and recognizing ourselves as part of a nation (22). Psychology scholars often speak of a social awareness that seems to differ from the individuals' consciousness (29) this means that there are differences in how we see ourselves and how we are: "Individual consciousness is itself of social or national nature."[2] Other psychologists such as Constantin Rădulescu Motru and, more recently, Daniel David continued Drăghicescu's related to the psychology of the Romanian people. One major issue that David identifies in his study is the segregation of regions based on the Romanians' opinions about themselves. The development of the country's image and branding should not be done independently of the country because the country itself is peripheral and not well known internationally. Probably the only region that has a chance to be recognized as such is the area of Transylvania due to Bram Stoker and the myth of Dracula. Mihai Iovănel dedicates a few pages to this subject, explaining the erroneous use of the myth's connection to Vlad Țepeș. From this point of view, the volume succeeds in clarifying a major stereotype represented by this myth (Iovănel 2021, 259-264). The concept of identity is strongly bound to all these myths and stereotypes promoted by Romanians and foreigners as well. Daniel David's work is very comprehensive in regard to the psycho-cultural profile of ourselves as the psychologist tries to offer a clear answer to this portrait using as a foundation the former works of Constantin Rădulescu Motru. The representation of "how we are" versus "what we think we are" was discussed based on specific psychological attributes such as personality, cognitive aspects, subjective-emotional aspects, and relational aspects, that were later customized by zooming on more specific aspects such as work, mental health, children, seniors, Romanian diaspora and others (David 2015, 182).

This study is very complex, but to sum up a few of its main ideas, it appears that our profile is dominated by what he calls "collectivist attributes." We tend to punish and be against anyone who prospers and tries to make a change. Performance is not rewarded. For example, a group of Americans was compared to a group of Romanians in a common exercise where both groups had to collaborate with their own members to work together. While the members of the American group supported each other and any leadership initiative on the idea that their gain returns as a gain of the group, the second group did the opposite: as soon as one of them had better ideas, the other members tried to bring him down. This attitude represents a clear sign of impediment to the ideal

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[2] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The original Romanian reads: "Conștiința individuală este ea însăși de natură și de origine socială sau națională" (Drăghicescu 1907, 31).

of global connectivity. However, the predictive values of this outcome are mostly underlined for the baby boomers (people that are over 55 years old) that match a more traditional, conservative profile. Rooted in the norms of a generation, the regularities that arise out of a community are adjustable to the needs of younger generations that might not identify themselves with the same stereotypes. Daniel David explains that there is a large discrepancy at a national level between how we see ourselves and how we project this image of ours. A nation's cultural profile is highly complex as people are divided into different clusters, depending on personality traits. It appears that Romania is segregated in two opposite directions that create a mixed auto stereotype both as a whole but also in every each of its eight development regions:

> When we compare ourselves with other ethnic groups in Romania, we consider ourselves 'civilized', but when we compare ourselves with other nations of the world, we say that we are 'uncivilized'. From the analysis of the semi-structured interview we notice the presence in auto stereotype of various attributes sometimes opposite in value: 'emotional', 'intelligent', 'less healthy' and 'choleric'[...] we notice that we consider ourselves 'gregarious', 'tolerant', 'hospitable', and 'religious', but also 'undisciplined'; the opposite attributes: 'persevering' vs. 'unpersevering' and 'collectivists' vs. 'Individualists (selfish)' are not significantly different from each other. So, we can conclude that the Romanian stereotype is mixed.[3]

The identity discourse should not be oriented towards oneself, it should embody a global identity system in which each country works for the benefit of all. For example, the good country index, created by Simon Anholt is a tool of measurement that shows each country's contribution to the global well-being of humanity. The measurements follow the countries' activity and involvement in each of the following domains: Science & Technology, Culture, International Peace & Security, World Order, Planet & Climate, Prosperity & Equality, Health & Wellbeing. On the website of The Good Country Index, Romania is placed on the 41st position with the following scores: 44th on Science & Technology, 45th on Culture, 65th on International Peace & Security, 53rd on World Order, 14th on Planet & Climate, 89th on Prosperity & Equality, 77th on Health & Wellbeing.

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[3] "Când ne comparăm cu celelalte etnii din România, ne considerăm 'civilizaţi', dar, când ne comparăm cu alte popoare ale lumii, spunem despre noi că suntem 'necivilizaţi'. Din analiza interviului semistructurat observăm prezenţa în autostereotip a unor attribute variate şi uneori opuse ca valenţă: 'emoţionali', 'inteligenţi', 'mai puţin sănătoşi' şi 'colerici'. [...] observăm că ne considerăm 'gregari', 'toleranţi', 'ospitalieri', şi 'religioşi', dar şi 'indisciplinaţi'; atributele opuse: 'perseverenţi' vs. 'neperseverenţi' şi 'colectivişti' vs. 'individualişti (egoist)' nu sunt semnificativ diferite unele de altele. Aşadar, putem conchide că autostereotipul românilor este mixt." (David 2015, 283)

These numbers show our ranking among the 169 countries included. Therefore, the international image of Romania cannot be described from a singular angle as there is a multitude of fields that construct it. Or, better said, that re-constructs it from an interdisciplinary point of view that offers a complete portrait of the causal chain that leads to a shifting identity.

Coming back to Mihai Iovănel's arguments on the negative self and foreign representations of the Romanian identity, it appears that indeed, on a larger scale, the image of Romanians tends to have neutral or negative attributes abroad. Daniel David shows that the Hungarians see us as patriots, Italians as procrastinating (*nemuncitori*) and the American perspective is often associated with the myth of vampires and Dracula. In addition, other Western Europe countries tend to correlate us with antisocial behavior. It seems that we, as Romanians, share a common opinion with the foreigners that consider us less scrupulous and not very hardworking. However, these external beliefs developed in this direction because the Romanian people often generalize that our identity is in such a way. Therefore, others started to believe the same about us because this phenomenon satisfies the needs of identity and predictability of the present (David 2015, 312). The contemporary individual is disposed more towards the outside world rather than the inside leading to a process of externalization especially for the post-communist countries. The author of the *Contemporary History* discusses this process at the very beginning of its volume. Since the dominant impulse is heading to the West, various forms of intense networking are developing in its direction. This history of literature brings into discussion various topics that brought the contemporary literature in its actual form. The critic emphasizes a series of fragile areas that are underdeveloped and that could give new direction to the future literature. These topics are described in the chapter *Points of Resistance* (*Puncte de rezistență*) and include the aspects of ecologies, epistemologies, gender, sexuality, LGBTQ+, race, emigrants, disabilities, subcultures, which he understands as "systemic reasons" (Iovănel 273), a phrase for describing the changes of society in all its aspects. They represent, in fact, areas of turning points in mentality, but also in the way of self-understanding and reflection on our own identity. In this sense, he is a visionary because a stabilization of these systemic reasons can lead to the widening of the identity spectrum and can generate a literary shift as well as create a greater closeness to the global space and the world literature.

"Collectible" Culture

National identity in the context of World Literature discussions is not a negligible factor because it conditions the very definition of World Literature,

as Damrosch points out in the first definition of the concept, which is "a refraction of national literature" (Damrosch 2003, 281). This implies that the local roots of any literature are automatically connected to the structures of World Literature. Cultural heritage in the context of the acute globalization of the present time no longer accepts, and probably was never possible, to be framed within immutable boundaries of identity. Of course, the central cultures that have a long history on the literary market inevitably influence small cultures.

In the age of globalization, translation increases the value of goods, and, at the same time, it makes it accessible to a larger market, being the link between the national and the international canon. The literary market is dominated by the immersion of various texts from a wide range of cultures which leads to a phenomenon of the cultural influence of the masses as the text is usually given credit by the giants of the literary market (United States, France, Spain, Germany). However, we must keep an eye on the fact that this age of "dataism" (Harari 2018) redirected almost all services to new digital platforms as a form of "reorganization of cultural production and distribution practices around these platforms" (Poell et al. 2019, 5–6). As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, any unknown voice, be it the voice of an artist or a consumer, has the power of creating public content. With the help of technology, individuality will be translated into plurality on the basis that many individual approaches generate a plurality of voices. This process is already happening in our daily life through freedom of speech and access to various social media networks. Any individual, known or unknown, can go viral and express their message to the world. A plurality of voices creates diversity, and the main challenge is to find ways of integrating it into a global system instead of diminishing it.

> For this latter reason, normative pluralism systems include ethno-cultural normative systems, whereas so far, no governance networks have been described as ethno-cultural systems. This may be because network governance research has focused mainly on process, whereas normative pluralism systems deal with content" (Malloy and Salat 2021, 8).

Mihai Iovănel explains that both in the global and internal market, the Romanian language competes with the other cultures. His *History* ends somehow pessimistically, stating that the Romanian literature will most probably become an echo, a shadow of what it used to be (Iovănel 2021, 680). As dark as it might sound, this scenario has a high chance of being attained. However, this would happen only if the scholars will allow literature and culture to exist only in a centralized manner. Through translation, a culture becomes collectible and gains capital by diversifying the market. The strategy of collecting goes beyond

culture is an economical approach applicable in every field of human existence because adding an object to a collection increases its worth. For example, in video games the characters gather points or coins to move on to the next level. The video game case is given here, especially for its connection to digital technology. Collecting has always been a major cultural activity as "the history of collecting is thus the narrative of how human beings have striven to accommodate to appropriate and to extend the taxonomies and systems of knowledge they have inherited" (Elsner and Cardinal 1997, 2).

The coming of technology transferred collections into digital assets and the trend of NFTs (non-fungible tokens) seems to announce their development into what many people call nowadays, the Web3:

> Non-Fungible means something unique, more like one of a kind, which cannot be replaced with something similar to that, and 'Token' refers to an 'asset' or a 'unit'. So, combining the words, Non Fungible Token is a unit or an asset that is genuine, unique, and cannot be replaced, representing the ownership of something of greater value. (Royce 2021, 42)

The *Business Harvard Review* offers a brief explanation of what Web3 implies by explaining each step of web transformation. This being said, Web1 was represented by the computer itself "the physical infrastructure of wires and servers that lets computers and the people in front of them talk to each other" (Stackpole 2022). Later, in the 2000s the internet became more interactive and determined "an era of user-generated content" (Stackpole 2022) where social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) became an important tool in expanding the ways of delivering information. This new way of networking entered the second phase of the Web which was also a phase of centralization as many big companies involved in this approach "have produced mind-boggling wealth for themselves and their shareholders by scraping users' data and selling targeted ads against it" (Stackpole 2022). The blockchains came to cover a need for having an open, decentralized network where the decision no longer belongs to only one entity. In theory, the NFTs are meant to avoid the deterioration of the artistic object and offer the small buyers the opportunity to involve in this process. The act of collecting is no longer limited to the educated elite but becomes accessible from anywhere at any time through the concept of digital wallets which is an "encrypted wallet" that protects your online identity (Stackpole 2022). I do not intend to explain an entire technology, but I will mention a few concepts that the arts might use in the future, including literature. The digital landscape comes as an opportunity for the writers to be in touch with their buyers and future readers. It works as a space to experiment with

various forms, publish and earn money directly from its clients. At the moment, there has been a great demand for visual Art NFT but a non-fungible token can be represented by anything digital, even a novel or a collection of poems.

For example, the Colombian poet Ana María Caballero, who lives in the United States, founded the platform *The VERSEverse* (a pun to the alternative digital universe speculated by *Facebook – Metaverse*). The initiative was shaped by the association with Gisel Florez, an art counselor with whom Ana María Caballero, together with two other poets, Kalen Iwamoto and Sasha Stiles, created a poetry gallery in NFT format. The gallery's mission is to bring poetry on an equal footing with other arts, such as painting or sculpture, based on the premise that poetry involves a constant creative effort that "deserves to be appreciated in the same way, either culturally or at the commercial level."[4] The poems included in this gallery work with the field of cybernetics and speculate on ways in which the self engages its senses in this interaction. These texts represent an experimental fusion of the elements of semiotics, translation, computer science, speculative design, and visual poetry. A similar platform is called *Crypto Poetry. The Future of Poetry* and was founded by Kai, a poet passionate about technology, whose identity is vaguely presented. The project began with Kai's collection of poetry, delivered with NFT status, and later contacted other writers to join the initiative. Currently, the platform presents itself as a community of poets, where each of them creates a various collection of poems later included for trading on blockchain platforms such as Ethereum, Solana, Tezos, Polygon, and others.[5]

To sum it all up, in the *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature,* Mihai Iovănel rebrands the meaning of literature's contemporaneity and places a milestone for Romanian humanities in an age of disruption and uncertainty. As the critic himself states, the current edition needs improvements and perhaps additional references. Nonetheless, his volume responds to the need for global integration and explores a few examples that show the fluctuations within the representations of Romanian identity while standing for a transnational approach. In this direction, Daniel David's monograph on the psychology of Romanians is essential in the field of international ethnic research. His study can be easily applied within the literary field as it explains why the nation has a mixed psycho-cultural profile. In addition, Iovănel's *History* creates space for an interdisciplinary dialogue. This paper tried to show the strong connection it has to psychology and the information technology using the concept of identity.

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[4] Original text: "El trabajo que va detrás de un lienzo, una escultura o cerámica es el mismo que va detrás de un poema y se deberían valorar de la misma manera, ya sea a nivel cultural o a nivel commercial" (Granados 2021).

[5] The *Crypto Poetry* platform can be consulted at the URL: https://cryptopoetry.io/.

Iovănel's *History* anticipates future changes in meaning that perhaps will redefine local identity in a global context. On top of that, the coming of a new digital era, represented by Web3 and block chain technology might create new opportunities for the field of literature and its history as well. The peculiar disposition for individuality, which is specific to the Western world according to Daniel David, might lead in the global context to a plurality of voices that will perhaps continue to probe their diversity in the digital world.

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*** Digital competitiveness ranking: https://worldcompetitiveness.imd.org/countryprofile/overview/RO.

*** The *Crypto Poetry* platform: https://cryptopoetry.io/.

TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES IN *THE HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN LITERATURE*

LARISA PRODAN[1]

ABSTRACT: *Transnational Perspectives in* **The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature***.* Discussing literature from a global perspective requires a transnational view on the evolution and international integration of literature. Most recent *World Literature* studies imply such an analytic perspective when questioning the recognition of certain national literatures within the more developed ones. While using concepts such as "minor" or "major literature" or, more precisely, "central" or "peripheral literature," attention needs to be paid, Prodan argues, when talking about the global acknowledgement of literature, especially of those literatures coming from "minor" and even isolated cultures. In *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020*, Mihai Iovănel proposes a thematic rather than a historical analysis of contemporary national literature with its periodized and temporal evolutions. The author includes, especially in the last chapter of his literary history, a transnational view of contemporary Romanian literature. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to analyse the way Romanian writers and their literary works are perceived by the critic as having "a transnational character." Prodan also investigates how Iovănel succeeds in renewing critical strategies in literary historiography. Thus, this contribution is mainly dedicated to the last part of Mihai Iovănel's *History*, which seeks out new strategies of transnational expansion of the spectrum of national literature, as the author also analyses the possibilities of a global integration and marketing of contemporary Romanian literature.

Keywords: *transnational literature*, *national literature, migration*, *literary history*, *periodization*

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[1] **Larisa PRODAN** is a PHD student in the Department of World and Comparative Literature, Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. She has authored articles and book reviews in several publications such as *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* and *Ekphrasis Journal*. Her research interests include literary theory and transnational perspectives on Romanian literature. Email: larisa.prodan@ubbcluj.ro.

REZUMAT: *Perspective transnaționale în* Istoria literaturii române contemporane. O analiză a literaturii la nivel global implică o perspectivă transnațională asupra evoluției și a integrării acesteia pe piața internațională. Studiile recente aparținând literaturii globale (*World Literature*) presupun tocmai o astfel de analiză a investigării modului în care anumite literaturi naționale s-au dezvoltat în cadrul literaturilor globale. Utilizând concepte precum „literatură minoră" sau „majoră" sau, mai precis, „literatură centrală" și „periferică," o analiză a fenomenului este necesară, după părerea mea, în special în cazul afirmării la nivel internațional a unor literaturi provenind din culturi „minore" sau chiar izolate. Mihai Iovănel, în *Istoria literaturii române contemporane. 1990-2020*, propune o analiză mai degrabă tematică a literaturii naționale contemporane, iar nu una istorică, analizată prin intermediul evoluțiilor literare temporale. Autorul integrează, îndeosebi în ultimul capitol al istoriei sale literare, o perspectivă transnațională asupra literaturii române contemporane. Astfel, lucrarea de față își propune o analiză a modului în care scriitorii români și operele acestora sunt percepute de criticul literar drept o literatură „cu specific transnațional" și, mai mult decât atât, a modalității prin care Iovănel reușește să inoveze strategiile de interpretare critică în istoriografia literară. Un studiu, așadar, dedicat în speță ultimei părți a *Istoriei...* lui Mihai Iovănel, având scopul de a identifica noi strategii de extindere a spectrului literar național înspre unul transnațional, căci autorul analizează posibilitățile de integrare și promovare a literaturii naționale contemporane la nivel global.

Cuvinte-cheie: literatură transnațională, literatură națională, migrație, istorie literară, periodizare

The rise of *World Literature* studies has offered a new, detailed perspective on the evolution and global integration of national literatures. Dealing with the "network" the scholarship in the field variously emphasizes requires a *transnational* view on the inclusion of so-called "minor" and "peripheral" literatures alongside the "major" and "central" ones. In its peripheral status, Romanian literature gains a certain position within the global network of literatures due to the standing of some representative writers and their literary works. Such an overall perspective of the national literature that gained a transnational position is offered by Mihai Iovănel especially in the last part of *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature. 1990-2020* [*Istoria literaturii române contemporane. 1990-2020*]. The present study is dedicated to this last chapter of Iovănel's literary history, as the author manages to expand the critical perspective on the Romanian national literature by analysing its transnational recognition. The main purpose of this paper is to emphasize the innovation

Mihai Iovănel proposes in creating literary historiography. By departing from the traditional model of periodized literary histories, the author approaches a rather thematic perspective in analysing the national literary productions. Such a thematic view is represented by the enlarging of borders for the Romanian national literature towards a transnational cannon. As Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian claim in the introductory part of the volume *Romanian Literature as World Literature*, "pursuing a worldly revisiting of Romanian literature" accomplishes "a rereading of this literature as world literature" (Martin, Moraru, and Terian 2018, 2). A similar perspective is also created by Mihai Iovănel in the analysis of contemporary Romanian literature, but perceived this time in a transnational context.

What is of primary interest in the case of *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature* is precisely the author's orientation towards the transnational integration of Romanian literature. If literary histories are generally focused on presenting the national literatures from the point of view of a temporal hierarchy, Iovănel departs his methodologic analysis from the classic canon of periodizing national literature and chooses otherwise a thematic structure oriented towards a global context. When discussing the themes of literary history and periodization, Susan Stanford Friedman claims that periodization is "a discourse about time, a methodology developed in the discipline of history that assumes the linear, chronological nature of time: past, present, and future" (Friedman 2019, 379-402). In her view, periodization represents quite a "convenient" method that "produces concepts — like 'modernity' or 'modernism'" and it offers an opportunity of re-reading and understanding literature within "the historical period of its production and reception" (379-402). Thus, Friedman supports the usage of certain "non-linear concepts of time" that might improve the methods of doing literary history:

> I think non-linear concepts of time might free up new ways of doing literary history, ones attuned to historical contextualization without being limited to ideologically weighted periodizations, ones that take into account the multiplicity, heterogeneity, and discontinuities of lived temporalities in cross-cultural, intercultural, and transcultural worlds (379-402).

Such "non-linearity" as a strategy of critical debate could be also seen in Mihai Iovănel's literary history, as trying to integrate the national literature within the transnational cannon might be interpreted as a development of the analytical methods when coming to the producing of literary historiography.

Questioning the departure from periodization in doing literary history, Eric Hayot discusses the miss of usage of such methods that imply a temporal hierarchy. What he proposes is in fact an "interdisciplinary" perspective that combines both "the disciplinary and the national" (Hayot 2011, 739) as, in his view, nation represents a basis for the transnational: "The nation lies, after all, at the heart of the transnational, just as the prominence of disciplines gives interdisciplinarity its meaning and power" (740). Such an "interdisciplinary" view combining "the disciplinary and the national" is retrieved by Mihai Iovănel, as he focuses his investigation on the creative strategies within the national literature, but integrating it at the same time in a global context. According to Hayot's perspective, we could claim that at the basis of Iovănel's transnational strategies of doing literary history lies the national literary phenomenon. Periodization gained, claims Hayot, a "near-total dominance" in literary studies, and such a status unfortunately causes at the same time "a collective failure of imagination and will" (740). Along the years, he states, "we have failed to create alternatives to periodization" (740). Period became a "central historical concept" in almost every level and form of literary education, it was institutionalized and the entire process was based on the context, on the "*historical* context" (741). Moreover, the author claims that "the lack of debate over the value of the period as concept" made periodization "ideological" (742). Thus, Hayot suggests some "alternatives" to "the forms of constraint that govern the periods (and theory of periods)" and one of these methods is to develop periods in such a way as to "cross national boundaries":

> Develop periods specifically designed to cross national boundaries. These would borrow for their logic some nonnational principle of social or cultural coherence, generating concepts like systems literature, literature of various economic formations (capitalism, feudalism, industrialism), literature of the city-state period, literature of Golden Ages, and so on (747).

Therefore, from this point of view, there could be easily observed that Mihai Iovănel, through his singular methods of dedicating the study of national literature to a transnational contextualization, and not to means of periodization, he manages to innovate the methodological strategies of doing literary criticism. By developing such an "alternative" to periodization, the transnational perspectives used by the author could be recognised as methods of "crossing national boundaries."

If we are to compare Iovănel's study with previous literary histories, and even to the tradition of doing literary criticism, the main focus of traditional literary histories is to offer a critical view on the national literature and also to

create a temporal hierarchy within the investigation of literary productions. Periodization, therefore, could be perceived as the main strategy of creating the canon of a national literature. These evolutions and processes within the already existing Romanian literary histories is analysed by Andrei Terian in his study (2009) dedicated to George Călinescu's *The History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present* [*Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent*]. Andrei Terian considers Călinescu's literary history a national literary product: "a victorious fight of the national 'background' against 'forms' came from abroad."[2] This is stated even though he identifies certain inspirations in doing literary criticism from European models (Terian 2009, 406), as Călinescu follows within his *History…* an interest towards the Italian, French, and German cultures (450-451).

Nevertheless, Andrei Terian dedicates his studies also to the forms of transnational literary criticism. Thus, in *Export Criticism* [*Critica de export*], the author claims that the export of Romanian literary criticism is extremely reduced nowadays. This is due to a much-decreased number of translations of the Romanian literature in an international language and also to a "lack of popularity of Romanian literature abroad" (Terian 2013, 6). If national literature seems to have failed in gaining an international status, states the author, it is even more difficult for Romanian criticism to acquire a transnational "export": "How could one export literary criticism when you could not widely export until now its object—literature?"[3] Moreover, it was even more difficult to internationally promote Romanian literature as there is no Romanian literary history written in English or French. Therefore, Andrei Terian is a literary critic that tries to integrate the Romanian literary criticism into a transnational context. Taking into consideration Mihai Iovănel' attempts to offer a transnational view upon Romanian literature, he does not resume only to following certain internationally acknowledged models in doing literary history, as G. Călinescu did for instance, but he opens up a worldly integration of the Romanian national literature. Iovănel's *History…* is not written "in English or French," namely in a language that might guarantee the global status of national literary criticism, but a forthcoming creation of a literary history written in one of the international languages seems to be a future perspective in the field of Romanian literary historiography.

Analysing different national and international literary histories, Andrei Terian observes that such literary criticism implies a "spatial turn" (78) and,

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[2] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The original Romanian reads: "o luptă triumfătoare a 'fondului' autohton împotriva 'formelor' venite din afară" (Terian 2009, 409).

[3] "Cum să exporţi critică literară atâta timp cât nu ai reuşit până acum să exporţi pe scară largă obiectul său – literatura?" (Terian 2013, 6).

therefore, transnational literary histories are even more adequate from this point of view as they offer "a polyphonic and fragmentary perspective, deliberately situating themselves at the antipode of literary histories from the end of 19th and the beginning of the 20th century."[4] Thus, space generally becomes the "object of study" when coming to literary histories and it represents ("or, at least, it should") "the main factor in the construction of a transnational identity."[5] Furthermore, Romanian literary studies should not follow, in author's view, a precise international model, but, considering the already overrated methods used in investigating literature, scholars should bring or create "a new mode of thinking literature" (291):

> If there is any significant lesson that Romanian literary studies should assume from the experience of today's international historiography, then I think it should consist not in imitating one or another recent disciplinary trends, but in accepting a new mode of thinking literature that is not limited to a certain methodology.[6]

Thus, when it comes to *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*, the author's thematic orientation is not entirely dedicated to space or spatial configuration of the national literature, as to obtain a "transnational identity," in Terian's terms, but he managed to innovate the manner of thinking literature, and it is not a temporal one. On the contrary, the literary critic departs his work from periodization and its specific methods of doing literary criticism.

The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature represents, in an overall view, an extended version of one of Iovănel's preliminary studies, namely *The Ideologies of Literature in Romanian Postcommunism* [*Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc*]. There could be easily observed similarities between the two works not only in terms of content and critical views, but also in structure and the hierarchical organization of chapters and subchapters. The author motivates the subject of his study by claiming that the "literary histories appeared after 1989 either do not overcome the threshold of communism's falling [...] or they discuss completely fragmentarily or subjectively the

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[4] "asumându-şi o perspectivă polifonică şi fragmentară, se situează în mod deliberat la antipodul istoriilor literare la sfârşitul secolului al XIX-lea şi începutul secolului XX" (Terian 2013, 78).

[5] "După cum arată declaraţiile coordonatorilor acestor istorii, ele se bazează pe un decupaj al obiectului de studio care sugerează că spaţiul este (sau, cel puţin, ar putea fi) principalul factor în construcţia unei identităţi transnaţionale" (Terian 2013, 79).

[6] "Dacă există vreo lecţie semnificativă pe care studiul literaturii române ar trebui să şi-o assume din experienţa istoriografiei internaţionale curente, atunci aceasta mi se pare că ar consta nu în imitarea uneia sau a alteia dintre ultimele trenduri disciplinare, ci în acceptarea unui *nou mod de a gândi literatura*, care nu se reduce la o metodologie anume" (Terian 2013, 291).

period."[7] Iovănel outlines a primary aspect that differentiates his investigation from those offered as examples to the previous specified hierarchy, namely the fact that he focuses on the "global image seen in its dynamic" and the main purpose of such view is to "overcome the micro-monographic approach" currently present in Romanian literary historiography.[8] Such perspectives would be extended in what becomes *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*, as in the last chapter of the book, the author dedicates his study to the "global image" and tries to include the national literature in a worldly context, by overcoming "the micro-monographic approaches."

Mihai Iovănel succeeds in creating a transnational overview on both the national literature and the literary history, and therefore my analysis focuses on the last part of *The History…* that is dedicated to those writers and their literary works that are seen as transnational literary productions. Thus, beginning with the title of the chapter, it is suggestive for its thematic orientation: "The fifth part. The transnational specific."[9] Mihai Iovănel approaches literature through both the biographical—presenting the personal and the professional evolution of writers—and the creative strategies developed along with the writer's evolution. Thus, he departs his methods from periodization and the analysed literary works belong instead to a sphere recognised as conferring national literature a global and transnational character. Moreover, the chapter is organised in three major subchapters, namely "Transnational Maps," "Global Connectivity," and "Towards a Transnational Canon."[10] Whitin this clearly organised hierarchy, the author presents a sociological perspective of literature's evolution within the global context. Some of the most important arguments presented cover the social events and processes that influenced Romanian writers and, by default, their literary creations.

Thus, the first part, "Transnational Maps," begins with an analysis of Romanian literature seen as "peripheral," this status being the main reason for the lack of global acknowledgment of national literature so far. As a "minor" literature, it is guided by the western "major" literatures, generally perceived as a point of reference. The peripherals are not only created, but also modified according to the specificities of "the centre," claims the literary critic. By presenting this status of Romanian literature, Mihai Iovănel also criticises the national literature's character and attitude of considering inferior neighbour cultures and literatures considered "minor" in their turn: "the lack of West's

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[7] "Istoriile literare apărute după 1989 fie nu depăşesc pragul prăbuşirii comunismului […], fie tratează cu totul fragmentar sau subiectiv perioada" (Iovănel 2017, 10).

[8] "Diferența specifică a cărții de față în raport cu lucrările amintite stă în accentul pus pe imaginea globală, sesizată în dinamica ei, care-și propune să depășească abordarea de tip micromonografic curentă de altfel în istoriografia noastră literară" (Iovănel 2017, 11).

[9] "Partea a cincea. Specificul transnațional" (Iovănel 2017).

[10] "'Hărți transnaționale', 'Conectivitate globală', 'Către un canon transnațional'" (Iovănel 2017).

reciprocity in knowing Romania remained an injurious matter. [...] Of course, such lines have a significant dose of ridicule in a Romanian culture that, with minimal exceptions, easily ignores the cultures of neighbour countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia etc."[11] Moreover, the author discusses the way Romanian writers, even when having the opportunity to promote the national literature within the western space, they did not do it or, at least, not entirely. The offered example is that of the German writer of Romanian origin, Cătălin Dorian Florescu. His literary works are mainly dedicated to migration – depicted as a general theme – but what Mihai Iovănel chooses for his *History…* is one of the last novels of the writer, *The Man that Brings Happiness* [*Bărbatul care aduce fericirea*] (2018). Based on the blend of two different narrative plans, the novel tells the story of two persons coming from distinctive spatial areas, Danube's Delta and New York, but, as Iovănel claims, the depiction of the two areas is realised "more in a touristic manner":

> The information about New York and Romania is related to the German reader's encyclopaedia via the trick of newspaper headlines read by the characters in the book—and these titles generally contain *info* familiar to a German-speaking reader [...] Then, most characters are more like ideas [...] than complex identities that can overcome the impression of a fluid patchwork of words. An idyllic note is added as a *topping*—one of the misery, melancholy and unhappiness that simple characters with a broken destiny struggle with [...]. A blend of realism and romance, of Dickens and chocolate commercials.[12]

Cătălin Dorian Florescu is therefore recognised as a transnational writer of Romanian origin. However, with *The Man that Brings Happiness*, he fails not only to fictionally represent the Romanian area, so that it could become better known in the West, but also to promote a national identity through language and spatial depictions. Even if the author might intend to offer a realistic view of the Balkan territory, the way it is perceived by the literary critic does not surpass the impression of a vague "assemblage" of words. Therefore, in the

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[11] "lipsa de reciprocitate a Vestului în ce priveşte cunoaşterea României a rămas un subiect lezant. [...] Desigur, astfel de rânduri au o doză semnificativă de ridicol într-o cultură română care, cu minime excepţii, ignoră senin culturile unor ţări vecine ca Bulgaria, Serbia, Croaţia, Slovenia, Ungaria, Cehia, Slovacia etc." (Iovănel 2017, 646-647).

[12] "Informaţiile asupra New Yorkului şi asupra României sunt raportate la enciclopedia cititorului german prin trucul titlurilor de ziar pe care personajele le citesc de-a lungul cărţii – iar aceste titluri conţin preponderent info-uri familiare unui germanofon [...] Apoi, majoritatea personajelor au un aspect preponderent ilustrativ, fiind mai mult idei de personaje [...] decât identităţi definite suficient de complex pentru a depăşi impresia de încropiri fluente de cuvinte. Ca topping, se adaugă un anumit idilism – un idilism al mizeriei, al melancoliei, al nefericirii în care se zbat personaje simple, destine zdrobite. [...] O combinaţie de realism şi romance, de Dickens şi reclamă la ciocolată" (Iovănel 2021, 647-648).

context of the "transnational" mapping of literature, C. D. Florescu is not presented as successfully managing that. However, Mihai Iovănel analyses only one of the writer's novels. Other works could have also been included and discussed, in my view, so that an overall view of Florescu's literary creation could have been formed.

The second part of "The transnational specific," titled "Global Connectivity," addresses again the differences between "centre" and "periphery" and mostly Romanian literature's attempts to "break through" the global market, with the help of a newly achieved character of "Europeanness." An initial version of this subchapter appears in *The Ideologies of Literature in Romanian Postcommunism* [*Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc*]. It is not only named the same, but also addresses the same topics and strategies of analysis. Among the attempts to penetrate the global literary market, Iovănel notices two representative "positions" within the Romanian national literature: the "collective" and the "individual" one. The "collective" position is represented by literary groups such as "'The Third Europe from Timişoara' (Cornel Ungureanu, Adriana Babeţi, Mircea Mihăieş etc.) that published books, collective volumes, literary magazines, it also organised colloquies on the theme of Mitteleuropa, exploiting the Habsburg and multicultural legacy—more European and more integrated—of Banat region."[13] However, regarding the "individual" position in the international marketing of Romanian literature, Mihai Iovănel mentions Mircea Cărtărescu. Cărtărescu's case is also discussed in the initial book, the literary activity of the author being in fact presented along the entire chapter as having a significant role in offering to the national literature a transnational status.

Contemporary Romanian literature's "adherence" to European space notably begins after Romania's integration to the European Union in 2007, states Mihai Iovănel. The social and the cultural evolution of the country are sustained, from that moment on, by the granting of different resources, such as opportunities to attend public lectures, translations or funding programmes—generally offered through scholarships of creation. These are perceived by the author as opportunities to promote and study national literature abroad. Also, Iovănel mentions the "recovery" of national writers "that had temporary relations with the Romanian literature, that either were born in the Romanian territory and tackled on Romanian thematic subjects (Panait Istrati, Paul Celan, Herta Müller), or entered, through different contexts, in the gravitational field of Romanian cultural system."[14] The discussed case is that of Emilian Galaicu-Păun, a writer

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[13] "A Treia Europă din Timişoara (Cornel Ungureanu, Adriana Babeţi, Mircea Mihăieş ş.a.), care a scos cărţi, volume colective, reviste, a organizat colocvii pe tema Mitteleuropa, valorificând moştenirea habsburgică şi multiculturală – i.e. mai europeană şi mai integrată – a zonei Banatului" (Iovănel 2021, 650-651).

[14] "recuperarea [...] unor scriitori care au avut relaţii episodice cu literatura română, fie că s-au născut pe teritoriul României şi au tratat subiecte româneşti (Panait Istrati, Paul Celan, Herta

originating from Bessarabia, whose work can be integrated both within the peripheral Romanian literature, the central French and the Russian one. The transnational status of Emilian Galaicu-Păun's literary work is thus outlined. Moreover, Iovănel approaches the case of the Romanian avant-garde, internationally represented by Tristan Tzara. He is highlighted as one of the writers who supported the evolution of twentieth-century Romanian literature through the new creative strategies adopted alongside Dadaism (661). Therefore, Iovănel states that for a writer from a peripheral space, accessing the global market is "a complex process."[15] It is not only based on the "trade between a periphery and a centre," it is not a "finite process," but a continuous one. The changes depend both on "politics" and "ideology" and the discussed cases are meant to emphasize a certain transnational recognition of the Romanian national literature gained along the years. The adopted perspective and methodological analysis, as could be seen, is not periodized or temporal, but rather a thematic one, the critic approaching the life and work of specific authors seen as globally representative for the national space and literature.

The third and last part of the chapter, "Towards a Transnational Canon," is dedicated to the export of national literature that could confer it a transnational recognition and also a possible integration into an international canon. Iovănel claims that "once with the opening of borders" in 1989, after the end of the communist regime, "there appeared new mobility opportunities." With the exception of Matei Vișniec—who "reinvented himself as a French playwright" – and Christian Moraru – who "became an important comparatist in the United States," Cărtărescu is recognised again as being "the only one in a position of global renown."[16] Again, the critical discourse focuses on case studies of writers that internationally promote national literature, and not solely on the literary analysis of their fictional works, temporally hierarchized as can be seen in most traditional literary histories. At the end of the chapter, Iovănel seems to be wary of national literature's international status, as he does not seem to identify the relevance of these literary works for a transnational positioning of literature. "There is little chance," he states, for Romanian literature to have a "central role

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Müller), fie că au intrat, prin diverse contexte, în câmpul gravitațional al sistemului cultural românesc" (Iovănel 2021, 654-655).

[15] "Intrarea unui scriitor provenit dintr-o (semi)periferie în sistemul global este un proces complex" (Iovănel 2021, 664).

[16] "Odată cu deschiderea granițelor apar noi posibilități de mobilitate între România și spațiul vestic; dacă până atunci conectarea fusese făcută într-un singur sens, dinspre Europa către România, [...] scriitorii români aveau posibilitatea de a se exporta. [...] Dintre optzeciști, exceptându-i pe Matei Vișniec, care s-a reinventat ca dramaturg în franceză, și pe Christian Moraru, devenit în Statele Unite un important comparatist, Cărtărescu e singurul într-o poziție de notorietate globală" Iovănel 2021, 667).

globally." The only solutions for national literature to become better known reside in translations or the export of writers—even through migration.[17]

Iovănel names two main strategies of "integrating" national literature on the global market. On the one hand, there are translations. The literary critic states that, with the help of translation, a writer coming from a peripheral space can achieve a global standing (2021, 668). By discussing Norman Manea's biography and literary work, his "originality" is assumed to be "the substance of the autobiographic matter"[18] that the writer authentically works with. The global and international connectivity of national literature is also exemplified by an analysis of Paul Goma's life and work:

> As a writer, Goma enters the series of the experimental writers. His narratives are almost never fluent from the point of view of chronology and expression. The writer fights every word, as he also did with the people in his real life. […] He was, therefore, a creator in the field of linguistic expression. Thus, all his books have an autobiographical core, whether they are diaries, memories or novels.[19]

While Manea and Goma are perceived as "spatially deterritorialized," because of their emigration, followed by their settlement in New York and Paris, Mircea Cărtărescu, even while having a good global dynamic, is appreciated for remaining a "national" writer. However, Cărtărescu is individualized through an authentic mechanism of "accessing the global network," namely the intertextuality ("a transnational mechanism that introduces a local material among its global references").[20] The previously mentioned "local material" is Bucharest, "a central *topos* in Cărtărescu's literature."[21]

On the other hand, the second strategy of global infiltration for national literature identified by Mihai Iovănel is the so-called "implant." It is based on the "infiltration" of a peripheral culture within a central one, "in such a way that

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[17] "Cel mai bun scenariu pentru România stă în creşterea capitalului său de notorietate şi a prezenţei pe listele de referinţe care populează canonul european şi nord-american […] . Aceasta se poate face fie prin traduceri […], fie prin exportarea, inclusiv prin emigraţie, de scriitori şi de viitori scriitori" (Iovănel 2021, 679-680).

[18] "Ceea ce dă originalitate scrisului lui Norman Manea este substanţa materiei autobiografice pe care o prelucrează prin intermediul formulei alese" (Iovănel 2021, 668-669).

[19] "Ca scriitor, Goma se înscrie în seria experimentaliştilor. Naraţiunile sale nu curg mai niciodată limpede din punctul de vedere al cronologiei şi al expresiei. Scriitorul se opreşte asupra fiecărui cuvânt pentru a se lupta cu el, aşa cum a făcut şi cu oamenii în viaţa reală. La un moment dat i s-a editat un volum de câteva sute de pagini cuprinzând cuvinte şi expresii inventate de Goma. A fost, aşadar, un creator în planul expresiei lingvistice. Altfel, toate cărţile lui au un miez autobiografic, fie că se numesc jurnale, memorii sau romane" (Iovănel 2021, 674).

[20] "mecanism transnaţional între ale cărui referinţe globale introduce un material local" (Iovănel 2021, 674).

[21] "Acest material este în primul rând oraşul Bucureşti, topos central al literaturii lui Cărtărescu" (Iovănel 2021, 674).

it modifies its parameters." A representative example is that of the Jewish-Romanian writer, Andrei Codrescu. He stands out in American literature as "a complex and prolific figure," for in his poetry he "remembers the experience of both Romanian and European surrealism."[22]

Thus, "The Fifth Part" of Mihai Iovănel's *History…* presents the evolution of twentieth-century Romanian literature, viewed from a transnational point of view. He analyses both the social and the creative processes that helped national literature to gain some international acknowledgement. The critical discourse is innovated by departing from the strategies of periodization and by adopting a case study structure that helps the literary critic to form an overall view on the transnational positioning of Romanian national literature. However, this chapter does not provide a close analysis of those fictional works that are thematically based on migration or exile. These literary themes could offer, in their turn, transnational perspectives on Romanian national writers and their works—separate from the previously-mentioned authors who confer a transnational character to national literature. In the second part of *The History…* there is a short subchapter on the phenomenon of migration: "The Emigrants" ["Emigranții"]. It represents yet further proof of Iovănel's different critical perspective on literary historiography. Instead of periodizing literature or establishing hierarchies, he proposes a few indicative thematic cores that are afterwards used as guidelines in his critical investigation of national literature. Therefore, similar to global connectivity and to the export of peripheral literature, the author claims that migration has significantly increased in Romania after the 2000s, this being the major reason for the numerous literary representations of the phenomenon. Several writers are mentioned, among them Adrian Schiop, Dani Rockhoff, Dan Lungu, Lilia Bicec-Zanardelli and others. As migrants themselves—in one form or another—they all portray in their works the trauma and exploitation that Romanian emigrants suffer upon relocating themselves to western countries. The analysed novels are those of Radu Pavel Gheo, *Goodbye, Goodbye, My Homeland…* [*Adio, adio, patria mea, cu î din i, cu â din a*], and Bogdan Suceavă, *Avalon. The Secrets of the Happy Immigrants* [*Avalon. Secretele emigranților fericiți*] (Iovănel 2021, 333). Both literary works offer an insight into the personal and psychological experiences of two Romanian emigrants who try to develop professionally within the USA. However, the critical analysis is not extended to the literary works of other writers, the

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[22] "Al doilea model este cel al implantului. El privește infiltrarea unei culturi centrale dinspre o cultură periferică într-un mod în care modifică subtil parametrii primeia, fără a preserva însă identitatea celei de-a doua […] În literatura americană Andrei Codrescu este o figură complexă și prolifică. În poezie el amintește de experiența suprarealismului românesc și european" (Iovănel 2021, 676).

two discussed novels being deemed representative for an entire literature dedicated to migration and exile.

To conclude, Mihai Iovănel innovates the strategies of literary historiography by constantly finding "alternatives to periodization" (2011, 747). Through this thematic structure of his literary history, the author manages to expand the spectrum of national literature. The discussed chapter, dedicated to the transnational acknowledgement of Romanian national literature, engages in a critical analysis of national literature that is on its pathway towards global recognition. Even if Romanian literature has not had a solid worldly representation yet, some manifestations of the transnational phenomenon can indeed be identified and strategies for a global acknowledgement of Romanian national literature need to be improved.

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SOME THEORETICAL SHORTCOMINGS IN MIHAI IOVĂNEL'S *HISTORY OF CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN LITERATURE: 1990-2020*

DANIEL CLINCI[1]

ABSTRACT. *Some Theoretical Shortcomings in Mihai Iovănel's* History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020. This paper is an analysis of some of the concepts (*posthuman*, *capitalist realism*, *transnational*) used in Mihai Iovănel's *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020*, pointing out the way in which the author borrows some terms from current global debates and uses them as labels, without their theoretical backgrounds and foundation. This echoes another misunderstanding in Romanian literary studies, that of the term *postmodernism*, which is, Clinci argues, another example of self-colonization.

Keywords: postmodernism, posthumanism, self-colonization, Romanian literature, capitalist realism

REZUMAT. *Câteva probleme teoretice în* Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990-2020 *a lui Mihai Iovănel*. Acest text este o analiză a câtorva concepte (*postuman*, *realism capitalist*, *transnațional*) utilizate în *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990-2020* a lui Mihai Iovănel, care arată cum autorul împrumută unii termeni din dezbaterile globale actuale și le folosește

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[1] **Daniel CLINCI** is an Assistant Professor at Ovidius University of Constanța and holds a PhD from the University of Bucharest, with a thesis on the historical avant-garde and the transition to experimental postmodernity. During his doctoral studies, he researched contemporary philosophy and media studies at the University of Amsterdam. He is also co-editor of *Post/h/um. Jurnal de studii postumaniste*, an independent journal dedicated to bringing new critical theories and concepts into Romanian through the translation of very recent academic articles by researchers worldwide. He has published *Avangardă și experiment. De la estetica negativă la cultura postmodernă*, București, 2014, and *First, Do No Harm. A Medical English textbook*, Constanța, 2020. Email: daniel_clinci@yahoo.com.

drept etichete, fără baza sau fundalul lor teoretic. Acest lucru reia o altă problemă a studiilor literare româneşti, cea a termenului de *postmodernism*, ca un alt exemplu de autocolonizare.

Cuvinte-cheie: *postmodernism, postumanism, auto-colonizare, literatură română, realism capitalist*

As expected, Mihai Iovănel's *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020* [Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990-2020] has received mixed reviews since its publication in early 2021. The less progressive critics, who published their reviews in *Observator cultural*, no. 1067, mostly argued against Iovănel's method of supposedly doing away with the Kantian principle of the *autotelic work of art* (or *aesthetic autonomy*) in favor of a more contextual approach, which the author dubs, to the shock and awe of many a conservative, as "post-Marxist" (Iovănel 13). The more progressive critics, who published their reviews in, among other places, *Revista Transilvania*, no. 7-8/2021, praised the book mostly for the fact that, due to its being sociologically informed, it reads like a historical narrative, like a story, and not strictly like a *literary history* in the traditional fashion of Romanian criticism, which establishes hierarchies and judges works from the all-seeing position of authority of the critic as a demigod of literature. In a sense, this is the context of Iovănel's contextual approach. Published during a silently blooming culture war between the venerable tradition of judging works based on the critic's *taste* and some newer ways of thinking, reading, and generally dealing with literature, the *History* managed to reinforce and uncover, in more ways than one, probably the most ignored process in Romanian culture: self-colonization.

Mircea Cărtărescu's *Romanian Postmodernism* [Postmodernismul românesc], first published in 1999, partially tells both the global and the local story of a concept and the debates that were sparked during the 1980s and 1990s by the introduction of this new label: *postmodernism*. Funnily enough, the local debate on postmodernism took place at a time when Romania was a modernized, industrial, authoritarian state, and when the literary field was largely controlled by the Party bureaucracy. Thus, the material conditions and the theories presented by Cărtărescu in the first part of his study could not be easily transposed into Romanian culture. Nonetheless, one may argue that Romanian literary studies embraced the label, but not the concept. In the absence of a *postmodern culture* and exhibiting a certain misunderstanding of the historical Avant-garde and its criticism of bourgeois culture (Cărtărescu 2010, 162), in the absence of a neoliberal capitalist condition, critics such as

Mircea Martin expressed some concern over the use of the label, mentioning a "postmodernism without postmodernity."[2] On the other hand, the general view was that postmodernism was an "evolution," a mark of renewal, progress, and value (Iovănel 2021, 154), an idea supported, in a somewhat ironic turn, by the currently conservative critics. The question, if I am allowed to still call it that, of *Romanian postmodernism* remains: why did the local literary critics and academics embrace this label, in spite of all the contradictions? There are, of course, many ways to navigate around this issue, and Iovănel tries to make sense of it, even mentioning self-colonization in a paragraph where he fails to recognize its meaning and where he ends up referring to it as "a reactionary concept."[3]

Alexander Kiossev came up with the concept of "self-colonization" as a means to explain the weird cultural status of "peripheral" or "lateral" areas in relation to the modern colonial European centers (Kiossev 1995). The colonial relation of power is relatively straightforward: European powers invaded, for instance, the Americas not only through hard, military might, but also through soft tactics, among which the most important was the spread of Christianity. This allowed for a certain resentment to develop within the indigenous populations who saw the colonists as invaders. Similarly, the Europeans doubted at times whether the indigenous peoples could pass as legally *human*, given that they did not seem to comply with the norms and rules of Western civilization (Anievas and Nişancioğlu 2015, 124-125). However, Bulgaria, Romania etc. remained at the periphery of *the West* and outside the colonial power dynamics. The nation-building processes of the nineteenth century in Eastern Europe were, as Kiossev argues, an example of self-colonization, that is, the import of methods and strategies like institutions, concepts, values, stories, and myths. At the same time, these young nations coming out of the nineteenth century also embraced their own inferiority in relation to European states (Kiossev 1998), willingly accepting their authority. One important fact that Kiossev discusses is legitimacy— "the recognition-granting gaze"—which can only be awarded from the European centers of (cultural) power. As modernity, humanism, capitalism, and *the West* were all created within the colonial relationship, the self-colonizing peoples were simply ignored; they ended up being neither exotic enough to be interesting for the West, nor quite as Western as the real thing (Todorova 2009, 13). Thus, self-colonization may explain the discourse and the promise of modernization and Europeanization that still wins elections in this part of the world, as well as the central tension in Iovănel's *History*. Rightfully denouncing that old form of self-colonization, which is nationalism with all its current

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[2] "postmodernism fără postmodernitate" (Cărtărescu 2010, 167; Iovănel 2021, 155).
[3] "conceptul este de fapt reacţionar (Iovănel 2021, 162).

conservative ideological appendages, Iovănel employs a new form of self-colonization, taking labels from some of the current debates within the Western Left without subjecting them to critical examination and without really managing to use them as concepts. Like his so-called postmodernist predecessors, he seems to consider that words like *posthumanism*, *capitalist realism*, and *transnational* have some sort of value to them as signs of progress but fails to build a necessary bridge between their meanings and the way he uses them in his *History*.

"Posthuman Dispersion"

In Chapter 16 of the *History*, Iovănel analyzes what he calls the "Posthuman Dispersion." The reader is left completely in the dark as to what this dispersion might be, for the author does not take the time to explain what he means by "posthuman." I can only infer that it has something to do with a "poetic wave" which has its own "tropes" and "stylemes,"[4] these being somehow linked to technology, the human-as-machine, the internet, popular music, and science fiction writing and cinema. For instance, Iovănel describes the "posthuman poet" as a "hipster," an urban bourgeois youngster, "natively integrated within digital culture," who nevertheless "ecologically explores and integrates various predigital cultural layers."[5]

Defining "posthumanism" and "the posthuman" is no easy endeavor, especially since there are a number of approaches that converge only partially and since not all the theorists associated with these concepts actually agree with them wholeheartedly. Posthumanism begins from multiple points, but one thing is clear: post-human-ism is a critique of Western human exceptionalism as invented during colonial modernity. We must also remember that "the posthuman" stems from Donna J. Haraway's "cyborg" figure, a feminist-socialist and materialist (and, if I may, also postmodern) "ironic myth," that is, it stems from a critique of classical liberal humanism (Haraway 2016, 5). Unfortunately, Haraway's use of the term "cyborg" created a dangerous misunderstanding between (critical) posthumanism and transhumanism, which is simply yet another iteration of that modern myth turned neoliberal capitalist that technology will indeed save the world and the human using high-end prosthetics. More recently, connections between posthumanism (not transhumanism) and literature have been drawn with mixed results. On the one hand, there are approaches that

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[4] "valul postuman pare să-şi fi atins faza finală a expansiunii. Stilemele poeziei postumane" (Iovănel 2021, 638).

[5] "poetul postuman poate fi reprezentat prin figura hipsterului – individ integrat nativ în cultura digital, care însă explorează şi integrează ecologic diverse straturi culturale predigitale" (Iovănel 2021, 618).

believe that "posthumanism," as a rejection of human exceptionalism, is a trans-historical category; in other words, that humanism contains posthumanism in itself and can be identified even in medieval literature (Steel 2017, 3). On the other hand, more respectful and coherent approaches understand that "posthuman(ist) literature" is a dubious theoretical issue, acknowledging that "posthuman literature might thus be a contradiction in terms" (Herbrechter 2017, 65). Herbrechter ends his study reminding the readers that the project of posthumanism – that of both criticizing the humanist tradition and bringing forth an understanding that "we," the "story-telling animal," were never alone – cannot be brushed aside since it is far from over (66). In the *Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman* (Clarke and Rossini eds. 2017), from which the above examples have been extracted, one may also find examples of literary themes pertaining to posthumanism, such as bodies, objects, technologies, and so on, all of which have a definite political underpinning.

Iovănel's chapter about "posthuman" poetry has, on the other hand, no political stake. Even though the book promised (or threatened) to be "post-Marxist," one will find the same old reading impressions and aesthetic judgment of a traditional critic. Why Iovănel decided to label some poets "posthumanists" remains a mystery if we only refer to the book. However, in keeping with the self-colonization process, it is obvious that Iovănel seems compelled to introduce the "posthuman" into his *History* as a means to gain some legitimacy or theoretical leverage by using a currently popular term, even if he hijacks all its deeper meanings, the debates it sparked (and still does), and its political foundations.

"Capitalist Realism"

Chapter 12 of the *History* deals with a number of fiction books from the 2000s and 2010s under the heading "Capitalist Realism." It too is an example of hijacking a political concept and turning it into a mere aesthetic label, while relegating the name of Mark Fisher to a brief footnote. Obviously, Iovănel is trying to mirror the Soviet tradition of Socialist Realism in post-Communist, capitalist times through pretentious wordplay (Iovănel 2021, 408). Mark Fisher's "capitalist realism" was defined as "the widespread sense that […] it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher 2009, 2). For Fisher, the power of capitalist realism, this feeling that there is no alternative, comes from the fact that capitalism somehow manages to integrate all previous history and all its opposites in the system of commodification. Practices, ideologies, concepts, Che Guevara, anything with a subversive potential, all are transformed into "merely aesthetic objects" (4) circulating within the vast networks of the capitalist market. Drawing from Marx, Debord, Deleuze

and Guattari, etc., Fisher seems to equate capitalist realism with a postmodernism haunted by an immobilizing lack of creativity (7), best highlighted by the case of Cobain and his band, Nirvana, where "even success meant failure" (9), even a protest against MTV would be televised and get high audience ratings *on* MTV. Capitalist realism is not merely the proverbial rat race, but the ideology which says that the rat race is the only possible reality.

In their "Introduction" to *Reading Capitalist Realism*, the editors (Alison Shonkwiler and Lee Claire La Berge) try to give Fisher's capitalist realism a literary twist by turning it into a critical "mode" of showing capitalist commodification at work (Shonkwiler and La Berge 2014, 15). However, their proposal of a realism from within the boundaries of capitalism has nothing to do with the novels listed by Iovănel in the chapter on "Capitalist Realism," nor with his discourse, which fails to be critical and remains simply descriptive.

"Transnational canon"

The first paragraph from Chapter 20, "Towards a Transnational Canon," develops what I have previously referred to as the central tension of the entire book, that is, the Europeanization and modernization of Romanian literature seen as value in itself, and implicitly opposed to a form of nationalism that says, on the one hand, that only local expressions are to be of interest for literary critics and, on the other hand, that Romanian literature loses its complexity in translation. Strictly speaking, the conundrum of Romanian culture in post-Socialism can be summed up in these two alternatives: the new self-colonization, that of a modernizing Euro-centric capitalism, or the old one, nationalist, patriarchal, Orthodox Christian, even rural. Both have their inherent issues. The first suffers from the absence of that "recognition-granting gaze" identified by Kiossev, exemplified in Iovănel's book by Cărtărescu's case (Iovănel 2021, 667), and, generally speaking, by a very particular relationship of power with (Western) Europe. The second is rendered almost superfluous by the Romanian exodus from the villages directly to richer European countries in search of jobs, mostly as cheap unskilled labor. In this chapter, Iovănel seems preoccupied with the way in which Romanian writers could gain some recognition in the West, proposing two possibilities: translation and implantation (Iovănel 2021, 668-675). However, he also seems reluctant to acknowledge that the question of recognition is part of the self-colonizing dynamics, using the phrase "integration of Romanian literature in the global market."[6] As the following paragraphs prove, "global market" does not really mean *global*, but *Western*,

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[6] "integrare a literaturii române pe piața globală" (Iovănel 2021, 668).

and the best (and dare I say, the only relevant) example is Cărtărescu, given under the "translation" tactic. The other tactic of gaining recognition from power, "implantation," suggests that Romanian writers may "infiltrate a central culture […] subtly modifying its parameters."[7] The only example given here is Andrei Codrescu. However, in spite of all these seemingly hopeful proposals, Iovănel lucidly understands the fact that the integration of Romanian literature in a "transnational canon" is very unlikely (679).

Thus, it is clear that Iovănel renounces his initial claim of "post-Marxism" throughout the book. This is most visible in the final section of the *History*, where he employs "transnational specificity" as a very elitist concept strictly centered around literature, devoid of the social and material conditions that make it possible. A transnational perspective, as Paul Jay says, means emphasizing "mobility, migration, travel, and exchange" (Jay 2021, 10), an encounter of cultures that end up "cross-pollinating." It is a descriptive tool (Jay 2021, 21), one that would fit a leftist analysis if that were the case. Iovănel uses it, on the other hand, with a normative flavor, as if Romanian literature *should* become part of a transnational perspective (but will probably not), a fact echoed by the relatively resigned tone of the *History*'s final paragraph. This is symptomatic both for Iovănel's position and for Romanian culture, in general. While a number of researchers have analyzed the fact that concepts such as *transnational literature/canonization* and *world literature* still maintain and propagate that venerable colonial Eurocentrism (Apter 2013; Thomsen 2008), Iovănel reproduces Lovinescu's "synchronism" and its inherent self-colonizing tone.

Finally, I would like to note that I do not use the term *self-colonization* with a moral undertone. Self-colonization is a historical process of nation-building in "lateral" or "peripheral" European spaces and thus a concept that puts into perspective a kind of power play that is outside the traditional colonial framework. In other words, self-colonization is not good or bad, it is the way Romanian culture and the Romanian nation have been constructed since the nineteenth century. Iovănel's *History*, however, could have avoided falling into this trap by engaging into a critical discussion on the terms, concepts, and labels that he uses, and by analyzing them from a leftist perspective. It is beyond doubt that this *History* is an important achievement within the field of Romanian literary studies and a welcomed shift in perspective. But it is also true that it sacrifices theoretical coherence in favor of rhetorical devices meant to give it a "synchronized" sheen. If it manages to spark some serious conceptual and theoretical debates around the terms it uses, then it will have been a breakthrough.

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[7] "infiltrarea unei culture centrale dinspre o cultură periferică într-un mod care modifică subtil parametrii primeia" (Iovănel 2021, 675).

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L'IDEOLOGIE EN PERSPECTIVE :
LA DEMARCHE HISTORIQUE DE MIHAI IOVĂNEL

ANCA SOCACI[1]

ABSTRACT. *Ideology in Perspective – Mihai Iovănel's Historical Approach.*
The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature by Mihai Iovănel brings back into question the present of Romanian literature both in terms of content and methods of analysis. In the present paper, Socaci dwells on the ambivalence between a materialist view and a critical one in the traditional sense—that is, one whose main function is to judge—with the aim of showing the limits of the socioanalysis that the author proposes. Considering the critic as a key player in the literary field and whose positioning is subject to complex schemes of perception, Socaci analyses the implications of the assumed but unquestioned subjectivity in the construction of the proposed overview, with an emphasis on the symbolic violence manifested by insufficient argumentation or by exclusion. Socaci's approach values concepts proposed by Pierre Bourdieu and other sociologists of literature, thus indicating that the contradictory dispositions of the critic work together to produce a methodologically eclectic work, as it proposes an analysis of external factors, but not of the subject placed in the role of the analyst. However, the scholastic discourse that does not question the perspective from which it is constructed fortunately contributes to the actualization of the literary present, by establishing a rapport of retroactive historicity (Jérôme David), in which novels (*Mara*) or literary postures

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[1] **Anca SOCACI** is a PhD student in the Doctoral School of Linguistic and Literary Studies of Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. Her doctoral dissertation in progress is entitled *Romanian Literature Translation Policies*. She graduated from the Faculty of Letters of the same university in 2018, with a BA in Romanian language and literature/Norwegian language and literature. In 2020, she completed a Master's in *History of Images – History of Ideas*. In 2019-2020, she was an Erasmus scholar at the Université de Rouen (France). Her interests include the figure of the Romanian writer in an international context, as well as the role of translation in the formation of the literary canon. Her latest publication in this area is "L'écrivain face au monde : la conduite de Mircea Cărtărescu dans les entretiens pour un public anglophone", in *Dacoromania Litteraria*, no. 8/ 2021. She has also published studies in *Transylvania* and *Studia UBB Philologia*. Email: anca.socaci@ubbcluj.ro.

(Dobrogeanu-Gherea, Ibrăileanu) are legitimized by their role as precursors of some critical directions and artistic movements present in Iovănel's contemporaneity. Thus, the proposed overview is in the service of a structural, sociologically aware analysis, and can therefore be considered a founding block in the necessary accumulations towards a national *grand récit*, similar to the one proposed by Pierre Bourdieu in *Les Règles de l'art*.

Keywords: *literary history, sociology, literary postures, symbolic violence, subjectivity*

REZUMAT. *Ideologia în perspectivă – demersul istoric al lui Mihai Iovănel.* Apariția *Istoriei* scrise de Mihai Iovănel repune în discuție prezentul literaturii române atât în ce privește conținutul, cât și metodele de analiză. În lucrarea de față, mă opresc asupra ambivalenței dintre o privire materialistă și una critică în sens tradițional, adică a cărei funcție principală este de a judeca, cu scopul de a arăta limitele socioanalizei pe care autorul o propune. Considerând criticul drept un actant a cărui poziționare este supusă unor scheme complexe de percepție, analizez implicațiile subiectivității asumate, dar neinterogate în construcția panoramei propuse, cu accent pe violența simbolică manifestată prin argumentarea insuficientă sau prin excludere. Abordarea mea valorizează concepte propuse de Pierre Bourdieu și de alți sociologi ai literaturii, indicând astfel faptul că dispozițiile contradictorii ale criticului conlucrează la producerea unei opere eclectice din punct de vedere metodologic, căci propune o analiză a factorilor exteriori, dar nu și a subiectului plasat în rolul analistului. Cu toate acestea, discursul scolastic care nu pune în discuție perspectiva din care este construit contribuie în mod fericit la reactualizarea prezentului, prin instituirea unui raport de istoricitate retroactivă, în care opere (*Mara*) sau posturi literare (Dobrogeanu-Gherea, Ibrăileanu) sunt consacrate prin faptul că funcționează drept precursori ai unor direcții și mișcări prezente în contemporaneitatea criticului. Astfel, panorama propusă se pune în serviciul unei analize structurale, sociologizante (în sensul Magdei Răduță), putând fi deci considerată o piesă în acumulările necesare către un *grand récit* național, de tipul celui propus de Pierre Bourdieu în *Regulile artei*.

Cuvinte-cheie: *istorie literară, sociologie, poziții literare, violența simbolică, subiectivitate*

Dans le champ littéraire roumain, une approche historique des ouvrages parus après 1989 est justifiée par une série de facteurs qui donnent l'impression d'un décalage de plus en plus marquant en ce qui concerne non seulement les contenus, mais aussi les methodologies de travail qui peuvent paraître inactuelles

sur une échelle transnationale. Le canon littéraire s'arrête à un seul auteur vivant, à savoir Mircea Cărtărescu, qui représente pourtant la generation des années '80 dans les livres d'apprentissage pour les lycéens, alors que des phénomènes actuels comme la circulation de la littérature roumaine dans le monde restent marginales dans les discours critiques. C'est pourquoi un travail historique qui repense et rediscute la contemporanéité est réclamé afin de situer la littérature roumaine et de permettre sa mise en examen contextuelle et relationnelle à la fois. Par ailleurs, c'est le rôle que devrait performer l'*Histoire de la littérature roumaine contemporaine. 1990-2020* [*Istoria literaturii române contemporane. 1990-2020*] de Mihai Iovănel, en assumant un point de vue très précis en ce qui concerne la méthodologie du travail : celui de la critique idéologique d'inspiration marxiste, nourrie par les théroies d'Althusser.

Mettant en valeur ce choix méthodologique, Iovănel tâche de renouer des fils de l'histoire littéraire et de s'interroger sur le rôle des institutions dans le fonctionnement de la littérature. Ainsi, il vise à reconstruire non seulement une liste, ou bien une hiérarchie des auteurs, mais aussi – et principalement, si l'on considère la nouveauté de ce type de travail historique – les conditions de production et de distribution des œuvres. Cependant, ces deux actions qui participent à la construction de l'histoire me semblent fondées sur des attitudes divergentes de l'auteur, en produisant ainsi un ouvrage éclectique. Le travail historique qui caractérise ce type de rapport à la literature en tant qu'évènement artistique et social est bien visible dans la description et l'analyse des institutions du champ littéraire et favorise un aperçu nouveau de la temporalité littéraire. Néanmoins, cette approche critique qui se réclame de la tradition marxiste ne remet pas totalement en cause le point de vue de l'auteur qui juge parfois d'une manière assez authoritaire, en se rapprochant plutôt de la domination symbolique que de l'analyse materialiste que Iovanel nous propose au départ.

Afin de mieux illustrer ce point, je vais m'appuyer sur la distinction entre l'idéologie et la doxa que Gisèle Sapiro présente à partir des théories de Pierre Bourdieu. Pour la sociologue, l'idéologie est liée à une approche marxiste et « présuppose en effet un système de valeurs cohérent et explicite, que les dominés intériorisent sous la forme d'une "fausse conscience" » (Sapiro 2007). La cohérence de ce système est mise en question par Bourdieu qui, en revanche, parle plutôt de « schèmes de perception, d'action et d'évaluation du monde » (Sapiro) qui forment l'habitus de tous les participants au monde social. C'est pourquoi la sociologue préfère utiliser le terme d'idéologie seulement en relation avec les *producteurs d'idéologie*, alors que le système de valeurs ou la vision du monde – c'est-à-dire la doxa – correspondent aux « œuvres qui ne relèvent pas directement du champ de production idéologique, mais d'une activité spécifique autonomisée » (Sapiro).

En suivant cette distinction, je considérerai l'*Histoire de la littérature roumaine contemporaine* comme un produit dans un champ autonome et dont la fonction primaire n'est pas idéologique. Ensuite, je me pencherai sur la vision du monde du critique (correspondant à l'habitus) et de réconsiderer la définition que Iovanel donne à l'idéologie. A la différence de cette dernière, l'habitus qui s'inscrit dans les schèmes de perception n'est pas tenu au standard de cohérence et de rationalité : « contrairement aux présupposés de la théorie de l'acteur rationnel, [les croyances] orientent les conduites et les jugements sans être nécessairement explicites, sous la forme d'un sens pratique » (Sapiro 2007). Ainsi, considérant que le critique agit également en tant qu'acteur *irrationel*, il serait possible de mieux contextualiser la nouveauté et les limites de ce travail.

Dans la lignée des revendications de Mihai Iovănel, l'une des plus importantes pour la construction de l'ouvrage, ainsi que pour l'éthos discursif, est celle *d'idéologie en tant que critique*, suivant les théories de Marx et d'Engels. L'auteur de l'*Histoire…* se présente dans la note introductive en tant qu'héritier d'un rapport à l'idéologie qui inspire – et incarne – la critique orientée vers le présent. Le modèle de Lovinescu lui sert de point d'appui, puisque ce parrain symbolique – ainsi que beaucoup d'autres, dont Iovănel se revendique plus ou moins par la suite (des critiques littéraires comme Ibrăileanu, Iorga, Maiorescu) – entretient un rapport polémique avec sa *contemporanéité* grâce à son engagement politique. Autrement dit, en « faisant de l'idéologie », c'est-à-dire en performant dans son discours sur la littérature une vision du monde, il (re)met en question d'autres points de vue et dévoile inconsciemment le sien. Pour cette raison, le choix de Lovinescu qui commence son *Histoire de la littérature contemporaine* avec un chapitre sur les idéologies est d'une très grande importance – en effet « discuter les idéologies est un geste fondateur pour Lovinescu en tant qu'historien de la civilisation en général et de la littérature roumaine contemporaine en particulier »[2] (Iovănel 2021, 10).

Ainsi, Iovănel réplique le geste de son parrain, mais il y a une différence que Ştefan Baghiu souligne : tandis que Lovinescu cache ses intentions, son successeur les rend visibles. Même si la vision du monde du critique – c'est-à-dire la façon dont il *fait de l'idéologie* – est toujours visible dans la production de la pensée de Lovinescu, à savoir dans la manière dans laquelle elle considère d'autres points de vue, cela ne suffit pas. Par rapport à l'affirmation de Iovănel, Baghiu dénonce la dénégation de Lovinescu : « Pendant que Lovinescu *prétend* qu'il travaille sous les auspices de l'autonomie de l'esthétique et de l'impressionnisme, Iovănel *déclare* qu'il travaille dans une grille idéologique »

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[2] Toutes les traductions du roumain m'appartiennent. « discuţia despre ideologii e fondatoare pentru Lovinescu, ca istoric în genere (al civilizaţiei) şi al literaturii române contemporane, în particular » (Iovănel 2021, 10).

(Baghiu 2021, 82)[3]. Dans ce contexte, Iovănel se distingue par le fait d'avoir rendu visible un processus qui se situe à l'origine de tout travail historique. En reprenant le propos de Baghiu, « Ce que Iovănel montre [...] est que chaque forme de se pencher sur la culture ou de faire de l'histoire est une forme de faire de l'idéologie. Et que cette idée, le fait que l'idéologique serait indésirable dans la poursuite de la vie culturelle, traduit une crainte de l'histoire à l'égard de la théorie critique, déstabilisante et incommode par excellence » (82)[4].

Dans la logique de cet argument, on pourrait pourtant se demander si *prétendre* n'est que *déclarer* sans (s')être mis en cause. La distance historique entre le cas de Lovinescu et celui de Iovănel rend d'autant plus probable la contestation du premier, alors que cela n'implique pas l'authenticité des propos ou du positionnement du dernier. Serait-il possible de rendre visible « l'idéologie de l'idéologie », où bien la fonction scolastique de l'idéologie, c'est-à-dire la contribution de l'acte de *déclarer* son adhésion méthodique à une autre forme de dénégation ? A mon avis, oui, mais cela nous oblige à reconsidérer le terme central dans ce débat.

D'ailleurs, cette démarche a déjà été menée par des sociologues comme Pierre Bourdieu, mais Iovănel n'insiste pas sur cet aspect, bien qu'il fasse référence à ses idées dans une sous-partie dédiée à la définition marxiste de l'idéologie. Au départ, le critique littéraire note que « formulée grossièrement, l'idée d'une classe qui conspire à reproduire sa domination sous les classes soumises ne peut échapper à un certain aspect conspirationniste » (Iovănel 2021, 67)[5]. C'est pourquoi, selon Iovănel, Pierre Bourdieu « tient à se distinguer de ses contemporaines marxistes » (67-68)[6] en remplaçant l'idéologie, qu'il considère comme « usée » (68)[7], par la doxa. Cette présentation assez sommaire semble inférer que le changement de terme n'est pas fondé sur une vision du monde différente – en revanche, il s'agirait plutôt d'un *rebranding* dont le sociologue français se sert pour se débarrasser de la mauvaise presse de l'idéologie marxiste. Si l'on reprend les propos auxquels la note en bas de page fait référence, on voit pourtant que cette description ne correspond pas entièrement à la réalité de l'entretien entre Terry Eagleton et Pierre Bourdieu que l'auteur cite. Or, j'estime

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[3] « În timp ce Lovinescu *pretinde* că lucrează sub auspiciile autonomiei esteticului și impresionismului, Iovănel *declară* că lucrează în grilă ideologică » (Baghiu 2021, 82).

[4] « Ce arată Iovănel [...] este că orice aplecare asupra culturii, orice formă de *a face istorie* este o formă de a face *ideologie*. Și că această idee, că ideologicul ar fi indezirabil în desfășurarea vieții culturale, vine ca o temere față de teoria critică, prin excelență destabilizatoare și incomodă » (Baghiu 2021, 82).

[5] « Formulată brut, ideea unor clase sus-pune care conspiră să-și reproducă dominația asupra claselor dominate nu poate evita un anumit aspect conspiraționist » (Iovănel 2021, 67).

[6] « ținea să se distingă de contemporanii săi marxiști » (Iovănel 2021, 67-68).

[7] « uzat » (Iovănel 2021, 68).

que le décalage entre les deux positions – celle du sociologue français et celle du critique roumain – peut être symptomatique pour les limitations de la critique idéologique.

Dans l'entretien avec Eagleton, Bourdieu commence son intervention par une expérience personnelle : celle de la violence symbolique qu'incarne pour lui le terme d'*idéologie*, notamment lié à la figure d'Althusser et de ses héritiers qui l'utilisent souvent. Pour le sociologue, cette notion n'est plus opérationnelle, mais elle participe à établir la différence entre ceux qui ont la (vraie) connaissance – celle qui correspond à la raison et à la démarche scientifique – et ceux qui ne l'ont pas. Les critères sont également assez flous : « They used it as a sort of religious notion by which you must climb by degrees to the truth, never being sure to have achieved the true Marxist theory » (Bourdieu ; Eagleton 1994, 267). Ainsi, le *rebranding* dont Iovănel parle serait en fait pour Boudieu une nécessité de ramener la discussion à des sujets qui sont partagés et sur lesquels personne ne réclame avoir l'autorite absolue à défaut (ou bien à l'exclusion) des autres. A l'opposition de ce système qui privilégie la conscience et la raison, Bourdieu pense que « the social world doesn't work in terms of consciousness ; it works in terms of practices, mechanisms and so forth. By using doxa we accept many things without knowing them, and that is what I call ideology » (268). En effet, il ne s'agit pas d'un remplacement de l'idéologie par la doxa, mais d'un changement de perspective qui inclut dans la réflexion l'inconscient, la dénégation en tant que processus qui participe à l'idéologie sans pour autant être questionné ou souligné dans les démarches de l'héritage marxiste traditionnel.

Dans l'ouvrage de Iovănel, on pourrait naïvement lier ce refus de l'inconscient – qui définit l'idéologie marxiste selon Bourdieu – à la manière dont Iovănel discute les études de littérature comparée de Cluj, notamment dans le portrait qu'il dresse de l'auteur Corin Braga. D'ailleurs, la violence du langage nous permettrait dans un premier temps ce type d'hypothèse : en présentant les travaux de Braga, Iovănel y voit une alliance (en proportions variables) entre la mythocritique de Gilbert Durand, la lecture psychanalytique et la recherche sur « les géographies magiques de type Paradis terrestre » (Iovănel 2021, 228)[8]. Selon le critique, le concept d'anarchétype que propose Braga est « appliquable sur un domaine extrémement grand, trop grand » et « apparaît comme une hypothèse auxiliaire de l'explication, rappelée afin d'actionner comme un *perpetuum mobile* à chaque instance où apparaît une crise de sens, c'est à dire pratiquement partout où il y a un produit artistique »

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[8] « geografiilor magice de tipul Paradisului Terestru » (Iovănel 2021, 228).

(229)[9]. Ainsi, d'après Iovănel, Braga se sert d'« un appareil théorique qui, en pratique, ne compte pour rien ou pour pas grand-chose (dans le sillage d'*anything goes*) » (229)[10].

La violence symbolique de ces propos est d'autant plus marquante qu'elle n'est pas accompagnée d'une argumentation convaincante. La méthode est éclectique et dépassée, l'auteur de l'histoire nous le dit, mais il parcourt plusieurs aspects très rapidement, presque en *catch-phrases* dont un aperçu a été présenté auparavant, et ne donne aucune référence qui pourrait éventuellement mieux illustrer son diagnostic, à part une chronique d'Andrei Terian qui ne se penche que sur un des livres de Corin Braga. Les nuances qu'apporte Terian ne semblent pas pour autant avoir de retentissement dans le portrait dressé par Iovănel[11]. Le point de vue de ce dernier n'est pas considéré en tant que tel par l'auteur et n'est pas remis en cause à travers des références ou des explications plus élaborées. En revanche, le critique *juge* l'adéquation de l'adhésion méthodologique de Corin Braga et de sa démarche académique en général. Par ailleurs, c'est ce que note Adrian Mureşan dans sa chronique : pour lui, Iovănel se nourrit de la rhétorique de l'outrage afin de trancher d'une manière catégorique entre les auteurs – personnages de son histoire –, en leur rattachant des étiquettes fatidiques, sans avoir pour autant exploré les nuances, dans ce cas.

Il est évident que le débat se fonde également sur une différence entre des visions divergentes du monde. Néanmoins, dans la chronique de Mureşan il est plus facile à suivre le lien qu'il établit entre sa formation (qui contribue à son habitus) et la critique qu'il fait du travail de Iovănel. Ainsi, lorsque Mureşan souligne le traitement inéquitable de Corin Braga, il le fait en tant que « produit de l'école de critique et histoire littéraire de Cluj » (Mureşan 2021)[12]. Or, cet aspect ne sert pas à faire des distinctions qualitatives, mais à rendre visible le point (de vue) où il se situe. Bien sûr, je doute que les propos sur Braga puissent apparaître moins violents à une autre personne, mais le chroniquer est conscient du fait que sa formation peut légèrement orienter le regard et hiérarchiser les

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[9] « aplicabil asupra unui spectru extrem de larg, prea larg » ; « el apare ca o ipoteză explicativă auxiliară chemată să funcţioneze ca un perpetuum mobile oriunde apare o criză de sens, adică practic oriunde se află un produs artistic » (Iovănel 2021, 229).

[10] « un construct teoretic care în practică nu înseamnă nimic sau înseamnă prea mult (după modelul *anything goes*) » (Iovănel 2021, 229).

[11] D'ailleurs, au carrefour de ces trois extraits, la critique de Adrian Mureşan peut être lue comme un reproche au fait que Iovănel méconnait ou présente mal l'article qu'il cite. Mureşan affirme que Iovănel refuse de reconnaître la présence des textes de Braga à l'étranger, et notamment le fait qu'il produit de la « critique d'exportation » (en utilisant ces termes) – concept avancé par Terian. Or, ce dernier souligne en effet la traduction et le retentissement français des ouvrages de Braga au début de l'article que Iovănel cite dans son histoire.

[12] « produs al şcolii clujene de critică şi istorie literară » (Mureşan 2021).

intérêts, en rendant ce portrait d'un critique emblématique de l'école de Cluj plus *visible* (voir *outrageux*) que celui d'un autre.

Mihai Iovănel n'est pas moins conscient de sa propre subjectivité : dans la note introductive, il présente ses limitations objectives qui prouvent la reconnaissance – même intuitive – du rôle joué par l'habitus dans l'acheminement de cette histoire. En fait, cette dernière se dresse à partir de rencontres et son écriture commence « au moment où j'ai commencé à lire » (Iovănel 2021, 13)[13], le critique affirme. Puis il poursuit sur le « caractère autobiographique » de l'ouvrage, dû à la lecture parfois non-organisée, mais qui trouve finalement une place dans la construction de la réflexion et du *je* discursif en particulier. Ainsi, le livre « reproduit, outre le passage obligatoire à travers tel ou tel issue ou auteur, la matérialité des contingences purement personnelles » (13)[14].

L'importance des *contingences* est mise en avant à travers la référence à Althusser, dont la méthode se fonde sur l'évènement aléatoire et son articulation dans un système qui retrouve de cohérence *a posteriori*. Ce type de rapport que la posture critique se donne pour but de performer dans cet ouvrage est présentée d'une manière plus intelligible à travers des rencontres fortunées, en reprenant l'exemple du voyageur qui prend un train en mouvement[15]. Le critique, tout comme ce voyageur, ou bien plutôt comme les protagonistes des westerns, ne sait pas d'où vient et où va le train – dans ce cas, le train de la littérature roumaine – et il participe (ou non) aux discussions avec les autres passagers, en ramassant un nombre infini d'informations diverses. Ce qu'il enregistre et qui va lui servir de point d'appui pour une reconstitution historique, ce sont donc des séquences aléatoires qui produisent un ensemble possible parmi l'infinité des possibilités.

L'acceptation des limitations subjectives serait donc perceptible dans le choix méthodique du critique. Or, de ce point de vue, j'estime qu'il est pertinent d'affirmer que Iovănel et Mureşan partagent une opinion sur la manière dont la formation contribue (même involontairement, inconsciemment) à la réflexion. Dans l'*Histoire…* cependant, la *déclaration* reste parfois purement déclarative et ne s'engage pas dans le service d'une prise en considération permanente de soi et de son propre point de vue. Or, le sous-chapitre dédié à la critique littéraire – d'ou l'on a extrait la partie sur Corin Braga – démontre un rapport extérieur aux objets de l'analyse, aux passagers du train que Iovănel a pris au départ. Ainsi, le produit ressemble plutôt à un panorama, qui intègre des médaillons séparés, mais tenus ensemble uniquement par l'appartenance générationnelle

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[13] « din momentul în care am început să citesc » (Iovănel 2021, 13).

[14] « reproduce, dincolo de turul obligatoriu prin problema *X* sau autorul *Y*, materialitatea unor contingenţe pur personale » (Iovănel 2021, 13).

[15] C'est d'ailleurs l'exemple que Althusser lui-même donne dans le livre que Iovănel cite.

ou par l'adhésion à une méthode. D'ailleurs, l'emploi de courts ou longs portraits caractérise également le traitement général appliqué aux auteurs de littérature par la suite.

Notamment, dans l'organisation de l'ouvrage, les fragments dédiés à tous les auteurs – y compris les critiques – occasionnent parfois une violence symbolique incarnée par un discours insuffisamment argumenté, comme dans le cas de Corin Braga. D'autres chroniqueurs insistent pourtant sur d'autres exemples d'*injustices* : Şerban Axinte insiste sur le portrait inéquitable de Gheorghe Crăciun en tant que critique et auteur de l'*Iceberg de la poésie moderne*. Je ne reprendrai pas les arguments de chaque partie de ce débat, mais il me semble important de noter qu'Axinte fait référence – quoique moins explicitement – à une violence du langage (« le critique littéraire abolit », « l'auteur essaie de prouver que les repères littéraires roumains majeurs viennent de l'idéologie marxiste ») et au manque d'argumentation et de nuance qui se traduit dans le discours du chroniqueur par le fait que « les choses ne sont pas si simples » (Axinte 2021)[16].

L'absence des arguments est redoublée par une autre, plus notable, à savoir celle des auteurs ou bien des textes jugés comme incontournables par les critiques de l'*Histoire*… En tenant compte du premier dossier de chroniques qui avait suivi la parution du livre – à savoir le dossier d'*Observator cultural* –, on voit que tous les chroniqueurs font des listes de portraits qui sont absents dans l'*Histoire* ou mal dressés par Iovănel (Cernat 2021). Il est également possible de voir une sorte de consensus sur quelques auteurs qui ont été *sacrifiés* lors de l'écriture de cet ouvrage[17], ainsi que sur l'idée que le critique valorise au premier rang ses pairs (contemporains ou symboliques). Cette dernière peut être une évidence, mais elle demande à être explicitée – c'est ce qu'affirme Bogdan Creţu : « Ce que je dis serait peut-être prévisible, mais je ne peux ne pas voir que les grands objectifs [de Iovănel] sont les auteurs qui partagent ses opinions idéologiques » (Creţu 2021)[18]. D'ailleurs, le critique lui-même accepte son positionnement et dans ses entretiens il répond parfois ponctuellement sur quelques auteurs non-inclus dans l'histoire, mais il n'adresse jamais l'absence du point de vue de la violence symbolique.

Certains chroniqueurs[19] saluent l'ambivalence performée entre un œil nouveau – matérialiste – et un autre, plus traditionnel – qui *valorise* et *critique*

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[16] « istoricul literar desfiinţează »; « autorul încearcă să demonstreze că reperele literare majore româneşti vin din ideologia marxistă »; « Lucrurile nu sînt chiar atît de simple » (Axinte 2021).

[17] Şerban Axinte regrette l'absence de O. Nimigean, soulignée également par Paul Cernat et Bogdan Creţu. Ces deux ajoutent à ce manque celui d'Octavian Soviany.

[18] « O fi previzibil ce zic, dar nu pot să nu văd că *mizele sale mari sînt autorii care îi împărtăşesc opţiunile ideologice* » (Creţu 2021).

[19] *Voir* les propos de Bogdan Creţu : « Ce qui est intéressant est que dans la deuxième partie du livre, quand il met en analyse des auteurs et des œuvres, Iovănel renonce en grande mesure à ce langage

au sens étymologique, c'est-à-dire sépare, distingue entre ce qu'il faut garder et ce que l'on ne garde pas. Or, à mon avis, le dernier – assumé en tant que tel et non pas mis en examen – rend impossible la polyphonie des voix et les interactions entre le *je* qui se (re)présente en critique/ historien et les objets de sa recherche qui sont, en fait, ses pairs, ses prédécesseurs et ses successeurs. Ainsi, l'auteur partage avec les personnages l'appartenance au monde social et, plus précisément encore, au champ littéraire où chacun se définit par sa position et sa trajectoire dans ce système construit à partir de la lutte symbolique inhérente. Il est donc évident qu'en s'interrogeant sur le fonctionnement de ce champ, l'auteur devrait en faire partie. Selon Bourdieu, « lorsque je soumettais à l'examen, sans ménagements, le monde dont je faisais partie, je ne pouvais pas ne pas savoir que je tomberais nécessairement sous le coup de mes propres analyses, et que je livrais des instruments susceptibles d'être retournés contre moi » (Bourdieu 2003, 13). Cependant, il n'y a pas beaucoup de réflexivité qui ne soit pas déclarative dans l'ouvrage de Iovănel.

Par conséquent, on pourrait douter de la vérité du travail historique qui, d'après Bourdieu, consiste à historiciser non seulement l'objet, mais aussi son propre point de vue, puisqu'il est aussi déterminé par l'insertion du critique dans le monde social. En fait, pour le sujet critique, « cet objet pour qui il y a des objets » (Bourdieu 2003, 187), *déclarer*, tout comme *prétendre*, n'est situé à l'origine d'un changement que si la *déclaration* devient un point de référence et de mise en question de la réflexion par la suite. D'ailleurs, dans des entretiens qui suivent à la parution de l'ouvrage, Iovănel note, par exemple, que la pensée de Teodora Dumitru a été fondamentale pour lui, parce qu'ils ont partagé des discussions formatives pour les deux[20]. De la même manière, on pourrait

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(de la critique idéologique) qu'il réactualise d'une manière non-systématique. Il redevient alors un critique qui observe les nuances – certaines esthétiques – et donne des verdicts corrects le plus souvent » / « Ceea ce e interesant e că, în partea a doua a cărții, cînd analizează autori și opere, Iovănel renunță în mare măsură la acest limbaj, pe care îl reactualizează nesistematic. Redevine un critic atent la nuanțe, unele estetice, dă verdicte cel mai adesea corecte » (Crețu 2021) ou de Paul Cernat : « Dans les chapitres sur "l'évolution de la fiction" et "l'évolution de la poésie", Iovănel revient à l'approche "classique" des auteurs et des textes illustratifs, à l'instar de Lovinescu et de Călinescu » / « În capitolele despre "evoluția ficțiunii" și "evoluția poeziei", Iovănel se întoarce la abordarea "clasică", lovinescian-călinesciană, pe autori și texte ilustrative » (Cernat 2021).

[20] *Voir* notamment l'entretien publié sur *Scena9* : https://www.scena9.ro/article/istoria-literaturii-contemporane-mihai-Iovănel. Consulté le 5 mars 2022. Dans cet entretien, Iovănel parle de ses choix méthodologiques, y compris celui d'écrire sur « des proches qui travaillent dans le même domaine » / « persoane apropiate care activează în același domeniu ». Ce geste rend compte, selon l'auteur, d'un travail *honnête* (« Je l'ai fait parce qu'il s'agit des ouvrages qui ont profondément influencé ma pensée » / « Am făcut-o fiindcă e vorba de lucrări care mi-au influențat profund modul de a gândi », « les exclure du tableau général serait falsifier ce tableau et le processus à travers lequel j'ai construit ce livre » / « A le exclude din tabloul general ar fi echivalat cu o falsificare a acestuia și

imaginer qu'à la formation du critique contribuent également d'autres relations intellectuelles dans le champ car le sujet est produit *avec et contre le champ auquel il appartient*[21]. Ces aspects d'une importance capitale pour la mise en perspective de la perspective elle-même restent non seulement in-adressés, mais aussi in-adressables dans la construction de l'ouvrage tel qu'il se présente dans cette édition, c'est-à-dire en alternant entre un parcours historique qui surprend la dynamique d'un train en mouvement et une séparation critique entre personnages et rencontres.

De plus, en opérant à l'intérieur de cette ambivalence, la violence des propos à l'égard de Corin Braga, par exemple, ne peut pas être abordée sans s'attaquer aux fondements méthodologiques de Iovănel. Ainsi, on pourrait rattacher cette violence à une historicisation partielle dont on se méfierait tout comme Adrian Mureşan, ou bien comme Baghiu le fait à propos de Lovinescu : l'auteur *déclare* l'adhésion à une vision du monde, mais ne s'interroge pas sur cela, même s'il entreprend un travail qui vise en effet la mise en lumière des visions du monde différentes. On pourrait, par la suite, blâmer soit la méthode, en la traitant de réductive, soit le critique, en soulignant sa mauvaise foi. En tout cas, la manière dont Iovănel agit semble plus proche de celle des *dominants* que Bourdieu critique dans son intervention. Si l'on revient sur l'entretien avec Terry Eagleton que nous avons présenté auparavant et que Iovănel cite dans son ouvrage, il est évident que Bourdieu se situe sur une position dominée, illégitime du point de vue de la raison scientifique valorisée parmi les marxistes. Ainsi, la violence symbolique empêche la visibilité de l'autre et le partage d'un espace de discussion. La reproduction du discours scolastique – quoique due à des inconvénients inhérents à une vision idéologique du monde ou dérivés d'une mise en perspective partielle du point de vue – peut avoir le même effet.

Néanmoins, il est nécessaire de souligner que l'auteur de l'*Histoire*… lui-même propose dans la note introductive une structure qui serait plus adapté à la performance véritable d'une critique historique. Cette démarche aurait pour but de rendre visible le critique en tant que personnage, *voyageur* dans ce train

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a procesului prin care mi-am produs cartea ») qui relève plutôt d'une décision éthique. En plus, le langage nous indique que l'auteur *fait* un choix dont il est conscient (« j'ai pris la décision » / « am luat decizia ») et qu'il contrôle rationnellement (« de présenter d'une manière neutre et non-valorisante » / « să prezint (neutru şi nevalorizant) »). Dans cette situation, l'accent est donc mis non pas sur l'expérience de l'auteur, sur sa formation en tant que sujet critique, mais sur son rôle et son devoir de critique.

[21] Cette phrase que Bourdieu utilise souvent particularise les types d'informations qui serviraient à ce travail. Demander une plus grande visibilité aux liens entre l'auteur et les personnages de son histoire ne signifie pas transformer l'histoire littéraire en séquences de scandales ou en bavardage, mais trouver la forme appropriée pour rendre visible la relation entre les êtres et les choses, ainsi que leur positionnement dans le champ qui détermine ces relations.

de la littérature contemporaine, en employant la forme du roman. Avant même de déclarer ses adhésions méthodologiques, Iovănel avoue qu'au départ son projet a été conçu comme « une histoire purement systémique de la littérature contemporaine, une sorte de roman d'usine où les mines et les voix individuelles apparaissent comme des détails d'une chorégraphie générale configurée par le mouvement et le bruit des engrenages » (Iovănel 2021, 12)[22]. Pas de *déclaration* des adhésions théoriques, méthodologiques et personnelles, mais un plus de *performance[23]* d'une position spécifique dans le monde social auquel le sujet appartient sans le vouloir et notamment dans le champ littéraire où il (ré)agit. Pourtant, il a renoncé à cette structure « à cause d'une sorte de compromis didactique » (12)[24] que je ne pourrais que regretter.

Derrière cette analyse ne se cache pas pour autant un réquisitoire, mais le contraire – en remplaçant non seulement *l'idéologie* par *la doxa*, mais aussi une vision du monde par une autre, les mérites de ce travail m'apparaissent plus clairement, notamment en ce qui concerne la relation avec le temps et la temporalité. Dès le début, le choix d'une histoire littéraire à auteur unique pourrait nous paraître surprenante, puisque Iovănel lui-même insiste sur le fait qu'un travail individuel – qui n'arrive donc à surprendre qu'un seul point de vue – est dépassé aujourd'hui (Iovănel 2021, 178-179). De nos jours, il semble logique que la pluralisation des perspectives entraîne ce changement nécessaire non seulement dans l'édition, mais aussi dans la structure interne des ouvrages.

Ce paradoxe est sans doute central dans la démarche de Iovănel et c'est pourquoi, par la suite, je ne tâcherai pas de suivre la contradiction qui pourrait s'y retrouver, en la considérant également un produit des dispositions divergentes. En revanche, j'estime plus pertinent de me pencher sur la manière dont l'auteur se positionne au carrefour du passé et de l'avenir car il est évident que ce positionnement n'est pas aléatoire et sans retentissement dans la critique à venir. Ainsi, je suivrai le sens que Iovănel donne à la *contemporanéité*, en tenant compte de la définition que Pierre Bourdieu propose. Dans *Méditations pascaliennes*, le sociologue relie le *présent* à l'intérêt[25], en lui opposant donc ce qui est indifférent ou voir absent (donc, *passé*). Par conséquent, le présent « ne se réduit pas à un instant ponctuel [...] : il englobe les anticipations et les rétrospections pratiques

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[22] « o istorie strict sistemică a literaturii contemporane, un fel de roman de uzină în care chipurile şi vocile individuale apar ca simple detalii în coregrafia generală configurată de mişcarea şi vuietul angrenajelor » (Iovănel 2021, 12).

[23] En employant ce terme, je renvoie aux recherches sur la posture d'auteur menées par Alain Viala ou Jérôme Meizoz. Tout comme l'auteur d'un texte littéraire, celui qui produit un texte critique se soumet également aux règles du jeu du champ littéraire et est mené, par conséquent, à performer un rôle stratégique à l'intérieur de ce champ.

[24] « Printr-un soi de comprimis didactic » (Iovănel 2021, 12).

[25] « Le présent est l'ensemble de ce à quoi on est présent, c'est-à-dire intéressé » (Bourdieu 2003, 304).

qui sont inscrites comme potentialités ou traces objectives dans le donné immédiat » (Bourdieu 2003, 304). Similairement, le travail critique de Iovănel renoue avec un passé qui devient présent et nécessaire afin de distinguer ce qui attire l'attention de ce qui ne le fait pas, selon l'auteur.

Dans un premier temps, il convient de noter que, en rattachant son travail à celui de E. Lovinescu, Iovănel déclare son adhésion critique à une tradition. En plus, avant même d'insister sur le rapport à Lovinescu, il commence par un tour des histoires littéraires qui lui précèdent – même celles qui ne couvrent pas la période à laquelle Iovănel réfère dans son ouvrage. Le point de départ est l'interrogation sur le mot *contemporain* et son référent – or, dans ce sens, il semble que l'histoire de Iovănel est plus proche de celles d'avant 1945 (E. Lovinescu, G. Călinescu) que de celles d'après, qui ne se penchent pas – dans leur majorité – sur le présent de la littérature (Iovănel 2021, 10). Ainsi, la démarche de Iovănel se donne pour but de renouer avec une tradition historique et de revenir à une autre façon de *faire de l'histoire*, une qui implique une performance idéologique déclarée.

Cependant, cette adhésion inclut également le désir de se distinguer, notamment par rapport aux critiques littéraires des générations précédentes, dont le travail est rendu sous la forme de chroniques ramassées, comme Marian Popa, ou bien Nicolae Manolescu. Le manque de travail historique, mais aussi d'une approche systémique, caractérise cette période et c'est pourquoi à la fin – donc, dans le présent de Iovănel – la nécessité d'un ensemble théorique et critique est pressante. D'ailleurs, tout au long de son travail, l'auteur de l'*Histoire...* revient à la littérature en tant que *système*, une littérature qui peut et qui doit être pensée dans la longue durée, mais avec la conscience avérée des limites de la pensée humaine et de son expérience. Ainsi, l'histoire littéraire se donne en tant que monde à découvrir ou à dévoiler, comme le montre la référence aux jeux de RPG (Iovănel 2021, 12). Ensuite, l'auteur nous présente le produit des rencontres entre le *philosophe matérialiste* et les textes, voir les auteurs qu'il fréquente.

Ainsi, après avoir accepté le côté aléatoire des rencontres et la contribution de la subjectivité qui gèrent les séquences, le sujet critique part du présent afin de remonter dans le passé. Les ouvrages et les mouvements principaux d'aujourd'hui trouvent leurs racines dans des textes issus d'un contexte semblable ou dont la force symbolique a été similaire – c'est ce qu'il démontre en parcourant la généalogie de la prose. Le tour commence au XIXe siècle avec les premiers essais qui présentent des traits du réalisme, suivis par le vrai point de départ qui semble être *Mara* de Ioan Slavici. Puis, il traverse le XXe siècle en s'appuyant davantage sur la période d'après 1945, où des revendications historiques sont à faire, comme l'auteur l'avait annoncé dès sa préface.

A la fin, ce parcours débouche sur la *contemporanéité* et est divisé en trois types de rapport au réalisme : le métaréalisme des postmodernes, le réalisme misérabiliste et le réalisme capitaliste. Chacune de ces trois branches est réclamée par ou répond à des changements sociaux, mais elles ne sont pas pour autant successives : par exemple, le métaréalisme est spécifique non seulement pour les auteurs des années '80, où cette direction est prédominante, mais aussi pour leurs pairs plus jeunes comme Caius Dobrescu ou Simona Popescu. Cependant, ce type de rapport deviant saturé, selon Iovănel, à la fin des années 2000, dans des romans comme *Syndrome de panique dans la Ville lumière* (2009, trad. fr. en 2012) de Matei Vişniec. Ainsi, le panorama fonctionne réellement comme un systeme fléxible d'actions et réactions à la fois littéraires et sociaux qui permettent de situer les auteurs en fonction de leurs choix esthétiques, tout en sachant que ceux-si ne sont pas aléatoires ou purement artistiques.

Le mouvement rétrospectif qui a dû être à l'origine de ce système a pour but de mettre en lumière des précurseurs justes et durables et, pour ce faire, Iovănel revient sur des textes et des auteurs moins ou mal-connus. Par exemple, dans cette partie sur la fiction (qui couvre en fait tout ce qui peut se réduire au *récit*), il insiste beaucoup sur *Mara* de Ioan Slavici. Bien que ce texte soit connu et, en quelque sorte, canonisé, étant parfois enseigné à l'école, mais non pas de manière obligatoire, la page et demie qui lui est dédiée dépasse les quelques lignes que Iovănel accorde aux autres auteurs canoniques d'avant les années 1950, comme Liviu Rebreanu. La manière dont le critique discute ces romans est similaire : en effet, il présente d'abord le texte en esquissant quelques repères fondamentaux, soient-ils liés à la composition ou à la thématique. Ainsi, *Ion*, « le roman fondateur du réalisme de l'entre-deux-guerres » (Iovănel 2021, 354)[26], se fonde sur la lutte d'émancipation sociale et celle d'émancipation nationale, alors que *Mara* est le produit du mélange entre les codes idyllique, naturaliste et réaliste. A la différence du roman de Rebreanu, Iovănel poursuit la description de ces codes, ainsi que l'argumentation de la façon dont ils fonctionnent ensemble, en rendant une analyse plus approfondie de ce texte.

Que *Mara* appartienne à l'histoire littéraire roumaine, personne n'en doute. Ainsi, il serait impropre d'affirmer que Iovănel vise à *consacrer* ce roman, si l'on entend ce terme dans l'aperçu weberien de légitimité[27]. Jérôme David insiste pourtant sur une distinction entre cette approche et une autre, qui se fonde sur le temps (historique) de l'œuvre et où *consacrer* signifie « rendre

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[26] « romanul fondator al realismului interbelic » (Iovănel 2021, 354).
[27] Quoique l'on puisse poursuivre la révolution que produit Iovănel même dans ces termes, à l'instar de Paul Cernat (2021).

durable » non seulement dans les *grands récits* de la littérature, mais aussi dans la diversité des pistes possibles. Or, quoique la comparaison ne tienne pas dans la culture roumaine qui n'a pas de *grand récit* sociologique d'une ampleur similaire à celui que Bourdieu présente en France, il existe tout de même un rapport critique aux précurseurs qui se fonde dans la longue durée. Ainsi, Iovănel ne réinvente rien, mais il réactualise des dispositions présentes dans le champ littéraire et déplace les accents (et les interprétations) non seulement sur le roman de Ioan Slavici, mais aussi dans le cas des critiques comme Dobrogeanu-Gherea ou Garabet Ibrăileanu.

Ces derniers illustrent le mieux un rapport d'*historicité rétroactive*, qui vise à considérer l'œuvre/ l'auteur et sa consécration – sa durée – non pas à partir de « la pérennisation des conditions de sa légitimation » (David 2010), mais de la postérité, du « jeu dynamique grâce auquel chacune des légitimités dont se réclame l'œuvre, et dont certaines franges du public reconnaissent les effets dans les textes, se modifie elle-même, s'agence aux autres, s'épuise ou resurgit » (David 2010). Ainsi, Iovănel revient sur le fonctionnement *antiautonomiste* de la critique des socialistes pendant le XIXᵉ (Gherea) et le XXᵉ siècles (Ibrăileanu), en soulignant également la perte de capital symbolique qu'ils enregistrent après la première partie du XXᵉ siècle. L'ouvrage ne présente pas la lutte entre le matérialisme critique et l'idéalisme d'une esthétique autonome (qui s'impose) au premier plan, mais rend durable des ouvrages et des positionnements essentiels du côté *antiautonomiste* et implique les mouvements de sa réception et ses instrumentalisations.

Or, ce processus correspond à un travail sur le présent qui ne consiste pas seulement à relier des relais idéologiques ou thématiques, mais à s'y intéresser, à « constituer une réalité quelconque en *centre d'intérêt* » (Bourdieu 2003, 300). Puisque cette nouvelle construction temporelle se fonde sur la réévaluation et la revalorisation, elle agit d'une manière déstabilisante au centre du champ littéraire. Sans doute, en *faisant le temps[28]*, tout comme en faisant de l'idéologie, le critique produit un discours scolastique fondé sur un rapport extérieur aux choses et au temps, comme nous l'avons observé en analysant l'ambivalence entre une vision matérialiste et une autre, plus traditionnellement critique. Cependant, le travail de Iovănel pourrait contribuer – paradoxalement, parce que la critique de David dont nous nous sommes servis afin de mieux illustrer ces concepts est dirigée notamment vers les travaux de Bourdieu – à un *grand récit* sociologique du champ littéraire roumain qui est toujours à venir. De ce point de vue, il est possible d'entrevoir dans cette

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[28] Je reprends l'expression de Pierre Bourdieu, qu'il présente en détail dans *Méditations pascaliennes* (Bourdieu 2003, 299-301).

exploration des pistes possibles une forme d'accumulation nécessaire qui va déboucher sur une approche historique du champ[29].

En somme, l'*Histoire...* devient essentielle dans le champ littéraire roumain puisque son auteur performe un rapport au temps et notamment à la contemporanéité que l'on apprécie tout en se méfiant des choix et des distinctions qu'il opère dans la littérature du présent. La réception de cet ouvrage a été marquée par une rhétorique de dénonciation – parfois voilée – des absences que les chroniqueurs ont jugées comme étant significatives en ce qui concerne soit la liste des auteurs et des œuvres, soit les arguments à fournir pour rendre ses diagnostics plus crédibles. Dans les entretiens qui avaient suivi à la parution du livre, Iovănel répond parfois ponctuellement à des telles situations, tout en affirmant justement qu'il assume la subjectivité de son découpage. Or, en tenant compte de la méthodologie du travail, cette justification paraît suffisante. L'auteur n'écrit que sur ce qu'il connaît et il le fait à la lumière de son expérience et de sa formation.

Néanmoins, en considérant la structure actuelle de l'ouvrage, il convient de noter que les implications de ce positionnement ne sont jamais interrogées pendant l'analyse du champ littéraire, quoique l'auteur de l'*Histoire*... en fasse partie. Ainsi, le parcours parfois hâtif et le manque d'une réflexion plus approfondie sur les concepts et les portraits d'auteur peuvent nous conduire à douter de cette exploration complexe du temps et à considérer *la contemporanéité* comme faisant partie de la doxa que l'auteur n'interroge jamais. Dans ce cas, il ne s'agit plus de dénonciations d'absences, mais d'une mise à l'examen du point de vue, notamment d'un questionnement de ce qui est ramené jusqu'à nos jours. En prenant l'exemple de la fiction, *le réalisme* sert de lien entre le présent conçu comme instant plus ou moins immédiat et un passé qui est toujours présent, toujours réactualisé (et reproduit) en descendance soit affirmative, soit négative (critique). Ainsi, il comporte les mêmes valeurs que l'habitus chez Bourdieu : « cette présence du passé au présent qui rend possible la présence au présent de l'à venir » (Bourdieu 2003, 304). La cohérence va de soi et réunit les textes – mais surtout les auteurs – qu'intéressent le critique, qu'il tient donc comme *contemporains* dans un sens plus large, mais qui ne sont en fait qu'une lignée d'écrivains et des textes que le critique juge favorablement, selon des dispositions partagées. En intégrant *le réalisme* dans l'opposition entre la raison matérialiste et l'inconscient qu'elle défoule, il serait pertinent de le considérer comme faisant partie de la doxa qui, par la suite, contribue à la formation de l'habitus.

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[29] D'ailleurs, on retrouve d'autres travaux inspirés de la théorie de champs, dont le plus proche de la période que couvre Iovănel est la lecture « sociologisante » de la génération 80 que Magda Răduță propose dans son dernier ouvrage, *În context*, paru en 2019 chez Muzeul National al Literaturii Romane.

Le présent sur lequel on n'a pas de point de vue se fonde toujours par rapport au présent qui prend à chaque fois des nuances différentes, non-soulignés, et qui participe en fait à distinguer les incontournables des infréquentables ou des infréquentés.

Le changement que cette situation réclame ne peut se produire qu'à travers une mise en question de l'histoire littéraire en tant que genre et un retour sur la figuration du critique, en poursuivant le travail historique jusqu'à l'autoanalyse. Par ailleurs, Iovănel propose une solution qui, au départ, semble assez convaincante – à savoir le roman. Si l'auteur déclare ses limitations objectives et subjectives à la fois, les *performer en discours* pourrait éventuellement se servir de cette forme qui décentre l'autorité du critique et lui impose le statut qu'il recherche : celui du voyageur dans un train toujours en mouvement.

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AMBIVALENCES OF A *TOUR DE FORCE*: *ISTORIA LITERATURII ROMÂNE CONTEMPORANE* AS CRITIQUE AND AS LITERATURE

ALEXANDRU MATEI[1]

ABSTRACT. *Ambivalences of a* Tour de Force*: Istoria Literaturii Române Contemporane as Critique and as Literature*. This essay starts from hypothesizing a double dimension of Mihai Iovănel's *History*: critical *and* literary (or, as Matei says, poetic). The idea of such an interpretation is given by Iovănel's quoting a late text by Louis Althusser, in which the French philosopher defines the figure of an "aleatory materialist," as opposed to a "dialectical" materialist. While critics have already discussed the critical dimension of Iovănel's project, an aspect Matei also examines in the last part of his contribution, less has been said, he maintains, about the *History* as a literary project, as "writing." Matei thus attends to the qualities and shortcomings of Iovănel's project, which stem, he claims, from the aforementioned double dimension of the *History*.

Keywords: *Mihai Iovănel, poetics of literary history, aleatory materialism, contemporary Romanian literature*

REZUMAT. *Ambivalenţele unui* tour de force*: Istoria literaturii române contemporane, proiect critic şi proiect literar.* Eseul de faţă porneşte de la ipoteza că *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* a lui Mihai Iovănel are o

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[1] **Alexandru MATEI** is Associate Professor at "Transilvania" University, Brasov, Romania. He teaches French modern and contemporary culture and literature. His research interests are Roland Barthes and French contemporary literature, ecological thought, ecology and aesthetics, and socialist and post-socialist media culture. He has a PhD in French contemporary literature from Ecole des Hautes Etudes Supérieures, Paris - University of Bucharest, with a thesis on Jean Echenoz' novels (2007). He has translated into Romanian French authors such as Jean Baudrillard, Bruno Latour, Roland Barthes, and Michel Serres. His published books include *Theory in the "Post" Era. A Vocabulary for the 21st-Century Conceptual Commons*, London, Bloomsbury, 2021 (co-edited); *Roland Barthes, Romanian Mythologies* (Bucharest, 2017); *Jean Echenoz et la distance intérieure* (Paris, 2013); *A Captivating Tribune: Television, Ideology and, Society in Socialist Romania* (Bucharest, 2013); *The Last Days of Literature: Small and Huge in French Contemporary Literature* (Bucharest, 2008). Email: amatei25@yahoo.com.

dublă dimensiune: una critică şi una literară (poetică). Ideea unei astfel de interpretări îşi are originea într-un citat dintr-un text târziu al lui Louis Althusser, în care filosoful francez distinge între un "materialist aleatoriu" şi un materialist "dialectic," care apare în Prefaţa cărţii. Dimensiunea critică a proiectului lui Iovănel a fost deja discutată într-o serie de articole şi mă ocup de aceasta în ultima parte a acestui eseu. Despre dimensiunea literară a proiectului său s-a vorbit mai puţin. Aş dori să evaluez, dintr-un punct de vedere mărturisit marginal, calităţile şi defectele *Istoriei* în măsura în care acestea rezultă din articularea celor două dimensiuni amintite.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Mihai Iovănel, poetica istoriei literare, materialism aleatoriu, literatura română contemporană*

Mihai Iovănel's *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature* attempts to name, for almost any kind of reader (Romanian or foreign), a UFO, as it were. Whereas the title itself is familiar in Romania,—harking back, along with the book's actual project, to Eugen Lovinescu,— what a reader of other literary histories published in Romanian discovers in Iovănel's book turns out to be less so. First of all, this is not merely a history "of literature" but, in the first two parts, what in France might appear under titles such as *Le Saga des intellectuels français* (Dosse 2018) or *La Décennie* (Cusset 2006): cultural-intellectual histories/ cultural studies. The opening parts, then, are followed by what does count as a history of Romanian literature, in parts 3-4. Finally, Part 5, if extended, could constitute a project in its own right: 'The Transnational Specificity." All in all, Iovănel's volume is spectacular in its accomplishments. The *History* therefore comprises at least three books. They coexist between the same covers for at least two reasons. First, because no one has written such books for decades, and there was no chance that anyone would, because the shrinking and de-professionalized local non-fiction publishing market does not seem to encourage such an enterprise. Compared to the 1960s and 1990s, the publishing market's relationship to books has become conformist and utilitarian: bookstores sell you a lot of gadgets before you get to books, and books have become objects of leisure and mindfulness agents, trinkets to be given as gifts, ether concentrates that you buy at Cărtureşti like you buy perfume at Séphora. From this point of view, Iovănel's *History* takes on a composite project that resembles the mission of the coach of a shabby football team. Knowing that he can only count on six players instead of eleven, the coach will assign double tasks: firstly, Mihai Iovănel acts as a sociologist, cultural historian, critic and literary historian. Second, we are of course talking about a personal commitment—as part of a

group—to a project concerning literary politics that is extremely necessary, but whose effects must be today recalculated, in terms of the social value of literature, which has been declining over the last two decades.

The stakes of this essay lie in assessing the ambivalences of this major intellectual undertaking in contemporary Romanian culture, from two perspectives: that of a literary project (of writing) and that of a critical project (on an ideological level). The two parts are not, however, equal, because what seems obvious to me is the preeminence of the ideological over the poetic. However, the latter cannot be absent. I would say that not leaving it out only enhances fidelity to the author's declared materialism. And the starting point is precisely the excerpt from Althusser as the author's ideological and scriptural, in other words personal intellectual and personal affective, driving force.

Before proceeding, I would like to add a few words about the place from which I am going to write this text, as opened to me by Iovănel's work. One of the most important reflexive concepts I have encountered lately is Donna Haraway's "situated knowledge," according to which situated and embodied knowledge is "an argument against various forms of unlocatable, and therefore irresponsible, knowledge claims" (Haraway 1988, 583). It is through the prism of this concept that I would like to write about the ambivalences of Iovănel's *History*; I would call them ambivalences rather than contradictions, perhaps because the latter term rationalizes ambivalence, specifies it but also reduces it. From the same point of view of situated knowledge, I believe that my position towards this project/manifesto can be neither neutral nor central. I am not a specialist in Romanian literature, and I have no interest in defending the project of the generation of the 80s over the one of the next generation (of the 2000s). Neither Nicolae Manolescu nor Eugen Simion have trained me. You can live unperturbed in Romania—today, at least—without feeling encumbered by pleas for the autonomy of the aesthetic, even if you deal, in a broad sense, with literature and cultural theories. That is why I do not think what I am writing here will be very interesting for what we could call, reductively, "camps." The fact that this *History* has now shaped such camps, that a lasting coldness now seems to have set in between representatives of two literary groups that have recently brought together the first two volumes of a large editorial project coordinated by Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian, cannot go unnoticed. Iovănel's *History* has, first and foremost, a strategic value on a literary front populated by an ever smaller and poorer army – which, however, has not died, has not deserted—and which cannot, from one day to the next, reabsorb all its complexes, especially now that the marketplace of ideas has become transnational and when those who read only in Romanian, and especially those who do not read in English, are condemned to isolation. If Iovănel has constructed a product for domestic use, he has also tried to construct an image of "the West"

that is different both from the one conveyed by all sorts of "nativists," who see the West as decadent, and from the conservative one of a white, old, possibly Christian, world cultural centre, without which the very idea of a centre loses its content. This West is itself ambivalent: it tends to identify itself with 'the world', with the planet—in the idea of a cultural democracy in which the hierarchy of cultures is a discourse of power that is nowadays denounced—but it nevertheless remains embodied in objects such as a book published in English by an international prestigious publisher. Without going into details, it is at least worth mentioning a problem that this *History* raises, both explicitly (Iovănel 2021, 162) and especially implicitly: that of (self-)colonization. I agree that ideas and discourses circulate; that the fear of contamination is irrational. The diffusion of forms created at the centre to the periphery is not, however, a process in which the centre is active and the periphery passive, but a process in which centres and peripheries enter into an agentive negotiation that can take all sorts of forms—some of which can be called self-colonization, for example the acculturation of Ataturk's Turkey in the 1930s and 1940s. What can underpin a theory of anticolonization may be, for example, the rhythm. The rhythm of change can be faster or slower, but what might be called social arrhythmias can occur, such as the Stalinist period in Romania, when one could feel 'taken over': in this case we are talking about violence, with the boomerang effect we know all too well.

Iovănel as an "Aleatory" Materialist

On page 12 of his *History*, Iovănel declares that he is inspired by—and probably identifies with—Louis Althusser's portrait of the materialist philosopher, written in the summer of 1986: "The materialist philosopher is a man who always catches a moving train, like the hero in American westerns. (...) This philosopher knows neither the Origin, nor the First Principle, nor the destination. (...) In short, he records sequences of random encounters, not, like the idealist philosopher, consequences deduced from an origin on which all Meaning is founded, or from an Initial Principle or absolute Cause."[2]

This is not, however, any materialism, but an aleatory one, in which our character witnesses atoms of the real about which we do not know where they come from and where they go. Contingents. The portrait in question, from which

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[2] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The original Romanian reads: "Filozoful materialist este un ins care întotdeauna prinde un tren aflat în mişcare, precum eroul din westernurile americane (...). Acest filozof nu cunoaşte nici Originea, nici Primul Principiu, nici destinaţia (...). Pe scurt, el înregistrează secvenţe ale unor întâlniri aleatorii, nu, precum filozoful idealist, consecuţii deduse dintr-o origine pe care se întemeiază întreaga Semnificaţie, sau dintr-un Princiăiu Iniţial sau Cauză absolute" (Iovănel 2021, 12).

Iovănel extracts a fragment translated from English, coagulates narratively, and the first piece of information about the character is this: "The essential thing is that he [the materialist philosopher] does not know where he is and wants to go somewhere" (Althusser 1994, 581—our translation from original French). Althusser's character is not disembodied: we learn that his name is Nikos, that he is Greek, that he has emigrated to the United States, that he accepts the first job offered to him and that he slowly succeeds in self-accomplishment: the most beautiful wife and the most beautiful animals are his—"after ten years of work." Althusser, who writes his last texts in a psychiatric hospital, compares his character to Gorbachev walking through the streets of Moscow. Towards the end, he adds, "He thus unwittingly becomes a quasi-professional materialist philosopher—but not a *dialectical* materialist, that horror, but an aleatory materialist." (Althusser 1994, 582—author's emphasis). Althusser, in these last years of his life after Hélène's murder, writes little and, above all, looks at the world from an exiled man's perspective—he is acquitted, but the anathema remains, the former ENS professor no longer has any power. Aleatory materialism—or, with another formula of his own, the "materialism of the encounter"—is an equally late invention, of which some dozens of pages remain where the author returns to the pre-Socratic beginnings of materialism, in a free essay that seems to anticipate something of Meillassoux's discourse of speculative realism. Philosophy, Althusser writes, becomes "the statement of the subjection of necessity to contingency," and is a "finding," without determinations, without origin and without great questions (1994, 542).

Even if this filiation claimed by Iovănel remains an authorial vignette—a spectacular one, which is why I have chosen to take it up and give it context—it points to something I would not want to overlook : the fact that we are dealing with a project that is at once intellectual and literary, institutional and aesthetic, ideological and affective, that attempts, in Promethean fashion, to build a composite object, unheard of in any editorial framework—Romanian and foreign—a kind of hypermarket you go to, as it happens, on a Friday evening, to buy what you no longer have at home, but where, once you arrive, you find something to eat, to go window-shopping for, to see what the market trends are, and from where you return, obviously, with much more than you imagined you were going to buy.

Therefore, I think I am not wrong if I confess that the first impression when reading this *magnum opus* is one of stamina, but also of a sort of autogenic chaos, magically ordered under the federative title of "history of contemporary Romanian literature." The author is himself aware of the magnitude of the result, but also of the likelihood that the effects—i.e. the manifested reality—have surpassed his initial intentions. It is precisely from this point of view that

I welcome Christian Moraru's "transformative" interpretation in the opening of his own article on Iovănel's history (Moraru 2021, 2). I would add, to this perspective, the concept of the "global" used by Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman in their work on French literature, entitled *French Global. A New Approach to Literary History* (McDonald and Suleiman 2010). Thus, for the two scholars, "global" does not mean exhaustive, totalizing, universalizing: "For us, the definition of global is more like that of a global positioning system (to cite the *OED* a last time): "a world-wide navigation system which allows users to determine their location very precisely by means of receiving equipment that detects timed radio signals from a network of satellites in stable, predictable orbits." The satellites move in stable and predictable orbits, but the GPS device itself accompanies people who move around a great deal, often in haphazard, unpredictable trajectories. One of the best things about a GPS device is its constant ability and willingness to 'recalculate'" (McDonald and Suleiman 2010, X). Iovănel attempts the impossible: rewriting Lovinescu after Deleuze, but also after Marx, in an attempt to foresee any readerly perspective. He would like his *History* to be read and above all *recognized* by Manolescu as well as by Ferencz-Flatz.

Iovănel as a Writer

Iovănel's story deserves to be read as an author's essay, at least to the same extent that it should be read as (a kind of) "history." Its first statement has echoes of Rousseau: "This book is the first history of post-communist Romanian literature": an observation and a statement. Along the way, it alternates spontaneous and reflective passages, in a way that pleases and annoys at the same time. It pleases, because Iovănel writes well, vividly, if at times overly synthetic (he wants to miss as few of Althusser's trains as possible and conjure up as much arbitrariness as possible). It annoys, on the other hand, because the *History* is not only not a didactic or Olympian text, but the effort of balanced expression is sometimes abandoned for a freedom that only a maternal language would allow. Here I would point out the page dedicated to Paul Cernat: the portrait's tones are at least malicious. Although Cernat has sometimes come dangerously close to Eugen Simion, for reasons not necessarily related to any ideological affinity, I do not believe the validity of a lineage/filiation between the two critics. Nor do I believe that Cernat is a conservative—undercover or not.

On the poetic dimension of the *History*, an essential methodological presupposition concerns the genesis of Iovănel's cultural-historical project: why should a History of Literature (which is supposed to assemble more data than a single narrative can) be the work, the product of a single author? Would

that not undermine its intellectual, epistemological and even ideological value? An implicit answer appears at the beginning of chapter 6, "Tools, directions, authors," where the author talks about the virtues of the *General Dictionary of Romanian Literature* he worked on and the advantages of a literary dictionary in general over single-author histories. It is the moment of a polemic with Nicolae Manolescu who, in line with his long-professed anti-positivism, considers the critical charisma that a dictionary can assume in relation to a single-author history insufficient. Iovănel contradicts him, and he is right to do so: "Much more up-to-date are multi-authored histories, whose diversity (...) offers a plural, more open and more democratic perspective on the subject" (Iovănel 2021, 179). But the self-irony is patent precisely because the statement itself belongs to a single author of one literary history. It is as if I, who stutter, were to declare that it is necessarily good for those afflicted with logoneurosis to teach. It is worth mentioning here that this meta-irony was nevertheless thematized by one of the critics of Iovănel's work. Ştefan Baghiu, in a subtle gesture in which he takes up the main criticisms that could or have been levelled at the *History*, in order to defuse them, justifies this type of project: "The idea is circulating that today literary histories are written by groups of authors rather than by single authors. But the reality *on the ground* is different: there is no history of post-war Romanian literature written by a collective. (...) So, in short, to say that it is strange to have a history of contemporary Romanian literature written by a single author in an era when literary research is done by collectives of authors is to assume that some collectives of authors are working on such histories" (Baghiu 2021, 84). It would not necessarily be important to note that such a project exists (even if it is not finished – that of the history of Romanian literature conceived within the Romanian Academy in the 1960s and 1970s, of which three volumes have appeared), but the argument of "the reality on the ground" only holds as irony. Of course, I am not only talking here about the *Romanian Literature as World Literature* project (Martin, Moraru, and Terian 2017), but also about the forthcoming *Transnational History of Romanian Literature*, which is also a collective project and will probably bear fruit in the form of the "toughest" history of Romanian literature since Călinescu's. Therefore, it seems to me that Iovănel's assumption of this project alone invites the reader to consider its literary dimension. I insist on it from my self-declared marginal position, but also as an essayist trained, *pour le meilleur et pour le pire*, in the French school.

Very little has been said about it, mainly because the nerve of Iovănel's writing has touched almost all the commentators so far, insofar as, with few exceptions, they are his colleagues, emulators or competitors within the same institutional space. Beyond the founding ambiguity of the discourse, which we

have already talked about, one that straddles the line between the objective and the subjective, a free indirect discourse as if spoken by a Stendhalian character—Stendhal after Althusser—Mihai Iovănel is a writer in love with writing, to a greater extent than most of us. Of all the critics of the 2000 generation that he reviews in the chapters devoted to (literary, in general) criticism, only Teodora Dumitru and Costi Rogozanu do not teach (but the latter, although he is now Andrei Terian's PhD candidate, worked for years as an op-ed author and as a TV moderator, performing oratorically).

There is a candour in Iovănel's writing that his sharpness hides well, but which his polemical instinct activates at every turn. This means that his texts and positions immediately attract either supporters or enemies. This discursive strategy has one obvious consequence: there will always be readers who will recognize themselves more in the moments of recreation, while others will identify with the spectators of the races. Each will, however, have moments when they are disturbed by what the other likes. This ambiguity works constitutively and can be traced on small spaces. It probably explains why, with the exception of the review by Florin Poenaru, a sociologist (Poenaru 2021,/), all the others, published by specialists in Romanian literature, from young PhD students to (former) members of the governing structures of the Writers' Union, have been—there may be exceptions—either negative or positive. Although Poenaru, the author of some of the most balanced and sagacious commentaries that have appeared on the *History*, speaks of promises that open and close as soon as they are made, his reproaches build upon initial praises: "It is Iovănel *at his best*, and the volume is and will be a reference in the Romanian cultural and intellectual space. This is also due, paradoxically perhaps, precisely to the internal contradictions of the volume that give it vitality" (Poenaru 2021). The undecidability of Iovănel's discursive positions/voices takes his candor to ever finer levels: the lexical, for example. Although he claims to be referring to an Althusserian passage in which the philosopher opposes aleatory to dialectical materialism, Iovănel often feels the need to use the term "dialectical" as a kind of Jack-of-all trades linguistic token. Used in place of or alongside "dynamic," "transformation," "modification," it does not immediately demand its use, but its ubiquitous presence offers a guarantee of coherence and fidelity to its own ideological assumptions.

Let us take an example. In Chapter 8, entitled "Points of Resistance," Iovănel writes: "the implicit model according to which literature and points of resistance interact in the system is, of course, dialectical and fluid; what seems obscene today becomes bourgeois conformity tomorrow"; on the same page, below: "being dialectical, the process of identifying points of resistance by writers is at the same time heuristic, based on trial and error" (Iovănel 2021,

274). The name of the chapter is the formula by which Iovănel identifies the nodes through which the actors of the literary field—writers, institutions, audiences, etc.—cross when they move from the Ceauşescu cultural regime to the post-Ceauşescu (or "communist" – "post-communist") one, and which reminds Moraru, appropriately, of Lacan's "points de capiton" (Moraru 2021, 9), and reminds me of a "maquette" (model)—the experimental model that the researcher makes in order to be able to print, through it, the form of reality which, thus reconstructed, can be subjected to laboratory experiments. These features therefore have a 'modelling function' (During 2015, 25). Only they are not part of a theoretical project, as would be the case for a philosopher. Their variations bring in Iovănel's thought: 'forms' (identified with literary genres), 'institutions' (which no longer have the benefit of an explication in a working concept and open a chapter on censorship), 'epistemologies' in which one speaks of 'the impact of new media', 'sociographies', 'the novel of anti-communism', 'the novel of pro-communism', 'ecologies' (just one page) (...), after which the system becomes more complicated: 'hierarchies' (Iovănel 2021, 308) subclassify themselves into a system in which, 'peasants' is a subclass of 'classes' which is in turn a subclass of 'hierarchies', the latter being of the points of resistance.

The rhetorical remark I make does not concern a major structural flaw, but an inherent one, as long as the processed matter remains huge and seems to be constantly expanding. Therefore, unlike Poenaru, I am not at all bothered, once I get down to earth, by accepting the materialist position the author initially declares he assumes. Here I agree with Ştefan Baghiu: what else could Iovănel do in a book that must be an impressive object, aimed at a wide audience, and which also cannot be excused, but can only include the dimension of a literary project (we are not in a simulation of the novel, in Barthes's terms, but in a version of the Real).

Critique's Triad

In effect, what really matters, for the author, and for the commentators—I repeat, with one exception, all of them being specialists in Romanian literature—is the critical dimension of the *History*.

The figure of old Althusser—or of young Nikos, his character—is a *captatio* and a kind of confession. Iovănel does not come from the fringes of the country; although he does not teach—unfortunately!—at university, he writes his history from the centre of the literary scene whose main narratives he polemically overturns. On the first page of the book appear, in order, the names of Eugen Lovinescu, Nicolae Manolescu and G. Călinescu, while a fourth, Ştefan Baghiu, gets his first quote in extenso, but in a footnote. The *History* is both the

manifesto of a group—perhaps it would be too much to say of a generation—and an assertion of power. Not only the text, but also the object—to keep within the framework of materialism (no joke)—is important. Alongside Andrei Terian's work on G. Călinescu, and published ten years later, Iovănel's *History* is the only volume of criticism published by any of the generation active after the year 2000 to exceed 700 pages. It closes a decade which, as Iovănel rightly writes on pages 234-235, was opened by the critic and professor from Sibiu who, today, of all specialists in Romanian literature working in the country, has authored the most publications in academic journals abroad, in volumes and the most important research projects—in short, who has managed to turn Sibiu into the second academic centre in literary studies, after Cluj.

I believe that the same strategy should also explain the title: *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*. Over the past century, using "history" in a title has become the most prestigious packaging for a work of literary studies in Romania. Iovănel reworks it critically, but above all strategically. I am convinced that this title is above all intended to impose a recognizable object on the market. Iovănel's history claims to be based on Lovinescu's model, not because Iovănel has remained confined to the models of the interwar period, but because he has succeeded in questioning an inertial use of the term "ideology," which has long been equated in Romania with authoritarianism. The first critical stake of the work is this: not to rehabilitate, but to rethink the concept of ideology, after decades of traumatic rejection. How to refute, to avoid a term essential to the freedom of any theoretical discourse? Refusing ideology is like the gesture of someone who, under communism, admires new blocks of flats and sees nothing strange when, in the evening, no electric light brings them out of the darkness. For the same reason—but we are talking about one of many—Iovănel claims a free Marxist affiliation, in order to try—an equally important and Promethean gesture in relation to the scale of the Romanian literary institution—to free the Marxist reference from the anathema that accompanied it and still accompanies it. That he feels the need to be a Marxist 'for real', that he resorts to Marxist 'platitudes' (Baghiu 2021, 83) and that he sometimes abuses words, all this only denotes the insecurity of the pioneer: the courage to be first is always put to the test. Finally, a third essential stake of the *History*, but perhaps secondary to the first two, is the historicization of the 80s generation (or Romanian postmodernism) through the long-awaited demonstration of the solidarity of literary—and political—ideology, between all the post-war generations who, from Simion-Manolescu to Lefter and later still, to Corin Braga and Caius Dobrescu, refused, for various reasons, to give up the tendency to protect literature from the sublunary world of everyday social life; or, if you like, which separated superstructure from infrastructure. The repositioning of

Romanian postmodernism in the continuity of a neo- or late-modernism also confirms tendencies in other literatures. In the French one, for example, the playful but elitist literature of the "Ecole de la Minuit" became historicized with the emergence of autofiction, of Houellebecq, and especially of an intermedial writing leading to a redefinition of the concept of literature (Rosenthal and Ruffel 2018). Iovănel's history institutionalizes and explains a literary ethos that changed on a Wednesday evening in 1997, when Marius Ianuș recited a poem that suddenly historicized his older colleagues, T. O. Bobe and Sorin Gherguț, who had read before (Iovănel 2021, 304-305).

These three stakes make the epochal relevance of Iovănel's work. But, and this again has not been noticed sufficiently, Iovănel chose to pay a price so that all these opinions, at odds with the Romanian literary establishment, could be communicated from a platform situated at the centre of the literary scene. One such polemic was born not so much from ideological differences as from the literary character of the work, which underlines a number of liabilities that have accumulated (see the campaign in *Observator cultural*). Under the title *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*, Mihai Iovănel gathers and arranges analytical essays, descriptive essays, almost paratactic enumerations, academic language and internal apostrophes. I think he does it deliberately: if he had stuck to academic rhetoric, the result would have been less spectacular, because the whole rhetorical cast would have had to be rethought and much of the published text would probably have been discarded; if he had aimed only at reaching a non-academic audience, then the theoretical armature of the work, in the sense of critical theory, which is the essential underpinning of the three great twists that nullify the legitimacy of the old Maiorescian-Manolescian narrative, would have been discarded.

What is the fate of a UFO that lasts? That of landing, first, losing its middle F; then, that of being identified, losing its U. That leaves O: a textual object that talks about a lot, and will no doubt be talked about more.

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LITERARY HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE PROBLEM OF THE AUTHOR: MIHAI IOVĂNEL'S *HISTORY* AND RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN AUTHORSHIP STUDIES

ALEX CIOROGAR[1]

ABSTRACT. *Literary Historiography and the Problem of the Author: Mihai Iovănel's* History *and Recent Developments in Authorship Studies.* The present paper examines the dynamics between literary historiography and authorship studies and the way in which these problems related to Mihai Iovănel's recent *History*. Ciorogar argues that authorship theories have always determined the workings of canonicity. Furthermore, the metamorphoses of literary histories could be viewed, he insists, as a series of conceptual revolutions. Consequently, arguments related to authorship have given rise to both new fields of research and disciplines. Finally, Ciorogar also suggests that the evolution of literary criticism and theory is more or less coeval with the history of auctorial models.

Keywords: authorship studies, literary history, criticism and theory, the death and return of the author, research methodologies, Mihai Iovănel

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[1] **Alex CIOROGAR** (Ph.D. in Comparative Literature - "Authorial Ecologies in the Age of Digital Media") is a Lecturer with the English Department (Babeș-Bolyai University, Faculty of Letters in Cluj-Napoca, Romania). "From Somaesthetics to the Stylistics of Existence: Styles of Reading, Ways of Living" in Anna Budziak, Katarzyna Lisowska, Jarosław Woźniak (eds.), *Literature, Performance, and Somaesthetics: Studies in Agency and Embodiment*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2017), "Beyond Print and Invisibility. 'Translatorship' in the Age of Digital Globalization" in Maria Sass Hrsg, Vlad Pojoga, Ștefan Baghiu (eds.), *The Culture of Translation in Romania/ Übersetzungskultur und Literaturübersetzen in Rumänien*, Peter Lang Publishing Group (Bern, 2018), and "The Ecology of Authorial Ascension" in *French Studies Bulletin* (Oxford University Press), vol. 41, Issue 154 are just some of his recent publications. His teaching and research interests include eighteenth-century poetry and Romanticism; hermeneutics, poetics, academic writing, contemporary literary theory; and posthumanism and metamodernism. He is the owner and founder of OMG, an independent publishing house based in Cluj, Romania, and the current director of *Echinox* magazine. Email: alexandru.ciorogar@ubbcluj.ro.

REZUMAT. *Istoriografia literară și problema autorului:* **Istoria** *lui Mihai Iovănel și noi dezvoltări în studiile de auctorialitate.* Lucrarea de față examinează dinamica relațiilor dintre istoriografia literară și studiile de auctorialitate, precum și modul în care aceste două problemă se raportează la recenta *Istorie* publicată de Mihai Iovănel. Teza principală e aceea conform căreia teoriile auctoriale ar determina modurile de funcționare a canonicității. Mai mult, metamorfozele istoriilor literare ar putea fi privite ca o serie de revoluții conceptuale. În consecință, argumentele și dezbaterile centrate în jurul conceptului de autor au dat naștere atât unor noi domenii de cercetare, cât și altor discipline. În cele din urmă, textul sugerează că evoluția criticii și a teoriei literare reprezintă, astfel, istoria modelelor auctoriale.

Cuvinte-cheie: *teorii auctoriale, istorie literară, critică și teorie, moartea și revenirea autorului, metodologii de cercetare, Mihai Iovănel*

One of the main directions of contemporary authorship studies could be described as a simple extension of the research hypotheses laid down by Michel Foucault in "What is an Author?" and, more precisely, as a historical reexamination of the changes that the author-function has undergone in different epochs and socio-political contexts. Whether we will ever live in an age in which literary culture will also function on other discursive criteria is difficult to predict; and after all, the focus of the present text lies elsewhere. In an age of crises, however, we know that today, more than ever, it matters who speaks. Texts are still circulating under the names of authors.

A second direction is represented by the reaction of academic discourses to the evacuation of a disciplinary field. Simply put, scholars who moved away from Foucault's directives migrated to the analysis of literary textuality, where they began to rediscover the signs of authorship. All studies devoted to scriptural figuration have, since then, attempted to reintroduce the question of authorship into the sphere of literary criticism by shifting the center of gravity. Since psychoanalysis and the developments of Saussurean linguistics and ideological criticism had shown that the author could no longer constitute the main object of study, researchers were forced to invent alternative solutions. This direction had been announced or prefigured, in fact, by Roland Barthes himself.

However, this second strand of the auctorial return includes a whole range of feminist, postcolonial, and ethnic studies (gender studies, queer, gay & lesbian studies). It should also be noted that both strands (the genealogy of the auctorial function, on the one hand, and the study of authorship as a text or as a turn of identity politics, on the other) took hold in the last decade of the twentieth century. Before going any further, however, one should remark that

the return of the author is not a phenomenon confined to the sphere of literary studies. Quite the contrary. I think the field that has benefited most from the renaissance of the authorial image is none other than the book industry itself (the proliferation of biographies, literary festivals, book fairs, launches, colloquia, conferences and debates; the whole mechanism of publicity, after all, but also private launches are all centered around the author).

To sum up, we have seen that the death of the author presupposed the criticism of the creative subject. The author's intentions had been exposed as fascist, and the author himself had become a mere element within more or less systematic coercive structures (ideological, discursive, unconscious, linguistic). In Barthesian terms, the author was being transformed into an interpreter of language. But the death of the author also imposed the disappearance of the older types of academic criticism (biographical, positivist, historical). The author was neither the source of the text, nor was he in a position to guarantee the ultimate meaning of the literary work. The writer was now caught up in the texture, the forces, the perspectives, the voices, the discourses, the relationships, the dynamics of the text. The author could no longer be thought of in any other way than a textual instance, as its effect or function. The author's position was unraveled, so to speak, in a multitude of processes of micro-subjectification. The death of the author, thus, led to his (re)birth as a fiction or a figure of the text, a figure devoid of any form of authority.

Mihai Iovănel's *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature (1990-2020)* is designed, first, to redefine the notion of contemporary literature itself. Secondly, I think, one should stress the importance of his novel methodology—a mix of (post)Marxist ideology critique and materialist speculations. In a world lit-type of approach, Iovănel rightly argues that the mobility of literary forms is a transgenerational type of movement and he finally points out that his taxonomy is both typological and historical. This amounts to the production of a book wanting to discuss the evolution of the Romanian literary system. However, he fittingly acknowledges this as a failure when admitting that

> I resorted to micro-monographs by a kind of didactic compromise with my initial project; I had long had in mind a strictly systematic history of contemporary literature, a kind of factory novel in which individual faces and voices appear as mere details in the general choreography configured by the movement and roar of gears.[2]

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[2] "De altfel, am recurs la micromonografii printr-un soi de compromis didactic cu proiectul meu inițial; avusesem multă vreme în minte o istorie strict sistemică a literaturii contemporane, un fel de roman de uzină în care chipurile și vocile individuale apar ca simple detalii în coregrafia generală configurată de mișcarea și vuietul angrenajelor" (Iovănel, 2021, 12).

Moreover, his discourse—as the paragraph above also clearly shows—tends to become rather allegorical while mixing his metaphors: "a literary historian [...] cannot invoke the luxury of wandering at random or at will through the area of his object of research, picking up a stray object here and there" or "like any RPG game, however *free world* and open to exploration it may be, literary history retains a number of objective limitations given by the reality of its subject matter."[3]

The author's return likewise produced his commodification. After almost two decades devoted to the play of signifiers, a new series of scholars returned to the study of figurality or authorial iconography during the 1990s. It was from this nucleus that the more recent strands of research developed: celebrity studies, for instance, or the study of literary careers. What we are dealing with here is a case, a special case perhaps, in which academic study has, in fact, followed the path laid down by the book industry. We should not forget that the death of the author represents the culmination of the evolution of a concept that has always been subject to severe contestation: "situated at the boundary between the inside and the outside of the text, the authorial function is projected as the space in which various contradictory voices, positions and identities come into conflict" (Detering 2002, xvi).

In order to build a new investigative trail, the clichés of the field must first be clearly mapped. There are two areas from which the discipline's most commonplaces originate: poststructuralism, as we have seen, and hermeneutics. The principles of the two lines of thought are, of course, contradictory. What they have in common, however, is the fact that both discursive regimes agree on the idea that the author has the capacity to influence the attitudes we adopt towards texts; and secondly, that the creative individual is just one element of the literary context. If, for poststructuralism, the empirical subject has no relevance in the interpretative process, literary hermeneutics is interested in the recomposition of auctorial intentions.

However, as Fotis Jannidis, Gerhard Lauer, Matias Martinez and Simone Winko rightly point out in the introduction to the volume *Texte zur Theorie der Autorschaft*, even the methodology of philological research is determined by the author, in the sense that bibliographies and libraries utilize the names of writers as their ordering element. Moreover, societies, foundations, literary prizes, museums, and monuments are named after authors. Philological research is also

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[3] "Un istoric literar, fie şi el unul al literaturii contemporane (un concept prin excelenţă deschis, în curs de developare), nu poate invoca luxul de a se plimba la întâmplare sau după bunul plac prin zona obiectului său de cercetare, culegând de ici sau de colo câte un obiect rătăcit [...] Ca orice joc de tip RPG, oricât de free world şi deschis explorărilor ar fi acesta, istoria literară păstrează o serie de limitări obiective date de realitatea obiectului său" (Iovănel 2021, 12-13).

based on the design of critical editions, volumes of correspondence or biographies centered around the same creative subjects (Jannidis 2009, 7-8). We also know that the methods of history and biographical criticism were also formed around the authorial figure. Of course, the role of the empirical author in the interpretation of texts depends on the nature of the biographical information and the way it is used, but the development of literary theory has shown that deriving the final meaning of a work (only) through or with the help of empirical data remains impossible. Equally absurd, however, has been the scope of deconstructivists to eliminate the role of agency from literary studies. The literary history of auctorial theories could therefore be understood as a series of small methodological revolutions in literary studies.

Thus, we can say that, against biographism, hermeneutical positions have sought a middle way between life and text. Friedrich Schleiermacher spoke of the conscious or unconscious intentions of the empirical author. Whichever it was, it had to be reconstructed in order to understand the text: this could just as well be concrete biographical data or simple statements (Jannidis 2009, 12). Let us also recall Wilhelm Dilthey's concept of the 'author's experience' which is then reflected in the work. Against hermeneutics, psychoanalytic criticism starts from the presupposition that the unconscious mechanisms of the author's psyche exert an influence on the creative process, which is why the method seeks to unearth the unconscious springs behind any textual approach. With Sartre, finally, phenomenological existentialism showed that more important than the author's unconscious is the writer's ideological positioning and the relationship he or she has with the world and the reading public (Jannidis 2009, 12-13). I will not be discussing those positions that presuppose an articulation of phenomenological hermeneutics with Marxist or formalist criticism because they have had (almost) no impact on the development of authorship studies. However, two conclusions are worth drawing from the volume edited by Fotis Jannidis: reading will always consider the existence of an author, determining, to some extent, the interpretation, just as the authorial reference does not (or should not) discredit the interpretative approach (Jannidis, 24-25).

After the experience of postmodernity, identity can no longer be thought of outside of performativity. Least of all, the auctorial one. In order to adapt to extremely unstable times, "performance" identities are nowadays rapidly changing, combining different registers and media, as Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Rick Iedema rightly observe in *Identity Trouble* (Caldas-Coulthard 2008, 1). Whether we place it in the framework of "liquid modernity" (Zygmunt Bauman) or in the realm of Peter Sloterdijk's foams, the identity crisis nevertheless arises from the need to constantly reinvent, redefining the nature of the creative subject through dynamism, fluidity, and complexity. By bringing together meanings, resources, affects, events, and existential regimes,

the identity of the auctorial subject is constantly multiplied (Caldas-Coulthard 2008, 2-5). Articulated somewhere on the borderline between the social dimension and phenomenological experience, identity is not only relational but also multimodal (Caldas-Coulthard, 6). Iovănel himself defines postmodernism as a form of meta-realism and meta-fiction (Iovănel 2021, 357, 399). Furthermore, in Romanian literary history, Iovănel writes,

> the 80s model was constructed through the conceptual network of realism-narrativism-biographism-authenticism-transitivity-contingency-urbanism-postmodernism, as opposed to the metaphysical-metaphorism-archaicism ruralism-(neo)modernism.[4]

Coming back to it, we can, therefore, only fix the ambiguities of the concept of author. To that end, I would like to list some of the most important dichotomies that characterize the functioning of authorship: 1) genius vs. craft, 2) autonomy vs. heteronomy, 3) undermining vs. subversion, 4) singularity vs. multiplicity, 5) celebrity vs. anonymity, 6) authenticity vs. falsity, 7) presence vs. absence, 8) authority vs. inferiority. These are not exclusionary terms. It would be more appropriate, therefore, to say that they indicate the existence of a plurimodal auctorial spectrum. The authorial idea can never be identified, so to speak, in its pure state. The ambivalence, hermeticism, imprecision or uncertainty of authorship will always be 'performed' through or with the help of these eight (8) categories. Theoretically speaking, the author is regarded as irrelevant in the interpretative process. We have also seen that other branches of the literary field still use the term. This means that there is a huge discrepancy between the image of the author within literary theory and the status that the author continually maintains in the practice of literary criticism (Claassen 2012, 2).

To explain the process of literary comprehension, Eefje Claassen articulates the methods of cognitive psychology with the tools of literary theory. The death of the author, she is right to note, functions as a slogan for various theoretical positions that dispute the role of the author in literary interpretation (Claassen, 3-4). In order to counter normative acceptances of the author's role in literary readings, the theorist simply presents the results of empirical research on readers' auctorial representations.

But I would like to qualify some of Claassen's comments. When an interpretative or contextualizing error (some would say it is basically the same thing) is repeated enough times, you begin to wonder if there is some form of

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[4] "Modelul optzecist a fost construit prin reţeaua conceptuală realism-narativism-biografism-autenticism-tranzitivitate-contingenţă-urbanism-postmodernism, opusă reţelei şaizeciste metafizică-metaforism-arhaicitate-ruralism-(neo)modernism" (Iovănel 2021, 496).

truth in the inadvertence. Thus, the "death of the author" is not just an anti-authoritarian or anti-patriarchal struggle. It is true that the gesture is, politically speaking, directed against bourgeois ideology, but, as we know, the essay cannot be objectively linked to the social context of counter-cultural movements. "The Death of the Author" has little or nothing to do with the "May '68" moment (as we know, the essay was published a year earlier in an American magazine). But, nevertheless, I cannot disagree with the idea that these are the (false) reasons why Barthes' intervention became the most influential text in the theoretical debates of the time. In other words, it may be that it was precisely this false and allegorical interpretation that contributed to the text's erroneous contextualization.

I will not dwell on Foucault's text because, unlike the Barthesian one, the significance of the auctorial function has been well understood by almost all the commentators involved in this debate. However, Claassen turns out to be, in fact, a very subtle analyst of the anti-intentionalist problem. She demonstrates, in other words, that the two representatives of the *New American Criticism* (Wimsatt and Beardsley) had a problem not so much with interpretation per se, but with the evaluation of literary works. Going further, however, it should be noted that what is fascinating about cognitive literary criticism is that the perspective manages to analyze, almost simultaneously, all three elements of the communicative relationship (author, text, and reader). However, this observation can be turned into a kind of main accusation. In other words, cognitive criticism can only think about the phenomenon of authorship through the eyes of the reader and the reading activity. In this way, the author loses ontological consistency. Moreover, Claassen does not seem at all interested in analyzing the conditions of existence that ensure the status of the author (neither in the literary field nor in the creative industries). Its existence or the need for its existence is simply assumed.

Paradoxically, the implied author has contributed, as Claassen rightly observes, to the diminished importance of the author in the interpretative process. The author is created either by the author himself, by the structure of the text, or by the professional reader. The concept remains, as we shall see, problematic. There are plenty of alternative suggestions. I will mention here only a few such solutions: empirical author, textual intention, inferred author, postulated author, hypothetical author, or constructed author. A crucial observation, however, would be the following: Claassen shows that, instead of proposing neutral descriptions of phenomena, anti-author theories turn out to be, without exception, normative (Claassen 2012, 10-13).

On the other hand, the author's return includes an entire series of new methodological directions. Perhaps one of the best known remains the so-called "persona criticism" developed by Cheryl Walker (1991). There are, however, reactions or directions in feminist literary criticism that, starting from the same phenomenon of the "death of the author", have chosen to ignore the said normative

requirement. Claassen claims that "the death of the author and its implications have not stopped feminist or postcolonial criticism from examining the identity, gender and ethnicity of authors" (2012, 15-16). Quite on the contrary, "the author functions as a category for valuing literary works" (16).

Thanks to developments in digital technologies and new social networks, authors can today not only express their intentions directly, but also influence the reception of their texts (Claassen 2012, 22-23). It would seem that things are quite clear: on the role of authorship, says Claassen, literary studies are still on the side of the death of the author, while other areas of the literary field act as if the author were still alive (34). I do not think, however, that things can be simplified so easily, because, as we shall see, there is a whole series of investigations interested precisely in examining the "vivacity" of this auctorial figure: literary celebrity studies and the francophone preoccupation with posturality, for instance.

However, Claassen succeeds in demonstrating that the author is one of the elements that structures the process of reading literature. Specifically, she points out that "empirical investigation says that even when readers have absolutely no information about the actual author, they still project a mental image of a person who has written a text for a purpose" (2012, 211). When the empirical author is implied (and identified), however, there seem to be only three elements that make up this figure: aspects of identity, presumed intentions, and moral stance (219). Even if readers construct mental images of authors, this does not tell us much about the interpretive process.

Reading is not synonymous, however, with exegesis. The implicit author image is affected if and when the reader receives information about the empirical author. I would also note that the implicit author is closely linked to the empirical author: "after all, it is the empirical author who wrote the text from which the reader constructs the image of the implicit author" (Claassen 2012, 221). If you juxtapose, metaphorically speaking, a whole series of implicit authors, the reader arrives, writes Claassen, at what Foucault called the function of the author (223). The difference would be, however, that if the Foucauldian function had been constructed with the help of cultural-legal skeletons, the chain of implied authors remains the result of the links that the reader establishes between different texts—a conglomeration, then, of abstract figures.

An excellent dramatization of the genealogy of the concept of authority and its relation to the idea of authorship is exemplarily summarized in the following paragraph:

> in short, the development of authorial authority starts from that of the Roman poet whose personal and initiatory authority was actual, goes through the medieval author who is authorized by God to speak with

authority and the author's extraordinary prestige as a genius in the
Romantic-modern period, and reaches the ever-decreasing social authority
of the modern author in the twentieth century. (Donovan 2008, 8)

Literary property rights, for example, are in an extremely close
relationship with the cultural constructs of authorship, which in turn are based
on the ideas of originality, creativity, uniqueness, and inspiration. Deconstructing
the idea of genius has led to an examination of the economic-political practices
and institutions that contributed, in concrete terms, to the crystallization of the
concept of romantic authorship (Donovan 2008, 9). I find it interesting to note
that the editors very succinctly contextualize the issue of the emergence of the
theories signed by Barthes and Foucault. The whole atmosphere of the 1950s,
they go on to write, was dominated by the anti-authoritarian currents broadly
associated with the 'New Left' (Herbert Marcuse being their main representative)
(Donovan 2008, 10). Even more fascinatingly, the anti-authoritarian efforts of
the American New Criticism are also relativized by problematizing other
historical examples: Russian formalism or pre-structuralist narratology (11).
The difference between the two great discourses oriented against the
intentions of the creative subject is superbly rendered here: if the anti-
authoring stake of the formalists had methodological consequences, the
representatives of the theory of the "death of the author" were interested in
issues of a more philosophical nature (Donovan 2008, 12). What most scholarship
in this field lacks, however, is an awareness that these debates should
nevertheless be overcome. The anti-authorial discourse is countered by many
other parts of the literary field (the issue of critical editions, organizations,
prizes, platforms), but also by the metamorphoses of recent literary sociology.
They identify the need to sketch answers to the questions generated by new
developments in information technologies: "even if these questions seem
urgent, they are not really new" (Donovan, 13). It remains, however, simply
prolix for critics such as Jeremy Hawthorn to attempt to demonstrate that anti-
auctorial poststructuralism could find many opponents, even if he is right to
observe that if Barthes simply wanted to reinvent the auctorial figure, Foucault
had established a much subtler (and, consequently, profitable) critique of the
way it works (Hawthorn 2008, 72-73).
When the notion of authorship passed through the filter of literary
theory, it was conceptualized in a negative sense. In other words, when the
concept of authorship entered the field of literary theory, it was instantly
removed from the sphere of literary criticism and history. Of course, the debate
is somewhat more complicated because there has been talk of Theory's death
since the 1980s, but it is clear that today that authorship is understood more in
institutional terms. Not surprisingly, defined as a set of practices, authorship is

the subject of sociological, rhetorical (rhetoric should be understood here in a very broad sense: the set of mechanisms responsible for the production of images, figures, postures, styles) or pragmatic investigations.

The concept has been, in other words, relocated. From the narrow circle of criticism and literary history, the author moved—in the second half of the last century—into the ranks of theory, only to be redistributed in the 1990s into two other broad categories. It is, first, the success of cultural studies in having arrogated to itself the whole agenda of identity politics (postcolonialism and feminism, I repeat) and, second, the transformation of authorship into a textual property in a vast range of different fields (from narratology to iconography, most figural readings could be included in this category).

Michael Joyce is right: "authors have been replaced or relocated [...] which changes the way we measure the value of authorship and cultural production—that is, a change in the position that authorship occupies in relation to other social roles or functions" (Joyce 2008, 260). We already know that the hypertextual phenomenon has altered the status of authorship. Joyce suggests, in this sense, that authorship would have become modular. A commonplace of the current era is that, economically (and in a more or less Marxist understanding), information has replaced traditional capital (265). Authorship would thus be relocated in the ability of writers to recontextualize different information, to (re)modulate it.

A much more interesting approach, however, comes from the sphere of rhetoric. The title of Michelene Wandor's work is very suggestive in this respect: "The Author is Not Dead, Merely Somewhere Else." The author is not dead, he has simply been relocated. This thesis is interesting, I said, because the new space of authorship, Wandor suggests, would be none other than that of creative writing. The main thrust of her demonstration is to reveal the links between literary theory, on the one hand, and the practice of creative writing, on the other. Of course, the common denominator of the two discursive domains remains precisely that of authorship. Wandor begins with a brief summary of her career and education, only to declare that what interests her most—at least in this book—is the methodology and pedagogy behind creative writing courses. No great surprises: the critic is "convinced that creative writing must be historicized, theorized, problematized and ultimately reconceptualized" (2008, 4).

However, the cliché against which Wandor sets out to direct the book's entire demonstration seems more relevant. Namely, that theory would be somehow opposed to creative writing and, at the same time, that, against the theories of the sixties, the latter would have succeeded in (re)bringing the author back to life and into the text. The significance and fragility of the gesture lie in the fact that, while theory is certainly not opposed to creative writing, it

is not clear why the locus of authorship (of intentionality and subjectivity) would indeed be in the text. The discipline is defined, albeit ambiguously, in a fairly clear way and is somewhat reminiscent of Damrosch's rethinking of world literature: 'creative writing is a mode of imaginative thought' (Wandor 2008, 7). More complicated are the narratives that make up the necessary context or foundation for creative writing courses to have focused, in defiance of the anti-humanist tendencies of critical thought, on creative subjectivity (literacy, the liberalization and democratization of education and the educational system, post-war social developments, the emergence of cultural theory, ideological formations, and, finally, the emergence or consolidation of new pedagogical institutions) (6-7).

The establishment of creative writing courses was a step forward (perhaps the last) towards the full professionalization of writers. The characteristics of creative writing courses could be summarized as follows: on the one hand, they are concerned with the development of talent and genius in an aesthetic-vocational perspective that would have as its ultimate goal the growth of literary values; on the other hand, however, creative writing courses are also designed as educational interventions (whether in the field of teaching literature or simply in the cultural development of citizens). These two perspectives are both concerned with the cultivation of expressive capacities. Writing is conceived as one of the forms that learning or knowledge can take (Wandor 2008, 18). Wandor concludes: "the new discipline brought not only new methodologies to the seminar or workshop, but also the principle that art should be taught by experts - i.e. professional writers" (18-19). The movement, as one can easily see, is a democratic one.

Authors and the history of national literatures received canonical legitimacy only as a result of "the development of literary criticism, the principles and vocabulary that established the form of critical discourse" (Wandor2008, 33). Moreover, vernacular literatures had begun to be studied under the influence of philology. They had been reduced, in other words, to mere samples through which the curious could collect a whole range of knowledge about language. On American soil, literature had become, under the influence of Dewey's pragmatism, "a means of self-expression; literature was no longer a subject devoted to linguistic or historical examination, it had now become an element that could be involved in the process of self-development" (Wandor 2008, 37). In short, we can say, without exaggeration, that the strengthening of the professional status of writers was a more or less direct result of the articulation of the new principles of literary criticism with constructivist philosophy. Iovănel wrote his *History* as a direct reaction against this nationalistic outlook and frame. In the final chapter of his book, the critic

tries to reconstruct an international or, to be more precise, a transnational perspective on Romania.

Wandor reminds us that, when it was not oscillating between "pure science" or impressionism, literary criticism had been restricted, at least until the beginning of the 20th century, to a combination of paraphrase, biography, historicism, ethics and source-hunting (Wandor 2008, 38-39). Courses in creative writing were thus conceived both as an internal form of understanding literature and as a reaction to the older version of literary study. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that, in order to become an author, the individual enrolled in the creative writing course needed first to master all the concepts of literary criticism (42). Nor is it a secret that these were developed by I.A. Richards.

Less well known is the idea that Richards succeeded in combining the analytical philosophy of the time with Freudian psychoanalysis, anticipating, to a certain extent, the experiments of today's cognitive sciences (Wandor 2008, 46). It becomes clear, therefore, that the New Criticism was not, at least not entirely, oriented against the examination of auctorial intentions. Which demonstrates, however, that from Richards to F.R. Leavis, "practical criticism" (as the technique of close-reading had come to be called) was not entirely disinterested in the relevance of social contexts to exegesis or evaluation (see also the discussion of the importance of Heideggerian phenomenology and Diltheyan philosophy in relation to the development of F.R. Leavis's conceptions of the practice of literary criticism in Michael Bell, "F.R. Leavis: The Writer, Language, History" in Hadjiafxendi and Mackay 2007, 75-91). Wandor repeats the neo-Romantic creed that united Arnold, Eliot, Richards and Leavis around the civilizing power of literature. Namely, that the critical study of literature "had become the key to the revival of values destroyed by industrialization" (Wandor 2008, 49). In short, literary criticism represented, through the means of a rhetorical trick, an indictment of the principles that structure extra-literary activities.

Following in the footsteps of Gerald Graff, who in the early nineties proposed the study of the evolution of cultural conflicts as a solution to the inconsistency of educational reforms (see *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education*, 1993), Wandor argues, without for a moment claiming to follow the precepts announced by the former MLA president, that for a better understanding of the transformations that literary studies has undergone we should problematize not so much the theoretical additions, but rather the dynamics of the polemics that have arisen between the attempts of some to dilute the text into a form of "literariness" and those of others to reinforce the ontological-autonomist definition of the literary work (Wandor 2008, 76). In short, the relocation of authorship could be read as follows: the debates surrounding the death of the author that had taken place

in the field of literary theory had been concomitant with the institutionalization of the auctorial practices involved in any form of creative writing. The irony, Wandor demonstrates with eloquence, is that the birth of the idea of creative writing remains, after all, the result of the interrogations that literary theory has addressed to textual processualism (84).

The historical emergence or birth of the professional writer is, however, a separate issue. The emergence of manuals dedicated to authors and creative writing, the establishment of specialized organizations and the consolidation of literary property rights are just some of the most important elements that have led, since the beginning of the 20th century, to the formalization of the current status of writers. The logic of creative writing courses is in direct contradiction with the stabilization of authorial norms. This is because the former relies on the existence of a romantic concept that presupposes creativity, talent or genius on the part of writers, whereas the latter operates in an egalitarian and, above all, prescriptive sense (Wandor 2008, 106-107). The didactics of creative writing seems to be based on a series of more or less irrational obstacles. Pedagogues involved in this field are determined to make authorial identity the main source of creativity. However, it is not necessarily the conscious self that is at stake, but rather the authors' attempts to express themselves by renouncing the self. In other words, creative writing has been replaced, as Wandor demonstrates, either by the idea of expressing individual experiences or by the notion of literature as therapy (117).

There are at least two categories of books that are, at least in appearance, dedicated to the death of the author. These are, on the one hand, those that either extend the theory of the disappearance or absence of the creative subject, or those that counteract it. Those who simply ignore the relevance, implications, effects, or consequences of ideas linked to the names of Barthes and Foucault are simply maintaining a naive illusion. As is the case, for example, when she argues that "creative writing is based on a theory of reading that returns us to the complicated problem of intentionality and the idea that authorial intention could be recomposed as a result of reading" (Wandor 2008, 147). The observation remains symptomatic of the physiognomy of literary practice. The implication would be that any teaching in the sphere of creative writing is still dependent on the structure and dynamics of literary theory. In short, talent cannot be taught. This seems to be the conclusion, Wandor suggests, that we should draw if we were to consider most of the discipline's simile-theoretical contributions. The solution would therefore be to move from normative to descriptive criticism.

Creative writing courses are based on the ideas that have been blown away by anti-humanist criticism and theory. The death of the author has led, as

we already know, to the denigration of the concept of subjectivity and, just as importantly, the notion of intentionality. The author's return also means the refocusing of entire disciplines around the creative individual. Even if this is no longer about developing interpretive reading strategies or methods, creative writing courses have attempted to re-establish a kind of new poetics. In other words, it is not the critic who benefits here from the processes or effects of theorizing, but the writer. However, in order to reflect on the new condition of authorship, we need to investigate the circumstances of its disappearance.

The issue is that Wandor merely repeats Seán Burke's ideas (Burke 1992). Yet the Irish critic's main thesis—that of pointing out the implicit contradictions of Barthesian theory—had already been discussed by Eugen Simion in the early 1980s. It is true that the position of power from which one proclaims the death of the author demands, first, precisely a (re)assertion of the legitimacy of authorial figures, but the fact is not, however, difficult to notice and was very clearly pointed out, a few years later, by Barthes himself. Let us recall that in 1971 Barthes wrote about "the friendly return of the author." This is not the time to criticize the work of the Irish theorist, but I do not agree with the idea that the death of the author has led to the seclusion of literary studies. Even more so since Burke himself states at one point that the French theorist's circular argument had demonstrated the impossibility of authorial non-presence. If the slippages that would characterize the absence of the author only strengthened the position of the creative figure, the isolationism that Burke points to would ultimately remain nonsense. I say this because it is precisely the secessionist agenda of the author's death (a theory, Burke argues, that those outside the academy would not grasp) that has produced a real democratization and widening of the literary sphere. Yet, it is also obvious that it was precisely because repression was well understood that a whole series of identity movements were born.

However, one cannot deny the reality that the critical bibliography devoted to Barthes, Foucault and Derrida is ridiculously vast, just as the vastness of this material is not necessarily an indication of the popularization of authorship theories, but rather a symptom of the self-reproductive mechanism of the academic system. Even so, I would still say that the multitude and breadth of the interventions due to the three thinkers signal, on the other hand, the need or the pleasure of the general public (and, therefore, of non-specialists) to have been up to date with the latest theoretical proposals. The idea that anyone can now become a literary critic (read author) also remains a liberal one. Recognizing that it is not the writer who has all the authority in the literary field also implies an awareness of the view that anyone can become an author if they give free rein to their passions. Barthes did not even argue, as the representatives of the

New Criticism had done, that access to literature depends only on the mastery of a set of critical tools. Barthes showed that authorship is ultimately a more or less hedonistic predisposition or attitude towards the text.

Wandor is right to value Burke when the Irish scholar demonstrates, without question, that authorship is a concept in constant feverishness: 'Burke suggests that there is a tension in discussions of the multiple manifestations and implications of authorship that can be reduced to the conceptual struggle between usurpation and authority' (Wandor 2008, 163). In other words, the author did not die of natural causes. He was killed, Wandor argues in Burke's footsteps, only to be replaced by the "new author" (the theorist as author). By rewriting the text, the critic now occupied the authoritative position in the relations established between the instances in the literary field: "the use of the concept of 'writing' as a metaphor becomes a camouflaged way of asserting the supremacy of the critical over the creative manner" (Wandor 2008, 163). Looking at the argument in reverse, the death of the author seems to be a critical decision, not a truth of the literary text. The absence of the author, Wandor continues, is not an easily verifiable fact about literature or discourse, but a statement of the auctorial form adopted by theorists. The debate surrounding the death of the author thus represented an investigation of the relationship between critic and text. The author's intention had been exposed as a form of control that the critic had to rid himself of.

I cannot, however, agree with the researcher's observation that "this is surely one of the most ridiculous ideational manipulations in the lexicon of literary postmodernity" (Wandor 2008, 164). It is not at all clear why the idea would be ridiculous since its influence has been paramount, in the same way that the author's death cannot be included, at least not entirely, under the umbrella of postmodernity. Equally problematic is the judgement that the demonstration could pass for manipulation. Those who have carefully read the Barthesian text know that the French theorist's intentions were fairly straightforward: at no time did he claim that the author's death would not mean an attempt to promote the new criticism against the academic (positivist, historical, biographical) criticism.

One other crucial observation that needs to be made is that most of Wandor's conclusions are, in fact, direct quotations. Without commenting on the views of others, Wandor mostly confines herself to reviewing some of the opinions of the most titled figures in the controversial discussion (Culler, Bennett, Burke). This is not to say that there are no instances where an author's intentions mismatch his or her words, but to invoke, as Wandor does, so-called recent interests in Bakhtinian theory, whose leading representative would be Peter Widdowson, is a sign of intellectual insensitivity, on the one hand,

because interests in Bakhtin's theory are by no means recent, and on the other, because the publication signed by Widdowson is, after all, from 1999. But leaving these points aside, I think what is more important is the way in which Wandor sets out to recontextualize the phenomenon of "auctorial return." If "at the heart of theory lies the relationship between language, the production of meaning and the individual subject" (Wandor 2008, 169), then we can say that the author seems to be the result or product of linguistic activities. The return of the author is sometimes equated with the birth of the modern reader, but is at other times relegated to the realm of identity politics. Wandor's conclusion, however, would be this: the author did not die because he was never 'there'. Which also means that the author could not return, as he was always located 'somewhere else'.

The author is, in fact, redefined in materialist terms. Drawing on the ideas of Benjamin or Brecht, she defines authorship as a kind of social activity or process. Leaving behind the figure of the inspired romantic genius, the empirical author is transformed into a producer. In this perspective, Wandor suggests, the theorist should also (re)focus his tools. Thus, he either becomes a sociologist or a historian: we should therefore consider "the social, historical, institutional and discursive boundaries and conventions of the author, as well as the effects of printing technologies and, finally, the evolution of copyright" (175). Lesser-known, the tradition is characterized by the interventions of Louis Althusser, Lucien Goldmann, Pierre Macherey, Bakhtin and Terry Eagleton. It is only bizarre that Wandor abandons the project, moving on to problematize pro- and anti-intentionalist proposals (from Wimsatt and Beardsley to Umberto Eco).

One also stumbles across a striking misreading of Eliot's famous essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." When the author of "The Wasteland" wrote that the author has no personality to express, the critic suggested that the author is a means by which different kinds of discourse and/or experiences could be (re)used. In other words, the author is a mediator. However, the intermediary nature of the author cannot and should not be confused with language: "the medium is language, its conventions and the way it is used in different contexts" (Wandor 2008, 188).

We have seen that many of the elements that influence or even determine the current features of authorship derive from a far from simple relocation of the phenomenon within other discursive-disciplinary spaces. It would seem, then, that the author somehow needed to pass through the filter of literary theory only to be sprayed into a whole series of other hypostases. Even if modestly assumed, the absolutely essential role that authorship had played within literary criticism and history had been decimated, in the heyday of theory, only to be reified, over the last decade of the last century, within the

practices of the literary industry. And perhaps it is precisely the analysis of the conditions conducive to these relocations that should be further studied. Authorship is a highly mobile concept, as we have seen, but the contexts that determine its fluidity also deserve careful examination.

Even if some scholars suggest that the recent evolution of authorship follows an anti-theoretical route, I would argue, however, that a serious contemplation of the material-historical conditions of contemporary authorship does not automatically equate to the abandonment of abstract reflection. Quite the contrary. I agree that authorship is no longer the subject of "Literary Theory" with a capital "T" (largely because there is no such thing anymore), but this does not mean that all the other disciplines devoted to the analysis of scriptural figures are simply devoid of a theoretical consciousness, as defined, along the Lukács-Goldmann-Williams line, by Edward Said—see "Travelling Theory" (i.e. the emergence of a notional ensemble describing the relationship between world and thought).

Thus, Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and Polina Mackay suggest, and rightly so, that "the study of authoriality would be determined by two interconnected contexts" (2007, 1). These are, on the one hand, the continuous change of methodologies in the academic field and, on the other, the way in which a variety of historical, cultural, technological and literary conditions would determine the emergence of different forms of authorship. The implicit assumption would be that the former represents more than mere methods of approaching the phenomenon. In other words, epistemological metamorphoses within literary studies would alter the very historical definitions and practices of authorship. Their volume thus examines "the transformations that the relationship between literary criticism and the history of authoriality has undergone, both in terms of changing theoretical models and the conditions behind these developments" (Hadjiafxendi and Mackay 1). The project is firstly historical and only then contextualizing (the conditions in which texts are produced, disseminated, and consumed). The editors therefore set out to put the identity of the auctorial modes and, importantly, the factors that contributed to their emergence into historical perspective.

The papers do not discuss authorship as a form of negotiating textual meaning (Hadjiafxendi and Mackay 2007, 2). I can only agree with the observation that forms of conceptualizing authorship change in response to changes in technological means. It would be necessary for "the theory of authorship to illustrate the ways in which the perspective it proposes on notions such as self, agency, ownership and authority are elaborated in individual examples" (2). The death of the author, we now know well, has only led to his return as a projection of the reading strategies enacted by the enamored reader. Studies

devoted to auctorial figurality have shown, on the other hand, that it was then relocated to textuality. A third variant, I would like to suggest, seems to draw on Foucauldian readings, and this is because the function of the author remains an extra-textual matter, highlighted by the epistemological turn of literary research.

What should be noted here is that theories of auctorial absence have given rise not only to a new field of research, but also to other disciplines. The methodological avalanche formed in the wake of the desperate cry of authorial death is truly impressive: "reception theory, deconstruction and semiotics are all reading practices that have arisen in the wake of attacks on the author" (Hadjiafxendi and Mackay 2007, 2-3). Moreover, we can agree that "although it reduced authorship to a simple process of signification, the theory of the sixties questioned the authority of the literary canon, giving rise to new approaches and fields of investigation—from the New Historicism or cultural materialism to gender studies and postcolonial studies" (2-3). A certain political-democratic sensibility underlies all the directions listed. Adopting the perspective of the cultural left, the critical theory of the sixties finally turned into an ecumenical-pluralist movement. Under the guise of multiculturalism, critical thought deviated from the path of a profoundly anti-humanist attitude into a kind of affective-identitarian agenda of rehabilitation or recuperation of marginality, minorities, the periphery or the subaltern.

Perhaps in the contradictory action and effects of the theory lie the origins of the confusion or paradoxes surrounding the long reception of the idea of auctorial disappearance. The postmodern relativization of the creative subject has thus meant the elimination of the idea that the text is an expression of the auctorial personality. What is clear, then, is that the author's death was not a natural one. In other words, someone killed him for a reason, in a specific context. Things are quite clear in this respect. More enigmatic, however, is the suggestion that Hadjiafxendi and Mackay put forth: that the author's death could also mean suicide. A cyclical or continuous suicide. Authorship is, in this sense, nothing more than a little technological trick or artefact (Hadjiafxendi and Mackay 2007, 9). The idea sounds quite promising, but is unfortunately readily abandoned. Eagleton's project is more lucrative: in the same collection, the famous theorist argues that any critical project requires, ideologically speaking, an auctorial form or model. His thesis is profitable because it manages to cover recent forms of theoretical authorship, interrogating the way in which different material practices have managed to rewrite the definition and/or function of authorship. Essentially, Eagleton claims that: "it is possible to interpret the history of modern thought as a series of subversive attacks on the Cartesian cogito" (Eagleton 2007, 185-193). The history of literary criticism and theory is, one could argue, the history of auctorial models.

In one of the most compelling articles to appear in the last five years in the sphere of authorial theory, Julie Marie Smith argues that, in the process of its formation, the authorial function can be altered, modified or taken over. The instrument through which these actions are operationalized, Smith says, is that of the "rhetorical chorus" (a concept adopted from the language of music theory). She emphasizes the idea that, although the auctorial stance is often invented (or initiated) by a single person, credibility or ethos—defined here as character, goodwill, and expertise—is ultimately a construct in which multiple people or institutions participate (or might participate). The same rhetorical chorus is, of course, responsible for the way an author's message circulates within different contexts. The demonstration is, as I said, enlightening, although I would not restrict the use of this notion to the digital sphere.

Taking up the proposal of Thomas Inge, the researcher then equates the "rhetorical chorus" with the notion of mediator or collaborator. The mediator is, quite simply, the instance that, standing between the speaker and the receiver, "uses its technical and rhetorical skills to distribute the speaker's message and at the same time promote or build the speaker's ethos" (the example targets a number of journalists, bloggers and activists) (Smith 2015, 22). Although they are "co-participants in the distribution of rhetoric, the chorus neither participates in the act of invention nor functions as authors or collaborators" (22). The rhetorical chorus is differentiated, Smith continues, from readers "because it possesses certain technical capacities to alter and rearrange the space of textual or digital artifact, technique, thereby contributing its own rhetoric" (22). Moreover, the mediator can contribute either to the construction of ethos or to the "authority and authenticity of the message" conveyed (34).

I would also mention the concept of "post-authorship." Paul Butler shows that by using the rhetoric of dominant groups, the marginalized are in fact in possession of a highly effective strategy by which an ideological conflict could be turned into a form of shared discourse (Butler 2015, 145). The demonstration is broadly similar to that put forward by Deleuze and Guattari with regard to minor literatures. In other words, if authorship is a classifying function of discourses, post-authorship, Paul Butler seems to suggest, would be that function whereby discourses—rather than distributing forms of authority (by constituting genres, works, destinies)—are, in fact, dynamized against each other to build a democratic platform (Graff's theory is, again, relatively similar). Post-authorship thus involves "a dominant and a contesting public, discourses and counter-discourses or, in the words of Roland Barthes, a mix of writings "that counteract each other" (Butler 2015, 145).

The main thesis of Mieke Bal's book—the idea that the humanities should rethink their methodological presuppositions, starting not from a set of

analytical tools per se, but rather from concepts (Bal 2002, 5)—is unfortunately not really new. I am afraid that Baudrillard had already suggested this when he described the object system in 1968. Moving forward, however, we should note that, in the author's view, concepts do not establish terms univocally, but in the form of a well-defined dynamism. Bal is therefore interested not only in what a concept can mean, but, above all, in what it can do (11). Analyzing most of the publications in the field of cultural studies published during the 1990s, she comes to the simple conclusion that all concepts are, in essence, "spaces for debate, for the recognition of differences and change" (13). However, Bal returns a few years with some additional details: concepts are never fixed— they travel between disciplines, individuals, historical periods, and geographical spaces. Of course, with these transmutations, the meaning, purpose, and value of concepts also change (13-23).

A concept such as authorship, for example, betrays, almost involuntarily, the historicity of the socio-cultural contexts in which it was produced and theorized. The problem, however, is that authorship remains a pluriform concept. This means that, for a better understanding of the notion, theorists should reconstruct the process of negotiation between non-conventional elements of the concept (the author as absence, for example) and the norms of a particular historical situation (the situation around May 68, for example). In a very important study devoted to the history of auctorial research, Christine Haynes outlines, for example, the evolution of the deconstruction of the Romantic genius in the second half of the last century. Moreover, she offers a clear overview of the current state of the discipline. Its characteristics, according to Haynes, were originality, sincerity, and inspiration. Over the past century, the heroic definition of the Romantic writer was dismantled by the onslaught of critical theory. The Romantic position of the author, Haynes declares, has thus been historicized by readings inspired by poststructuralism, New Historicism, the sociology of literature, and, finally, book history (Haynes 2005, 288). It must be said that Haynes' text remains the only scientific contribution that realizes and emphasizes the importance of topicality in analyzing the auctorial phenomenon. And this is not only about the effects of the digital revolution, but also about the divide between the image or representations of the auctorial phenomenon, on the one hand, and reality or scriptural practices, on the other. The most important contribution of the works dealing with the authorial problem (at least those that the researcher reviews here) is, in essence, the realization that the collaborative nature of authorship should also be conceptualized or reflected in the discourse or critical-theoretical representations of the cutting edge.

Contrary to all expectations, the historical turn in literary studies has led, Haynes points out, to the perpetuation of the romantic definition of

authorial genius. Why is authorship such an important element? The answer, she believes, is very simple. The Romantic understanding of the idea of the author (centered on the notion of originality) gave birth to the tools used in literary studies. Historiography, biographism, psychology, and positivism, all aimed at recovering authorial intentions—and thus the meaning of the work.

The first wave, so to speak, of the demystification of the idea of the author came from the New American Criticism. The intentional error had been popularized even before the post-war period. The historical (Foucault), sociological (Bourdieu) and materialist interpretations of the fifties and sixties are the touchstones for transforming the image of authorship from a form of talent to a hypostasis of professionalism. This perspective is obviously Marxist and shows that authorship is, in fact, the result of the accumulation of a series of technological, social, and economic transformations and developments, such as the invention of the printing press, the emergence of the reading public, or the birth of the commercial/industrial market. Much more convincing, however, is the criticism coming from those working in the sphere of analytical bibliography. Interested exclusively in the physical aspects of the book, Haynes writes, they have ended up neglecting the role of the author altogether. The situation of distant reading (Franco Moretti) does not seem to be very different today, precisely because it does not reduce literature to a closed system (of forms, let us say), but paradoxically, I would say, restricts the space of existence of literature to the model of a network of nodes and transfers.

Haynes could not, of course, miss the moment of the author's death, where the meaning of the text is always reconstructed by each reader. Interesting and at the same time surprising, however, is the assertion that it was not Barthes but Foucault who first resurrected the idea of the author. In the Foucauldian sense, I repeat, the author is a function of discourse that plays a dual role—aesthetic on the one hand, and legal on the other. Mark Rose, Martha Woodmansee and Carla Hesse are rightly mentioned as the most important continuators of the Foucauldian work of investigative genealogy. They have explored the process of the emergence of the auctorial function in both legal discourse and aesthetic reflection, examining issues such as state censorship, copyright laws, the ideology of Romantic philosophy, and the dynamics of economic forces, among others.

The romantic notion of the author is projected as a kind of birth of the modern writer. The position is a little different from the generally accepted one held by Alain Viala. However, the next stage in the demystification of the figure of the Romantic author is marked, in the 1970s, by the interventions of *New Historicism*, which holds that the author is merely an intertextual construction or, so to speak, a by-product of discursive effects. Moreover, Haynes writes,

those involved in the field of book history had themselves succeeded in turning the author into an instance of the so-called communicative circuit (a network of relations composed of institutions and individuals). Whether we are talking about the cultural, technological or economic, or the social or political, the context itself suddenly becomes one of the keywords of literary research. Last but not least, it should be remembered that the sociology of cultural production has transformed the author into an agent of the literary field.

And while I agree with the observation that researchers today have at their disposal a heterogeneous mix of theories and methods from which they could borrow various concepts and tools for investigating authorship, I believe, however, that there are many more areas and disciplines that Haynes overlooks. To recapitulate, it must therefore be said that authorship is not only a function of discourse (Foucauldian genealogy) and more than the result of intertextual constructions (New Historicism), in the same way that, although it is rightly one of the instances of the communicative circuit (material history of the book) or an actor in the literary field (sociology of literature), the creative subject also remains the object of interest of many other investigative registers: narratology, rhetoric, ethics, hermeneutics, biography and others (Haynes 2005, 201).

David Saunders showed that the author is neither a representative of an aesthetic personality nor a discursive effect (or not just that), but rather a legal entity appointed to protect, writes Haynes, the economic interests of publishers and book distributors and, surprisingly enough, less so those of the writer. I quote the scholar's partial conclusion: "genius is not a result or a precondition of the idea of copyright, but an artificial construct that has legitimized and naturalized certain power structures" (Haynes 2005, 295). In any case, a proper and systematic examination of authorship would require, first, an epistemological reconceptualization of the existing methodology itself.

The researcher's proposal has value to it and can easily be associated with Koselleck's theories. And this is precisely because ideas of authorship, on the one hand, and scriptural practices, on the other, need to be analyzed in tandem with the material conditions and social relations (collaboration and the role of intermediaries) in and through which all these creative processes are expressed and/or embodied (Haynes 2005, 305-306). Haynes observes that, despite new insights from literary sociology and cultural history, scholars still rely on traditional methods such as biography or textual analysis. Even if they claim to be interested in the contexts surrounding the auctorial phenomenon, scholars often end up naturalizing the Romantic definition of the original author and the inspired individual. According to Haynes, "they fail to explain how auctorial ideas and practices have changed as the historical context has changed" (314). She argues for an eclectic approach from a theoretical and

methodological point of view. It is not enough, she goes on to say, to represent authorship as a linguistic construct, just as it is insufficient to represent the determinism that the ideological ideas a society entertains in relation to the notion of authorship are pure reflections of economic structure.

But what Haynes fails to address is precisely the problem she lucidly reveals. And this is not only because pointing out a few dichotomies is a sign of oversimplification (changing ideas about authorship and historical contexts; cultural conceptions of authorship and a range of socio-economic conditions), but, more importantly, because she seems to completely ignore the existence of other dimensions of the auctorial phenomenon. Because authorship is a multidimensional phenomenon (1. representations, 2. institutions, 3. agents, and 4. practices), Haynes does list some (not all) of the disciplines that should be included in any analysis of authorship: literary criticism, bio-bibliographical examination, and, finally, the historical study of contexts (Haynes 2005, 316). Given that Iovănel has himself broached the subject of literary history in an ecological, institutional, systemic, and networked fashion, it behooves one to conclude that the concept of authorship is also understood and re-described here as a global and relational phenomenon (Iovănel 2021, 666).

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THE RE-ORIENTALISED COSMOPOLITAN TURN IN YANGSZE CHOO'S *THE GHOST BRIDE*

SANGHAMITRA DALAL[1], DAVID H.J. NEO[2]

ABSTRACT. *The Re-Orientalised Cosmopolitan Turn in Yangsze Choo's* The Ghost Bride. The magical realist bestseller *The Ghost Bride* (2013) by Yangsze Choo was adapted into a Netflix original series in 2020. The story revolves around the female protagonist, Pan Li Lan, whose hand has been requested to wed the late Lim Tian Ching, making it a "ghost marriage" or "spirit wedding," and her, a ghost bride. With the financial woes that the Pan family is facing, Li Lan has to carefully consider this macabre proposal by the wealthy and prominent Lim family. In this article, the authors look at the novel and the Netflix series, *The Ghost Bride* and argue that it is a form of re-orientalised metropolitan cosmopolitanism, contrived for global consumption in the current global cultural marketplace. Set in 1893, in the colonial cosmopolitan port city of Malacca, the production employs the elite culture of the *Peranakan* Chinese and re-orientalises it. The critics will, therefore, examine the dynamics of re-orientalism and cosmopolitanism and eventually contend that the production of *The Ghost Bride* manifests a re-orientalised cosmopolitan turn in depicting a local culture for a global audience.

Keywords: re-orientalism, metropolitan cosmopolitanism, magical realism, Peranakan Chinese, The Ghost Bride

[1] **Sanghamitra DALAL** is a Senior Lecturer at the College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. She completed a PhD in postcolonial diasporic literature at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests include postcolonial migration and diasporic literatures, with special interest in South and Southeast Asian literatures in English; transnational and transcultural literatures and cultures; and life writing. She has published articles in indexed journals and book chapters with Palgrave Macmillan and Springer Nature. Email: sanghamitra@uitm.edu.my, sanghamitra.dalal@gmail.com

[2] **David H.J. NEO** taught at Canadian, Australian, and Malaysian educational institutions and is currently a Senior Lecturer at the College of Creative Arts, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia. He received his tertiary education from both Canada and Australia and wrote his doctoral thesis on magical realism in cinema at La Trobe University, Australia. His research interests include *Peranakan* culture, postcolonialism, cosmopolitanism and film. He published on popular imaginary and cultural constructions of the *Nonya* in *Peranakan* culture in the journal *Ethnicities*. Email: davidhjn@uitm.edu.my

REZUMAT. *Turnura cosmopolită re-orientalizată în* **The Ghost Bride** *de Yangsze Choo.* Bestsellerul magic-realist *The Ghost Bride* (2013) de Yangsze Choo a fost adaptat într-un serial original difuzat de Netflix în anul 2020. Când mâna protagonistei Pan Li Lan este cerută de răposatul Lim Tian Ching, perspectiva devine aceea a unei "căsătorii fantomatice" sau a unei "nunți spiritiste," cu ea ca mireasă fantomă. Date fiind problemele financiare cu care se confruntă familia Pan, Li Lan se vede nevoită să ia în considerare propunerea macabră a bogatei și puternicei familii Lim. Prezentul articol discută seria ecranizată de Netflix după romanul *The Ghost Bride* ca o formă de cosmopolitism metropolitan re-orientalizat, conceput pentru consumul global pe piața culturală globală actuală. Amplasată în Malacca, oraș-port colonial cosmopolit în anul 1893, producția exploatează cultura de elită a comunității chineze *Peranakan* și o re-orientalizează. Vom examina, așadar, dinamica re-orientalismului și cosmopolitismului cu intenția de a demonstra că producția *The Ghost Bride* marchează o turnură cosmopolită re-orientalizată în reprezentarea unei culturi locale pentru un public global.

Cuvinte-cheie: re-orientalism, cosmopolitism metropolitan, realism magic, chinezi Peranakan, The Ghost Bride

Introduction

In this article we will examine Yangsze Choo's novel *The Ghost Bride* and pay particular attention to the Taiwanese-Malaysian Netflix original series in six episodes, directed by Malaysian filmmakers, Ho Yu-Hang and Quek Shio Chuan, which was released on 23 January 2020. This series developed from a fourth-generation Chinese-Malaysian diasporic author Yangsze Choo's debut novel *The Ghost Bride* (2013). It is a speculative and magical realist fiction, which not only refers to the ancient Chinese tradition of "ghost marriage" and "spirit weddings" but also traverses the phantasmagorical world of the Chinese afterlife. The novel became a *New York Times* best-seller and attracted the attention of Netflix. This particular series was launched along with two other series as a part of the "long-gestating first batch of Chinese-language original series" of "three distinct, binge-friendly genres" (Brzeski 2019). According to Erika North, the then Netflix director of original content for Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan, it is the culmination of two years of hard work, and they have deliberately chosen three very different genres to represent the scope and breadth of their creative content categories. She emphasizes its uniqueness and states that "nothing quite like this has ever been released simultaneously in 190 markets" (Brzeski 2019).

The overwhelmingly popular and commercially successful over-the-top (OTT) media services in recent times indicate that the process of creative content production is no longer confined to transferring any content from one medium to the other but is driven by the constantly shifting socio-cultural and economic configurations of the current times. As we examine *The Ghost Bride* as a global Netflix production, we perceive that it is largely dictated by variously assumed cultural identity markers and astute commercial interests, predominantly in its attempt to garner a wider viewership across the continents, including that of the younger generation as well. Therefore, in the course of our discussion, we will particularly focus on how the production re-constructs Chinese folklore and re-presents traditional cultural mores and practices through a fictional narrative, and argue that in order to cater to some conjectured ideas of the contemporary consumption habits, the production of *The Ghost Bride* eventually manifests a re-orientalised cosmopolitan turn in depicting a local culture for a global audience.

The Re-Orientalised Cosmopolitan Turn through Magical Realist Metropolitan Cosmopolitanism

The idea of re-orientalism, as proposed by Lisa Lau in her article "Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals" (2009) indicates a different representation of the Orient, consigning "the Oriental within the Orient to a position of 'The Other'" (Lau 2009, 571). Lau and Ana Cristina Mendes further expand the idea in the introductory chapter of their edited volume *Re-Orientalism and South Asian Identity Politics: The oriental Other within* (2011) which identifies the way in which Edward Said's influential ideas on orientalism, as evident in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), could be further extended to accommodate the ever-evolving alternative perceptions and visions, as a large number of diasporic, cosmopolitan postcolonial subjects all over the world are increasingly connected with each other, by virtue of the exponential rise in digital media and technologies.

Lau and Mendes acknowledge that the legacy of orientalism, as proposed by Said, is still relevant as it continues to construct specific cultures and identities. However, they also argue that the essence of orientalism has additionally acquired an alternative perspective in recent times, which they have termed "Re-orientalism." It is evident, as they claim, when "cultural producers with eastern affiliations come to terms with an orientalised East, whether by complying with perceived expectations of western readers, by playing (along) with them, or by discarding them altogether" (Lau and Mendes 2011, 3). Consequently, such reconfigurations of cultural constructs necessitate novel modes of cultural analysis as Lau and

Mendes emphasize: "Re-orientalised discursive practices and rhetorical strategies are often sites of subversion where meanings are in constant flux," and this proposition exposes "the power of Orientalist discourse, while underscoring its instability and mutability, and as such provides avenues for questioning the endurance of Orientalist practices today" (Lau and Mendes 2011, 3).

Re-orientalism can perpetuate, as Lau and Mendes argue, through the process of self-Othering in various forms, relegating not just the self but the "other orientals they are regarded as representing, as Other" (Lau and Mendes 2011, 6), hinting at relenting to the dynamics of the expected cultural stereotypes, assumed to be fit for global cultural consumptions. Lau's views on re-orientalism are not unprecedented, as similar conceptualizations can be evinced over the last three decades. Lau and Mendes have justifiably acknowledged the various connotations of the comparable idea which are also in circulation, such as "ethno-orientalism" (Carrier 1992), "new orientalism" (Spivak 1993), "self-orientalism" (Dirlik 1996), "internal orientalism" (Schein 1997), and "reverse Orientalism" (Mitchell 2004).

However, our focus and utilization of the concept of re-orientalism, as we examine the novel and the Netflix original series, *The Ghost Bride*, will be predominantly based on our simultaneous examination of both the textual and paratextual features in order to identify how the productions "make a marketable commodity out of exoticising the 'Orient' or products from the 'Orient'" (Lau and Mendes 2011, 4). We will explore how postcolonial cultural producers exploit different re-orientalist strategies and inquire into whether such practices ensue from the complex power dynamics that dominate the current global cultural marketplace. Nevertheless, due to increasing movement and connectivity, exchange and interaction in the contemporary era, the physical and cultural distinctions between the Orient and the Occident are obviously getting blurred. Therefore, we contend that the current practice of re-orientalism often displaces the primacy of the West as the centre, and unfolds a non-Eurocentric cultural configuration, engendering a realignment of the centre-periphery dynamics. Such a viewpoint directs us to acknowledge the fact that contemporary literary and cultural productions, in pandering to the supposed demands of the "alterity industry" (Huggan 2001, vii), articulate, in Berghahn's words, a kind of exoticism which is "inflected by cosmopolitanism, rather than colonial and imperialist, sensibilities" (Berghahn 2017, 16).

Cosmopolitanism remains a contested term and has been explored by different critics from widely different angles. While Ulf Hannerz opines that cosmopolitanism "entails an intellectual and aesthetic openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrast, rather than uniformity," indicating a "willingness to become involved with the Other" (Hannerz 1996, 103), Timothy

Brennan points out that the term might also indicate developing different ideas of ethnocentrism or perpetuate the continuing asymmetries of power within inclusive conceptions of global culture. Thus, Brennan proposes: "With an almost allegorical resonance in the centres of imperial power, a dialectic within the field expresses itself most acutely in cosmopolitanism" (Brennan 1997, 27). Referring to the stereotypical practices of certain postcolonial novelists and the cosmopolitan alterity industry, that often play the intermediary roles of external cultural commentators, having an eye on the export market, Brennan witnesses a "formulaic quality," which he terms as "the politico-exotic" (Brennan 2006, 61). He observes that, as specific cultural productions tend towards catering to the demands of commodification, they gradually lose their "ability to shock, and therefore to reorient value" (Brennan 2006, 61).

Graham Huggan, in his much-referenced *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) comments with regard to Brennan's observations: "Postcoloniality meets cosmopolitanism in a variety of carefully managed products, packaged for easy consumption as a readily-identifiable global corpus" (Huggan 2001, 12). This cosmopolitan alterity industry, as Huggan suggests, carefully exploits cultural difference and turns it into a globally marketable commodity through offering "a range of available options for both the producers and consumers of culturally 'othered' goods" (Huggan 2001, 12). Yet, the commercial success of such cultural products in oriental packaging also clearly indicates that such practices of commodifying cultural differences could command certain aesthetic values, which Huggan has identified in terms of "the exotic." However, he significantly differentiates between these two terms — "exotic" and "exoticism."

According to Huggan, the word "exotic" is used widely and thus commonly misunderstood, as exotic is not an inherent quality to be found in certain people, places or objects, whereas "exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic *perception* — one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery" (Huggan 2001, 13, emphasis in the original). Thus, since exoticism could simultaneously incorporate strangeness and familiarity in different degrees in response to different circumstances, it could also acquire complex layers of aesthetic, ideological, political and commercial dimensions, depending on the perspectives of the producers and the consumers. Moreover, exoticising certain people, places or objects is also a conscious manipulation which applies specific "exoticist codes of cultural representation" (Huggan 2001, 20) in order to satiate the "global 'spectacularisation' of cultural difference" (15).

David Neo's dissertation, *The Cosmopolitics of Magical Realism in Cinema* (2011), explores the complex cosmopolitan alterity industry particularly through magical realist films and conceives the notion of minoritarian and metropolitan cosmopolitanism. Minoritarian cosmopolitanism is preoccupied with minoritarian modernity (often associated with the Left)—third world realities (and) of refugees, diasporic people, migrants and exiles; in contrast to Aihwa Ong's (more Rightist) work on "elite transnationalism" and "flexible citizenship," which Neo conceptualises as metropolitan cosmopolitanism that generates capital and fetishizes localism for global consumption. Neo also argues that the magical realist cosmopolitics of metropolitan cosmopolitanism enables Hollywood to accept and harness magical realism to further generate capital. Peng Cheah and Bruce Robbins in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (1998) posit cosmopolitics to be the dynamics of "the mutating global field of political, economic, and cultural forces in which nationalism and cosmopolitanism are invoked as practical discourses" (Cheah and Robbins 1988, 33). We will, therefore, explore the cosmopolitics of metropolitan cosmopolitanism in *The Ghost Bride* production in order to illustrate the cosmopolitan alterity industry of Netflix, demonstrating how Netflix's branded identity, contrived for global reach, is part of its "original programming" and "content" that it has developed since 2013 (Laboto 2019).

The narrative of *The Ghost Bride* is contextualized within the historical cosmopolitan port city of Malacca, which was part of the Straits Settlements of British Malaya.[3] It begins in the year of 1893 and introduces the Lim family, a prominent and wealthy Peranakan[4] Chinese family. They request the poorer Pan family for the hand of their daughter, Pan Li Lan (Huang Peijia), to be the ghost bride of their late heir, Tian Ching (Kuang Tian). Therefore, the proposal of marrying the dead Tian Ching is actually a proposal of "spirit-wedding" where Li Lan would have to become the ghost bride. Such a morbid proposition might appear as a convenient solution to the Pan family's financial woes; but Tian Ching deceitfully lures Li Lan into the netherworld (in the series), and the production explores her adventures in the underworld—the unknown land,

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[3] The British Straits Settlements consisted of Malacca (Melaka is the decolonised name that is currently used), Penang and Singapore.

[4] *Peranakan* is a Malay word which means "locally born". It, therefore, refers to communities which formed out of mixed ethnic ancestry, predominantly with the Chinese (*Baba Nonya*), Arab (*Jawi Peranakan*), European (Eurasians) and Indian (*Chetti Melaka*) merchants who intermarried local women—out of which, the *Peranakan* Chinese is the largest. *Peranakan* communities in Malaysia have always been marginal communities. The *Peranakan* Chinese in the Straits Settlements became a cosmopolitan elite community with British colonisation and helped the British develop the Straits Settlements. Many became wealthy from tin and rubber, and the early 20th century witnessed the golden age of *Peranakan* culture.

which is termed by Yangsze Choo in the novel as the "Plains of the Dead." The production of *The Ghost Bride* thus exoticises Chinese folklore, particularly the ancient Chinese tradition of "ghost marriages" or "spirit-weddings," and engages the cosmopolitan for commercial purposes, exploiting and commodifying cultural specificities, particularly that of the *Peranakan* culture, to be sold (streamed) to a global audience.

The commodification of *The Ghost Bride* is further evident in the selection of the language used for the Netflix production. Choo's novel is written in English, however, the series is produced in Mandarin. Apart from trying to reach the Chinese population (the largest population in the world) the production in Mandarin apparently appears to be more "authentic" to the global audience, befitting the Chinese theme and content. The commercial benefits of a Mandarin language production for *The Ghost Bride* are also obvious, as the New York bestseller is enjoying even more sales since the release of the series in Mandarin, essentially because of fetishized localism reaching an international audience. Zainir Aminullah, the executive producer of the Netflix production, reveals that:

> [...] it was decided to be Mandarin because we wanted to reach as wide and as diverse an audience as possible. Although the original material was in English, we thought that with the visual medium the authenticity of the actors delivering their lines in the Peranakan culture instead of English would be a lot more authentic than delivering it in English. **So the decision was taken to shoot the series in Mandarin which we thought would cast a much wider net globally in terms of acceptance (Cheema 2020).**

Zainir's remarks are inaccurate, as the southern *Peranakans* speak a Baba Malay patois and the northern *Peranakans* speak *Hokkien*. However, the naming of the characters in the novel such as Tian Bai and Tian Ching are not names in *Hokkien* (the dialect group of most *Peranakans*) but in Mandarin. *Peranakans* have never traditionally spoken Mandarin, and most of them, being anglophiles, would be more comfortable speaking in English. Such intentional use of Mandarin, therefore, exemplifies re-orientalising the production for presumed commercial benefits. Zainir further points out:

> This is a big headline for us and Malaysians within the industry. It's a Malaysian intellectual property in terms of the book, the author, a Malaysian cast, and crew. ***I would say close to 99 percent of everybody involved were Malaysians.*** We also have an international cast from Canada, U.S., and Taiwan. But in terms of the production crew, it's entirely Malaysian except for one or two supervisors. We're proud because we were able to demonstrate at the global scale for a global audience that this series was entirely developed, packaged, and delivered by Malaysians (Cheema 2020, emphasis in the original).

He seems to deliberately discount the fact that the visible main cast are Taiwanese and that it has been described as a Taiwanese-Malaysian (and not the other way around) production. The emphasis on the Malaysian involvement illustrates global cultural flows and the cosmopolitan alterity industry demonstrating the cosmopolitics of metropolitan cosmopolitanism. Here, we do not just witness the dynamics of Chinese transnationalism (Malaysian *Peranakan* Chinese, Taiwan and China), but Malaysia has also been roped into the transnational imaginary of *The Ghost Bride* production, subscribing to a pan-Asian re-orientalised cosmopolitan turn, which also engages with fetishized localism at the same time. Consequently, in the following sections of our discussion, we will be focusing on the representation of certain specific cultural aspects in *The Ghost Bride* and examine how *Peranakan* culture has been consciously re-orientalised and re-constructed in order to align it with global commercial demands of the Netflix original productions.

Reinscribing *Cherita Rumah Tangga* as a Netflix Original

Cherita rumah tangga is a Malay term, which loosely translates to "household tales," is a form of family oral storytelling. They are usually fascinating stories of family intrigues, particularly with prominent *Peranakan* families, where traditionally a few generations with concubines and maids lived under the same roof. Ancestor worship and reverence to the dead form the central belief system of the *Peranakan* Chinese, where the dead (usually elders and ancestors) are appeased to ensure blessings and well-being for the family. Ancestral homes or *rumah abu*,[5] which is also a Malay term with a Chinese concept, literally translating as "house of ashes," are part of the family prestige and the idea emanates from the practice of using joss sticks during ancestor worship, where the ashes from the joss sticks symbolize the ancestors. The ancestral hall within the *rumah abu* contains the *sin chee*[6] or ancestral tablets of the family along with the family portraits. It is important for the *Peranakan* Chinese families to maintain the *rumah abu* and the responsibility is shouldered by the eldest son, who carries the patrilineal family name and inherits a larger

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[5] *Kampong Belanda* (which translates to "Dutch Village") is essentially the Heeren Street area (that has been renamed Jalan Tun Tan Cheng Lock and also known as the millionaire strip of Malacca), was where the elite *Peranakan* Chinese once lived. Most houses on Heeren Street were *rumah abu* of prominent families—however, many of these *rumah abu* have been sold and turned into commercial establishments and boutique hotels. Currently, only a few families still hold on to these *rumah abu*. In Penang, since *Hokkien* patois is spoken, the *Hokkien* term for the ancestral home, *kong chu*, is used instead.

[6] These ancestral tablets bear identical information found on the deceased's gravestones—the information of their descendants.

share of the family estate, whereas his wife is expected to perform ancestor worship on a regular basis. Therefore, the grim idea of acquiring a living ghost bride is mainly to ensure that the practice of the ancestor worship could continue to be observed sedulously within the family. *Nonyas*[7] are required to cook elaborate meals and perform all the customary practices. This is the function Li Lan in *The Ghost Bride* is supposed to fulfil.

In the narrative of *The Ghost Bride*, Lim Tian Ching assumes the responsibility of the eldest son since he is the only son of Lim Teck Kiong. But Teck Kiong is actually the second son from the previous generation. Tian Bai (Ludi Lin), Tian Ching's cousin, is actually the rightful heir and son of the eldest brother from the previous generation; however, this is minimalised (not explained) in the Netflix series. But the novel clarifies that Tian Ching's father (Teck Kiong) did initially agree that his late eldest brother's son (Tian Bai) would be the family heir. However, with time, Teck Kiong changed his mind to favour his own son, Tian Ching (Choo 2013, 14). Such complicated family intrigues were typical and part of the *cherita rumah tangga* of many prominent *Peranakan* families. Concubinage further compounds the family intrigues and since there were usually great wealth (and also recognition) at stake, family members, including concubines, would often tussle for as much as they could get for themselves and their sons. These family intrigues were skilfully captured by Choo in the novel when Li Lan is in the magical realist Plains of the Dead or hell (which is more complex than the living Lim family on earth). The Lim mansion and estate in the netherworld were ("magical realistically") built on what the earthly Lim family burned to their dead and ancestors.

In the Plains of the Dead in the novel, Li Lan meets the rancorous ghost of the third concubine of her (paternal) grandfather, whom Li Lan had never heard of before (on earth) and her sordid tragic tale is revealed (which is not dealt with in the series). She was a maid from another household and her lover was the second son of that household; when she became pregnant, she thought he would marry her. But he decided to propose to Li Lan's mother instead. However, Li Lan's mother rejected him and married Li Lan's father. Thus, the maid had to abort her baby and later became the third concubine of Li Lan's (paternal) grandfather. To secure her position in the family, she schemed to seduce Li Lan's father (her stepson) in order to conceive a son, but was unsuccessful. When Li Lan's mother became pregnant, this maid (who had also become her step mother-in-law) tried to harm her. But Li Lan's father rescued

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[7] *Nonyas* refer to *Peranakan* women and *Babas* to *Peranakan* men; *Nyonya* is also a variant spelling. The "English pluralised" form of *Nonyas* have become colloquialised and accepted in the English used in Malaysia and Singapore; so we are adopting this in this paper. The same goes with *Babas*, *Peranakans* and other words like *kebayas.*

his wife by wrenching her away from a physical brawl which sent the maid to her death as she fell down the stairs and broke her neck (Choo 2013, 201-207). Such intriguing and salacious *cherita rumah tangga* in the novel fetishises *Peranakan* culture.

As already mentioned, the importance of the dead features strongly in *Peranakan* Chinese beliefs, and many resources are spent on the dead to ensure that they are well provided for in the afterlife, which is felicitously illustrated in *The Ghost Bride*. Both the novel and the series capture the *Hokkien*[8] practice of *kong teck*, which could often be expensive, as paper hell notes, paper ingots, replicas of houses, cars, other worldly materials and even effigies of servants are burned for the dead so that they could enjoy them in their afterlife. Mme Lim is depicted frequently and devotedly burning joss paper, furniture and multiple servant effigies to ensure that Tian Ching is well provided for in the afterlife. In fact, when Tian Ching wants or needs something, he will magically appear in his mother's dreams, making his requests known, and she will burn them in the earthly world so that he could have them in the netherworld.

Choo indicates that even though it is not very common, the idea of ghost marriages appears to be more familiar with the overseas Chinese communities (particularly in South East Asia and Taiwan). She states: "I was surprised to find that many mainland Chinese had never heard of such practices, and could only assume that it was due to the Communist influence which discouraged superstitious behaviour for decades" (Choo 2013, 386).[9] Thus, the morbid Chinese tradition of ghost-marriages and spirit-weddings has been fetishised into a marketing strategy to appeal and sell the series to a global audience. *The Ghost Bride* production, therefore, re-orientalises the idea of ghost marriages (which do not happen frequently), the Chinese funerary rites such the *kong teck*, and its conception of the afterlife, in order to create original content and programming of easy consumption for a Netflix global audience.

COMME des GARÇONS (CDG) Hell

We now pay attention to the costume production in *The Ghost Bride* as we notice that outfits and attires of the protagonists are imagined and designed

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[8] *Hokkien* is a Chinese dialect of Southern China, mostly spoken in the province of Fukien; most *Peranakan* Chinese of the Straits Settlements are *Hokkien*.

[9] An article online (ABC News) says that ghost marriages are a 3,000 year-old Chinese practice that is still happening in rural China. There is a black-market demand for female corpses, since men in China outnumber women, as Chinese culture favours sons over daughters. Therefore, historically there is a high rate of female infanticide. Apparently thirty years ago, a female corpse for a ghost bride can cost 5,000 yuan; now it is 150,000 yuan; some would even kidnap and murder for ghost brides (Xu and Xiao, 2018).

in a significantly distinct manner. The paperback cover of the novel depicts presumably Li Lan lying on her side in a gold embroidered dress, which appears to be a postmodern oriental ensemble, instead of what has been traditionally worn in the 1890s Malacca. The cover design apparently strives to portray a dreamy, romantic image—a fragment of her lower face, a vine creeper at the top left corner, and a blurred image of roses on the third lower part of the cover. Had it been the context of Malacca in 1893, as the initial chapter of the novel presents, all *Nonyas* would be wearing the *baju panjang*—a calf-length top without buttons, fastened by *kerosang* or brooches of gold and diamonds or other precious stones, and worn with a *sarong batik* (batik tube). The *baju panjang* was replaced by the *sarong kebaya* only in the second half of the twentieth century as Peter Lee points out in his seminal volume, *Sarong Kebaya: Peranakan Fashion in an Interconnected World 1500-1950*. However, in the novel, the "two good dresses" (Choo 2013, 9) that Li Lan has inherited from her mother do not appear to be *baju panjang* as they are usually not embroidered. The embroidery on the collar and sleeves of the dresses suggest that they might be *kebayas* (embroidered waist-length tops also without buttons fastened with the *kerosang* and worn with the *sarong batik*) but the embroidered collars and cuffs cannot be unpicked as Choo mentions (2013, 10), as it would have ruined the *kebaya*.

The Netflix series, on the contrary, contrives a situation where Li Lan's nanny has been asked to buy Li Lan appropriate clothes to attend the Lim family's party, so that it could provide the directors and the costume designer with the opportunity to showcase the *Peranakan kebaya*. However, the production deliberately deviates from displaying conventional *Peranakan* attire. Traditionally, the wealthy *Nonyas* were meticulous with their *sarong batik*—often acquired from Pekalongan;[10] the embroideries of their *kebaya*; and most importantly, their jewellery, as this distinguished the *Peranakans* from the *sinkhek* (the later Chinese immigrants) who could not afford such extravagance. As one of the directors of the series, Ho asserts that their primary aim in creating the Netflix production is to cater to fun and entertainment, which does not need to be necessarily true to historical facts: "*So it was confirmed, we were not going to make a historical film*. It should be youthful, fun and entertaining" (Cheema 2020, emphasis in the original). Therefore, instead of dressing Li Lan in an elegantly embroidered *kebaya*, a colourful *sarong batik*, and exquisite *Nonya* jewellery, she is portrayed wearing a garish lace top with sequins and a plain pink flare skirt, and no *Nonya* jewellery at all, as she attends the Lim family's party. Consequently, the directors and the producers of the series consciously

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[10] The *Nonyas* favoured *batik* from this particular area in Indonesia as it catered specifically to *Nonya* taste—the motifs of the *batik* were Chinese motifs and they were done in vibrant colours; unlike the usual browns of most *batik*.

re-orientalise and exoticise the "cumbersome" traditional look through opting for a "postmodern" style, thus discarding the distinctive cultural practices of the cosmopolitan, elite, and aristocrat *Peranakans* of the Straits Settlements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Similarly, in the novel, Tian Ching's mother is depicted in a *baju panjang* of mourning colours (Choo 2013, 12)—which is culturally inaccurate. The *Peranakan* Chinese have a tradition of mourning for three years for their parents, and so *Nonyas* will usually also have a special set of silver and pearl jewellery since the mourning period is so long, because gold and diamond jewellery are not allowed during the morning period. But the *Peranakan* Chinese will never mourn for their children, as it is considered improper and inappropriate as they are a generation younger. Neither can one host a party if there is a death in the house, but this happens in the series. Tian Ching's mother in the series is neither seen in a proper *baju panjang* nor *kebaya*—a *Nonya* of her stature would usually favour the *baju panjang* as it would give her the opportunity to display all the accompanying family jewellery with it. It is evident that both the author of the novel and the producers of the series, in their attempts to commodify the traditional *Peranakan* Chinese culture, eventually hastily assembled certain cultural markers of the ancient Chinese and the *Peranakan* Chinese, and misappropriating both, eventually created a marketable fetishised and exoticised production in a re-oriental packaging of an original content.

Tian Ching, who mostly appears in hell and in Li Lan's dreams, is presented as vivacious and playful, a paragon of fashion and style, which certainly conforms to the directors' vision. The cosmopolitan influence of colonisation at the turn of the twentieth century has indeed influenced the *Babas* to appear stylish and dapper in their western suits, however, Lim Tian Ching/Tian Tze-Kuang in the series with his beautifully groomed shoulder length hair, and in a variety of trendy fashionable clothes that ranged from T-shirts to fur coats is a far cry from the traditional elegant style. In episode 4 of the series, when Tian Ching welcomes Li Lan in the Plains of the Dead, he is seen to be wearing a white T-shirt and colourful striped pants with a blackish-grey damask thigh-length coat with brooches, with colourful beaded necklaces hanging on his neck. Later, when Li Lan is having dinner with him, he appears in a greenish-grey silk *changshan*[11] with a huge peacock brooch (ironically Li Lan wears no jewellery but Tian Ching does) pinned to its Mandarin collar and a fur coat, which he eventually throws off as he invites Li Lan to dance a tango with him! Such an exhibition of garish opulence culminates in Tian Ching's banquet, the masquerade ball, which is specifically conceived for the series. The

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[11] Also known as *changpao* or *dagua* which is a Chinese gown with a mandarin collar for men.

scene, however, eventually descends into a fashionable Comme des Garçons hell of guests, complete with the costume designer's domino masks, the directors' postmodern ensemble, and the set designer's evocation of the gothic, as the banquet table of carcasses as food decorated with pearl necklaces is paraded in full display. Such cultural appropriation and the commodification of cosmopolitan re-orientalism for commercial gains are evident, particularly with the Netflix series, which is pandering to the popular taste of a global audience.

Orientalist Chinoiserie?

Andaya and Watson Andaya observe that divergent cultural traditions converged in the port cities of Malacca to create a new and integrated cosmopolitanism (2016, 20) and this is exemplified in the hybrid *Peranakan* architecture that was a combination of eclectic influences. Lee Kip Lin in *The Singapore House 1819-1942* and Julian Davison in *Singapore Shophouse*[12] describe the *Peranakan* architectural style as Chinese Baroque, English Georgian, Victorian Eclectic, Gothic, Edwardian Baroque and Neoclassical which integrated Chinese, European and Malay ideas and influences, becoming unquestioningly cosmopolitan. And Quek (the other director of the series) in an interview reveals that: "Actually, the majority of filming was done in Iskandar Puteri, Johor Baru. It is set in Melaka, but so many of the heritage sites we filmed in were so well preserved and suited the era. We had references that we could replicate" (Nathan 2020). In the same article written for *The Malaysian Reserve*, we are also informed that the series was filmed in Penang, Taiping and Ipoh. Interestingly, there was no filming done for the Netflix series on the actual location of Malacca, where the narrative is set in.

Such is the current reality of filming production work, where there are many practicalities to consider—very few filmmakers these days have the luxury of being true auteurs insisting on the authenticity of the set and costumes. However, the *Peranakans* with a discerning eye can distinguish from the frontages, whether it is a Malaccan or Penang *Peranakan* house[13] and what has been filmed as the front of the Pan residence is a typical Penang *Peranakan* house and not a Malacca *Peranakan* house. The Lim family house shown in the

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[12] There are subtle differences in the *Peranakan* architecture of Malacca, Penang and Singapore. But Singapore being a global city with good infrastructure has always been the flagship of *Peranakan* revival. Therefore, more books on *Peranakan* architecture have been produced in Singapore than the other two Straits Settlements cities.

[13] The *pintu pagair* or the screen doors are different. In the south (Malacca and Singapore), the *pintu pagair* are usually about three-quarters of the main door; whereas in Penang, they are usually the length of the main door.

series is actually the Cheong Fatt Tze – The Blue Mansion[14] hotel in Penang;[15] however, the production team have simply changed the colour of the building and the Chinese characters on façade of the Chinese gate to read: "A Grove of Trees,"[16] which is the meaning of the family name, Lim. We would like to also highlight that with increasingly advanced technology such as computer-generated images (CGI), images are often simulated. Alterations of actual images such as changing the colour of a building and the Chinese characters of a façade may be changed. Alterations may be produced with a simple click. It would be impossible to recreate 1893 Malacca, but one might argue that it might be more "authentic" to film in Malacca. The practices described above are today common practices of the filming industry—to alter and simulate environments and settings; where accuracy is frequently compromised. Therefore, would the use of Penang *Peranakan* buildings be a misrepresentation of Malacca and constitute a form of orientalist chinoiserie—when such misappropriations are a common practice of the industry and when recreating 1893 Malacca is an impossibility? Would it be accurate or fair to describe it as re-orientalism? It is re-orientalism, but we think it is more essential to understand the significance of the aesthetic, ideological, political and commercial dimensions behind these cultural products, which we have strived to elucidate in our discussion.

Conclusion

We have thus examined how the global dynamics of commodification and exoticisation of cultural practices have re-constructed and re-presented the Chinese folklore of spirit-wedding and the uniqueness of *Peranakan* Chinese culture in *The Ghost Bride* production, which manifests the re-orientalised cosmopolitan turn as a form of metropolitan cosmopolitanism. However, we have, more importantly, interrogated the observation made by Lau and Mendes regarding the power of orientalist discourse; and how the postcolonial cultural producers exploit and commodify different re-orientalist strategies and whether such practices ensue from the complex power dynamics that dominate the current global cultural marketplace. Therefore, through our particular focus on analysing the representation of the traditional stories of family intrigues, and exploring the ways of conceptualizing set, costumes, and locations of the production, we contend that manipulating and exoticising certain codes of

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[14] According to Cilisos, the Netflix series was filmed at The Blue Mansion: https://cilisos.my/5-malaysians-killing-it-in-the-global-entertainment-scene-who-are-not-henry-golding/ (9 May 2021).

[15] Another point to note is that Malaccan *Peranakan* bungalow houses had stronger European influences than Chinese.

[16] The Chinese characters on the actual Cheong Fatt Tze gate façade are different.

cultural representation to appeal to the global masses is realized to be an easy marketing strategy for a capital-generating series of popular culture, such as *The Ghost Bride*.

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"QUESTA SIEPE". SULL'*INFINITO* DI LEOPARDI TRA TRADUZIONE E INTERPRETAZIONE

OTILIA-ŞTEFANIA DAMIAN[1]

ABSTRACT. "*Questa siepe*". *On Leopardi's* **Infinity** *between Translation and Interpretation.* This study aims to analyse the translation of Giacomo Leopardi's *Infinito* in Romanian made by Eta Boeriu (1923-1984) and of some other modern translations of this poem in Romanian. The author demonstrates that the translation of Eta Boeriu is still the most refined one, so we will compare it especially with the variants of Lascăr Sebastian and Vasile Romanciuc. Using the concepts of Eugen Coşeriu's translation theory (Coşeriu 2009), especially his references to meaning, designation and sense (Coşeriu 1991, 220-21), Damian focuses on the term "siepe" ("hedge"), on its role in creating the sense of limit and the infinity in the poetry and on its linguistic and cognitive synonyms in the different Romanian translations.

Keywords: *Leopardi, Coşeriu, translation theory,* The Infinity, *Eta Boeriu, Yves Bonnefoy*

REZUMAT. "*Questa siepe*". *Despre* **Infinitul** *lui Leopardi între traducere şi interpretare.* Prezentul studiu îşi propune să analizeze traducerea în limba română a poeziei *L'Infinito* de Giacomo Leopardi realizată de Eta Boeriu (1923-1984) şi a unora dintre ultimele traduceri moderne ale acesteia în limba română. Vom încerca să demonstrăm că versiunea Etei Boeriu este în continuare cea mai rafinată, fapt ce rezultă în special din compararea acesteia

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[1] **Otilia Ştefania DAMIAN** insegna lingua e letteratura italiana presso il Dipartimento di Lingue Romanze della Facoltà di Lettere (UBB Cluj). Tra il 2007 e il 2010 ha seguito il corso di perfezionamento presso la Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa (Italia). Ha conseguito il dottorato di ricerca in Filologia (dal 2008) presso l'Università "Babeş-Bolyai" di Cluj-Napoca. Le sue pubblicazioni e i suoi studi di ricerca si concentrano sulle interferenze culturali italo-romene e sulla lingua e letteratura italiana. È autrice del libro *Antonio Possevino e la Transilvania tra censura e autocensura*, Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, Cluj-Napoca, 2015. Email: otilia.damian@ubbcluj.ro.

cu variantele lui Lascăr Sebastian şi Vasile Romanciuc. Folosind conceptele teoriei traducerii lui Eugen Coşeriu (Coşeriu 2009), în special referinţele sale la semnificaţie, desemnare şi sens (Coşeriu 1991, 220-221), ne vom concentra asupra termenului "siepe" ("gard viu"), asupra rolului său în crearea ideii de limită şi de infinit în textul leopardian, oprindu-ne asupra sinonimelor sale lingvistice şi cognitive în diferitele traduceri româneşti.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Leopardi, Coşeriu, teoria traducerii,* Infinitul*, Eta Boeriu, Yves Bonnefoy*

Obiettivi e metodo di ricerca

Leopardi è uno dei poeti italiani più amati in Romania e le sue liriche sono state affrontate da vari traduttori (Cărcăleanu 1983)[2], prima che nel 1981 Eta Boeriu regalasse al pubblico romeno il raffinato frutto del suo lavoro di traduzione, la nota versione dei *Canti* (Leopardi 1981), in edizione bilingue, che rimane fino ad oggi insuperabile e insuperata. Le operazioni compiute nel suo laboratorio poetico sono state oggetto di varie indagini; anche noi ci siamo soffermati sulla sua officina esaminando le sue traduzioni attraverso il filtro delle considerazioni di Eugen Coşeriu, una strada che ci ha permesso di mettere in risalto da un lato i pregi, comunemente riconosciuti dalla traduttrice, a livello sintagmatico, e certi limiti del suo lavoro, riscontrabili nel caso di un'analisi in verticale (Damian 2021, 247-58).

Nel presente studio affronteremo ancora la versione che la letterata romena ha dato della lirica *L'Infinito*, di cui abbiamo già scritto in precedenza (Pop 2001, 37-43), quando abbiamo ricorso agli strumenti offerti dalla teoria interpretativa della traduzione, in particolare di Georges Mounin (Mounin 1963) e Marianne Lederer (Lederer 1984), mostrando da un lato l'eccezionale capacità poetica di Eta Boeriu e dall'altro le libertà non indifferenti che la traduttrice si assume rispetto all'originale. Nelle pagine che seguono prenderemo in discussione la sua versione dell'*Infinito* paragonandola ad altre versioni più recenti, in particolare a quella del noto scrittore moldavo Vasile Romanciuc, ma anche ad alcune traduzioni francesi, in particolare quella di Yves Bonnefoy. Riteniamo che continuare ad esaminare le traduzioni attraverso le trasformazioni avvenute nelle strutture profonde, in seguito alle tecniche di parafrasi che producono sinonimi cognitivi e non sinonimi linguistici sia una strada che può portare ancora ad esiti sorprendenti nell'analisi traduttologica. Ricordiamo brevemente,

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[2] Per la storia delle traduzioni di Leopardi in romeno si veda Cărcăleanu 1983 e Cimpoi 2006.

anche in questa sede, che per Coșeriu[3] (Coșeriu 1991, 214-39) vanno seguite due fasi nella traduzione di un testo, quella semasiologica che trova le difficoltà semantiche, sintattiche o testuali al livello del testo di partenza e quella onomasiologica che trova delle soluzioni a queste difficoltà nella dimensione metatestuale (Coșeriu 1991, 222). Per Coșeriu, infatti, lo scopo di una traduzione è quello di rendere il medesimo riferimento alla realtà e il medesimo senso con i mezzi di un'altra lingua, e pertanto non di ridare il medesimo significato (Coșeriu 1991, 220-22). Riferendosi invece alla traduzione del testo poetico Coșeriu osserva che "nella traduzione della poesia, che è linguaggio assoluto, si può fare solo un'approssimazione o un adattamento e mai una traduzione effettiva, vale a dire il passaggio da una designazione ad un'altra designazione, poiché l'assoluto in una lingua non è allo stesso tempo assoluto in un'altra lingua [trad.ns]." (Coșeriu 1995, 167).

Composto nel 1819, l'*Infinito* è celeberrimo tra le poesie di Leopardi, tanto che nel 2019, per celebrare il suo bicentenario, ci sono stati in Italia innumerevoli convegni, eventi vari, mostre e pubblicazioni di grande pregio[4], scientifiche o divulgative, tra cui anche opere destinate a un pubblico per bambini, come ad esempio la versione dell'*Infinto* pubblicata da Einaudi Ragazzi (2019) con le illustrazioni di Marco Somà e un testo inedito di Daniele Aristarco, pubblicazione riproposta anche in un'edizione romena (del 2020), dall'editrice *Signatura* di Cluj-Napoca (Floreşti), con la traduzione di Eta Boeriu, a completare la serie di manifestazioni romene[5] dedicate al bicentenario leopardiano.

Il poeta italiano è noto al pubblico romeno colto attraverso la traduzione di tutte le sue liriche, delle *Operette Morali*, di lettere e brani dello *Zibaldone*, ma anche attraverso studi di spessore (una ricca bibliografia si può leggere in Cimpoi 2006, 129-41), tra cui quelli di Alexandru Balaci (Balaci 1972), Iosif Cheie Pantea (Cheie Pantea 1980), Eleonora Cărcăleanu (Cărcăleanu 1983), Mihai Cimpoi (Cimpoi 2006) o Smaranda Bratu Elian (Elian 2003), e da molti altri italianisti o critici letterari. Anche la lirica che ci interessa di più in questo contesto ha conosciuto più di quindici traduzioni (Cimpoi 2006, 92-3); più note sono le versioni di Alexandru Iacobescu (Leopardi 1918), Giuseppe Cifarelli (Leopardi 1938), Lascăr Sebastian (Leopardi 1963) oltre a quelle, più recenti, del moldavo Vasile Romanciuc (Leopardi 1995) o dell'indianista George Anca (Leopardi

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[3] Nel presente studio abbiamo accennato, per mancanza di spazio, solo ad alcuni dei titoli dedicati da Coșeriu alla traduzione (molti tradotti in varie lingue straniere). Rimandiamo ai lavori di C. Varga (Varga 2017), J. Polo (Polo 2017), al sito www.coseriu.de/publikationen e all'antologia di Dorel Fînaru (Coșeriu 2009) per un ulteriore approfondimento bibliografico.

[4] Gli eventi si possono consultare su http://www.centrostudileopardiani.it/comitato/attivita/, ultimo accesso 25.06.2022.

[5] Vedi tra queste manifestazioni https://iicbucarest.esteri.it/iic_bucarest/ro/gli_eventi/calendario/ omaggio-a-giacomo-leopardi.html, ultimo accesso 26.06.2022.

2013). Ma la pubblicazione dell'edizione illustrata per bambini dell'editrice *Signatura* del 2020, accompagnata dalla traduzione di Eta Boeriu rappresenta un nuovo traguardo per la ricezione di Leopardi in Romania. Nonostante la presenza di altre traduzioni più recenti, pensiamo che la scelta di continuare a promuovere la variante di Eta Boeriu quale ambasciatrice di Leopardi presso il grande pubblico, in particolare presso quello dei bambini e ragazzi romeni, spesso trascurato per ciò che riguarda le opere di qualità, nell'edizione illustrata da Marco Somà, sia la scelta migliore in grado di propagare il messaggio raffinato di questa lirica non solo tra specialisti e lettori colti, ma anche presso lettori comuni.

Sinonimi linguistici e sinonimi cognitivi

Tra le varie traduzioni dell'*Infinito* in romeno esamineremo qui solo quelle moderne di Lascăr Sebastian, Eta Boeriu e Vasile Romanciuc[6], ma accenneremo anche a quelle in francese di Yves Bonnefoy, Philippe Jaccottet e Michel Orcel, tutte traduzioni che, complessivamente, raggiungono lo scopo, più ampio, di presentare al pubblico quei temi essenziali su cui Leopardi tornerà poi un anno dopo nello *Zibaldone* (luglio 1820), in particolare la sua teoria del piacere e quella del vago e dell'indefinito.

Nella visione di Leopardi ci sono parole di per sé intensamente poetiche, per le sensazioni indefinite che suscitano ("lontano", "antico", "profondo" ecc.). Dato che l'analisi di un componimento (e di una traduzione poetica) è un'operazione complessa, che presuppone lo studio di un numero impressionante di informazioni che interagiscono tra di loro a vari livelli (morfologico, lessicale, stilistico, sintattico, semantico, metrico-prosodico ecc.) e che sarebbe impossibile riportare qui, la nostra riflessione si concentrerà su una sola parola, molto rara in Leopardi, che riteniamo essere una difficoltà non indifferente nella traduzione dell'idillio in romeno (anche se in apparenza potrebbe non apparire così). Si tratta della parola "siepe", strettamente collegata all'idea di finitezza materiale, che ricorre una sola volta nei *Canti*, appunto all'inizio del secondo verso "Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle,/ E questa siepe, che da tanta parte/ Dell'ultimo orizzonte il guardo esclude." (Leopardi 1997, 120), non è per niente presente nelle *Operette morali,* ma solo nello *Zibaldone* dove compare una sola volta proprio nelle pagine in cui Leopardi elabora la sua teoria del piacere, scritta tra il 12 e 23 luglio del 1820:

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[6] Durante l'argomentazione della nostra tesi faremo riferimento anche alla versione di George Anca, anche se non è l'oggetto del presente studio. La traduzione di Lascăr Sebastian si può leggere in Leopardi 1963, 49-50 e quella di Eta Boeriu in Leopardi 1981, 134.

> L'anima umana [...] desidera sempre essenzialmente, e mira unicamente [...] al piacere, ossia alla felicità, che considerandola bene, è tutt'uno col piacere. [...] Alle volte l'anima desidererà ed effettivamente desidera una veduta ristretta [...]. La cagione è la stessa, cioè il desiderio dell'infinito, perchè allora in luogo della vista, lavora l'immaginazione e il fantastico sottentra al reale. L'anima s'immagina quello che non vede, che quell'albero, quella siepe, quella torre gli nasconde, e va errando in uno spazio immaginario, e si figura cose che non potrebbe se la sua vista si estendesse da per tutto, perchè il reale escluderebbe l'immaginario. (Leopardi 1997, 69-74).

Controllando il lemma nel dizionario (Zingarelli 1996, 1676) capiamo che "la siepe" è un riparo fatto da una piantagione lineare di piante arbustive usato come ornamento, limite o recinzione di campi, orti o giardini, che viene generalmente tradotto in romeno con il corrispondente "gard viu". Si tratta di un termine che ha un'ascendenza letteraria, anche se ai giorni nostri potrebbe essere ritenuto un termine di un linguaggio settoriale, attinente al giardinaggio, alla botanica, all'architettura o al design. La siepe ricorre nell'*Inferno* dantesco (XXXIII, 82-83) nell'espressione "fare siepe", dopo il celebre racconto del conte Ugolino, durante l'invettiva contro Pisa: "Ahi Pisa, vituperio delle genti/ del bel paese là dove'l sì suona,/ poi che i vicini a te punir son lenti/ muovasi la Capraia e la Gorgona/ e faccian siepe ad Arno in su la foce/ sì ch'ello annieghi in te ogne persona!" (Alighieri 1991, 93). Poi ricompare anche in un autore dell'Arcadia, in Giovanni Maria Crescimbeni, una volta in *Allegoria della giovinezza* (Crescimbeni 1842, 206) ("Cade allor impallidita/ Scolorita/ Tra l'orror di siepe ombrosa,/ Cade, aimè, la meschinella" (Crescimbeni 1842, 206) e un'altra volta nell'*Elvio favola pastorale d'Alfesibeo Cario pastore, e custode d'Arcadia* (Crescimbeni 1695, 32).

Nell'*Infinito* di Leopardi "la siepe" è inserita in un tessuto ricco di novità lessicali. Nei primi tre versi della lirica si possono leggere, infatti, parole della tradizione arcadico-petrarchesca (anche "la siepe" la si inserisce in questa tradizione) poi invece dal v. 4 ci sono parole inusitate che contribuiscono alla creazione dell'infinito. Da un lato il testo sembra variare il motivo della solitudine ricercata in un *locus amoenus* (infatti la siepe rimanda all'Arcadia), dall'altro "narra" anche un'esperienza nata dal limite imposto da una semplice siepe che impedisce la vista e induce il poeta a immaginare con la mente lo spazio e il tempo infinito.

Paragonando le traduzioni prese in considerazione, le varianti trovate dai traduttori sono per lo più sinonimi linguistici, per riprendere la terminologia di Coşeriu: "perdeaua/de tufe nalte" (v. 2-3) per Lascăr Sebastian, "gardu-acesta" (v. 3) per Vasile Romanciuc, "gardul viu" per George Anca (v.2) e "desişul" per

Eta Boeriu (v.2), la sola ad eliminare dalla sua traduzione un termine banale, come "perdea" o "gard", tuttavia reso poetico da Leopardi, ma poco espressivo in romeno, con un termine altamente suggestivo come "desiș". Si tratta per Eta Boeriu di un sinonimo cognitivo, per riprendere Coșeriu, a nostro avviso prudente, che si sforza di creare una variante romena attenta ai minimi dettagli, in grado di aumentare il coinvolgimento del lettore, di adattare il linguaggio assoluto della poesia leopardiana al pubblico romeno.

Su questo termine anche il grande poeta Yves Bonnefoy ha meditato a lungo nella sua traduzione francese della lirica leopardiana, oscillando tra la scelta della parola "haie" al plurale o al singolare (Bonnefoy 2017)[7], ma senza dubitare che la variante giusta sia il corrispondente "haie", una scelta che, nella visione del poeta francese, riesce ad esaltare anche attraverso la traduzione la grandezza e la modernità di Leopardi. Riprendendo la traduzione in francese di Bonnefoy (Bonnefoy 2000, 43), Fabio Scotto (Scotto 2019, 471-84), riflettendo sulla difficoltà di tradurre la poesia, affianca la traduzione dell'*Infinito* di Bonnefoy a quelle di Philippe Jaccottet (Jaccottet 1997, 31) e Michel Orcel (Scotto 2019, 482). Da un lato lo studioso osserva che Bonnefoy compie delle scelte lessicali eleganti, vicine al tono e al registro dell'originale, mentre Philippe Jaccottet, coerente con la sua necessità di contemplare il reale, per enunciarlo, opta in questo caso, esattamente per la variante di Bonnefoy ("cette haie", come si legge in Jaccottet 1997, 31), termine preferito anche da Orcel (Scotto 2019, 482), che mantiene di norma una grande vicinanza all'originale leopardiano. Abbiamo riportato qui le scelte dei traduttori francesi per vedere se da questo confronto è possibile capire meglio il senso delle operazioni compiute da Eta Boeriu nella sua traduzione romena, ma notiamo che il problema è esclusivamente della versione in romeno, data la sostanziale unità delle varianti proposte in francese in questo luogo testuale, varianti che sono sinonimi linguistici e cognitivi allo stesso tempo.

Prima di riflettere sul valore di queste scelte dobbiamo riportare in discussione le considerazioni di Coșeriu. Abbiamo visto che le traduzioni romene analizzate hanno risolto il problema lessicale della "siepe", posto dall'originale leopardiano (nella tappa semasiologica appunto), con soluzioni simili nella dimensione metatestuale, soluzioni lessicali che riprendono un termine settoriale e lo inseriscono nella dimensione poetica, tranne Eta Boeriu che, invece di proporre il corrispondente "gard viu", sceglie il sinonimo cognitivo "desiș" nel v. 2, rafforzandolo poi con il termine "crîng" al v. 7. Quello che notiamo è che tutte le varianti studiate sembrano confermare l'ideale di Coșeriu, si mostrano in grado di ridare lo stesso riferimento alla realtà e lo stesso senso con i mezzi di un'altra lingua. Ricordiamo a questo punto che lo scopo della traduzione è

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[7] La traduzione di Bonnefoy si può leggere in Bonnefoy 2000, 43.

per Coșeriu la ricerca dell'espressione dello stesso contenuto (testo) in lingue diverse. Per capire a fondo il senso del testo leopardiano e chiarire di conseguenza il valore delle operazioni di Eta Boeriu nella sua traduzione è opportuno prendere qui in calcolo il concetto di significato (il contenuto dato per ogni singolo caso di una lingua storica), di designazione (il riferimento a una determinata cosa, fatto, stato delle cose extralinguistiche) e di senso (il contenuto di un testo o di una unità testuale nella misura in cui questo non coincide con il significato e la designazione). Qual è il senso del testo leopardiano e il contributo della "siepe" alla creazione di questo senso?

"**La siepe**" e le sue interpretazioni

Secondo Luigi Blasucci (Blasucci 1996, 192-194), l'idillio è un'esperienza emotiva e una di conoscenza, ma anche la celebrazione della forza dell'immaginazione ("l'infinito come «finzione» immaginativa, stante la materiale finitezza di ogni vastità reale" si può leggere in Blasucci 1996, 193). Il segno della finitezza materiale pare essere proprio la siepe leopardiana, importante sia nella prima parte della lirica in cui il poeta svolge il motivo dell'infinito spaziale, ma anche vera "chiave di volta" che introduce il motivo acustico (lo stormire del vento tra le piante della siepe) e che permette il passaggio alla seconda parte in cui viene costruito l'infinito temporale. Quindi la "narrazione del processo interiore" ha sempre nella siepe un punto di riferimento fondamentale, aspetto che Leopardi chiarirà nello *Zibaldone*, nel luglio del 1820 (Leopardi 1997, 71), nelle pagine in cui prende avvio la sua riflessione sul piacere e l'indefinito.

Nelle traduzioni romene il sinonimo linguistico "gard viu" rischia di creare un effetto contrario a quello del testo originale e l'unica tra i traduttori analizzati ad accorgersene è proprio Eta Boeriu. La sua preoccupazione sembra essere quella di selezionare un lessico altamente simbolico, in grado di favorire la meditazione, di evitare un possibile arresto del movimento del pensiero con un effetto non desiderato.

Leopardi usa con "celeste naturalezza" (per riprendere Santagata), parole provenienti da registri diversi, inserendole sapientemente nella sua lirica, proprio perché un poeta di grande talento. Eta Boeriu, raffinata poetessa e profonda conoscitrice sia dell'originale italiano, sia delle culture romena e italiana, non solo ha rispettato semplicemente con la sua scelta l'originale, ma è andata oltre il sinonimo linguistico, cercando il sinonimo cognitivo, e trovando nei termini "desiș" (v.2) e "crîng" (v.9) in un lessico non caro, ma carissimo, familiare al lettore romeno, il sinonimo cognitivo in grado di scatenare con immediatezza l'idea di comunione con la natura, con i boschi, ritenuta specifica della cultura romena e della sua "anima". Il momento espresso da Leopardi nella poesia è infatti un'esperienza "dell'anima".

Per ricreare questo momento, quest'esperienza, in romeno, Eta Boeriu sembra non aver voluto rischiare di rovinare la sua traduzione proponendo nel tessuto della sua versione un accostamento comune, se non addirittura comico. Non si può parlare, infatti, nella cultura romena di amore per le siepi (la lirica inizia con "sempre caro mi fu"), nemmeno di un amore per "i recinti" (che sarebbe il sinonimo italiano per "gard", per la costruzione che circonda un cortile, un terreno) e, mettendo nel contesto poetico questi termini, forse il lettore romeno non avrebbe capito l'eleganza del discorso leopardiano e il sublime del suo procedimento poetico (fatto che potrebbe accadere nella lettura delle altre versioni). Infatti per un lettore comune la parola "gard" potrebbe essere, nella memoria latente, associata con alcune espressioni con un senso negativo, tra cui "a nimeri (a da) cu oiştea-n gard" (letteralmente dire una cosa inopportuna, imbarazzante), o ancora "a sări peste garduri" (avere un comportamento imorale), "a-și pune gard la gură" (stare zitto), o ancora l'espressione diffusissima "prost ca gardul" (letteralmente "stupido come il recinto").

Coșeriu sottolinea che una buona traduzione è quella che cerca l'espressione dello stesso contenuto (testo) in lingue diverse. In questo caso il senso primordiale è indicare nella traduzione, tra i vari significati possibili in romeno dell'italiano "siepe", quello che designa esattamente il riferimento extralinguistico proposto da Leopardi e quello che crea la tonalità dell'originale, la sua espressività, lo stesso effetto. La siepe è un termine vago e indefinito, collegato alla civiltà italiana, ma anche al topos del luogo ameno[8]. Mentre Sebastian, Romanciuc e Anca, tra i moderni, ma anche i traduttori francesi esaminati, scelgono di rimanere fedeli al sinonimo linguistico (che per i traduttori francesi equivale a quello cognitivo), Eta Boeriu cerca quel riferimento extralinguistico, quella designazione affettiva in grado di ricreare il cosmo leopardiano in romeno e la trova in "desiş" e "crîng", termini cari e familiari, persino banali, simili a quelli dell'originale del poeta recanatese. Essi sono infatti capaci di riproporre la "celeste naturalezza" in romeno poiché legati all'area semantica della foresta, del bosco, del romeno "pădure" o, meglio, "codru". Con questa scelta la traduttrice suggerisce il limite materiale, l'ostacolo presente nell'originale e allo stesso tempo ricrea nel lettore romeno l'affetto che Leopardi o il lettore italiano può provare per una siepe familiare.

La natura benigna (e i romeni)

"Desiş" ha una forza istantanea di riportare alla memoria l'amato "codru", quindi di designare in un batter d'occhio il vero cosmo romeno, il suo universo

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[8] Cfr. per questo topos Curtius 2002 (edizione romena Curtius 1970); Avalle 1977 e, per la letteratura italiana, Fekete 2008.

allo stesso tempo esteriore ed interiore, il legame affettivo e familiare con questa presenza ricorrente nella cultura e letteratura romena. Eta Boeriu ha risolto con finezza e raffinamento il suo problema testuale ricorrendo a sensi culturali latenti derivati dalla specificità della cultura della lingua d'arrivo, soprattutto popolare, che anche nel folclore non cessa di esaltare l'intimo legame dei romeni con la foresta, una foresta che protegge ed è sempre stata luogo di rifugio dagli abusi, le discriminazioni e le ingiustizie della storia, via di scampo di fronte alle invasioni, ma anche luogo dell'amore, di esperienze mistiche, estatiche, *locus amoenus*. Il bosco ha accompagnato la storia dei romeni ed è un simbolo nell'immaginario comune della resistenza e della natura benigna, fatto esaltato d'altronde da Giurescu (1975).

La lirica di Leopardi propone l'esperienza di un Io partecipe, di un Io inserito in un luogo famigliare, che parla di un colle caro e di una siepe cara, un luogo carico di esperienze personali, un *locus* assoluto della memoria esteriore ed interiore, ma anche un luogo reale, intimo in cui poter "naufragare" come su un'ultima spiaggia, quella appunto dell'immaginazione, dell'intelletto nel tentativo di salvarsi dall'"arido vero" che occuperà la sua mente e la sua esistenza negli anni a venire[9].

Questo luogo può essere delineato nel lettore romeno sollecitandolo a ricreare uno spazio, allo stesso tempo esteriore ed interiore, in qualche modo simile, carico di connotati personali, connotati che andrebbero cercati nelle esperienze familiari e, molto probabilmente, trovati nella comunione con la natura. Questo ci appare essere un sinonimo cognitivo, necessario per una buona traduzione, come appunto nella visione di Coșeriu. Un lettore romeno in grado di identificarsi con il testo leopardiano dev'essere un Io coinvolto quanto quello leopardiano, in grado di attivare esperienze di affettività simili, e per fare questo ha bisogno di appigli testuali capaci di connetterlo ad esperienze culturali profonde, da ritrovare in un paesaggio familiare.

Winfried Wehle (Wehle 1997, 273-94), analizzando la lirica, osservava che l'andamento del poema "ha una trasparenza come quella suggerita dal mare, nel quale sfocia il testo" (Wehle 1997, 280-81). L'Io che medita compie nella poesia, secondo il critico, movimenti ondeggianti ed è sottoposto a "un rito d'iniziazione: solo dopo una serie di gravi prove l'Io può accedere ad una nuova identità" (Wehle 1997, 280-81), ma prima deve esplorare la facoltà visiva dell'intelletto, superare la superficie, partire dalla siepe (quindi da un "desiș" o "gard", a seconda della variante scelta) per abbracciare spazi interminati col pensiero: "Così la limitatezza dello sguardo sensibile di fronte alla siepe appare quale promessa di un'illimitatezza del pensiero, che comincia al di là della sua soglia [...]. Proprio

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[9] Cfr. anche l'intervento di Andrea Cortellessa sull'*Infinito* disponibile online all'indirizzo https://library.weschool.com/lezione/sempre-caro-mi-fu-quest-ermo-colle-infinito-zibaldone-leopardi-poetica-8568.html, utimo accesso 20 giugno 2022.

nel mezzo (!) del poema (8) l'Io [...] ritorna al punto di partenza idilliaco, alla siepe [...] e al colle, ma solo per partire nuovamente." (Wehle 1997, 280-81). Successivamente il luogo ameno sarà delineato, al nono verso, da "queste piante" tradotte con "foșnește-n crîng" v. 9 da Eta Boeriu, da Lascăr Sebastian "cum prin aceste tufe/foșnește vântul" vv. 11-12, da Romanciuc "foșnește printre crengi" v. 9, accennando anche lui, con questa variante, ai rami degli alberi, mentre per George Anca abbiamo "foșnind printre tulpini" v.9. Il critico nota che la siepe è il luogo che spezza lo sguardo, ma spezza anche il vento tra le piante, stimolando l'udito verso un movimento del pensiero, verso la meditazione.

Affinché il medesimo senso possa essere suggerito con i mezzi del romeno, affinché si possa davvero svolgere una meditazione alla lettura della traduzione romena è importante non arrestare il flusso dei pensieri soffermandosi sulla traduzione dei significati, per cercare sinonimi linguistici, ma esaltando un rapporto con il contesto, come avviene nell'*Infinito* che ha alla base la veduta ristretta. Solo una traduzione che metta in primo piano l'affetto per il limite, per la natura benigna, quindi per un "desiș", che potremmo tradurre con "boschetto", piuttosto che per un "gard viu", è in grado di favorire l'articolazione del pensiero nei due momenti che partono entrambi dalla "siepe" (il primo dai vv. 1-8 che impedisce la vista creando l'idea di infinito spaziale e il secondo dai vv. 8-15 che dalla voce del vento tra le piante della siepe crea l'idea dell'infinito temporale, dell'eternità). La scelta di Eta Boeriu, apparentemente di poco conto, è una scelta decisiva che orienta la ricezione del testo verso un'interpretazione affine a quella proposta dall'originale italiano, che è la narrazione di un viaggio (Blasucci 1997, 104) e di un naufragio (Luporini 1996, 137-43). Con il termine "desiș" ci si sposta più facilmente tra piano reale e fittizio, anche per un lettore romeno, grazie alle sensazioni visive e uditive che scaturiscono dalla "siepe" per arrivare mentalmente ai due infiniti, dello spazio e del tempo, in un'avventura che è dell'animo. Anche per questo Binni parlava di un "itinerario della mente nell'infinito" (Binni 2014, 98) mostrando che il linguaggio limpido, sobrio ed estremamente suggestivo di Leopardi, profondamente musicale corrisponde a "un'articolazione perfetta del componimento nelle sue parti intervallate da pause e da riprese che sottolineano, con una crescente novità e alacrità di approfondimento, il percorso di questo itinerario dell'intero animo del poeta nella progrediente presa di coscienza del sentimento dell'infinito" (Binni 2014, 99), un itinerario che difficilmente scaturisce in romeno da un "gard", sia pure animato in quanto "gard viu", forse da "perdea/de tufe nalte", letteralmente "tenda di cespugli alti", secondo la traduzione di Lascăr Sebastian, ma sicuramente da un "desiș", termine con connotazioni infinitamente care all'animo romeno. In questo modo la variante di Eta Boeriu adotta una tecnica espressiva simile a quella leopardiana, che esemplifica la sua idea di poesia vaga e indefinita, creando una poesia del piacere, della felicità, una poesia che esplora l'inclinazione del lettore romeno all'infinito.

Oltre la siepe

Di seguito cercheremo di osservare da vicino altri elementi per capire meglio la qualità delle varianti analizzate. Osservando la sintassi notiamo che tutte le versioni romene prese in calcolo la rispettano, nei vari *enjambements* che sviluppano il discorso poetico leopardiano. La coesione è data anche dal grande numero di congiunzioni e connettivi che abbondano nell'idillio come ad esempio "ma sedendo" (v. 4), puntualmente ripreso dai traduttori ("Dar, stând" per Romanciuc e Sebastian, tranne per Eta Boeriu che traduce "Cum stau" al v. 4; il leopardiano "ove per poco" (v. 7) è tradoto con "aproape" v. 7 da Sebastian e da Romanciuc , con "e mi sovvien" (v. 11), "şi-mi aminteşte" da Romanciuc sempre v. 11, "şi, iată, mi-amintesc" v. 14 da Sebastian, "şi-mi amintesc" v. 11 da Eta Boeriu.

Anche le congiunzioni sono generalmente rispettate nelle varianti romene, soprattutto quelle che collegano gli elementi descrittivi (v. 5-7: "interminati/ spazi di là da quella, e sovrumani/ silenzi e profondissima quiete" diventa per Romanciuc "interminabilele spaţii nevăzute /şi liniştea cea supraomenească", per Lascăr Sebastian era "nesfârşite spaţii, /şi supraomeneşti tăceri, şi-o pace/ atât de adâncă şi de vastă" ai vv. 7-9, "nemărginite/ spaţii peste hotarul lui, şi-imense/tăceri, şi-o pace infinit adâncă/ în gând cu gândul înfirip" sempre ai vv. 5-7 per Eta Boeriu), ma non quelle collegate ai passaggi tematici (tranne al v. 15: "e il naufragar" che, nella variante di Eta Boeriu diventa "şi mi-e dulce/ în marea-aceasta calmă naufragiul", per questioni di ritmo).

Per ciò che riguarda il lessico, i traduttori si sforzano di selezionarlo, anche se Lascăr Sebastian usa termini meno diffusi in poesia tra cui "colnic", "perdea", "îngrăditură", generalmente le traduzioni sono fedeli all'originale italiano nel tentativo di suggerire al lettore l'infinito spaziale o temporale (gli "interminati spazi" al v. 4 trovano sinonimi linguistici e cognitivi giusti in romeno "interminabilele spaţii" v.5 per Romanciuc; "nesfârşite spaţii" v.7 per Sebastian, "nemărginite/spaţii" v. 4-5 per Eta Boeriu che colloca, grazie all'*enjambement*, in posizione forte, rispetto agli altri traduttori, sia l'aggettivo in grado di suggerire l'infinito, sia il nome astratto che lo accompagna ("spazi", v. 5); o ancora "l'eterno/ E le morte stagioni" (vv. 11-12) che Lascăr Sebastian traduce con "de veşnicie,/de toate anotimpurile moarte", v 14-15, "de eternitate,/ de anotimpuri moarte", vv.11-12, per Romanciuc, con rispetto per la carica lessicale e sintattica (*l'enjambement*), mentre per Eta Boeriu la migliore variante è ai vv. 11-12 "de veşnicie,/de moarte ere".

Per il finale del testo tutti i traduttori preferiscono tradurre "dulce" per "dolce" (v. 15) (Eta Boeriu lo colloca in posizione forte, alla fine del verso 14, anche questa volta grazie a un *enjambement*) e "mare" per l'italiano "mare" (v. 15), approfittando della vicinanza delle due lingue romanze, italiano e romeno. Le varianti romene esaltano quindi il valore spirituale del "dolce abbandono

della mente" (Marchese 1985, 80-2), un abbandono a "un'esperienza totalizzante, metafisica" e mettono tutte in posizione forte la metafora del mare, dell'immensità in grado di suggerire l'infinito. Il naufragio si connota anche in romeno ("naufragiul" per Eta Boeriu e Romanciuc, "scufundarea" per Sebastian) di un'esperienza interiore, positiva, grazie al noto ossimoro conclusivo che rimane tale quale anche in romeno, grazie ai sinonimi linguistici sopramenzionati che equivalgono a sinonimi cognitivi.

Sempre da un punto di vista retorico risulta evidente che anche nelle varianti romene gli *enjambements* sono essenziali, come nell'originale italiano, e seguono, anche se a volte eccedono, l'originale. Anche in questo caso è proprio Eta Boeriu ad esplorare in particolare le potenzialità di questa figura. Il primo *enjambement* che troviamo nelle versioni romene non è presente nell'originale italiano, nei versi 1-2: "Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle/ E questa siepe" viene tradotto da Eta Boeriu con "mi-a fost dragă-această/ colină-nsingurată" ai vv. 1-2, mettendo in posizione forte il dimostrativo, da Romanciuc "colina/ aceasta solitară" ai vv. 1-2 e da Sebastian "colnicul/ acesta singuratic" vv. 1-2. Il senso di quest'operazione è da ricercare nell'intento dei traduttori di mettere in risalto i dimostrativi del testo. Solo Eta Boeriu d'altronde rispetta gli altri *enjambements* "interminati/ spazi" vv. 4-5 e "sovrumani/ silenzi" vv. 5-6 (resi con "nemărginite/spații" vv. 4-5, "imense/ tăceri" 5-6), creando una variante in romeno che produce, secondo quanto affermato da Angelo Marchese (Marchese 1985, 80-2) per l'originale italiano, "effetti di allargamento polifonico della misura metrica". Naturalmente non è possibile seguire in romeno le assonanze ("sempre", "siepe") e consonanze dell'originale, ma i traduttori seguono da vicino la sintassi, in particolare la coordinazione che lascia aperte in romeno le suggestioni della disposizione binaria dei sintagmi: "e mi sovvien l'eterno" (v. 11) è per Romanciuc "și-mi amintește de eternitate" (v. 11), diventa "și-mi amintesc de veșnicie" (v. 14) per Sebastian e "și mi-amintesc atunci de veșnicie" (v. 11) per Eta Boeriu; "e le morte stagioni, e la presente/ e viva, e il suon di lei" (vv. 12-13) è reso con "de anotimpuri moarte și de-aceasta/ prezent și viu, de sonurile sale" (vv. 12-13) da Romanciuc, "de toate anotimpurile moarte,/ de cel prezent și viu, și a lui larmă" (vv. 15-16) per Sebastian, mentre Eta Boeriu comprime il senso dell'originale in "de moarte ere și de cea prezentă/ în zvâcnet vie". Riteniamo di grande suggestione nella variante di Sebastian la parola "larmă", ma anche la scelta della Boeriu di sopprimere "il suon di lei" e di proporlo con "zvâcnet", un luogo testuale che permette di chiarire il rapporto della traduttrice con l'originale, che è di tipo interpretativo.

Infatti, analizzando la lirica, Winfried Wehle (Wehle 1997, 273-94) notava che l'infinito spaziale e quello temporale, che noi immaginiamo oltre la finitezza, sono in realtà un abisso; l'unica certezza è il presente, purtroppo è una certezza che si spegne come un suono. L'idea di questa certezza in fin di vita è

simbolicamente contenuta in "zvâcnet", anche se avvertiamo qui la necessità di un sinonimo cognitivo migliore nella versione romena, il suono della vita, seppur breve, è bellezza (almeno in questo particolare momento della creatività leopardiana). Forse in questo caso bisogna ammettere che "în zvcnet vie" è un arricchimento della traduzione rispetto all'originale italiano, come capita a volte nelle varianti, seppur straordinarie, della Boeriu[10].

In ogni modo, secondo le affermazioni di Marchese, la struttura sintattica del componimento, che è coordinativa anche nelle traduzioni romene, è in grado di esprimere, nel momento in cui è rievocata l'esperienza interiore, effetti di successione psicologica ed emotiva dell'Io. La fluidità sintattica delle traduzioni prese in discussione lascia aperta la possibilità di interpretare il testo leopardiano anche con strumenti psicanalitici, come aveva fatto Giovanni Amoretti (Amoretti 1979, 111-13), che analizzando nell'*Infinito* la presenza di simboli materni vede il tentativo dell'io poetico di ristabilire la comunione con la natura e con la madre, ipotesi interessante che collega la siepe e le piante all'elemento femminile, fissando la scena in uno spazio chiuso e protettivo, ma anche costrittivo, un'ipotesi interpretativa anche in questo caso meglio suggerita dalla variante "desiş" e "crîng" della Boeriu, piuttosto che da quella di "gard", poi "crengi" di Vasile Romanciuc o di "perdeaua/ de tufe nalte" poi "tufe" di Lascăr Sebastian.

Secondo Amoretti l'idillio si svolge grazie a una successione ininterrotta di onde concentriche, in una circolarità delineata anche dai pronomi dimostrativi, attentamente tradotti in romeno, in particolare dalla Boeriu, che segue oltre a quelli di vicinanza ("această/ colină" vv. 1-2) anche quelli di lontananza ("acelei nesfârşite/de dincolo tăceri" v. 9-10), a differenza di Romanciuc e Sebastian che propongono solo quelli di vicinanza, ma complessivamente questa attenzione dei traduttori favorisce nel lettore romeno "i mutamenti di prospettiva che, all'interno di un tutto unitario restituiscono l'immagine e il sentimento della dialettica armonia dell'essere, nella quale Io e Mondo appaiono distinti ma strettamente abbracciati in una simbiosi di vitali affinità e necessarie dipendenze" (Amoretti 1979, 111-13).

6. Conclusioni

Possiamo concludere che nelle varianti prese in discussione i traduttori sono riusciti a mettere in evidenza la riflessione poetica sui temi dell'infinto e dell'indefinito familiarizzando il lettore romeno con le idee leopardiane, in particolare con la teoria poetica che mette al centro la visuale ristretta, capace di potenziare l'immaginazione (a sua volta collegata con la poesia). Per raccontare invece in modo corretto il processo interiore che tende verso il sublime

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[10] Cfr. per altri esempi in questo senso Damian 2021.

proposto da Leopardi è importante selezionare, come ha fatto Eta Boeriu, un lessico romeno in grado di orientare il lettore, gradualmente, partendo dall'esperienza sensoriale del limite ("la siepe"). Pensiamo dunque che la sua versione, che coglie nella traduzione in romeno della siepe una vera e propria chiave di volta del percorso interiore di riflessione, proponendo di tradurla con un termine collegato al bosco (o boschetto) sia quella in grado di offrire ancora il miglior sinonimo cognitivo per questo problema testuale.

Analizzando le poche varianti d'autore dell'*Infinito*, Marco Santagata sottolineava la delicatezza degli interventi fatti da Leopardi sul testo dell'idillio (Santagata 1994, 164-69), ritenendo la lirica un "oggetto fragile" (Santagata 1994, 164), con una struttura circolare, con meccanismi di andata e ritorno messi in moto, nella variante romena, soltanto dalla felice intuizione di Eta Boeriu. Nella poesia si può leggere il discorso di un Io dell'infinito[11] e proprio la poetessa romena realizza un oggetto-testo delicato quanto l'originale, aiutando il lettore ad attivare la propria voce dell'interiorità "fatta di percezioni, associazioni, memoria, procedimenti relazionali e affettivi" quindi la propria soggettività, un processo che può avvenire solo grazie alle suggestioni delle parole. Rendere solo il sinonimo linguistico, concentrarsi solo sul significato rischia di generare un effetto lontano da quello sublime dell'originale. La designazione, il riferimento al fatto extrasensoriale, come suggeriva Coşeriu, va ricercato nel serbatoio di esperienze specifico alla romenità, nel tentativo di permettere al soggetto nativo, attraverso la traduzione, di immaginare ciò che non ha limiti di spazio e di tempo, fino a uscire, grazie alla traduzione, da sé stesso e a "naufragare" dolcemente nell'immaginazione, nell'assoluto.

Eta Boeriu, fra tutte le traduzioni studiate in questo lavoro, continua ad apparire anche oggi quella che favorisce di più, con le sue scelte ricercate (anche se in apparenza lontane dall'originale), l'esperienza essenziale proposta da Leopardi, quindi un percorso che dai vari stimoli sensoriali della natura, tramite raffinati processi interiori, invita il lettore ad espandere, dalla vista del limite fisico della siepe ("desiş"), l'immaginazione dell'infinito spaziale e a mettere in moto, dallo stimolo del rumore del vento fra le fronde ("foşneşte-n crîng"), un processo interiore da cui nasce l'infinito temporale. Anche il lettore romeno può in questo modo percorrere l'*itinerarium in infinitum* dell'originale, secondo la fortunata espressione di Walter Binni, senza che eventuali trappole testuali arrestino il flusso della meditazione, dell'esperienza interiore di "profondo piacere, di una forma alta di felicità e di pienezza dell'animo che è giunto al possesso del sentimento dell'infinito." (Binni 2014, 98).

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[11] Per questo percorso interpretativo si veda oltre a Santagata 1994, anche, in forma più divulgativa, il commento all'*Infinito* in Santagata, Carotti, Casadei e Tavoni 2006, 346-51. Tutte le citazioni sono tratte da questa edizione.

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FIKTION BEI PAUL DE MAN

ZOLTÁN KULCSÁR-SZABÓ[1]

ABSTRACT. *Fiction in Paul de Man*. Literature as a modern institution is founded—as, considering the relationship between testamentality and fictionality, Jacques Derrida pointed out in his essay *Demeure* and pertinent texts—on the one hand on the neutralization of the undecidability that haunts the demarcation line between literature and its "other," and on the further fiction of *comme si* on the other. Aiming to inquire into the far side of this institutionally fortified "other fiction," the present contribution attempts to give an account of Paul de Man's concept of fiction that is based on the non-phenomenal effects of a machine-like textuality. This concept appears—even if in a rather dispersed way—again and again in central contexts of the *Rousseau* part of *Allegories of Reading*, but has received surprisingly little attention in the literature on de Man. The focus of this article lies on the close reading of a longer passage from the final chapter of the mentioned work.

Keywords: deconstruction, fiction, Paul de Man, testimony, textuality

REZUMAT. *Ficțiunea la Paul De Man*. Literatura ca instituție modernă este fundamentată – așa cum sublinia Jacques Derrida în eseul său *Demeure* și în alte texte relevante privind relația dintre testamentalitate și ficționalitate – pe de o parte, pe neutralizarea indecidabilității care bântuie linia de demarcație dintre literatură și "celălalt" și, pe de altă parte, pe ficțiunea lui *comme si*. Având intenția de a examina zona îndepărtată a acestei "alte ficțiuni" fundamentate instituțional, contribuția actuală încearcă să dea seama de conceptul de ficțiune la Paul de Man, concept bazat pe efectele non-fenomenale ale unei textualități

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[1] **Zoltán KULCSÁR-SZABÓ** ist Professor und Leiter des Lehrstuhls für Vergleichende Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft der Eötvös-Loránd-Universität in Budapest. Zu seinen Forschungsschwerpunkten zählen Theorie und Geschichte der modernen Lyrik, sowie Literatur- und Kulturtheorie. In seinem zuletzt veröffentlichten Buch beschäftigt er sich mit der ungarischen Lyrik des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts (*Jeltelen felhők között*, 2022). Er war Mitherausgeber u. a. der Sammelbände *Signaturen des Geschehens* (Transcript 2014) und *Life After Literature* (Springer 2020). Emailadresse: kulcsar-szabo.zoltan@btk.elte.hu.

cvasi-mecaniciste. Acest concept apare iar – chiar dacă într-un mod destul de dispersat – în punctele nodale ale secțiunii *Rousseau* din *Alegoriile lecturii*, dar a beneficiat de surprinzător de puțină atenție în literatura consacrată lui de Man. În prezentul articol accentul cade pe lectura atentă a unui pasaj mai lung din capitolul final al lucrării menționate.

Cuvinte-cheie: *deconstrucție, ficțiune, Paul de Man, mărturie, textualitate*

Wie lässt sich eine Fiktion bezeugen? Wer ist oder wie wird man zum Zeugen einer Fiktion? Oder, allgemeiner formuliert, wie kann über Fiktion (als Fiktion) gezeugt werden? Diese Fragen reichen viel zu weit, um hier beantwortet zu werden, auch wenn es – denkt man vor allem an Jacques Derridas späte Auseinandersetzung mit dem Phänomen des falschen Zeugnisses (s. v. a. Derrida 2002) – an zumindest indirekten Ansätzen zur Präzisierung dieser Fragestellung nicht gänzlich fehlt. Die Beantwortung solcher Fragen würde u. a. voraussetzen, dass es möglich ist, die Erscheinungsformen oder Effekte von Fiktion(en) bzw. die Umstände, unter denen das fiktive Moment eines Diskurses sich als solches bloßstellt, territorial sauber abzugrenzen. Das ist bekanntlich nicht der Fall. In seinen Kommentaren zu Maurice Blanchots *L'instant de ma mort* hat Derrida – im Kontext einer Fragestellung, die den anfangs gestellten (scheinbar zumindest) diametral entgegengesetzt ist – sogar davor gewarnt, die diskursive Möglichkeit eines reinen oder authentischen Ortes des Zeugnisses voreilig anzunehmen. Zeugenschaft wird nicht nur im Sinne einer referenziellen Ausgeliefertheit vom Fiktiven heimgesucht, sondern auch strukturell erst von der in ihr einsickernden Fiktionalität ermöglicht. Es geht erst dort um wahre Zeugenschaft, wo es unmöglich ist, auch für den Zeugen zu zeugen („Niemand / zeugt für den / Zeugen" – zitiert Derrida Celan: Derrida 1998, 34.), mithin die in seiner Singularität und Unersetzlichkeit wurzelnde Authentizität des Zeugen referenziell zu bestätigen – zumindest ohne, dass diese Bestätigung sich auf die ethische Bedingungsstruktur eines falschen Zeugnisses einlassen muss. Der Diskurs des Zeugen ist strukturell einerseits auf referentielle Indeterminiertheit, andererseits auf Wiederholung und Reproduktion und dadurch auf die Möglichkeit der Manipulation angewiesen (vgl. v. a. 31, 92-94. bzw. 37, 49) – und zeugt dadurch nicht zuletzt von der Fiktion, von der Seinsweise einer Fiktion, die sich nicht hinter die ihr institutionell zugeschriebenen Grenzen zurückweisen lässt, wie das z. B. die moderne Institution der „Literatur" vorschreibt, die Derrida an verschiedenen Stellen und in unterschiedlichen Zusammenhängen als die Institution des *comme si* beschrieben hat. Die *Möglichkeit* von Fiktion, mithin die Möglichkeit von Literatur ist von der anderen Seite der genannten

Institution (Derrida: dem „Anderen" von Literatur) prinzipiell nicht wegzudenken, eben deshalb insistiert diese Institution darauf, die Unentscheidbarkeit, die die sie ermöglichende Grenzziehung heimsucht, zu „neutralisieren". Diese Neutralisierung erfolgt durch die Fiktion (durch die territoriale Gleichsetzung von Fiktion und Literatur, durch die Institutionalisierung von Fiktion im Begriff der Literatur), und zwar – wie Derrida formuliert – durch eine andere oder weitere Fiktion des *comme si* (124). Es ist nämlich gerade diese Institutionalisierung, die im gewissen Sinne *fiktiv*, die im gewissen Sinne eine Fiktion ist. Die literarische Institution oder die Institution der Literatur ist – zumindest im von Derrida gemeinten modernen Sinne (s. dazu die Überlegungen in Derrida 1992, 34-38) – u. a. von der Voraussetzung einer allgemeinen oder umfassenden Fiktionalität definiert, die aber selbst Fiktion ist, weil sie die Präsenz des fiktionalen Momentes in nichtfiktionalen Diskursen leugnet bzw. eben als literarisch neutralisiert.

Fiktionale Erzählungen sind aber, meint zumindest, in dem etwas verschiedenen Kontext seiner späten Programmschrift über den *Widerstand gegen die Theorie*, Paul de Man, durchaus schwierig aus „der Welt oder der Wirklichkeit" wegzudenken: „ihre Auswirkungen auf die Welt mögen sogar zu stark sein, um erfreulich zu sein" (de Man 1987, 92). Diese für de Man typische Folgerung ist im genannten Essay von einem komplexen Argumentationsgang vorbereitet, wo es vor allem darum geht, den der damaligen Literaturtheorie anhaftenden Einwand vom „Verbalismus" zu entkräften. Weit entfernt davon, im Bann einer „Leugnung des Realitätsprinzips im Namen absoluter Fiktion" gefangen zu sein, besteht die Theorie de Manschen Zuschnitts auf die Voraussetzungen einer „nichtphänomenalen Linguistik", die „den Diskurs über Literatur von naiven Entgegensetzungen von Fiktion und Wirklichkeit [befreit], die selbst die Folgen einer unkritischen, mimetischen Auffassung der Kunst sind. (…) Literatur ist Fiktion nicht nur darum, weil sie sich irgendwie weigerte, »Realität« anzuerkennen, sondern weil nicht a priori feststeht, dass Sprache gemäß den Prinzipien (oder diesen *ähnlichen*) der phänomenalen Welt funktioniert. Es ist daher nicht ausgemacht, dass Literatur eine glaubwürdige Informationsquelle über irgend etwas ist, außer über ihre eigene Sprache." Das Zitat gibt vieles zu denken. Zunächst ist die Behauptung hervorzuheben, laut der Sprache nicht mimetisch verfährt: wenn überhaupt, dann für ihrer selbst stellt sie ein zuverlässiges Modell dar – was, wie Rodolphe Gasché richtig betont (Gasché 1998, 130), keineswegs auf eine Art Selbstreflexivität der Sprache zielt, zumindest beim späten de Man nicht –, in diesem Sinne ist Literatur vielleicht eben in diesem Sinne Fiktion. In der Sprache werden die „Prinzipien der phänomenalen Welt" vielleicht nicht einfach nur negiert, sondern – wie das der Text etwas rätselhaft durch Kursivschrift hervorhebt – ihr Funktionieren *ähnelt* nicht einmal diesen Prinzipien. Diese Akzentuierung ist etwas merkwürdig, da

– wie das Derrida in seinem magistralen Kommentar gemerkt hat (Derrida 2006, 73, 129-134) – de Man einige Jahre vorher, im Schlusskapitel *Entschuldigungen* seiner *Allegorien des Lesens* eben das Moment solcher Ähnlichkeit wiederholt unterstrichen hat, nämlich in seinem Vergleich zwischen den Operationsmodi der Sprache und denen der Maschine, deren Prinzipien vielleicht ja nicht zur phänomenalen Welt gehören mögen, die aber – und dies bleibt zu bemerken – dennoch über einen quasi-phänomenalen oder mimetischen Bezugspunkt des de Manschen Sprachmodells zeugt. Am wichtigsten scheint jedoch hier die implizite Folgerung zu sein, wonach die strikte Gleichsetzung von Literatur mit Fiktion sozusagen von der Erkenntnis widerlegt wird, dass das fiktive Moment gerade in der Nichtphänomenalität der Sprache verankert ist: fiktionale Erzählungen können ihre unerfreuliche Auswirkungen genau deshalb in der Welt oder in der Wirklichkeit entfalten, *weil* sie nicht den Prinzipien dieser Welt folgen und deshalb kaum imstande sind, diese abzudecken, ersetzen, simulieren oder einfach unter der Voraussetzung eines *comme si* zu wiederholen.[2]

Sprache, so sieht es an diesem Punkt aus, scheint die Möglichkeit, die Institution von Literatur auf den Begriff von Fiktion zu begründen und diese dadurch zu neutralisieren, vielmehr zu erschweren, statt zu ermöglichen. In dieser Hinsicht ist es durchaus konsequent, dass eine Fiktionstheorie, die Fiktion als das zentrale Prinzip einer anthropologischen Begründung dieser Institution betrachten möchte, wohl unausweichlich dazu tendiert, auf das Primat der Sprachlichkeit zu verzichten. Auch Wolfgang Iser, der die Leistung des Fiktiven im fiktiven Text u. a. darin erblickt hat, dass durch ihn „die Sprache selbst überschritten und folglich hintergehbar wird", muss dabei anerkennen, dass „das Fiktive nicht mit dem Konstitutionsgrund des Textes gleichzusetzen" ist (Iser 1993, 50-51).

Bezeichnenderweise ist das auch bei dem frühen de Man nicht gänzlich anders: obwohl das Paradigma der romantischen Poesie auf das Primat der (eben aufgrund dieses Primats als fiktional bezeichneten) Sprache gegenüber der empirischen „Wirklichkeit" zurückgeführt ist, scheint das daraus hergeleitete Konzept von Fiktionalität ein abtrennbares Bereich der Sprache vorauszusetzen, das mit dem „Anderen" der Literatur schon deshalb in keine Berührung kommen kann, weil es die Außenwelt negiert. Dort, wo de Man – eigentlich fast überall in seinen Schriften, die vor seiner „Wende zur Rhetorik" entstanden sind – auf poetische Fiktion zu sprechen kommt, und zwar im Kontext einer eher phänomenologisch statt sprachtheoretisch zu nennenden Terminologie, verankert er den Begriff in der Vorstellung einer ontologischen oder vielmehr

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[2] Deshalb kann de Man in dem nächsten Satz zu Recht mit der Behauptung fortfahren, wonach „was wir Ideologie nennen, ist genau die Verwechslung von Sprache mit natürlicher Realität, von Bezugnahme auf ein Phänomen mit diesem selbst."

temporalen Separation, die seine romantischen Helden (in erster Linie Rousseau, Wordsworth und Hölderlin) zu ihrer eigentlichen Grunderfahrung gemacht haben und ihre poetische Sprache eben auf diese Erfahrung aufgebaut haben: die unumkehrbare Separation zwischen Tat und Deutung, Bewusstsein und Außenwelt, Präsenz und Dauer wird in der – oder *als die* – Fiktionalität der poetischen Sprache reflektiert (s. stellvertretend für eine Vielzahl diesbezüglich relevanter Stellen de Man 1966; s. dazu de Graef 1995, 5-28). Auch 1967 noch, wo de Man in seinem Essay *Criticism und Crisis* vielleicht zum ersten Mal sich an den Versuch wagt, literarische Sprache bzw. die damit gleichgesetzte Fiktionalität mit Blick auf eine zeichentheoretische Terminologie zu definieren, greift er auf diese Separationsfigur zurück (de Man ²1983a, 17). Die Fiktionalität der literarischen Sprache (die ihrerseits das Wissen darüber manifestiert, „dass Zeichen und Bedeutung niemals zusammenfallen können") offenbart sich mittels eines „self-reflecting mirror-effect", der die Separation des fiktionalen Werkes von der „empirischen Realität" bezeugt. De Man geht hier – vielleicht im Gegensatz zu seinen späteren Schriften – noch von der Möglichkeit davon aus, was Iser „Selbstanzeige" der Fiktion genannt hat (als Beispiel dient hier die Heldin von Homers *Ilias*, die die Bilder des im Epos erzählten Krieges in ein Gewand einwebt – *Ilias* 3,125-128), grenzt sich hier allerdings bereits offen und scharf von einer Kompensationstheorie des Fiktiven ab, und es ist eben diese Unterscheidung, die dann in dem ungefähr zur selben Zeit entstandenen Klassiker *Die Rhetorik der Zeitlichkeit* zu de Mans auch später oft wiederholter Auslegung der Schlegelschen Ironiedefinition („permanente Parekbase") hinführt, von der de Man hier die „Einmischung" des Autors hervorhebt, der „die von der Fiktion erzeugte Illusion zerstört" und dazu dient, „den allzu bereitwillig sich auf die Illusion einlassenden Leser davor zu bewahren, Wirklichkeit und Fiktion zu verwechseln und die essentielle Negativität der Fiktion zu vergessen" (de Man 1993, 116-117).

In *Allegorien des Lesens* taucht das Beispiel von Homers Helena in einem zum Teil verschiedenen Zusammenhang wieder auf: im Kapitel über Rousseaus *Gesellschaftsvertrag* soll es durch einen Vergleich mit dem Gesetzestext die „unpersönliche, maschinenartige Systemartigkeit" der Grammatik illustrieren, die eine Proliferation des (Gesetz-)Textes durch die referenzielle Indifferenz, d. h. „die Indifferenz des Textes bezüglich seiner referenziellen Bedeutung" ermöglicht (de Man 2012, 212). Dieses Konzept von referenzieller Indifferenz wird im *Rousseau*-Teil von *Allegorien des Lesens* bekanntlich zu einem Textmodell erweitert, in dem die nichtreferenziellen Operationen eines Textes (und für de Man gäbe es ohne die Möglichkeit solcher referenziellen Indifferenz keine Textualität: „genauso undenkbar wie ein Text ohne Grammatik ist eine Grammatik ohne Suspendierung der referenziellen Bedeutung"; 213) mit denen der Grammatik

und/oder einer Maschine verglichen werden.[3] Diese referenzielle Indifferenz reicht aber noch nicht aus, um zu einer zuverlässigen, wenn auch äußerst breit gefassten „Definition" des Textes zu gelangen (de Man stellt das Wort „Definition" konsequent in Anführungszeichen[4]): die Maschine Text generiert nämlich (mindestens) einen Referenten, „der das grammatische System unterminiert, dem er seine Verfasstheit verdankt" (214; de Man 1979, 269.). De Man stellt hier, immer noch im Kontext des Vergleichs zum Gesetz, eine „verstohlene Geste (deceitful, covert gesture)" fest, in der durch die Referenz das Singuläre oder das Besondere die Bedeutung von dem Text „entwendet", auf die es kein Recht hat[5] und die nun nicht einfach die Inkongruenz zwischen Zeichen und Bedeutung, sondern „die Divergenz von Grammatik und referenzieller Bedeutung" exemplifiziert, eine Divergenz, die zunächst die theoretische Ursache für die Existenz einer „figurativen Dimension der Sprache" angibt, wenig später aber auch die Definition von Textualität begründet.

Diese Ausführungen verweisen auf ein zentrales Moment des abschließenden Kapitels von *Allegorien des Lesens*, wo de Man aus einer Szene von Rousseaus *Confessions* ausgeht, in der Rousseau über einen in gewisser Hinsicht harmlosen Diebstahl (die Entwendung eines Bandes) und seine darauffolgende Anschuldigung des Hausmädchens Marion erzählt (Rousseau 1959a, 85-87). Nachdem er durch eine furiose (Re-)Konstruktion der Zirkulation des Bandes den Diebstahl als das Stehlen eines „freien Signifikanten" bloßgestellt hat (de Man 2012, 235-245), interpretiert de Man Rousseaus Entschuldigung, nämlich dass er nach der Enthüllung des Diebstahls deshalb Marion angeschuldigt hat, weil ihr Name ihm als erstes einfiel („je m'excusai sur le premier objet qui s'offrit"), als eine „Zufallslüge" (247), deren Implikationen er in Rousseaus vierten *Rêverie* in Form einer Fiktionstheorie aufspürt (Rousseau 1959b, 1027-1030). Das ist die (im Buch also reichlich spät angelegte) Stelle, wo de Man sich mit Rousseau an einer Definition von Fiktion versucht, zugleich vielleicht die längste zusammenhängende Passage bei de Man, die er (fast) ausschließlich diesem Begriff widmet.

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[3] Diese Maschinenhaftigkeit kennzeichnet in gewisser Hinsicht auch de Mans Art, Texte/Maschinen zu lesen. S. dazu Bennington 1989, 215.

[4] Die „Definition" lautet: „*Text* nennen wir jede Entität, die aus einer solcher doppelten Perspektive heraus betrachtet werden kann: als ein generatives, nicht abgeschlossenes, nicht-referenzielles grammatisches System, das durch eine transzendentale Signifikation abgeschlossen wird, welche den grammatischen Kode unterminiert, dem der Text seine Existenz verdankt. Die »Definition« des Textes erklärt auch die Unmöglichkeit seiner Existenz und präfiguriert die allegorischen Erzählungen dieser Unmöglichkeit." (de Man 2012, 215.).

[5] Wie Derrida darauf hinweist, ist die Möglichkeit des falschen Zeugnisses in dieser Geste verwurzelt. Vgl. Derrida 2006, 96-98.

Was an diesen Ausführungen im Moment am meisten interessieren kann, ist die Tatsache, dass de Man, dem es hier bekanntlich in erster Linie um die komplexe Beziehung zwischen konstativer und performativer Sprache geht, den Zustand einer um jede Bedeutung bzw. jedes System von Motivationen gebrachten Signifikation einerseits mit der Fiktion gleichsetzt, andererseits (diese Fiktion) für fiktiv erklärt. Die Zeichenfolge „Marion" muss im Sinne von Rousseaus Entschuldigungen jeglicher Signifikanz entbehren, „denn nur dann, wenn der die gesamte Kette initiierende Akt, die Äußerung des Klangs »Marion«, wirklich ohne ein denkbares Motiv ist, wird die totale Arbitrarität der Handlung zur wirksamsten, effektivsten performativen Entschuldigung überhaupt" (244). De Man scheint in der Fiktionstheorie von Rousseaus vierter *Rêverie* ein alternatives Deutungsrahmen für die falsche Anschuldigung zu entdecken: hier steht dem Begriff von Lüge, die als eine Art Entwendung von Wahrheit bzw. Entwendung von Bedeutung in einer aktuellen referenziellen Konstellation bloßgestellt wird, die Kategorie von Fiktion gegenüber, die – als harmlose Täuschung – das „geschlossenen System" hinterfragt, „in dem Wahrheit Eigentum ist und Lüge Diebstahl" (248). Die Entschuldigung von Rousseau könnte sich demnach auf die Unterscheidung zwischen Lüge und Fiktion aufbauen[6], die zunächst im Bezug auf die Relation zwischen „Tatsache" und „Darstellung" aufgerissen wird. „Was eine Fiktion zur Fiktion macht – schreibt de Man – , ist keine wie auch immer geartete Polarität von Tatsache und Darstellung. Fiktion hat mit Darstellung nichts zu tun, sondern ist vielmehr die Abwesenheit einer jeglichen Verbindung zwischen der Äußerung und einem Referenten" (249). Im Sinne dieser Definition (oder zumindest „Definition") ist Fiktion als eine harmlose Aufhebung einer referenziellen Konstellation dadurch von Lüge unterscheidbar, dass letztere als eine Art „fehlgeleitete Lektüre" eben dieser Fiktion zustande kommt und den Akt des Fingierens mit einer bestimmten Handlung (im Kontext der behandelten Episode: einer argwilligen Beschuldigung) ersetzt. In Wahrheit ist es aber vielmehr so, fährt de Man fort, dass es nicht die Fiktion selbst ist, die „für die Konsequenzen verantwortlich gemacht werden [kann], sondern ihre fälschlicherweise referenzielle Lektüre. Als eine Fiktion ist die Aussage unschädlich, und der Irrtum ist harmlos; es sind die fehlgeleitete Lektüre des Irrtums als eines Diebstahls oder einer Verleumdung, die Weigerung zuzugeben, dass Fiktion Fiktion ist, der sture Widerstand gegen die selbstverständliche »Tatsache«, dass Sprache in Bezug auf referenzielle Bedeutung vollkommen frei ist und setzen kann, was auch immer ihre Grammatik ihr zu sagen erlaubt, die den zufälligen Irrtum in Ungerechtigkeit verwandeln." (250)

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[6] Zum Problem dieser Unterscheidung bei Rousseau s. Margel 2007, 42-57.

De Man führt hier eine Art Selbstdefinition oder – wenn man will – die Struktur der „Selbstanzeige" von Fiktion vor („zuzugeben, dass Fiktion Fiktion ist"), eine tautologische Bestimmung, die zugleich als ein Satz von der Wahrheit, eine wahre Aussage darstellt. Fiktion ist Fiktion – diese Tautologie besagt – zumindest auf den ersten Blick – , dass Fiktion sich als Fiktion versteht, dass Fiktion nichts anderes ist als Fiktion und dass sie dies erst dadurch ist, dass sie darüber weiß und dass sie dieses Wissen nicht verschleiert, folglich dass eine Fiktion, die sich als solche – auch wenn auf eine eher implizite Weise – bezeichnet, diese Selbstbezeichnung auf eine referenziell richtige Aussage gründet, sie sagt die Wahrheit, sie ist – und hier stimmt de Man statt oder neben Rousseau mit Nietzsche überein (es wäre z. B. auf ein vielzitiertes Fragment aus 1873 zu verweisen, das auch in *Allegorien des Lesens* zu finden ist: „Kunst behandelt also den S c h e i n als S c h e i n, will also gerade n i c h t täuschen, i s t w a h r." [Nietzsche 1999, 632; vgl. de Man 1988, 157) – wahr. Fiktion ist wahr, ist eine Wahrheit, indem sie sich als Fiktion bezeichnet bzw. entblößt. Es ist aber, wie de Man das kurz darauf zugeben muss, äußerst schwierig, diese Selbstbezeichnung zu lokalisieren oder zu formalisieren. Fiktion wurde ja als die Nichtexistenz jedweder Beziehung zwischen Tatsache und Bedeutung definiert, die Selbstanzeige der Fiktionalität müsste also in dieser Definition formalisiert werden können, eine Definition kann aber kaum auf diejenige Generierung eines Referenten verzichten, ohne die laut de Mans oben zitiertem Textbegriff keine Textmaschine operieren könnte. De Man bringt dieses Paradoxon in der folgenden Aussage auf den Punkt:

> Es scheint unmöglich, das Moment zu isolieren, in dem die Fiktion frei von jeder Bedeutung dasteht; in genau dem Moment, da sie gesetzt wird, und auch in dem Kontext, den sie erzeugt, wird sie sofort falsch interpretiert: Sie wird als eine Determination ausgelegt, die *ipso facto* überdeterminiert ist. Aber ohne dieses Moment, das als solches nie existieren darf (never allowed to exist as such), wäre so etwas wie ein Text nicht vorstellbar. (de Man 2012, 250-251; de Man 1979, 293)

Fiktion, indem sie sich als solche bezeichnet, ist keine Fiktion mehr. Das Moment der Fiktion aber (ein Moment, ohne die es keinen Text geben *darf*: auf die Mehrdeutigkeit dieser Kondition – oder Warnung? – ist noch zurückzukommen), sei es noch so unverzichtbar, lässt sich nicht identifizieren, *es gibt ihn nicht, folglich gibt es die Fiktion nicht*. Das oder vielleicht der Moment der Fiktion als solche ist etwas, das oder der niemals kommen wird, etwas, das oder der im Begriff des Textes gesetzt (oder vorausgesetzt) wird, aber sich nie referentiell verwirklichen kann. Das Moment der Fiktion ist selbst fiktiv.

Diese Folgerung macht zunächst die Tatsache sichtbar, dass – wie das von Cynthia Chase zu Recht bemerkt wurde (Chase 1986, 102[7]) – de Man hier die an einer früheren Stelle erwogene Möglichkeit, im Namen Marions eine von Signifikanz vollständig befreite Zeichenfolge zu identifizieren, gleichsam im Rückblick aufgeben oder zurückziehen muss. Zweitens könnte darauf hingewiesen werden, dass das fiktive Moment im Textmodell de Mans nie an sich, nie *als solches* zur Erscheinung kommen kann. Genau darum geht es im *Metapher*-Kapitel von *Allegorien des Lesens*, wo de Man eine denkwürdige Interpretation von Rousseaus Parabel über die Entstehung des Eigennamens „Mensch" im *Versuch über den Ursprung der Sprachen* entfaltet. Hier weist de Man u. a. darauf hin, dass in der Metapher „Riese", durch die der „wilde Mensch" den ihn begegnenden anderen bezeichnet, vor den er Angst hat, d. h. wo die metaphorische Identifizierung („*er* ist ein Riese") eigentlich die Aussage „*Ich* fürchte mich" ersetzt, „eine zwischen Fiktion und Tatsache in der Schwebe befindliche referenzielle Situation (die Hypothese der Furcht) in eine wörtliche Tatsache verwandelt wird." (de Man 2012, 36-37) Die Furcht – die erst durch diese Figur zur wörtlichen Realität gemacht werden soll – wird von de Man eine „parafigurale Fiktion" genannt: dieser Neologismus de Mans bezeichnet einen (man ist geneigt zu sagen: fiktiven) Zustand, in dem es keine wortwörtliche und damit auch keine rein figurale Bedeutungen gibt, da die Bedeutung der Riesenmetapher zunächst auf den „permanenten Schwebezustand" bezogen ist, in dem „zwischen einer wörtlichen Welt, in der Erscheinungsbild und Wesen zusammenfallen, und einer figurativen Welt, in der diese Übereinstimmung nicht a priori gesetzt ist", nicht endgültig unterschieden werden kann. Die Metapher, die – wie de Man das betont – ihren Referenten gerade dadurch erzeugt, dass sie ihren eigenen figurativen Status befestigt (d. h. sich als Metapher entblößt) neutralisiert eben diese „parafigurale Fiktion", indem sie „das fiktionale, textuelle Element in der Natur der von ihr konnotierten Entität [übersieht]." Fiktionen sind folglich parafigural genau deshalb, weil sie der Unterscheidung zwischen Figur und Referent (und – wie de Man hinzufügt – zwischen „intratextuellen" und „extratextuellen" Ereignissen[8]) widerstehen

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[7] Was diesen "freien Signifikanten" betrifft, äußert auch Derrida seine Zweifel: Derrida 2006, 45.

[8] „[Die Metapher] nimmt eine Welt an, in der intratextuelle und extratextuelle Ereignisse, wörtliche und figurative Sprachformen unterschieden werden können, eine Welt, in der das Wörtliche und das Figurative Eigenschaften sind, die isoliert und folglich untereinander ausgetauscht und füreinander eingesetzt werden können. Dies ist ein Irrtum, obwohl man sagen kann, dass ohne diesen Irrtum keine Sprache möglich wäre." (de Man 2012, 37.). Diese Welt, könnte man hinzufügen, d. h. die Welt, in der die genannten Eigenschaften untereinander ausgetauscht und füreinander eingesetzt werden können, ist eine Welt, in der die anthropologische Fähigkeit des Fingierens und damit der herkömmliche Begriff von Fiktion gegeben sind. Deshalb ist es kein Irrtum zu sagen, dass ohne diesen Irrtum keine Sprache

bzw. weil sie in dieser Unterscheidung neutralisiert werden – wie die Furcht des „wilden Menschen" sich im gewissen Sinne dadurch mildert, dass ihr Auslöser einen Namen bekommt. Erst in dem Moment, wo Fiktion um ihren parafiguralen Status gebracht ist, wo also ihre Parafiguralität entwendet wird, wird Fiktion zur Fiktion, wird sie sich im institutionellen Sinne als „Fiktion" bezeichnen können.

Diese Folgerung führt zurück zu de Mans Formalisierung der Selbstanzeige von Fiktionalität, nämlich zur Aussage, dass „Fiktion Fiktion ist". Im Lichte der Einsicht, nach der das Moment von Fiktion als solche niemals isoliert werden kann, bleibt diese zwar weiterhin eine „wahre" Aussage, nun aber weniger in der Form einer tautologischen Identifikation, sondern als ein Satz der Negation, der darauf hinweist, dass es das, was hier Fiktion genannt wird, im referenziellen Sinne nicht gibt. Die Selbstanzeige oder Selbstbezeichnung von Fiktion, oder die Möglichkeit einer solchen Selbstanzeige ist eine Fiktion.

De Man hält, freilich, auch eine andere, wenngleich etwas metaphorische Bezeichnung für diesen fiktiven Zustand der reinen Fiktion parat, und zwar die der „Maschine". Im Schlussteil des Essays soll dieses Modell (Text als Maschine) die performative Kehrseite des textuellen Feldes beschreiben, das sich in erster Line dadurch von der anderen Modellierungsmöglichkeit dieses Feldes (Text als Körper) unterscheidet, dass in ihm „die Dekonstruktion der figuralen Dimension" erfolgt und folglich „die Illusion von Bedeutung" aufgegeben wird (de Man 2012, 258-259). Die textuelle Maschine wird bereits hier in einer flüchtigen Bemerkung mit Kleists „antigraven" Marionetten verglichen, die einige Jahre später zum Gegenstand eines der letzten Essays von de Man werden sollten, und mittels dieses Vergleichs als „die Anamorphose einer Form" beschrieben, „losgelöst von Bedeutung und fähig, jede erdenkliche Struktur anzunehmen, (…) jedoch auch völlig erbarmungslos in ihrer Unfähigkeit, ihre eigene strukturelle Formgebung aus nicht-strukturalen Gründen zu modifizieren" (252). De Man lässt hier keinen Zweifel, dass diese Beschreibung der Textmaschine exakt die Seinsbedingungen für seinen Fiktionsbegriff zurückspiegelt (er wiederholt hier ja beinahe sich selbst: „Die Maschine ist wie die Grammatik, wenn diese von der Rhetorik des Textes isoliert wird, ohne das kein Text

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möglich wäre – andererseits liegt aber genau darin der Grund dafür, dass solche Operationen (Tauschen, Ersetzen und ähnliche) dafür verantwortlich sind, dass Fiktion imstande ist, eben diese Welt zu ersetzen oder zu negieren. „Es ist immer möglich – so eine unmittelbare Folgerung de Mans im *Entschuldigungen*-Kapitel, die er aus der Erkenntnis zieht, dass das Moment von Fiktion sich niemals isolieren lässt –, sich jeglicher Erfahrung zu stellen (jegliche Schuld zu entschuldigen), weil die Erfahrung stets als fiktionaler Diskurs und als empirisches Ereignis gleichzeitig existiert und es nie möglich ist, zu entscheiden, welche der beiden Möglichkeiten die richtige ist" (251).

erzeugt werden kann"), mit dem einzigen Unterschied, dass mit der Vorstellung einer Textmaschine die Konnotation „der unversöhnlichen Wiederholung eines vorgezeichneten Musters" hinzukommt. Genau diese Seinsbedingungen wurden aber für referenziell unmöglich bzw. fiktiv erklärt: es ist also anzunehmen, dass die Maschine des Textes (die Maschinenhaftigkeit des Textes oder die Maschine im Text) ebenso wenig zur Erscheinung kommen kann (oder, wie de Man in der vorhin zitierten, entscheidenden Passage über das fiktive Moment der Fiktion formuliert hat, *darf*, sie ist *never allowed to exist as such*), wie der Zustand einer reinen Fiktion – darin lässt sich vielleicht eine mögliche Erklärung für die Beobachtung von Derrida finden, nämlich dass de Man sich in diesem Essay vielmehr Vergleichen („Text als Maschine", „Die Maschine ist wie…") als Identifizierungen bedient. Es ist die Maschine selbst, die diese (Selbst-) Identifizierung, und folglich die Identifizierung des fiktiven Momentes sozusagen *verbietet*, ohne das sie nie funktionieren könnte. Dieses Verbot oder, wenn man will, Fiktionsverbot, ist ein Verbot der Sprache[9], die die Isolierung oder die Formalisierung ihrer eigenen Gesetze untersagt. Sprache ist demnach nicht einfach eine Versprechensmaschine[10], sondern zugleich eine Verbotsmaschine.

Interessant ist ferner der Begriff „Anamorphose", der hier – in der Umgebung einiger bei de Man sonst eher seltenen Lacanismen bzw. in Anbetracht des ursprünglichen Titels des Aufsatzes (*The Purloined Ribbon*), der wohl auf Jacques Lacans berühmtes Seminar über Poes Novelle *The Purloined Letter* alludieren dürfte (de Man 1977; Lacan 1966; vgl. dazu Derrida 2006, 45, 75) – vielleicht auch Lacans Ausführungen über Anamorphose in Erinnerung ruft, die an Beispielen wie Holbeins Gemälde *Die Gesandten* oder Dalís fließenden Uhren das Konzept einer Spaltung von Auge und Blick illustrieren (vgl. Lacan 1987, 85-95). Für de Man scheint der Begriff jedenfalls die referenzielle Indifferenz von Sprache (als Maschine) zu exemplifizieren: ihre Fähigkeit, „jede erdenkliche Struktur anzunehmen" scheint aus ihrer relativen Unabhängigkeit von der Signifikation zu folgen. Im Diskurs des späten de Mans kehrt diese Vorstellung einer anamorphischen Textualität an mehreren Stellen wieder, z. B. in den Arbeiten zur *Aesthetic Ideology*, wo die figurative Struktur der Sprache mehrmals auf eine „Anamorphose der Tropen" zurückgeführt wird, u. a. um die Entfaltung eines tropologischen Systems (eines Textes) aus dem arbiträren Akt eines

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[9] Welches Verbot also eigentlich einen latenten, aber ziemlich bezeichnenden Imperativ in de Mans Diskurs impliziert: Wer die Welt zu verstehen sucht, sollte sich nicht an Fiktionen wenden, nicht in Fiktionen fliehen, die irreführenderweise versprechen, eben diese Welt in Klammern zu setzen!

[10] S. de Mans berühmte Heideggerparodie (de Man 2012, 225.): „*Die Sprache verspricht (sich)*; in einem Maß, das notwendig in die Irre führt, spricht Sprache ebenso notwendig das Versprechen ihrer eigenen Wahrheit aus."

Setzens zu veranschaulichen (de Man ²1996a, 425; de Man 1996b, 176-177).[11] Im Schlussteil des Kleist-Essays über *Ästhetische Formalisierung* taucht der Begriff in einer überraschend dichten Frequenz auf. Wo de Man die ästhetische Wirkung des Puppenspiels statt Puppe oder Spieler aus „einem System von Faden und Schnüren" erklärt und dieses System zum eigentlichen *Text* ernennt (der sich zwischen Puppen und Puppenspieler „entspinnt"), beschreibt er das „Transformationssystem" dieses Textes als „die Anamorphose des Fadens, wenn er sich dreht und in die Tropen der Ellipse, der Parabel und der Hyperbel windet" (de Man 1988, 227-228). Diese Anamorphose zeugt von einer fast mathematischen Formalisierung des Systems, deren Vorteil darin liegt, dass sie von „semantischen Intentionen" unabhängig ist und über die Präzision einer „Maschine" verfügt (230). Es fällt sofort auf, dass de Man die Kleists Text entliehene geometrischen Kategorien – übrigens mit aller Recht – „Tropen" nennt und damit auf eine Homonymiereihe zwischen geometrischen und rhetorischen Formen aufmerksam macht. Die Möglichkeit dieser Harmonisierung zwischen den sich geometrisch abzeichnenden Bewegungsformen und den rhetorischen Transformationen („Tropen sind quantifizierte Bewegungssysteme.") impliziert hier, zumindest auf den ersten Blick, u. a. die Realisierung der für de Man theoretisch ausgeschlossene Möglichkeit, dass die textuelle Maschine als solche bzw. das fiktive Moment der von jeder Signifikation befreiten Fiktion in ihrer Isoliertheit doch hervortreten können, und zwar dadurch, dass ihre Operationen durch die Formalisierung mit den Operationen der Tropen konvergieren.

De Man ging es bekanntlich darum, die ideologische Tragweite solcher Formalisierungen aufzudecken, was im Kleist-Essay in der Geste gipfelt, die im Hintergrund der ästhetischen Formalisierung (und der auf dieser begründeten Institution der „ästhetischen Erziehung") die Bedrohung einer Gewalt aufzeigt, die die Formalisierung erst ermöglicht.[12] Diese Gewalt meldet sich u. a. in der Opposition zwischen den leblosen Körpern der Puppen und den tanzenden menschlichen Körpern an. Während der Boden z. B. für die „antigrave" Bewegung der Puppen „nicht der Boden stabiler Erkenntnis [ist], sondern eine Anamorphose des Fadens, durch die er zur Asymptote einer hyperbolischen Trope wird", muss der menschliche Tänzer „seine Bewegungen beständig für kurze Augenblicke der Ruhe, die nicht Teile des Tanzes sind, unterbrechen"

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[11] Manuskripte in de Mans handschriftlichem Nachlass zeugen davon, dass die Kategorie der Anamorphose ihn in seinen letzten Lebensjahren regelmäßig beschäftigte. Eine frühe, letztlich verworfene Titelvariante seines späten, nicht vollständig ausgearbeiteten, aber umso wichtigeren Baudelaire-Essays *Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric* (vgl. de Man 1988, 179-204) lautete *Anthropomorphism and Anamorphosis* (Paul de Man Papers. Box 7:9.)

[12] „Die ästhetische Erziehung versagt keineswegs; sie gelingt nur zu gut, so gut nämlich, dass sie die Gewalt verbirgt, durch die sie allererst möglich wird." (de Man 1988, 231.)

(229-230[13]). Diese Unterscheidung von Kleist interpretiert de Man als die Unterscheidung zwischen einem System von Tropen, die von der Schwerkraft der Signifikation befreit sind und den „Parabasen des ironischen Bewusstseins", die die ästhetische Illusion ein- oder unterbrechen bzw. negieren („eine Dialektik, die von wiederholten Negationen zerstückelt wird, kann nie ein Tanz sein; bestenfalls ist sie ein Trauermarsch"). Diese bodenständige Gewalt, die die ästhetische Form zerstört und die von de Man anderswo mit der „Materialität der wirklichen Geschichte" in Zusammenhang gestellt wurde (202), bedroht die in der Konvergenz zwischen den formalisierten Operationen und den rhetorischen Transformationen möglich gewordene reine Selbstpräsenz von Fiktion („history is not fiction", meint de Man dazu 1969 de Man [2]1983b, 163). Diese Gewalt ist sogar genau die gleiche Gewalt, die durch „die Zergliederung der Bedeutung" die Isolierung des Fiktiven erwirkt und die den formalisierten Tanz als eine „anamorphische Transformation von Tropen" erscheinen ließ (de Man 1988, 231-232). Das Beispiel der Anamorphose hat Lacan zur Folgerung geführt, wonach das, *was ich erblicke, nie das* [ist]*, was ich sehen will.*" (Lacan 1987, 109) Die Anamorphose von Fiktion vollzieht sich darin, dass das Moment der Fiktion, das, um mit Derrida zu sprechen, „einen unsichtbaren Einschnitt in der Geschichte markiert" (Derrida 1992, 59), in der Darstellung der bzw. als Fiktion unzugänglich wird.

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[13] Vgl.: „Die Puppen brauchen den Boden nur, wie die Elfen, um ihn zu *streifen*, und den Schwung der Glieder, durch die augenblickliche Hemmung neu zu beleben; wir brauchen ihn, um darauf zu *ruhen*, und uns von der Anstrengung des Tanzes zu erholen: ein Moment, der offenbar selber kein Tanz ist, und mit dem sich weiter nichts anfangen lässt, als ihn möglichst verschwinden zu machen." (Kleist 1978, 477).

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DISSOLUTION DU SUJET ET SPECULARITE MINERALE DANS LA POETIQUE DE ROGER CAILLOIS

FRANÇOIS MOLL[1]

ABSTRACT. *Dissolution of the Subject and Mineral Specularity in the Poetics of Roger Caillois.* Heir to analogical thought – which is a scientific, philosophical and poetic thought of nature – Roger Caillois develops a demanding poetic ethics. Postulating, in his critical and poetic work, the necessary dissolution of the subject, Caillois only seeks to strengthen his presence, to ward off his fear of indistinction and to ensure, ultimately, his own scriptural legitimacy. In doing so, he chooses stone, which he opposes to the indecent volubility of the plant, as a literary model of sustainability, as the emblem of his poetics and as a lyrical mirror through which alone he agrees to appear in his own text.

Keywords: Caillois, poetry, nature, dissolution, subject

REZUMAT. *Disolutia subiectului și specularitate minerală în opera poetică a lui Roger Caillois.* Promotor al gândirii analogice – o gândire științifică, filozofică și poetică a naturii – Roger Caillois dezvoltă o etică poetică extrem de exigentă. Postulând, în opera sa critică și poetică, necesitatea dizolvării subiectului, Caillois urmărește totodată să reconfirme prezența eului poetic, să-și alunge teama de instinct și să-și asigure, în cele din urmă, propria legitimitate literară.

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[1] Professeur de lettres, **François MOLL** est docteur en Langue et littérature françaises de l'Université d'Aix-Marseille, associé au laboratoire CIELAM. Ayant consacré sa thèse à l'étude de la déontologie poétique de Roger Caillois, ses travaux portent sur les liens, en poésie, entre nature, esthétique et vérité, et s'attachent, plus généralement, à examiner l'imagination poétique et fantastique (*Roger Caillois, principes pour une déontologie poétique. De la Nature à l'Œuvre,* thèse de doctorat en Langue et littérature françaises soutenue le 26.X.2020 à l'Université d'Aix-Marseille ; « Pour une déontologie poétique : la « justesse » du poème chez Roger Caillois », *Fabula-LhT*, n° 24, « Toucher au « vrai » : la poésie à l'épreuve des sciences et des savoirs », dir. Annick Ettlin et Jan Baetens, novembre 2020, URL : http://www.fabula.org/lht/24/moll.html ; « ''Toutes les chances sont plutôt pour la continuité'' : Roger Caillois sur l'anthropocentrisme, revue *XXI/XX- Reconnaissances littéraires, « Pour en finir avec l'anthropomorphisme ? »*, dir. Thomas Augais et Florian Alix, *Classiques Garnier, à paraître.) Email :* francois.moll@hotmail.fr.

Procedând astfel, alege piatra, văzută mereu în opoziție cu volubilitatea indecentă a plantei, drept model literar al durabilului. Piatra va deveni atât o emblemă a poeticii lui Caillois, cât și un spațiu de reflectare a eului liric.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Caillois, poezie, natură, disoluție, subiect*

Dans les dernières années de son existence, Roger Caillois pénètre au cœur de la pierre, conduit dans les entrailles de la matière – ainsi que le furent les enfants d'Hameln sur le destin desquels il médite dans *Le Champ des signes* – par « l'étranger inconnu, son pourpoint rouge et son manteau vert, son instrument dérisoire, son apparente candeur, qui cache un piège » (Caillois 2008, 1146). Cet étranger aux charmes irrésistibles, insidieux, Caillois le fréquente depuis longtemps déjà sous le nom du démon de l'analogie, *daïmon* familier qui lui a inspiré cette entreprise de réinvestissement des apparences sensibles sur quoi se fonde, en grande partie, ce qu'il nomme son « esthétique généralisée ». C'est à l'instigation de ce démon aux suggestions duquel il a toujours prêté une oreille à la fois troublée et enthousiaste que Caillois tâche de se montrer attentif aux résurgences formelles qui ponctuent le monde et jettent, entre les règnes, entre les êtres, les objets, les images perçues ou rêvées, des ponts ténus mais admirables.

« Le monde est un arbre pareil » au « dragonnier bifide » des Canaries qui « déploie par fourches successives et identiques comme angles de cristal sa frondaison immense » : « une sève unique y circule du tronc massif au pâle surgeon » (Caillois 2008, 1084). Les occurrences du même à travers l'inextricable sylve du monde des apparences confortent l'esprit, si elles instaurent un système de contraintes duquel procède la possibilité même de « la pensée utile »[2], si elles amoindrissent aussi la part que prend à son œuvre – mais est-elle jamais sienne ? – la subjectivité créatrice. Les pierres, que Caillois collectionne depuis 1952 et dont il fait, dès *Méduse et Cie* (Caillois 1960), le support de ses méditations, exhibent les analogons avec lesquels il se sent le plus d'affinités et constituent comme le dernier *medium* de sa parole : « J'ai mis longtemps », avoue l'auteur du *Fleuve Alphée* (Caillois 1978), « à choisir les pierres comme référence, en même temps par défi et par désir peut-être – presque comme repoussoir » ; elles lui « offr[ent] l'exemple d'un immuable inhumain, par conséquent à l'abri des faiblesses de l'espèce » et asseyent définitivement – en

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[2] « La condition de la pensée utile est que le monde soit fini. Or dans un monde fini et foisonnant, les choses se répètent et se répondent. Des cycles et des symétries, des homologies et des récurrences s'y laissent déceler. Il n'est rien qui n'ait sa place dans une ou plusieurs séries, rien qui ne possède quelque part son pendant et son double, le chiffre qui en ramène le pressentiment et la nostalgie. », Roger CAILLOIS, *Cases d'un échiquier*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, p. 71.

apparence, du moins – ses théories scientifiques et esthétiques. L'emblème de son esthétique désubjectivée est alors la « pierre autoglyphe » (Caillois 2008, 1043), œuvre acheiropoïète, *non hominis manu picta*. Le sujet esthétique se trouve ainsi « délogé » de lui-même, tel le narrateur du *Récit du délogé* (Caillois 1970, 308) qui, peu à peu, sous l'influence d'un mollusque parasite, se trouve « dépersonnalisé » jusqu'à atteindre « la réalité ultime, qui n'est pas le néant, mais la grisaille » (Caillois 1970, 331) avec laquelle il se confond et d'où il craint même d'être extrait. Ce devenir minéral du sujet, qui laisse si bien en lui passer la nature qu'il n'en est plus que le « pseudopode » (Caillois 2008, 1085), semble ainsi le terme dernier d'une esthétique paradoxale dont Caillois voulait qu'elle fût « généralisée », selon laquelle tout, jusqu'aux images de la poésie, appartient au même cosmos, tisse une même cohérence, l'art étant alors considéré comme un prolongement des œuvres de la nature et trouvant dans ce *continuum* sa légitimité. Nous nous demanderons ainsi dans quelle mesure le motif minéral permet à Caillois de confondre « les impostures de la poésie » (Caillois 1944) ; de récuser, en semblant d'abord y céder, l'horrible attrait qu'il éprouve pour l'indistinction ; et comment il fournit à son texte un modèle lyrique qui soit juste, dans lequel le sujet puisse se refléter, et accéder enfin à l'expression poétique.

« Confidences impersonnelles d'une ombre cachée à des ombres anonymes »

La dissolution du sujet dans l'espace du monde et dans celui, fraternel, du texte constitue un motif récurrent de l'œuvre cailloisienne, un infratexte qui circule – telle la sève unique dont Caillois imagine avec effroi qu'elle irrigue tous les végétaux – dans la trame de ses ouvrages les plus divers ; motif qui influence si bien jusqu'à la constitution et la mise en œuvre mêmes des méthodes qu'il emploie et des thèses qu'il avance, qui structure de façon si manifeste la plupart de ses textes qu'il ne paraît pas hasardeux de penser qu'il surdétermine toute son activité scripturale, frappée au coin d'une « dépossession »[3] volontaire. Ce motif fantasmatique est déterminé par la tension qui règne entre deux pôles antagonistes, la distinction et l'indistinction, dont Caillois ne cesse d'interroger les pouvoirs d'attraction et dont il fait le socle de la réflexion qu'il mène, dès ses premiers ouvrages, sur le mimétisme animal et sur les rapports qu'entretiennent sacré et profane (Caillois 1938, 84). Cette tendance universelle à basculer dans l'indistinction provoque, chez Caillois, un désir paradoxal auquel se mêle nécessairement beaucoup de répugnance.

Plaçant l'homme dans la continuité du monde, Caillois conteste qu'il soit de quelque manière insolite ; dès 1954, dans l' « Avertissement » liminaire à sa

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3 Stéphane Massonet parle de « dépossession scripturale » ; Stéphane MASSONET, « Le retour et les détours de la fiction », *Europe,* nov.-déc. 2000, n° 859-860, p. 162.

Poétique de Saint-John Perse, il met à mort l'auteur étudié, « [faisant] à peu près comme si [celui-ci] n'existait pas ». C'est que ce motif de la désindividuation, cet effacement délibéré du sujet lyrique, sert, en premier lieu, à prouver l'hypothèse d'une esthétique généralisée, d'un « esclavage consenti » (Caillois 1996, 160) du créateur aux lois de la nature. En effet, ainsi que le relève Stéphane Massonet, « si la littérature est », depuis l'exil argentin,

> aux yeux de Caillois un des biens les plus précaires de la civilisation dont il convient de reconnaître la richesse , les conséquences de sa méfiance à l'égard de la littérature l'ont amené à annoncer la disparition et la mort de l'écrivain. La fiction ne deviendra possible qu'à partir du moment où l'écriture de Caillois assumera cette disparition. (Massonnet 2000, 155-56)

C'est ainsi que, quant à son œuvre propre, Caillois se plaira, jusqu'au dernier entretien qu'il accorde, le 30 décembre 1978, à Hector Bianciotti et Jean-Paul Enthoven, à la considérer comme un ensemble de « confidences impersonnelles d'une ombre cachée à des ombres anonymes » (Caillois 1981, 25). Malgré cet anéantissement énonciatif qui répond à une dépréciation de la singularité humaine, auctoriale, l'œuvre demeure tissée de « confidences » qui disent sa tentation autobiographique. Cette tentation, toutefois, fut immédiatement censurée dans des textes tels que *L'Aile froide* ou *La Nécessité d'esprit* (Caillois 1981), Caillois se refusant à les faire paraître mais sans pouvoir empêcher son œuvre d'osciller perpétuellement entre une aspiration au lyrisme et une rétractation vers la désubjectivation, vers l'intérieur de la parenthèse – ou plutôt de la coquille – de l'érudition impersonnelle ou des grandes théories unificatrices. Constitutif de l'œuvre, ce balancement entre la distinction lyrique et l'indistinction du sujet dans le milieu de la culture ou de la nature (mais Caillois s'évertue bien souvent à superposer ces deux milieux, de manière à montrer que la culture n'est qu'une nature continuée) apparaît en lui-même comme un véritable « biographème », un motif en soi chargé de dire les contradictions qui travaillent l'auteur et qui signe sa façon d'être au monde et à soi. Ce n'est d'ailleurs qu'opérant un détour par le genre du mythe, œuvre sans auteur qui semble émaner de la culture elle-même, que Caillois acceptera, dans *Le Fleuve Alphée*, de se confier.

L'on pourrait penser que ce motif de la dissolution de soi trouve d'abord ses origines dans les expériences menées par le groupe Grand Jeu que Caillois a fréquenté, encore lycéen, par l'entremise de son voisin, Roger Gilbert-Lecomte. Lorsqu'il rejoint, quelques années plus tard, le cénacle surréaliste, Caillois se prête, bon gré mal gré, aux séances d'écriture automatique et tente de se placer, pour étudier le mécanisme des associations libres, sous la dictée de son inconscient. C'est pour cette même raison que, simultanément, il prétend cultiver une « psychasthénie légendaire », « crainte obsédante de la dilution du corps

dans l'espace », essai de mimétisme psychotique dont il rend compte dans *La Nécessité d'esprit*. « Crainte obsédante », désir horrifique, cette aliénation volontaire, cette chimère d'une « détumescence subjective » – et le terme lui-même signale la dimension sexuelle de cette dialectique entre le sujet viril et le milieu femelle –, d'« une déperdition de substance égotiste », d'« un épuisement dépressif voisin de ce que le lexique monacal appelait *acedia* » et qui « constitue la dernière des tentations auxquelles Flaubert soumet son saint Antoine : ''être la matière'' » (Hollier 1992, 83), apparaît donc très tôt comme le point nodal de la pensée cailloisienne. Caillois éprouve d'emblée une étrange et avide aversion pour ce motif, comme s'il avait choisi, afin d'y mettre bon ordre, aimanté par cet indéchiffré, d'écrire de préférence sur ce qui le révulsait.

Il semble cependant, à y regarder de plus près, que Caillois n'ait jamais, sous prétexte d'étudier scientifiquement les rouages de l'imagination, désiré qu'éprouver sa propre tolérance à l'abandon des prérogatives de la conscience pour ensuite amorcer, en retour, un mouvement vers un excès de maîtrise qui l'amène à rationaliser le délire sur le mode, volontiers distancié, de l'analyse. Intervient alors la systématisation comme mise au pas de l'enthousiasme, le travail de nomenclature profane comme moyen de contenir la frénésie des fêtes de l'esprit, l'indistinction du sujet dans l'intertexte scientifique comme châtiment de sa présomption à se distinguer.

Nature

La fonction principale que revêt, chez Caillois, ce choc en retour du vertige taxinomique est d'endiguer l'ivresse lyrique : par l'anéantissement volontaire du sujet dans la « bulle » de la culture, l'auteur tâche de juguler la prolifération végétale de son imagination, cette « prolifération anarchique des idées » qu'il considère comme « l'équivalent de la multiplication cancéreuse des cellules » (Caillois 2008, 161). Le fantasme du pullulement incontrôlable et mortifère de la végétation – de son « immense et comme invincible réserve de forces femelles, à la fois passives, sournoises et voraces », « dont la puissance redoutable balance celle de l'homme » (Caillois 2008, 138) – est lui-même surdéterminé par le motif de la dépersonnalisation, qui peut être considéré comme son suprême « catalyseur d'associations mentales » (Caillois 2008, 139). L'auteur n'a jamais fait mystère, loin de là, de la « défiance instinctive » qu'il éprouve à l'encontre des plantes ; il a su dire et répéter à l'envi « la fascination et le recul devant l'immensité spongieuse de l'Amazonie », qu'il imagine « gorgée de miasmes, de pestilence, de fermentations délétères » (Caillois 2008, 139).

Dans l'œuvre, deux motifs constamment s'affrontent : l'humidité-négligence négative – féminité prédatrice, profusion végétale, chaleur moite, mollesse dangereuse de l'inspiration, de l'enthousiasme poétique – et la siccité-

maîtrise positive – masculinité inquiète, vent d'hiver, âpre froidure, voie sèche de la connaissance, rigueur de la rhétorique. Les charges affectives passent parfois, à l'occasion des ruptures épisodiques qui ponctuent nécessairement la pensée de Caillois, de l'un à l'autre de ces pôles. Nous constatons ainsi la duplicité d'une nature qui change de signe : elle est, dans *Vocabulaire esthétique*, par exemple, la matrice inépuisable et gloutonne de la végétation que l'homme, en ses œuvres, doit se garder d'imiter ; une invite à produire « selon sa nature », à l'encontre des traditions formelles que l'histoire a éprouvées ; et suivre son exemple licencieux, c'est encourir le risque de se montrer aussi brouillon, éphémère, délétère, en vérité, que le végétal. Si Caillois accepte finalement la littérature, c'est qu'elle est inoffensive, appelée à périr avec « l'espèce transitoire » et, surtout, que – dans *Le Fleuve Alphée*, notamment – la « parenthèse », la « bulle », « l'océan » intertextuel du savoir se trouve, à son tour, placé sous le signe de la prolifération et du danger. La nature végétale et l'élément liquide (multiplication, engendrement anarchique, périlleux) recouvrent ainsi d'abord la poésie puis la pensée tout entière.

Le végétal, qui est en vérité traité comme sujet à part entière, concurrent du sujet percevant et énonçant, thématise l'agressivité de l'espace envers l'individu, dont l'intégrité intellectuelle est perpétuellement menacée par l'engloutissement. Le végétal est tout ce qui menace l'individu, échappe à sa maîtrise, et dont il s'agit de contrecarrer l'expansion : l'imagination analogique doit ainsi plier sous le joug de la rigueur scientifique si l'on veut qu'elle produise, non une lecture du monde, mais une « science de la perception » (Caillois 1972) qui permette d'habiter l'espace sensible du monde. Mais force est de remarquer, avec Laurent Jenny, « l'ambivalence d'une telle stratégie : pour résister aux menaces de dévoration végétale, le sujet Caillois se précipite dans une autre forme d'assimilation naturelle » (Jenny 1992, 66) en tentant de s'abstraire dans la contemplation des formes minérales.

Les objets, quant à eux, rassérènent, offrent leur « secours » (Caillois 2008, 120) à l'esprit dérouté et anxieux : « il me semble », confie Caillois,

> que j'eus toujours dans mon plus proche univers un groupe d'engins ou de simulacres qui équilibraient en quelque sorte le trop abondant butin que je retirai de ma fureur de lire. Si l'on veut, au lieu de connaître seulement par l'imprimé, je connaissais aussi par les choses et par le réseau qu'elles tissent entre elles. (Caillois 2008, 120)

Objets « carrefours » qui « réunissent des aspects ou des propriétés qui semblent à première vue incompatibles » et dont « chaque rencontre étonnante » fournit « un gage ambigu de l'unité du monde » (Caillois 2008, 122), leur pouvoir consiste certes à « mett[re] en branle le démon de l'analogie » mais surtout à ancrer matériellement ses évocations extravagantes et dérisoires.

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> Ils obligent à l'observation, ils sont par nature ''ouverts''. [...] Aucun sacré ne les habite : ils se refusent à tout culte et ne conseillent aucune piété. Ils ne sont pas des symboles : ils ne signifient rien qu'eux-mêmes. (Caillois 2008, 128)

Leur matérialité, leur éventuelle incongruité, sollicitent, il est vrai, l'imagination mais l'excitent moins qu'elles ne la lestent : contrepoids de la culture livresque, les objets passifs et parcimonieux, secs, sont fondamentalement dénués de sens ; leur insignifiance est le gage de leur innocuité et celle-ci, l'assurance, pour le sujet, de conserver sa suprématie, la possibilité même « de se poser comme sujet de perception, de réflexion et d'écriture et d'atténuer l'angoisse de sa propre disparition. » (Bridet 2000, 135)

Les pierres conjurent la crainte du mouvant, de l'indistinct, du profus, du passager. C'est donc depuis les minéraux, éléments comptables, passifs, stériles et stables, que Caillois applique sereinement sa pensée sur le massif, le continu, l'actif, le mouvant. Objets quintessentiels – qui « condensent et portent à leur maximum d'intensité les caractéristiques de l'objet » (Bridet 2000, 134) –, objets éminemment talismaniques, elles paraissent repousser[4] la tentation du soi et de la capitulation devant l'afflux de l'imagination qui court sous le texte – « si j'évoque de préférence le règne minéral », dit Caillois, « c'est qu'il est le plus contradictoire avec l'univers de l'imagination » (Caillois 2008, 159) – mais semblent, tout à la fois, affirmer l'unité du sujet, qui les charge de soi, qui, se projetant sur la virginité de leur support, subsiste, indivis, à travers sa dissémination.

Vertige et mimétisme

Le motif de l'assimilation à l'espace innerve la pensée et soutient le texte, signale l'impasse à laquelle semble aboutir la dialectique du distinct et de l'indistinct. Métaphore de l'espace, le végétal prédateur et séducteur menace d'engloutir l'individu, de le diluer dans l'indistinction primale ; il symbolise « cette crainte panique (ce désir obscur ?) d'être *dévoré* », « d'être *avalé* » (Pérez 1991, 391), de quoi procèdent également les charmes du vertige – vertige d'abdication devant la tentation lyrique ou vertige glacial de la rhétorique sévère, de la connaissance absolue. Si le sujet poétique s'efface, c'est alors pour que ne se dissolve pas le sujet pensant, perpétuellement mis en péril par ce qui échappe à son contrôle. Il s'agit bien de conjurer la crainte qu'engendre la prolifération du motif en y sacrifiant de façon raisonnée, scientifique : problématique, imprévisible, soumis à la tentation, le sujet énonciateur se fond

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[4] « J'ai mis longtemps », avoue l'auteur du *Fleuve Alphée*, « à choisir les pierres comme référence, en même temps par défi et par désir peut-être – presque comme repoussoir ».

dans l'objectivité, dans l'impersonnalité du discours scientifique ; il prend, en quelque sorte, les devants, se dissimule avant que d'être éclipsé, et la démarche diagonale (Caillois 2008, 484-85), unificatrice, de Caillois doit se comprendre comme la manifestation d'un impérieux besoin de préserver, occulte, sa propre unité à travers la dispersion des objets du savoir et des supports du rêve qui ne cessent de s'imposer à l'imagination.

La disparition seule du sujet peut rendre sensible l'unité de l'espace des choses et des discours, mais cette disparition est ici volontaire, déontologique, quand l'abandon aux tendances naturelles induit une assimilation dont le sujet n'a pas conscience en raison même de son inconscience des démarches que suit la nature. Le sujet revêt la panoplie mimétique de l'insecte : se confondant avec le milieu, se parant du masque de la mort, il protège son individualité et échappe ainsi, paradoxalement, à la menace de l'indistinction : « le ''je'', soustrait de l'œuvre, en fait d'autant plus inextricablement partie » (Syrotinski 1992, 63) ; il infuse le texte de son absence. Mais cette manœuvre que l'on a tôt fait d'imputer à l'instinct de préservation, Caillois n'ignore pas qu'elle révèle plutôt, chez l'insecte même, la concomitance de l'ivresse ludique et de la pulsion de mort. Plaisir de se cacher, volupté ressentie par qui arme dans l'ombre, comme le sectateur d'une puissante société secrète, les dispositifs du piège tendu à l'esprit du lecteur, la mort simulée de l'auteur, « ce mouvement d'assimilation à une extériorité pure » que constitue la psychasthénie légendaire, « laisse béante – mais comble – l'intériorité » et indique une inclination à s'abandonner à la « ''tentation de l'espace'', tentation reconnue dans l'*ultima ratio* du mimétisme animal » (Jenny 1991, 355).

Et si l'on peut considérer que « la pulsion de mort prend, au fil de l'œuvre de Caillois, une dimension ontologique » (Jenny 1991, 198), c'est non seulement qu'il est aussi jubilatoire que monstrueux de se laisser quelquefois happer par le vertige de l'indistinction – car « le vertige est partie intégrante de la nature » et qu'« à lui aussi on ne commande qu'en obéissant » (Caillois 1958, 265-66) – mais que gît encore, dans ces fluctuations salvatrices entre l'autre et le même, la chance de rester soi.

Méduse et Cie dresse une typologie du déguisement dont il semble qu'elle convienne à l'analyse des modalités d'énonciation de l'œuvre même de Caillois. Celui-ci assigne « trois fonctions » au mimétisme (Caillois 2008, 509) : le « Travesti », qui consiste à « passer pour un autre » par l'« imitation d'une apparence définie et d'un comportement reconnaissable » ; le « Camouflage », dont le but est « la disparition », l'« assimilation au décor », la perte de « l'apparence de l'individu vivant isolé » par « immobilité, inertie, balancement en harmonie avec le mouvement du support » ; l'« Intimidation », enfin, qui veut « faire peur sans être réellement redoutable » en employant notamment la « mimique terrifiante ou frénétique » (Caillois 2008, 514-15).

S'il ne semble pas permis de supposer que Caillois ne se soit jamais laissé entraîner à « se faire passer pour autrui » – si ce n'est en tentant d'assimiler Saint-John Perse à sa propre poétique, et faisant alors plutôt passer le poète consulaire pour une émanation de lui-même –, il est indubitable que les procédés du « Camouflage », « invisibilité trompeuse », « escamotage de soi », l'ont séduit. À l'image du narrateur de son *Récit du délogé*, Caillois cultive « l'étrange impression [d'être] lentement délogé de mon corps et [d']y consent[ir] ; mieux : [d']y aspir[er]. » (Caillois 2008, 460) Se projetant intentionnellement hors des frontières de sa subjectivité, l'auteur peut se croire, « à la fin », « disséminé dans l'espèce entière » (Caillois 2008, 460), voix fantomatique du savoir désincarné, d'une perception dépourvue de focale. Il met en place une stratégie textuelle d'anéantissement énonciatif, organise la disparition du sujet dans son énoncé, s'assimilant à l'évidence des choses, habilement dissimulé sous le masque de la Rhétorique.

« Poursuite, comme vertigineuse, de l'invisibilité pour elle-même », l'essentielle gratuité du « Camouflage » ne doit certes pas être négligée ; mais il est impossible d'ignorer quelle chimère de « toute puissance secrète qui agit dans l'ombre » alimente cette apparente invisibilité. L'instinct de « Camouflage », s'il peut se suffire, s'il présente, par nature, une dimension autotélique, ne semble trouver à s'assouvir véritablement que dans le jaillissement qui le rompt. Ainsi, l'apparition hypnotique, l'irruption subite de l'ocelle intimidant, du sujet « terroriste » asénant sa téméraire hypothèse, apparaît comme une constante de l'écriture cailloisienne. Le masque de l'indistinction ne fait que préparer le surgissement médusant du locuteur, qui « faisait le mort » pour endormir la vigilance de son destinataire. C'est que le masque est considéré, dès *Les Jeux et les Hommes*, comme inséparable du vertige.

Ôtant le masque de son immobilité morbide, Caillois cède soudain au « vertige » – et tente d'y entraîner son lecteur, de le convaincre de la validité de sa pensée et de son esthétique généralisée : l'érudition, la méthode scientifique ne sont ainsi que les masques d'une pensée insidieusement agressive qui ne se dilue dans l'espace que pour mieux l'infuser. Cette disparition élocutoire révèle donc sa nature de simulacre, ce qui serait peu si ce simulacre ne semblait mettre en péril l'édifice théorique que l'effacement a pour fonction d'accréditer. Ainsi que le remarque Laurent Jenny, la « corrélation entre dissolution du sujet et unification du réel » est patente dans la pensée cailloisienne ; mais force est de constater que « la dissolution du sujet ne scelle pas son silence. » et que « c'est bien du foyer d'une subjectivité qu'émane cette pensée de la dissolution du sujet. » (Jenny 1992, 10) Caillois paraît, par le truchement, toujours, du narrateur de son *Récit du délogé*, admettre l'échec relatif de son entreprise de désindividuation : « à aucun moment », confesse celui-ci, « je n'ai perdu le sentiment d'être quelqu'un. Sans doute, je m'éprouvais quelqu'un de mal circonscrit ; pourtant,

quoique très fortement dilué, je savais bien que je n'étais pas tout ni partout. J'étais impuissant à me situer en un point précis. Je continuais néanmoins à me sentir moi. » (Caillois 2008, 459)

Si le sujet a procédé à cette « dépersonnalisation par assimilation à l'espace » (Caillois 1938, 131), il a moins tenté de se confondre dans son environnement – les formes naturelles qu'il perçoit ou le champ des arts sur lequel il légifère – que de recomposer ce dernier à son image, de le conformer à sa subjectivité malgré – ou plutôt grâce à – ses prétentions à l'objectivité. Caillois s'attache, ce faisant, à démontrer que toute démarche savante, toute tentative, si méthodique soit-elle, de commentaire des données de la nature est inextricablement liée à l'idiosyncrasie qui l'énonce ; qu'aucun discours, quelque absolue que se veuille son allégeance au réel, ne peut être tout à fait séparé de son émetteur.

Le texte réagence plutôt un monde étroitement tissé de l'identité auctoriale. Plus que jamais concurrent de la nature dont il adopte, en secret, la forme végétale, la plus puissante, la plus vorace, le sujet se répand, racinaire, dans les ténèbres souterraines. L'humilité proclamée n'est qu'un leurre, un simulacre, un masque trompeur qui dissimule la prééminence réelle du sujet sur les objets auxquels il s'attache, de ce sujet qui prêche avec ferveur l'extinction des individualités, à l'exception de la sienne propre. Soumis à une tentation autobiographique permanente, si le délogé devient « grisaille » (Caillois 2008, 475), c'est que, changé en brouillard obsédant, il s'insinue partout, occulte jusqu'à l'objet de son discours, protégé par l'indistinction.

Pierres

L'on pourrait croire – et certaines déclarations de l'auteur lui-même peuvent nous y autoriser – que le cycle minéral, qui constitue l'ultime partie de l'œuvre de Roger Caillois, consacre sa théorie d'une « esthétique généralisée », en scelle l'authenticité par une mise en œuvre poétique. Les textes dédiés à « l'écriture des pierres » semblent, en effet, couronner une œuvre dense et traversée, de part en part, de résurgences obstinées, fournir à la pensée diagonale « le lieu et la formule » de sa plus évidente expression. Objets quintessentiels, objets par excellence, les minéraux proposent à Caillois un support juste et fidèle, sûr, où puisse, sous l'égide des lois de la matière, s'ébattre son imagination ; ils lui offrent, simultanément, le lieu d'une construction de soi en sujet poétique.

Anonymes, vierges, inutiles, inhumaines, les pierres élues par Caillois, « archives suprêmes, qui ne port[ent] aucun texte et qui ne donn[ent] rien à lire » (Caillois 2008, 120), ne sauraient menacer le sujet ; elles accueillent, au contraire, celui qui, à leur égard, s'est « défendu de rien inventer » (Caillois 2008, 1041), se contentant de *les* inventer au sens premier, de les découvrir. Dans la préface de *Pierres*, où la scansion anaphorique semble souligner l'ivresse

solennelle que procure la performativité reconquise du langage, Caillois énonce ainsi les postulats premiers de sa poétique minérale : « je parle de pierres nues, fascination et gloire, où se dissimule et en même temps se livre un mystère plus lent, plus vaste et plus grave que le destin d'une espèce passagère. » (Caillois 2008, 1037-38)

Il ne s'agit pas de superposer les dérisoires signes humains à la sereine flagrance des signes naturels mais bien de « rendre perceptible le ressort d'une fascination », de « saisir sur le vif une des naissances possibles de la poésie » (Caillois 2008, 1039), de fonder une équivalence des signes : signifiance de la pierre plus restituée qu'établie, malgré les protestations de l'auteur, par la signification du poème. La singularité de ces pierres est indéniable ; mais qu'elles n'apparaissent pas singulières au profane est plus important encore, car c'est pour cette raison qu'elles permettent au poète qui les désigne, les nomme, les décrit, d'affirmer sa propre unicité. Elles lui accordent d'assouvir son désir de sortir de la « bulle »[5], de s'extraire – ponctuellement, il est vrai, timidement, peut-être, tant abondent, dans ces ouvrages, les références livresques – du monde proliférant de l'imprimé pour opérer un retour aux choses, pour rêver, à la limite, d'une poésie autoglyphe, qui s'écrirait toute seule, qui permettrait au sujet de « laisser passer en soi la nature » (Caillois 2008, 1084-85) et le guérirait, ainsi que l'affirme la légende qu'il rapporte, de sa stérilité.

Caillois, s'emparant des minéraux et se sentant lui-même « devenir un peu de la nature des pierres » (Caillois 2008, 1078-79), méditant sur les « origines » et la « nécessité » de leur « beauté », compose ainsi des textes denses, une poésie lapidaire descriptive dans laquelle domine ce paradoxal lyrisme scientifique qu'il louait chez Perse sous le nom de « science de la perception ». Images du texte même, « les nodules d'agate sont boulets gris et rugueux, franchement rébarbatifs » qu' « il faut [...] rompre pour connaître les spectacles qu'il arrive qu'ils recèlent : rien, le plus souvent, qu'une morne matière peu translucide, à peine différente de celle du premier silex venu ; mais parfois, des tracés capricieux [...], des pyrotechnies immobiles dans une nuit pétrifiée. » (Caillois 2008, 1051) La tentation poétique semble enfin pouvoir être accueillie, qui a pu s'aboucher à l'exigence scientifique : il est tentant de discerner, dans la poésie discursive des *Pierres*, le dépassement dialectique de l'opposition entre prolifération végétale de l'imagination et immobilité minérale de l'intellect, de repérer la réconciliation du fluide et du stable, de l'humide et du sec, l'unification de la matière et de l'esprit dans le figement éternel des flux de la création. Il n'est ainsi de végétaux acceptables que ceux qui n'en sont pas, qui n'en inscrivent, à l'instar des dendrites au cœur de la pierre, que la trace délicate, infrangible et morte ; l'imagination poétique n'est, de la même manière, admissible qu'au prix d'une

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[5] La bulle, « l'univers second, en partie réel, en partie fictif, qui finit par isoler de l'astéroïde de terre et d'eau où il émergea bon dernier. », *Le Fleuve Alphée, Œuvres, p. cit.*, p. 164.

inclusion dans « le linceul de glace infusible » (Caillois 2008, 1047-48), dans une Rhétorique translucide de la langue pétrifiée. Si leur fonction première auprès du poète semble être d' « avert[ir] l'esprit qu'il est de plus vastes lois qui gouvernent en même temps l'inerte et l'organique », les « fougères fausses » des dendrites, « plus saxifrages que la haute herbacée qui, ancrée à la verticale des parois de montagne, élève du moins ses hampes dans l'air libre », enseignent surtout qu'il n'est de vérité que dans le simulacre, dans le « mirage » (Caillois 2008, 1047-48). Le démon de l'analogie n'en est pas moins séduisant, qui laisse vertigineusement entrevoir à Caillois, selon les mots de Claude-Pierre Pérez, « le vestige d'un effort ténébreux vers le Sens, d'une volonté fragile et faillible de signifier » (Pérez 1991, 392) à laquelle souscrit et participe l'auteur.

Conjuguant l'immobilité – mimétisme, indistinction, effacement – à l'apparition médusante[6], les pierres lestent l'imagination, la garantissent, « fix[ent] des vertiges » à leur surface – et c'est bien une poétique de la surface, de l'apparence, que privilégie Caillois, qui fonde la validité de sa poésie minérale sur les « signes », sur les « caractères » et la syntaxe qu'il reconnaît les unir. Microcosme mort reproduisant fractalement un macrocosme voué à l'entropie, la pierre décrite donne corps au fantasme d'une totalité unifiée et maîtrisée. Non connotées – ou si abondamment que les sens seconds réciproquement s'annulent –, à peine dénotées – s'il se refuse à faire œuvre de minéralogiste, Caillois emploie volontiers leur désignation scientifique – chargées d'un sémantisme rare qui commande au langage qui en rend compte de mimer leur dépouillement, de se raréfier lui-même, les pierres auxquelles Caillois consacre ses derniers textes peuvent, dans une certaine mesure, fonctionner comme des talismans chargés de protéger l'auteur de la prolifération de son imaginaire particulier et de l'orgueil de la pensée tout entière. *Memento mori*, elles délivreraient d'abord une leçon d'humilité, au sens étymologique : leur nécessité, ce « code universel et secret (quoique non impossible à déchiffrer) qui préside à la lente naissance des formes inévitables » (Caillois 2008, 1044), en remontre à la vie, cette « humidité sophistiquée […] qui rompt avec la perpétuité minérale, qui ose l'échanger contre le privilège ambigu de frémir, de pourrir, de pulluler. » (Caillois 2008, 1096)

Caillois consent certes à voir dans l'imperfection de l'homme, dans son désir de déroger aux lois de la nature, l'emblème ambigu de sa grandeur ; mais c'est une concession malgracieuse, et que la vie soit « chargée de secrète vertus, capable de défis, de fécondité » ne pèse pas bien lourd face à la perfection des minéraux, nés d'une violence qui a su s'éteindre à son paroxysme :

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6 « Il suffit que le cercle ait été révélé dans une pierre. Voici la fascination aussitôt amorcée. Le cercle qui habite l'agate et la corsite, qui préside à l'aubier comme à la corolle, qui, du soleil à l'œil, circonscrit tant de contours, s'affirme jusqu'en ces profondeurs comme un des rares interlopes préposés au trafic entre les différents règnes. », Roger CAILLOIS, « II- Physique - Agate II », *Pierres*, *Œuvres*, *op. cit.*, p. 1055-1056.

En de terribles creusets souterrains furent modelés les volumes scoriacés des métaux natifs. Ils semblent continuer de se hérisser et presque d'exploser : partout déchirés, partout agressifs et rebelles, ils fixent les sursauts d'une matière courroucée, qui se bat, qui se rebiffe où et comme elle peut. (Caillois 2008, 1045)

Aller et retour entre l'intérieur des choses et leur surface, la poésie de Caillois renonce à pénétrer les mystères de la matière, se satisfait d'en consigner les apparences, d'en faire sonner les rimes, de provoquer de littérales épiphanies analogiques. Réactivant le *topos* du *liber mundi*, l'auteur s'attache à donner de la syntaxe du monde une description linguistique au-delà de laquelle il est illusoire de prétendre aller.

Les pierres donnent à lire, immobiles, figées, les énergies naguère à l'œuvre dans l'univers, énergies dont elles constituent les archives, lois dont elles consignent le code. Tenter, par le jeu d'une imagination et d'un langage justifiés, circonstanciés, homologués, d'en découvrir les origines et les processus, c'est attester l'unité du monde ; c'est faire allégeance à la beauté naturelle, seule concevable, seule pleinement légitime. L'effacement du sujet auctorial derrière l'*enargeia* de la pierre paraît alors aller de soi : il ne faudrait pas que la subjectivité du poète entrave la circulation du sens à la surface des pierres ; le texte devrait laisser passer la lumière d'une monstration des correspondances qui tissent la réalité.

Simulacre

Mais, à y regarder de plus près, l'écriture des pierres se révèle moins le lieu d'un dépassement des dissonances naturelles que celui d'un inextricable enchevêtrement du langage, du sujet, des objets et des idées : la concordance unitaire du monde, postulée et mise en œuvre par le texte, se mue insensiblement en indifférenciation, en indistinction élémentaire. Pensée, imagination et langage ne se placent pas dans la continuité de la matière mais se trouvent comme pris en elle, médusés, pétrifiés. Les textes consacrés aux pierres paraissent alors proclamer la faillite – ou, du moins, souligner les limites – du projet de généralisation esthétique en ce qu'ils n'illustrent pas la « logique de l'imaginaire » (Caillois 2008, 949) mais tentent, délibérément, de la produire, de la justifier à l'encontre des évidences. Le « champ des signes », cette table de référence et de concordance, est, en définitive, soumis à l'arbitraire du sujet ; la phénoménologie de l'imaginaire périclite, l'épistémologie poétique dégénère en pure vanité d'un univers anéanti.

Abyssale, irréductiblement parcellaire malgré les allégations analogiques, la poétique minérale accuse une insondable négativité : son ambition unitaire est véritablement totalitaire, et exige un univers impollu de tout dynamisme, privé de toute énergie, purifié de toute vie, définitivement *incommunicable*.

Caillois, méditant sur « les dessins des agates », récusant la paréidolie qui pourtant structure ses métaphores, se plaît à soutenir qu'il « ne compte à rien tout ce que sait identifier dans ces ombres une imagination éperdue ou joueuse, qui y projette un peuple de simulacres » et qu'il préfère, quant à lui, « regard[er] ces dessins comme ils étaient au matin des âges, quand rien n'existait qu'eux » (Caillois 2008, 1052) ; l'on décèle, dans le mouvement de concentration dont procède l'écriture, dense représentation du microcosme minéral, de ses énergies paroxystiques à jamais sidérées, le plus captieux des simulacres, celui qui feint de s'ignorer, celui qui, sous couvert de détailler le territoire commun, établit et parcourt un « espace-de-personne » (Caillois 2008, 1129), « habit[é] des ténèbres blanches de la mort des gemmes » (Caillois 2008, 1053).

      Caillois semble ainsi volontairement se déloger de lui-même et faire, en même temps, de « l'espèce transitoire » la plus inquiétante des étrangetés qui ponctuent l'univers ; s'il est quoi que ce soit qui, dans la pierre, fasse signe à l'homme, c'est sa vanité et son désir qui s'y projettent, s'y réfléchissent en un « fantôme indistinct ». (Caillois 2008, 1050-51)

      Mélancolie de la connaissance, *taedium vitae* du savant, l'*acedia* cailloisienne naît de ce consentement final à l'impossibilité d'un savoir unifié, sinon unificateur.

> Broyé, calciné, le cristal, s'il perd sa forme, ne la recouvre plus, sinon par industrie. Il est poudre désormais, scorie et pluie de cendres, emblème sobre qui montre le chemin de toutes choses, même des pierres, et de toutes formes, image qui tarit l'ardeur de vivre, de créer. (Caillois 2008, 1058)

      Les mortifications auxquelles se soumet le sujet qui s'efface, qui perd toute forme et toute ambition, indiquent assez clairement l'échec d'une *libido sciendi* impossible à satisfaire : l'observateur, se laissant glisser le long de son regard, s'assimile à son objet et révèle l'inanité de ses desseins analogiques, de son discours structurant. L'acédie, cependant, est autant signe d'orgueil que d'humilité, de dépit que d'assentiment. Le signe humain achoppe sur le signe immémorial de la pierre, à l'insignifiance duquel il veut et ne veut pas atteindre. La dépersonnalisation de l'auteur, l'effacement du sujet sont, nous l'avons dit, des simulacres et, quoique leur objectivité et leur valeur se voient récusées, les propositions analogiques continuent de soutenir l'univers – un univers poétiquement, subjectivement recréé de toutes pièces. Il ne s'agit pas de dire que Caillois affable de bout en bout mais bien que, si exactes que soient les assises scientifiques de sa pensée, elles masquent une démarche rien moins que positive. Le sujet est projeté sur un monde poétique recréé à sa mesure et qui n'a d'autre objet, véritable miroir d'obsidienne, que d'en réfléchir l'ombre énigmatique.

      À l'encontre des postulats fondamentaux de l'esthétique généralisée, c'est bien avant tout l'image du sujet que le texte enferme – son *imago*, tout à la

fois dernière mue, forme définitive, parfaite, de l'insecte ; masque mortuaire ; manifestation d'outre-tombe –, « quartz fantôme » dont les contours sont répétés à l'infini dans la gangue d'un texte qui le dissimule et le préserve. Le texte ne montre plus, sous son apparente impersonnalité, que la concentration d'une subjectivité qui forme le centre secret d'où croît, comme dans les cristaux, l'architecture du texte et du monde. Si « la dissolution du sujet ne scelle pas son silence » (Jenny 1992, 212), elle laisse, au cœur de la matière recréée par le texte, une empreinte indélébile, la trace fossile non d'un animal mais des lois mêmes de l'univers auxquelles l'auteur en son texte se soumet moins qu'il ne s'y substitue, « comme l'empreinte fossile, ce sceau, cette trace n'est pas effigie seulement, mais la chose elle-même par miracle stabilisée, qui témoigne de soi et des lois cachées de la lancée commune où la nature entière est entraînée. » (Caillois 2008, 1083) Les images du monde qui sont censées garantir la pertinence du texte ne servent, en définitive, qu'à établir un milieu mimétique auquel le sujet affecte de se confondre, semblant adhérer à une tendance naturelle à l'indistinction, mais pour mieux en surgir, fascinant, impérieux.

Le texte pétré met en scène la quête d'une construction de soi, la recherche d'une unification de la conscience du sujet à partir des moments « épars et sursitaires » de sa perception. L'absence inexpugnable autour de laquelle gravite l'œuvre et qui proclame mieux que tout marqueur énonciatif, que toute séquence autobiographique, l'emprise de l'auteur sur un texte dans lequel il paraît se confondre, cette « identification mystique » (Jenny 1992, 213) à « toute pierre jetée au centre de soi » (Caillois 2008, 1098-99) contribue à effacer de l'espace tout autre sujet, menace potentielle. La méditation poétique s'avère, en définitive, un acte individuel de récréation d'un monde d'apparences, de surfaces polies comme celle des pierres, n'ayant d'autre fonction que de renvoyer sa propre image au sujet dissimulé. L'auteur semble apaiser, ce faisant, l'angoisse liée à sa condition mortelle, passagère, et tente de réaliser le fantasme d'une maîtrise de l'espace extérieur et intérieur, d'affirmer les contours de sa personnalité, de leur conférer une herméticité et une pérennité adamantines.

Ainsi Caillois, au terme du parcours intellectuel qui l'a conduit à circonscrire les devoirs et les pouvoirs de la poésie, semble avoir renoncé à prouver, de manière incontestable, l'obéissance absolue de l'imaginaire et de ses expressions aux lois de la nature ; de la même manière, il n'a finalement pas établi sur ce *continuum* quelque communauté esthétique, mais plutôt sur l'expérience de la perception, de son insignifiance et du désir pourtant si vain d'écrire. Il a su, sans jamais se départir d'une indéniable honnêteté intellectuelle, d'un souci constant d'exactitude, trouver à s'affranchir de ses réticences et se constituer en véritable sujet, régnant sur soi, sur l'objet, sur le texte à la façon de l'empereur segalenien, « par l'étonnant pouvoir de l'absence » (Segalen 1995, 117).

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READING *ROMEO AND JULIET*'S ILLUSTRATIONS AS PARATEXT: A CLOSE-UP ON THE BALCONY SCENE

DANA PERCEC[1], LOREDANA PUNGĂ[2]

ABSTRACT. *Reading "Romeo and Juliet"'s Illustrations as Paratext: A Close-up on the Balcony Scene.* Paratextual elements, particularly illustrations, play a crucial role in how the texts they accompany are understood by their readers. As instances of intersemiotic translation—the result of transfer of linguistic signs into visual ones—, they direct the readers' meaning-making process by encapsulating not only the illustrators' own artistic vision, but also by bringing to the fore socio-cultural elements of both the historical context and its contemporary readership. The range of intersemiotic translation techniques in use to do this lead to the creation of illustrations whose degree of faithfulness to the text varies. This article considers a number of illustrations corresponding to the balcony scene in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* that were produced in

[1] **Dana PERCEC** is Professor of English Literature at the West University of Timişoara, Romania. She teaches early modern literature, Victorian literature, and literary translation. Her areas of interest include cultural history and gender studies. She is a PhD supervisor in English literature, Comparative literature. She is a member of several professional and scientific societies, including the Romanian Writers' Union and The European Society for the Study of English. She has published books about Shakespeare's theatre and about British culture and civilization, as well as chapters in collective volumes and articles in Scopus, Erich+, Ebsco indexed international journals. She has edited a collection about middle-brow literary genres (historical fiction, romance, fantasy, children's literature, and crime fiction). She is a member in the editorial board of several WoS indexed journals (*British and American Studies*, *Brukenthalia*). Email: dana.percec@e-uvt.ro.

[2] **Loredana PUNGĂ** is professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the West University of Timişoara, Romania. Her domains of expertise are translation studies, English lexicology, and applied and cognitive linguistics. She holds an MA in British and American Studies, and a PhD in Philology from the university where she currently teaches, completed on the basis of research mostly carried out at the University of California, Davis, as a Fulbright scholar. Her publications include three books and eight book chapters in thematic volumes, most of them published abroad. She is (co)-editor of three volumes published in the UK, and a member of the editorial or advisory boards of several academic journals, indexed in international databases like Scopus, Erich+, WoS, etc. Email: loredana.punga@e-uvt.ro.

a time span between the 18th century and the present. It looks in more detail at how these illustrations faithfully connect to the original play and to the broad historical context in which it was written or, rather, use them as input only to reflect other attitudes, points of view, socio-cultural tendencies, etc.

Keywords: *illustrations as paratext, interesemiotic translation, the balcony scene, William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," text re-creation*

REZUMAT. *Ilustrațiile tragediei* **Romeo și Julieta** *ca paratext: prim plan cu scena balconului.* Elementele paratextuale, inclusiv ilustrațiile, au un rol crucial în felul în care textele pe care acestea le însoțesc sunt înțelese de cititori. Ca exemple de traducere intersemiotică – rezultat al transferului între semnele lingvistice și semnele vizuale –, ilustrațiile ghidează procesul de construire a sensului de către cititori nu numai prin faptul că sintetizează viziunea artistică proprie a ilustratorului, ci și prin aceea că aduc în prim plan elemente atât ale contextului istoric și ale cititorului contemporan. Gama de tehnici de traducere intersemiotică folosite pentru a face aceste lucruri duce la propunerea unor ilustrații fidele sau mai puțin fidele textului. Prezentul articol analizează modul în care câteva ilustrații corespunzătoare scenei balconului din *Romeo și Julieta*, piesa lui William Shakespeare, produse în intervalul de timp dintre secolul al XVIII-lea și prezent, dovedesc.

Cuvinte-cheie: *ilustrațiile ca paratext, traducere intersemiotică, scena balconului, Romeo și Julieta de William Shakespeare, re-crearea textului*

Introduction

Though it is the literary text itself that lies at the core of a book, the paratextual elements that surround it are of no less importance in capturing the readers' interest. Consequently, these elements have also often been of concern to scholars.

Gérard Genette and Marie Maclean's are perhaps the most often cited names when it comes to directing attention to those elements that accompany a text (author's name, title, preface, illustrations, reviews of the book, interviews with the author) and those elements that prolong it "in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb, but also in its strongest meaning, to *make it present*, to assure its presence in the world, its reception and its consumption" (1991, 261).

All paratextual elements represent "areas of transaction" (1991, 261), sites where meaning is negotiated with the readers, based on what the author himself/ herself, the preface writer, the reviewer, the interviewer, or the

illustrator suggest to be (the) possible key(s) to the interpretation of the text these elements surround. Thus, they play a crucial role in guiding readers through the hermeneutic process.

Of all paratextual elements, illustrations are the only ones that do not encapsulate meaning in the verbal code, but function as "iconic paratext" (Genette and Maclean 1991, 265). As such, they may well be looked at as instances of intersemiotic translation, anchored in the text, but zooming in on some of the details it offers, condensing, making explicit or implicit, omitting or adding elements as compared to it, just like in interlingual translation (as we have shown in previous studies on intersemiotic translation, e.g. Percec, Pungă 2021). The selection of interesemiotic translation techniques as well as the results of resorting to these techniques, i.e. the illustrations themselves, presuppose that the illustrator has already placed the text under his/ her own lens, and has given it a personal interpretation. Quite often, as Genette and Maclean (1991, 265) suggest, this personal interpretation carries marks of the influence of the "factual" paratext. To add to what the French scholar thought the factual paratext encompassed—among other things, "the historical awareness of the period which saw the birth of a work," which "is rarely a matter of indifference when reading it" (1991, 265)—, we suggest that the historical and cultural awareness of the period when the text was received, interpreted and illustrated also impacts the shape its illustrations take.

This article focuses on a number of illustrations from a range of historical periods, in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*—more exactly, on illustrations inspired by the famous "balcony scene." It seeks to interpret them, based on what was said above, as artefacts carrying a specific cultural, historical, and personal imprint and offering, via visual signs, suggestions to the readers in various epochs for interpreting Shakespeare's own words.

Shakespeare Illustrated

The history of illustrated editions of Shakespeare's *Complete Works* coincides with the history of Shakespeare's appropriation and the playwright's transformation into a national and, later, international cultural asset. After a first century of oblivion, in the 1700s, the joint efforts of actors, writers and visual artists bring Shakespeare back to the general public's attention as the "Bard," the uncontested literary and moral authority.

It is worth noting that, while particular examples of the process of responding to Shakespeare's play through images have been documented (there are studies on the Boydell Gallery, on the Pre-Raphaelites' interest in Shakespeare, on some famous illustrators of the Golden Age, etc.) to the best of our knowledge there is no comprehensive study—diachronic or otherwise—of

illustrated Shakespeare. And, as the paper focuses on the balcony in *Romeo and Juliet*, to the best of our knowledge, there is no comprehensive study about the illustrations of this scene.

Among the earliest—and most notable—examples of Shakespeare revival in the eighteenth century, which contributed to the stabilization of the myth, was The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, a project put forward in 1786 by John Boydell, printer and engraver. His goal, via the publication of the first illustrated edition of the Elizabethan playwright's works, was also that of establishing a national school of painting. In order to achieve this idea he brought together the most important and talented British artists, as well as new, undiscovered talents, who all shared, if not a common style, at least a common vision about national culture and history. Boydell invited them to illustrate famous scenes from Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies. As Rosie Dias (2013, 31) argues, The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, which, over a decade, exhibited 170 original paintings to be reproduced as illustrations in a *Complete Works* edition, located national identity and specificity in Shakespeare's plays.

The Victorian period, with its Edwardian and interwar extensions, added another dimension to Shakespeare's reception in Britain, well reflected in the illustration of his original and adapted works. Not just a national cultural icon, the Bard was now a vehicle of education, an arbiter of good taste, a role model for families, from junior to senior members. This may seem surprising, given the violence of many Shakespearean scenes and the bawdiness of his language, but the nineteenth-century Shakespeare industry heavily censored both, on stage and in print. The result was either an idealized, escapist version of the plays, or an edulcorated, prudish one. A book that greatly contributed both to the dissemination of Shakespeare's plots among all social strata of the society and to their perception as household goods was Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. First published in 1807 with illustrations from Boydell's gallery, the siblings' ideas caught on, becoming and remaining popular throughout the nineteenth twentieth centuries. Rewriting 20 of Shakespeare's best-known plays, *Tales from Shakespeare* intended, as Mary argued in the preface, to narrate the stories in a language that was friendlier to the readers, without giving up the original text entirely by-voiding modern phrasing. The result was an accessible and atemporal text, an impression supported by the illustrations that accompanied the stories. As Jeff A. Menges suggests (2011, 11), if the Lambs' initial intention was a version of Shakespeare that would not be highbrow, but suitable to middle-class tastes and average levels of education, eventually the book's successive editions contributed to the fact that "Shakespeare was embraced as a symbol of British excellence." It is worth noting that the history of the illustrated editions of the *Tales*, reaching a climax of popularity during the Golden Age of illustrations, from the 1880s until the interwar period,

consolidated this reputation of the Elizabethan plays. In Menges' words, "the acceptance of Shakespeare's work on a higher social level made it a respected subject for gallery works, attracting artists not perceived as illustrators" (2011, 10). Artworks inspired by well-known Shakespearean characters and scenes made their way into fine-art circles. The effect was also visible on the book market of illustrated Shakespeare, the Lambs' *Tales* as well as the original texts receiving "gift book treatment" with full-page illustrations that were sophisticated artworks in their own right (Menges 2011, 10).

After more than a century of being a symbol of British excellence, towards the end of the twentieth century, the perception of Shakespeare became that of a pop icon. Appropriation into popular culture is a democratic cultural phenomenon which blurs political and social boundaries, gender, ethnic, and linguistic differences, as well as cultural hierarchies. A reflection of this can be found in the rewriting of the *Complete Works* in a non-canonical or counter-canonical key, but also in the educational projects aimed at increasing the accessibility of the Shakespearean text and reviving the interest of the younger readers in an established cultural authority. If the Lamb's *Tales* were, declaratively, aimed at children, but gained popularity and respect from all age groups, Shakespeare for today's young adults is meant to restyle the Bard as "cool," for entertainment purposes, or as "no fear," for learning purposes. While the list of such projects is quite long, for the purposes of this paper, we would like to mention only two examples, which also capitalize on the visual potential—the graphic novel and manga.

The graphic novel's elitist claims are quite recent, while its origins, in the comic book genre, are more modest. Commercial success was followed by critical and even academic interest in the 1980s, probably beginning with Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist and editor Art Spiegelman's serialized graphic book *Maus* (1980-1991). After this, the graphic novel vogue was responsible for the increased trust of educators in the genre's capacity to bring reading practices into a new age. According to respectable educational journals, graphic novels are good for teachers and students alike, helping them bond around a common goal, that of "moving beyond words" (Knutson 2022, 1). Graphic novels are also said to develop visual literacy, inference skills, as well as to engage reluctant readers. Needless to say that a popular educational and editorial endeavour is that of rendering Shakespeare's plays into graphic novels, designed for different age groups. The experience of the Shakespearean text is layered and gradual, the graphic versions may suggest, as the reader can be initiated into the basic elements of the play (plot, characters, etc.), continues with some familiarity with the Elizabethan verse (in a selection of famous lines), and finishes with the original, complete Shakespeare. The graphic enterprise follows these three stages, providing a "quick text" novel (more image than text), a "plain text" book (Shakespeare re-told with illustrations for every scene) and an "original text" version (the entire Shakespearean text backed with explanatory illustrations).

A genre that literally annihilates cultural and geographical boundaries is manga. A type of graphic novel originating from Japan, manga follows a stylistic framework that goes back to the nineteenth century and is not addressed only to teenagers. More than a genre, in fact, manga is a medium, which covers fictional and nonfictional areas and an almost endless variety of subgenres, from detective fiction and romance, to science fiction and drama. According to Hirohiko Araki (2017), a well-known creator of manga in Japan, this is more than a genre, more than a medium, but rather a synthesis of many art forms and expressions. Given the popularity of manga, Shakespeare as manga became, in the 2000s, an expression of the need to appropriate the Bard's works not only in a manner that was not tributary to a specific time frame, but, more importantly, in a manner that was free of specific cultural influences. Manga is a Japanese medium, with recognizable Japanese specificities, but when it features Shakespeare's famous English-speaking characters, these two cultural extremes neutralize each other, resulting in a hybrid product. However, with a balanced ratio of text and drawing, Manga Shakespeare has become not only an editorial success, but also a critically acclaimed endeavour. The series is coordinated by both a Shakespeare scholar and an educational editor and offers abridged versions of the play that allow readers (and teachers) to focus on key moments from the play's plots. According to the editors (on mangashakespeare.com), Manga Shakespeare is good for learning English as a second language, is suitable for both boys and girls, follows Shakespeare's texts and keeps young readers' interest in Shakespeare alive.

Romeo and Juliet, and the Balcony

There are many locations in Shakespeare's plays that are well-known even to people who have never read a line of Shakespeare or watched a minute of a Shakespearean performance. The ramparts of Elsinore Castle, where Hamlet meets his father's ghost, the Scottish heath, where the three witches mix their potions to answer Macbeth's questions, or the English heath, where King Lear goes mad, are all famous. And they also all have at least approximate real life geographical equivalents. But there are numerous venues described in Shakespeare's plays which are mere figments of imagination, some more obviously so than others. The best-known Shakespearean venue, however, is another figment of imagination, the balcony in *Romeo and Juliet*. In a book dedicated to this famous scene, Percec wrote about how much of the present-day balcony in Verona is the result of a process of appropriation, first for artistic reasons, later for tourists' convenience (Percec in Frenţiu 2016, 9). On 23 Via Cappello, in Verona, Italy, there is a house, *detta di Giulietta*, to which tourists have been going on pilgrimage since the mid-nineteenth century. Even though the original Renaissance house did not have a balcony (as few Renaissance

houses ever had), the local municipality had an ancient stone grave, beautifully carved, added to the old architecture, under a certain window, to accommodate the expectations of visitors, unwilling to make the difference between their real life tour of the city and the fictional love scene in Shakespeare's tragedy. More attention to both architectural and textual details would prompt the tourists not to look for the balcony at all, but this old object with a reinvented function is a good example of how consumerist expectations alter physical reality.

The star-crossed lovers meet at Juliet's house twice in the play, in act II scene 2 and in act III scene V. The spatial indications are minimal in the text, referring to a window and an orchard. These places can be added to the full list of locations in the Veronese tragedy: a public place, a street, a room and a hall in the Capulet House, Friar Laurence's cell, a lane, etc. The balcony as such is neither explicitly mentioned nor implicitly described, though the window above could be reminiscent of some of the balcony's specific features: a transition between outside and inside, between public and private, between male and female, between open and secret. The window above, confused with a balcony, is an extension of Juliet's chamber, an intimate, domestic, feminine space, separated from other locations, which are crowded and formal, like the ballroom, or rowdy like the marketplace, filled with citizens. These venues, in the absence of an individualized approach, can be all read as various representations of masculinity. Juliet's chamber, as we learn from Act III, scene V, is a figurative fortress, to which access is permitted only to other females – the Nurse and Lady Capulet, Juliet's mother. An extension of the girl's private room which is still coded as feminine, bearing the same characteristics of enclosure, secrecy, discretion, domesticity, is the garden. Romeo's entering the orchard in order to climb to Juliet's window is the first step towards conquering the woman's private space—and her heart—because the garden is, in western secular and religious traditions, a woman's privilege and responsibility. According to Twigs Way (2006, 5), modest women who worked as weeders, housewives who grew vegetables for their families, nuns who sought spiritual salvation within the walled gardens of monasteries, artists in search of a theme related to nature, and privileged women who used gardening as a pastime, all illustrated the fact that "the history of the garden is a history of women."

Juliet's complete privacy starts to disintegrate when Romeo, at the beginning of Act II, crosses a real and symbolic boundary, at the end of "a lane by the wall of Capulet's orchard, [into] Capulet's orchard." What happens next is one of the best-known Shakespearean moments: Juliet being caught unaware while declaring her love for a Montague man and her hope that, for love, he will be ready to give up his name and overcome the family feud. Her love, uttered aloud only because she thought herself alone, is no longer secret and, with this revelation, the affair of the two lovers begins, because Juliet, allowing Romeo to

be privy to her most intimate feelings, has no reason to keep him outside her private chamber (and her body).

What is interesting to observe about the reception of the star-crossed lovers' tragedy is that the visual representations of the play contributed, in the most substantial manner, to the invention of the balcony. The favourite scenes of *Romeo and Juliet*, revisited again and again by painters and illustrators, certainly include Friar Laurence's sleeping potion, which Juliet drinks in Act IV to appear dead, the lovers' actual deaths, but none is more popular than the so-called "balcony scene," more properly called "the window" or "the orchard" scene.

Boydell's gallery immortalizes the balcony for the first time in a 1797 painting and engraving by John Francis Rigaud (Figure 1). Victorian painting and illustration are rife with balconies, the lovers' embrace being detailed in rich colours and establishing the two major directions in which this scene is presented—with erotic overtones, like Ford Madox Brown's Pre-Raphaelite 1870 composition (Figure 2), or following the sentimental tradition, like one of the period's favourites, Frank Bernard Dicksee's 1884 painting (Figure 3). These influential painters are important sources of inspiration for almost all subsequent illustrations of the love scene (whether Act II scene 2 or Act III scene 5), which feature a version of the balcony and the lovers' whispered conversation or embrace. Victorian in chronology and later in spirit, illustrations of the original play and of retold versions until the 1920s (H. C. Selous, Figure 4, William Hatherell, Figure 5, or Frank C. Papé, Figure 6) can be regarded as variations on the theme of the balcony.

Recent pictorial adaptations for young adults may sometimes attempt a faithful continuity, as we can see in the graphic novels (Figure 7). But they are so tributary to this topos that, even when trying to displace it, as happens, for example in the Manga Shakespeare genre (Figure 8), the balcony – of a modern block of flats against the cityscape of skyscrapers – is still there.

Nineteenth-century Representations of the Balcony

Among the first known illustrations of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is John Francis Rigaud's painting and, later, engraving. A member of the Royal Academy of Arts when Boydell commissioned him to illustrate the scene of Act III scene V, Rigaud provided the gallery with one of the four artworks inspired from the star-crossed lovers' tragedy. A typical neoclassical composition, Rigaud's *Romeo and Juliet* features three characters in eighteenth-century attire in an eighteenth-century décor. The engraving is heavily anchored in the time of its creation, as indicated also by the detail of the railing, a richly decorated wrought ironwork. A rope ladder is hanging from the balustrade.

Figure 1
Source: https://www.sellingantiques.co.uk/701498/a-georgian-engraving-
print-of-romeo-juliet-1797/#

Romeo's pose, while athletic (sitting astride the railing), is the most sentimental of all, clinging languorously to his beloved before jumping off. Juliet, somewhat maternally but rather sternly, is trying to disentangle herself from his embrace. Sitting upright while Romeo is straddling the balustrade, Juliet also appears taller than her lover. This is a possibly unintentional reversal of gender roles, with a pleading, love-stricken man and a self-assured, poised woman. The nurse in the background is making ample gestures to hasten the separation of the two, thus reinforcing the impression of female control. The composition translates into image the final moments of the lovers' sexual encounter in Act III, scene V, interrupted by the nurse who announces the arrival of Juliet's mother:

> Your lady mother is coming to your chamber
> The day is broke; be wary, look about. (39-40)
> Juliet's apparently more composed state depicted by Rigaud contradicts

the Shakespearean text, where both lovers seem overwhelmed by bad premonitions as they deplore their separation:

Juliet, "Therefore stay yet; thou needst not to be gone (16),
Romeo, "More light and light, more dark and dark our woes!" (36).

Rigaud's engraving selects only Romeo's depressed state to convey a sentimental overtone to the composition.

Considered one of the most romantic artworks on this subject, Frank Bernard Dicksee's *Romeo and Juliet* was created for a luxury edition of the tragedy, illustrating Romeo's line "Farewell, farewell, one kiss and I'll descend" of the same third act and fifth scene. Like Rigaud's, Dicksee's painting presents the balcony from within, the light of dawn outside in contrast with the shadows of the night still lingering inside. In fact, replicated behind the lovers, the structure on which they are shown standing bears the architectural features of a loggia, a covered gallery supported by richly decorated columns. This proves Dicksee's attention to historical and cultural verisimilitude, as these details, together with the rooftops and spires of buildings and churches in the distant background, create a convincing impression of Renaissance Italy.

Figure 2
Source: https://tumblrpics.com/pics/915132.html#gallery-3

The artist captures the sense of doom in the lovers' words, quoted in the previous paragraph, in a symbolic way, showing their bodies, prisoners of the dark but aiming for the light. Dicksee's attention for historical detail can also be seen in the display of specific elements in the male protagonist's clothes. Romeo, fully dressed, unlike Juliet, is equipped with a plumed red hat, a sword with a silver handle, a leather coin purse and a red cloak. His readiness to depart is chromatically opposed to Juliet's plain white gown and more static position. Another detail, which is less tributary to historical accuracy and disconnected from the Shakespearean text, but typically Victorian, is the presence of flowers. In the background, on Juliet's side, a bunch of white lilies symbolizes bridal purity and innocence, reminding viewers of the two lovers' secret nuptials. The passion fruit clinging to the marble column on Romeo's side has flowers in full bloom, suggesting that the wedding has just been consummated.

Dicksee's composition is heavily influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite vision, not only in the use of vibrant colours, but also in the interest for the historical past.

The best-known Pre-Raphaelite translation into image of Romeo and Juliet's romantic affair belongs to Ford Madox Brown, a member of this movement who was less concerned with its escapist quality and more with the inclusion of social commentary and even caricature. His *Romeo and Juliet* departs from both Victorian sentimentalism and Pre-Raphaelite Romantic fantasy and presents a slightly taboo-breaking, eroticized version of the love story. Brown has Romeo dressed completely in red, suggesting fiery passion, in contrast with Juliet's golden yellow gown, imitating the hues of the dawning day. Romeo plants a passionate kiss on Juliet's naked and exposed neck and very low-cut decolletage. While his face is hidden from the viewers, Juliet's mimicry and body language suggest a trance-like or, rather, enraptured state. In contrast with Rigaud's composition, which presented a Romeo more determined to stay and a Juliet more inclined to let him go, at the Nurse's advice, Brown's Romeo and Juliet go back into the predictable gender patterns. Romeo's outstretched left arm and hand indicate his resolve and haste to leave, while Juliet's fingers cling to his bodice, in an attempt to hold him still and prolong the moment.

Meticulously, the painter adds a rope ladder to a balcony with wrought iron railing, the only anachronistic element in a painting which, otherwise, observes the Pre-Raphaelite interest in historical accuracy. The balcony is surrounded by a blossoming apple tree, which hints at Romeo's remark in the play:

> This bud of love, by summer's ripening
> May prove a beauteous flower when next we meet. (Act II, scene 2, 120-22)

Figure 3
Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a3/DickseeRomeoandJuliet.jpg

It seems, then, that Brown creates a shortcut between the second act, when the two lovers meet in secret for the first time, and the third act, when they actually make love. This is, in fact, something that Shakespeare himself often did in the plays, accelerating the plots and shortening, often at the risk of unnaturalistic improbability, the temporal and spatial distance between various scenes. Still a promise, the two lovers' affair in Brown's painting may not have been consummated yet, despite the intense erotic charge, which makes viewers wonder whether "the bud" did become "ripe."

Increased sentimentality makes most of the late Victorian and Edwardian illustrations aseptic. Faithfully realistic as well as prudish, suitable for consumption by families with children, most of the illustrated editions during the middle and late Victorian period have a higher degree of formality than their predecessors. One such conservative approach can be seen in the 1864-1868 edition of the *Complete Works*, illustrated by the Victorian artist Henry Courtney Selous, which includes full-page drawings and engravings, with captions guiding readers to the exact lines they are meant to detail. Romeo and Juliet in the black-and-white engraving are re-enacting the separation in Act III scene V:

Juliet: Then, window, let day in and let life out.
Romeo: Farewell, farewell. One kiss and I'll descend. (41-42)

Figure 4
Source: https://www.openculture.com/2016/09/3000-illustrations-of-shakespeares-
complete-works-from-victorian-england.html
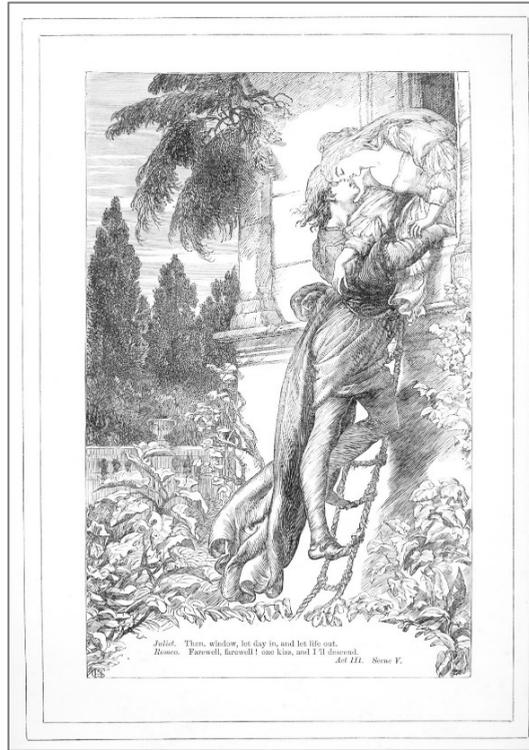
The illustrations, conservative as they are, also display echoes of the Romantic tradition of engraving, perfected by the French artist Gustave Doré, whose propensity for fantasy conveyed a dreamlike dimension to his works and whose great attention to the background and the details of the landscape gave the impression of a three-dimensional experience. Selous borrows something from Ford Madox Brown, too, choosing to hide Romeo's face and to contrast the colours of the lovers' clothing. Juliet's light-coloured gown is matched with her fair hair, not favoured by many nineteenth-century painters, except the same

Brown. A significant architectural detail, among the details of the garden with flowers, the trees in the background and the stones of the walls, is the absence of the balcony, or of the loggia, and their replacement by the original "window above." The rope ladder is leaning against the wall, and the two lovers' posture gives a sense of movement to the composition: Juliet is reaching out for a Romeo who is climbing down, her hands holding him feebly, in a gesture that combines despair with resignation. Her lowered gaze and half-closed eyes reinforce this impression.

The Balcony during the Golden Age of Book Illustrations

The aseptic quality of the illustrations continues in the early twentieth century, even if the mentalities have changed dramatically. Regarded as indisputably canonical, Shakespeare is approached in an academic way, with little room for innovation and even less potential for critique. A luxury edition of *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* from 1912, published by Hodder and Stoughton, has 22 watercolours by William Hatherell, a painter and illustrator considered suitable as his main subject materials were related to historical fantasy. A balcony scene decorates the frontispiece of the book, showing Juliet alone, at the beginning of act II. Hatherell's favourite topics, the Arthurian legends, influence the style of the heroine's dress, making Juliet a generic *châtelaine*, possibly reminiscent of the tragic Lady of Shalott, immortalized by another famous Pre-Raphaelite, John William Waterhouse. Juliet is standing on a moon-lit, ivy-clad stone balcony, lost in reverie, her body language overly sentimental (her hand at the back of her head, in a meditative pose). The watercolour's title, "O, Romeo, Romeo, Wherefore Art Thou Romeo?," indicates the moment of the play, when Juliet's private space is invaded by the lover who steals into the orchard and overhears the girl's declaration of love. Hatherell's illustration is apparently the most chaste of all because Romeo's presence is only inferred. However, the perspective is clearly Romeo's, the heroine being watched upwards, from below. The unsuspecting Juliet on the balcony is, therefore, the subject of the illicit male gaze. This may be an explanation for the surprise and fear the girl voices in the play when she first realizes Romeo has overheard her soliloquy and trespassed into her private space:

> How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?
> The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
> And the place death, considering who thou art,
> If any of my kinsmen find thee here. (II, 2, 62-65)

Figure 5
Source: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hatherell-o-romeo-romeo-
wherefore-art-thou-romeo-n02937

Understandably formal are also the illustrations of adaptations, such as Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*. As the book is explicitly targeted at children, many illustrators choose the fairy-tale mode when rendering both tragic and comic Shakespearean subjects. A good example is a 1923 illustration in colour of *Romeo and Juliet* by Frank C. Papé. The British artist was one of the most prolific book illustrators before World War I and during the interwar period, his works decorating well-known editions of *Robinson Crusoe, The Arabian Nights, The Odyssey*, retold histories of Gargantua and Pantagruel, among other projects. Combining realistic and fantastic elements, Papé was ideal for children's books with an educational value and the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* were a very good example of such reading material. Coloured in pastel shades, Papé's balcony scene is graceful, even balletic, with the protagonists embracing in a flowing movement. Romeo is climbing on the said blossoming apple tree with rounded pink flowers while standing on his tiptoes, to kiss Juliet on her cheek, chastely. Juliet is leaning over the loggia lovingly, her hands around Romeo's neck. Like the fairy-tale rendition of the balcony scene by H. C. Selous, Papé's illustration features a Titania-like blonde Juliet, in white, unsubstantial garments, in contrast with Romeo's outdoor attire, complete with a sword. The

moment of the play depicted in the illustration is related to the reference to "the bud of love" prepared to ripen, in Act II, scene II, and summarized in the caption with a line from the Lambs' retelling: "The day was breaking when they parted." Remarkably, even if this is the most prudish of all illustrations of the balcony scene, it is also the closest in structure to Brown's *Romeo and Juliet* (the pink apple flowers, Romeo's extremely dynamic posture in contrast with Juliet's more static bearing, the chromatic contrast between the two characters, etc.).


The day was breaking when they parted

Figure 6
Source: https://www.pinterest.com/pin/84301824245809371/
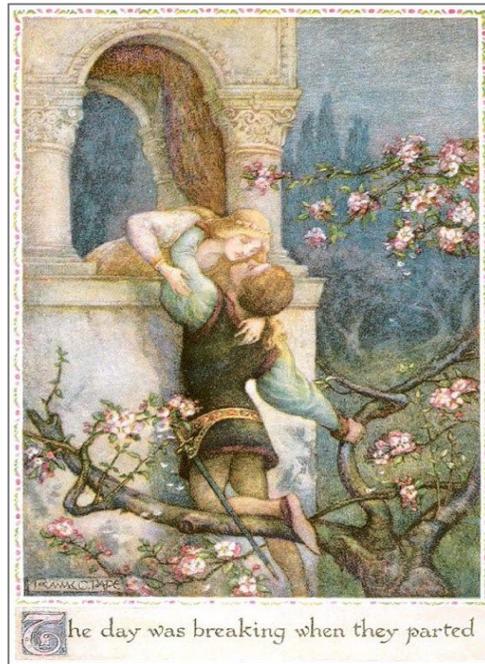
Revisiting the Balcony in the Twenty-first Century

In visual renditions of the play from our contemporary period, there is a noticeable tendency to intervene in the original Shakespearean text, to add or extract content, to direct attention to issues that may or may not have been relevant to the Elizabethan audiences. The graphic novel, meant primarily for educational purposes, simplifies the plot, reducing it to essential moments, and the illustrations follow suit. The graphic novel version of *Romeo and Juliet*, rewritten in "plain" text by John McDonald and illustrated by Will Volley, is presented, by a reviewer on Amazon, as "inspired […], depicts every scene of

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the play in full-colour illustrations, accompanied by every word of the original text. Authentic yet easy to follow, this exciting adaptation is ideal for purists, students, and readers who appreciate Shakespeare's matchless verse." The accompanying images are reduced to the essential, as seen in the balcony scene that decorates the book cover. This time, both Romeo and Juliet are dressed in red, in an attempt to suggest more gender equality between the two. The tree Romeo is climbing is an unidentified species, a sign that plant and flower symbolism, so important to the Victorians, is no longer relevant for contemporary readers. However, one particular detail is brought to the forefront, a sign that the illustrator intended his composition to target readers informed by the global popular culture and mass tourism. The balcony on which Juliet is standing contains the sculptural details seen by the tourists during their visit to the house *detta di Giulietta*, on 23 Via Cappello, Verona, Italy. The readers who would recognize these specific elements are those who have been engaged in a popular ritual distantly connected to Shakespeare and more closely to the experience of visiting Italy: possibly they have touched Juliet's bronze statue in Verona, hoping to be lucky in love, or they have eaten "Penne Romeo with gorgonzola" at a local restaurant and an ice cream called "Juliet's sighs" at the *gelateria* next door, as even the most basic Veronese travel guide book would recommend.


Figure 7
Source: https://www.amazon.com/Romeo-Juliet-Graphic-Classic-Collection/dp/1420506315
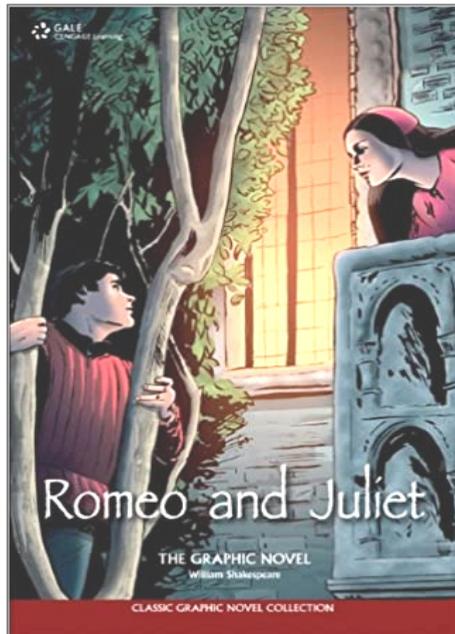
The illustration on the cover is repeated in the book, for Act II, scene 2, from which the author selects the following exchange:

> Romeo: Neither, fair saint, if either thee dislike.
> Juliet: How camest thou hither, tell me, and wherefore?
> The orchard walls are high and hard to climb,
> And the place death, considering who thou art,
> If any of my kinsmen find thee here. (II, 2, 61-65)

Juliet's spatial position above and Romeo's precarious balance among the branches of the tree are replicated in these lines which also indicate that Juliet initially had the upper hand, reminding us of Rigaud's early work for the Boydell Gallery.

Figure 8
Source: Shakespeare, William, and Sonia Leong. 2007. *Manga Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet*. Harry N. Abrams.

Finally, the Manga Shakespeare combines an essentialization of the Shakespearean text with a graphic design that bears little—if any—connection with the Elizabethan world. Even if they are designed by western artists and scholars for a western audience, the Manga Shakespeare comics have recognizable

Japanese manga characteristics such as the big, expressive eyes of the characters, the tall, slender figures, the realistic settings, the vignettes, etc. Manga *Romeo and Juliet* is no exception. The balcony scene contains a transition from two vignettes showing Juliet, preoccupied, talking to herself with sparkling white daisies in the background, to the scene itself, in which the two protagonists are seen from a distance, in an urban garden with geometrically cut shrubs, separated by a (concrete) wall from a modern city with skyscrapers in the distance. Juliet is standing on the balcony (with a transparent glass railing), looking down at a Romeo dressed in severe black (mourning-like) clothes. According to Andreea Şerban (2016, 73), the transparent balcony could also be interpreted as an intertextual reference to the fairy-tale fantasy, where dark-haired Juliet is imprisoned in a glass casket, Snow-White-like, waiting for the prince to rescue her. The casket can be symbolically connected to the pressures put by Juliet's family and their constant control on her decisions and even on her body.

Juliet's aside, in the vignettes, is a shortened version of her soliloquy, overheard by Romeo, who is hiding in the shadows:

> [...] the mask of night is on my face,
> Else would a [...] blush bepaint my cheek
> For that which thou has heard me speak to-night (II, 2, 85-87)

The word left out in line 86 is *maiden* ("a maiden blush bepaint my cheek," in the original). This may work in the spirit in which Dicksee's use of flower symbolism presented a transition from the virginal white lilies to the passion flowers in full bloom. If not her maidenly quality, Juliet's very young age is most emphatically indicated in this manga rendition, the girl wearing two very long pigtails, blowing in the wind, contrasted with her ample, mature, and elegant dress. Both lovers' clothing, in fact, creates an impression of formality, doubled by the physical distance between them.

The text accompanying the scene is completed with another sentence which, in fact, continues Juliet's line, but the bubble is placed above Romeo, thus giving the false impression that it is spoken by him. The sentence is a substantial contraction (four lines are reduced to one, after another string of 18 lines, from 87 to 103, is annulled):

> [...] thou overheard'st [....]
> My true love's passion: [...]
> [...]
> Which the dark night hath so discovered. (II, 2, 103-06)

The decision to attribute one of Juliet's lines to Romeo may have a levelling effect. If the balcony places Juliet above her lover, in a posture that may suggest aloofness (but, given the sparkling daisies of the close-up, is probably more a sign of shyness), the discursive advantage Romeo seems to have over Juliet brings the two lovers back on a par with each other.

Conclusion

The illustrations discussed in this paper belong to different cultural periods, are targeted at different audiences, add or subtract details, according to the current trends in illustration or in the reception of the Shakespearean text. Some of them capitalize on an idealized version of chaste love, while others contain clear sexual overtones. They follow gender stereotypes in describing the two lovers' relationship, or they challenge these gender stereotypes. However, they are all examples of the way in which the cultural memory of Shakespeare (and, in this case, of "the balcony scene") depends less on the literary text and more on the mechanisms of interpretation and appropriation.

This analysis of illustrations of what is known (though inaccurately, as we have explained) as "the balcony scene" in Shakespeare's famous *Romeo and Juliet* has pointed at how these paratextual elements, the result of interesemiotic translation, are connected to or disconnected from the text they accompany and the socio-cultural context in which this text was written.

While concentrating on these aspects, the paper concludes that, like in intersemiotic translations, like interlingual ones, faithfulness to the original is not always sought after. The illustrators' own aesthetic inclinations, their response to the socio-cultural context in which the original play was created or, on the contrary, their departure from it so as to get closer to the socio-cultural dimensions of the context in which the play is received, their preoccupation with the functionality of the text they illustrate: all these factors have a bearing on how they transfer the text in visual form. The illustrators' choices are similar to those of translators working with words only: they sometimes "literally reproduce the textual elements in the pictures" (Pereira 2008, 109), other times they add elements that are not present in the text or omit some that the text mentions, "emphasize specific narrative elements" or "adapt the pictures to a specific ideology or artistic trend" (Pereira 2008, 111, 114). Like interlingual translators, illustrators also resort to intertextuality in their artwork – it is not seldom that, as we have seen in some of the cases discussed here, they bring elements of previously made illustrations into their own.

As forms of "interpretive imitation" (Leach 1982, 175), both translations and illustrations re-create the text, offering to the public what can be described as

reading keys to the book. Translators and illustrators are both, as Behrend (1997, 24) said, intruders with their own interpretation, "into an intellectual and aesthetic transaction that would otherwise involve only the literary author and the reader." They are, thus, intruders in the readers' meaning-making process as well.

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LA LECTURE *« KALÉIDOSCOPIQUE »* EN LIGNE

ANGELA-GABRIELA POP[1]

ABSTRACT*. Kaleidoscopic reading online.* The hypothesis Angela Pop examines is that the Internet brings with it new textual-discursive practices, including a new type of reading: kaleidoscopic reading. This emerges from information published in digital frames created by the world of Internet. It is characterized by a non-linear reception path, in which the reader follows milestones created by hyperlinks, in the page displayed by the computer. It is a quick reading, which goes from text to hypertext and aims to familiarize the readers with the content they are reading. An issue in an online environment concerns the role the internet user might play. Pop distinguishes three such online roles: 1. first, the *internet reader* [from the French *lecteurnaute*, i.e. *lecteur + internaute* (=internet user)] is the passive reader who only enjoys Internet content. He only reads texts written by others, and for him the Internet is a source of information. 2. second, *a virtual author*, one who publishes various papers (and content), which makes us consider him an author in the real world. 3. A third role is played by the *internet scriptor* (in French: *scriptornaute*) a person who makes comments online, on texts published by *virtual authors*. A transition of the Internet user from one "role" to another can take place in the process of kaleidoscopic reading. Pop identifies three essential types of kaleidoscopic reading: circular, spiral and open. "Ecrilecture" (from the French *écrire*=to write + *lecture*=to read) coexists with online *kaleidoscopic reading*.

Keywords: *Internet, communication, "kaleidoscopic" reading, internet lecturer, author, internet scriptor, "écrilecture"*

REZUMAT*. Lectura caleidoscopică online.* Ipoteza pe care o studiem este aceea că Internetul generează practici textual-discursive noi, printre care și un nou tip de lectură: *lectura caleidoscopică*. Ea apare odată cu activitatea consumatorului

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[1] **Angela-Gabriela POP** prépare une thèse de doctorat en philologie sur le discours numérique, à la Faculté de Lettres de l'Université « Babeș-Bolyai » Cluj-Napoca. Elle enseigne le français langue étrangère à Colegiul Național « Gheorghe Șincai » de Cluj-Napoca, et à l'Institut français. angela.gabriela_pop@yahoo.com.

de conținut al cadrelor digitale create de lumea informaticii și a Internetului. Acest tip de lectură se caracterizează printr-un parcurs al receptării non-linear, în care cititorul urmează jaloanele hyperlinkurilor din spațiul paginii afișate de calculator. Este o lectură rapidă, care trece de la text la hypertext și de la un modul textual la un altul. Ea are ca scop doar familiarizarea cititorului cu conținutul pe care-l parcurge. În mediul online se pune problema rolurilor utilizatorului de Internet care acționează prin gest (gestul de a face *click* de exemplu) pentru a-și manifesta prezența. Distingem trei asemenea roluri, pe care le vom denumi: *lectornaut, autor virtual* și *scriptornaut.* 1. *Lectornautul* este cititorul pasiv care „consumă" conținutul Internetului ca pe un spectacol. El doar parcurge textele scrise de alții online, se informează pornind de la ceea ce citește. 2. Îl numim *autor virtual* pe cel care publică, pe diverse site-uri Internet, materiale de importanța celor care ne fac să-l considerăm autor și în lumea reală. 3. Rolul de *scriptornaut* este cel în care enunțiatorul situat online comentează textele publicate de autorii virtuali. În timpul lecturii caleidoscopice poate avea loc trecerea internautului de la un „ rol" la altul. Distingem trei tipuri esențiale de lectură caleidoscopică: cu parcurs circular, în spirală și cu parcurs deschis. *„Ecrilectura"* coexistă cu *lectura caleidoscopică* online.

Cuvinte-cheie: *Internet, comunicare, lectură „caleidoscopică", lector, autor virtual, scriptornaut, „ecrilectură"*

Introduction

Notre texte présente une série de considérations d'ordre théorique sur la lecture en ligne, ainsi que sur les rôles de l'internaute dans ce processus. La recherche dont il fait partie porte sur le texte-discours numérique, se situant dans les cadres de l'analyse linguistique du discours telle que pratiquée par Dominique Maingueneau, Jean Michel Adam, Patrick Charaudeau, ainsi que celle promue par Marie-Anne Paveau, qui prend le discours numérique « natif » comme objet d'étude.

Après un passage en revue des principales étapes dans l'évolution de la lecture, nous allons définir un nouveau type de réception, qui apparaît suite à la façon dont se présente le contenu avec lequel le récepteur doit entrer en contact sur l'ordinateur relié au réseau Internet.

Notre hypothèse de départ est que nous assistons en ligne à des pratiques de lecture peu ou voire pas du tout représentées avant l'apparition d'Internet. Une de celles-ci est la *lecture kaléidoscopique,* que nous présentons dans cet article. Elle suppose que le lecteur manipule à l'aide de gestes cliquables, des fragments de texte rencontrés sur différents sites, dans le processus de réception. Elle intègre aussi – pour le lecteur – la possibility du passage d'un rôle identitaire à un autre.

1. Pratiques de lecture à travers le temps.

Alberto Manguel parle de l'évolution du texte écrit et de sa réception à travers le temps, en évoquant le passage de la lecture à haute voix, tout à fait naturelle il y a deux mille ans, à la lecture silencieuse, qui ne s'est imposée en Occident qu'après le dixième siècle (1998, 73). Entre temps, la lecture a connu d'autres transformations dont la dernière est due au développement de l'informatique et du réseau Internet.

Bien avant que l'ordinateur devienne accessible à l'échelle planétaire, Roger Chartier prédit, en 1996, dans son article « Du Codex à l'écran. Les trajectoires de l'écrit » : « La révolution du texte électronique sera elle aussi une révolution de la lecture ». Il se réfère à la matérialité du texte d'avant Internet, qui va être annulée en ligne, ainsi qu'à l'apparition des textes-fragments dont la forme et la longueur font penser à des « archipels textuels sans rive ni borne ». Il prédit des mutations dans les manières de lire, « de nouveaux rapports à l'écrit », et des techniques intellectuelles totalement réinventées (Chartier 1996, 32).

Si dans les « structures fondamentales du livre », transformées plusieurs fois à travers le temps, il ne voit pas une « révolution », il admet pourtant qu'avec Internet et le monde numérique nous assistons à une « reconfiguration totale des supports de l'écriture, ainsi que des formes de celle-ci » (Chartier 1996, 32).

L'auteur dresse aussi une courte histoire de la lecture, dans laquelle il évoque une première étape marquée par l'existence du « volumen », où étaient inscrits les textes en Antiquité. Ce support était associé à « une lecture continue » qui sollicitait aussi le corps. Celui qui lisait devait tenir le rouleau à deux mains (Chartier 1996, 32), de sorte qu'il lui était impossible d'écrire ou d'effectuer autre chose durant ce processus.

Le passage du *volumen* au « codex », dans sa version manuscrite, suivie de celle imprimée, a représenté, selon Chartier, un pas révolutionnaire en avant, car le support de l'écriture a permis désormais au lecteur de feuilleter ce qu'il avait devant ses yeux comme objet à lire, « organisé à partir de cahiers, feuillets et pages ». « Le codex peut être paginé et indexé, ce qui permet de citer précisément et retrouver aisément tel ou tel passage. » (Chartier 1996, 32). Lire un codex peut permettre une lecture fragmentée, comme sur l'ordinateur, mais sur papier le lecteur va toujours percevoir l'œuvre de manière globale, et cela grâce à l'objet matériel qui contient le texte. L'auteur s'interrogeait déjà en 1994 sur l'évolution de la lecture des textes numériques, citant Antonio Rodríguez de las Heras qui proposait d'introduire dans les représentations que nous avons de l'écran, la dimension de la profondeur, à côté de la largeur et de la hauteur,

dans l'espace numérique, ce n'est pas l'objet qui est plié, comme dans le cas de la feuille d'imprimerie, mais le texte lui-même. [N.S.] La lecture consiste (...) à "déplier" cette textualité mobile et infinie (...) [et] constitue sur l'écran des unités textuelles éphémères, multiples et singulières, composées à la volonté du lecteur, qui ne sont en rien des pages définies une fois pour toutes. (Chartier1994, en ligne)

2. Le texte *kaléidoscopique*

Nombreux sont ceux qui remarquent les mutations dans les pratiques de lecture apparues suite au changement de la matérialité du texte, lu en ligne (Beaudouin 2002, Ertzscheid 2002, Davalon et all, 2003 etc.). On parle de la « lecture d'écran » qui « est d'abord une lecture de survol et de repérage » (Davalon 2003) ou de « la tendance contemporaine à l'hypertextualisation des documents » qui « peut se définir comme une tendance à l'indistinction, au mélange des fonctions de lecture et d'écriture **»** (Lévy 1995), de « lecture navigante » (Maingueneau) et même d'« écrilecture » (Paveau, 2017, 218, qui cite la définition formulée par Barbosa, 1992) .

En effet, depuis l'invention de l'ordinateur et du réseau Internet, le discours a subi de nombreuses transformations, de nature à affecter l'acte de la lecture. Une « nouvelle plasticité du texte » (Lévy 1995, 127) abrité par un dispositif énonciatif numérique influence désormais la réception. C'est chez Lévy que nous retrouvons pour la première fois la métaphore du texte kaléidoscopique :

> Par rapport aux techniques antérieures de lecture en réseau, la numérisation introduit une petite révolution copernicienne : ce n'est plus le navigateur qui suit les instructions de lecture et se déplace physiquement dans l'hypertexte, tournant les pages, déplaçant de lourds volumes, arpentant la bibliothèque, mais c'est désormais un texte mobile, *kaléidoscopique*, qui présente ses facettes, tourne, se plie et se déplie à volonté devant le lecteur. (1995, 127)

Lévy parle d'un « nouvel art de l'édition et de la documentation », dû à la rapidité dont le lecteur de la Toile essaie de tirer profit des « masses d'informations » (1995, 129) qu'il rencontre sur son parcours.

Le texte tapé sur ordinateur est aujourd'hui le fruit d'une collaboration entre l'homme et des logiciels d'écriture qui permettent de faire afficher des contenus textuels et discursifs sur l'écran. Tout se passe dans un environnement technique où se déroulent des processus dont le fonctionnement et la structure sont inaccessibles à celui qui n'est pas formé à cette fin. Il y a des dispositifs énonciatifs numériques et une interaction permanente entre l'homme et

l'ordinateur, qui rendent possibles tant l'écriture que l'acte de la réception. La lecture en ligne est réalisée suite à des gestes :

> Alors que, sur le support papier, toutes les pages sont coprésentes, elles n'apparaissent, dans le cas de l'hypermédia, qu'à *la demande* de l'usager. Cela crée une situation de lecture particulière, dont la caractéristique principale est que le lecteur doit constamment faire des choix en cliquant sur tel ou tel bouton s'il veut faire apparaître telle unité d'information ou telle autre. » *Chaque bouton, chaque hyperlien est ainsi* ***une invitation à aller plus loin***, *une promesse de contenu.* [N.S.] (Vandendorpe 1999, 227)

L'importance du geste du lecteur qui découvre un texte en ligne peut entraîner une comparaison avec le « zapping » du téléspectateur assis devant la télévision. Ce sont, en effet deux phénomènes du même type.

Vandendorpe rappelle les études de Lipovetsky sur la télévision, là où celui-ci affirme que : « le lecteur zappeur n'attend pas de la lecture qu'elle lui apporte un savoir quelconque et encore moins qu'elle change sa vie : il lui suffit qu'elle le prémunisse contre l'ennui » (Vandendorpe 1988, 69). Un côté tragique y est détecté même, plus précisément dans l'attitude du téléspectateur toujours « à l'affût » d'une émission qui puisse le captiver. Passif, devant l'écran, celui-ci attend toujours de trouver instantanément quelque chose à regarder.

Nous constatons que Vandendorpe utilise – avant Lévy – la métaphore du kaléidoscope pour qualifier les actions de la personne qui découvre du texte en ligne. Il voit dans la lecture dans l'espace numérique une action « fébrile où le lecteur est constamment à la surface de soi-même, surfant sur l'écume des sens offerts, emporté *dans un kaléidoscope d'images et de fragments de texte* oubliés dès qu'ils ont été perçus. » (1988, 228) [N.S.]

> La dynamique du Web tend ainsi à transformer la lecture en une activité fébrile où le lecteur est constamment à la surface de soi-même, surfant sur l'écume des sens offerts, emporté *dans un kaléidoscope d'images et de fragments de texte* [N.S.]oubliés dès qu'ils ont été perçus. (1988, 228)

Tous les auteurs s'accordent sur le fait que le nouveau milieu qui abrite les textes-discours numériques favorise un type de réception inouïe. Nous allons appeler cette nouvelle pratique : « lecture kaléidoscopique » », qui permet à son utilisateur d'avoir accès à un nombre infini de textes et de discours, grâce à Internet et à la *world wide web*.

C'est en effet à l'aide du geste de l'internaute que se construisent les actes d'écriture en ligne ou de lecture. Si le récepteur décide – par des clicks – quel fragment textuel il va aborder et de quelle manière, il pourra même y ajouter

du contenu, laissant une trace discursive de sa présence sur la Toile. C'est ainsi qu'il peut reconfigurer les éléments du discours numérique telles les pièces situées à l'intérieur d'un kaléidoscope. Il peut y « voyager » d'un hyperlien à l'autre, rester dans le cadre du site où il se trouve ou le quitter, au besoin, pour aller sur un autre site, à la recherche de telle ou telle information. C'est ainsi que ce nouveau type de lecture, kaléidoscopique, se dessine sur Internet.

3. La « page » en ligne

L'un des éléments qui affectent la matérialité du texte numérique est le nouveau support de l'écran de l'ordinateur, car dans l'espace virtuel, la notion même de *page* ne coïncide plus avec celle qu'on connaissait avant Internet, sur papier.

Chaque billet d'un blog, par exemple, peut avoir un caractère multimodal. Il contient à la fois des textes, des images, des séquences filmées etc. La multi-modalité du texte découvert en ligne sollicite le regard du lecteur, ainsi que le geste du click, obligatoirement. Le récepteur va utiliser le curseur afin de faire dérouler devant ses yeux un espace discursif bien plus grand que celui offert par le format papier usuel avant l'apparition du texte numérique. En effet, les interfaces numériques d'aujourd'hui sont très variées et la page à laquelle le lecteur y a accès prend des formes différentes en fonction de l'appareil utilisé.

A présent, dans le dictionnaire Larousse on trouve deux sens du mot *page*, associés au domaine de l'informatique, introduits assez récemment :

> **Page Web :** document multimédia au format HTML contenant des liens vers d'autres documents. (Il est accessible sur un serveur Web, grâce à une adresse unique *[URL],* et peut être affiché depuis un navigateur.)
> **Page d'accueil :** première page d'un site Web qui s'affiche lors d'une connexion, fournissant une présentation générale du site et donnant accès à l'ensemble des rubriques qu'il contient.[2]

La définition de la *page Web,* plutôt technique, introduit lexicalement des termes inexistants avant la découverte de l'informatique : le *format HTML* ; le « lien », « serveur Web », « URL » « navigateur », qui appartiennent à un univers discursif dont l'existence était impossible à concevoir auparavant, en absence de l'ordinateur et du réseau Internet.

« La page d'accueil », la dernière acception citée plus haut, comporte – dans le dictionnaire – une définition du point de vue discursif. C'est le premier type de page avec laquelle le lecteur entre en contact sur tous les sites et c'est ici qu'il trouvera les informations concernant les détails utiles à la compréhension de la situation discursive dans laquelle il se trouve.

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[2] https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/page/57231; vue le 16/03/21

Du point de vue ergonomique, en ligne, la consultation de n'importe quel type de page a lieu dans un espace visuel plusieurs fois plus grand que celui d'une page classique appartenant à un livre en papier. Le « scrolling », c'est-à-dire le fait de faire dérouler l'écran à l'aide de la barre de défilement ou de ce que les rédacteurs web appellent « l'ascenseur », est un geste obligatoire, devenu banal aujourd'hui, dans l'utilisation d'un ordinateur.

En plus de sa longueur, la page des sites contient des énoncés parsemés d'hyperliens accessibles à tout moment, signalés par des « cadres cognitifs » (la couleur bleue, en général) « permettant à l'usager de reconnaître immédiatement un segment technolangagier et donc de pouvoir cliquer » (Paveau 2017, 80).

4. L'hypertexte et l'hyperlien

Selon Paveau, les origines de l'hypertexte (auquel mène l'activation de l'hyperlien) seraient placées dans l'article de Vannevar Bush : « As we may think », paru en 1945. Celui-ci imagine à l'époque « un projet d'extension de la mémoire humaine qui préfigure l'hypertexte informatique qui sera inventé vingt ans plus tard par Ted Nelson en 1965 » (Paveau 2017, 213). On y retrouve aussi la première définition de l'hypertexte :

> « il s'agit d'un concept unifié d'idées et de données interconnectées, et de la façon dont ces idées et ces données peuvent être éditées sur un écran d'ordinateur (Nelson1993 cité par Clément 1995 : en ligne) ».

Le pas suivant sera accompli en 1968 par Doug Engelbart, lorsqu'il présentera, avec son équipe : « la souris, le courrier électronique et l'hypertexte » (Paveau 2017, 213).

En 1990, l'invention du web par Tim Berners Lee, complètera les étapes de la naissance de l'hypertexte. « A cette histoire technique correspondent des évolutions sociotechniques et communicationnelles » (Paveau 2017, 213).

Paveau donne une définition « technodiscursive » de l'hypertexte, qui implique d'« adopter une perspective qui prend en compte les usages, c'est-à-dire les processus technolinguistiques d'élaboration, en production comme en réception puisque les deux se confondent.» (Paveau 2017, 214)

Elle y évoque deux autres définitions pour l'hypertexte : l'une donnée par George Landow en 1996, « centrée sur le lien », l'autre par Bruno Bachimont qui fait la distinction entre « l'hypertexte » et « l'hyperdocument ». Elle observe que tous les deux insistent en effet sur la « relationnalité » de l'hypertexte.

La définition de Landow :

> « L'hypertexte est une technologie de l'information dans laquelle un élément –le lien- joue un rôle majeur. » « Le lien crée un nouveau genre de connectivité et de choix pour le lecteur. L'hypertexte est donc à

proprement parler une écriture multiséquentielle ou multilinéaire plutôt que non-linéaire (Landow 1996, 157 ; cité et traduit dans Ertzscheid 2002, 129). » (Paveau 2017, 215)

La définition de Bruno Bachimont, formulée quinze ans après celle de Landow :

> « On convient d'appeler ici *hyperdocument* tout ensemble de documents constituant une certaine unité, et *hypertexte* ce qui résulte de l'informatisation d'un hyperdocument sous la forme d'un réseau de nœuds documentaires et de liens navigationnels les reliant (Bachimont 2001, 110). » (Paveau 2017, 215)

Plus tard, les recherches d'Alexandra Saemmer ont permis d'approfondir le rôle et le fonctionnement de l'hyperlien, dans lequel elle voit : « une particularité fondamentale du texte numérique » (2015, 23). Elle va définir l'hyperlien comme : « élément textuel 'hyperlié' à lire et à manipuler, qui est inséré dans un texte (appelé « texte géniteur ») et qui renvoie vers un texte généralement encore invisible (appelé « texte lié »). » Elle affirme s'inspirer de « la définition de l'hyperlien comme signe passeur (Jeanneret et Souchier 1998) qui met en relation les dimensions de signe lu, de signe interprété et d'outil manipulable » (Saemmer 2015, 23)*.

> L'hyperlien en ce sens large est omniprésent dans le texte numérique : dans les résultats proposés par les moteurs de recherche, les journaux en ligne, les portails d'information et les sites commerciaux, les réseaux sociaux, la littérature numérique et le jeu vidéo. (Saemmer 2015, 15)

Le rôle du lecteur en ligne devient ainsi très important, celui-ci pouvant arpenter des lieux discursifs nouveaux dont la porte d'accès est représentée par l'hyperlien. Il est alors légitime de se poser la question de la spécificité de l'acte accompli par le récepteur du texte numérique.

> Beaucoup de critiques s'accordent néanmoins pour affirmer que le support numérique demande un lecteur plus « actif », quand le lecteur ajoute lui-même du texte ou des hyperliens à la matrice d'origine, son activité se transforme en écriture. Qu'est-ce qui se passe en revanche quand le lecteur active des liens hypertexte ? Est-ce que cette activité relève d'une activité d'écriture ou de lecture ? Le dispositif hypertextuel classique ne permet généralement pas de changer le texte produit par l'auteur. (Saemmer 2022, 2)

5. « Écrilecture » en ligne

Paveau parle de l'« écrilecture »**,** terme qui « désigne la fusion de deux activités de lecture et d'écriture impliquée par le dispositif technique reposant sur l'usage de l'hyperlien » (Paveau 2017, 218). Le lecteur repère l'hyperlien, celui-ci étant d'une autre couleur et/ou surligné dans le texte.

> L'hyperlien lui donne le choix de continuer sa lecture linéairement ou de cliquer et de se laisser « adresser » à un texte cible : sa lecture est alors une écrilecture puisqu'il écrit, en le lisant, un autre texte que celui qui se présente superficiellement à lui ; le lecteur est un écrilecteur. Cet autre texte est préparé par le scripteur mais uniquement comme potentialité, sur le plan de la matérialité textuelle il n'existe pas. (Paveau 2017, 218)

Paveau décrit la délinéarisation due aux éléments qui relèvent de l' «environnement techno discursif » qui modifie le « fil du discours » (2017, 145) :

> Le fil du discours présente deux formes de délinéarisation : à l'écriture et à la lecture, les deux étant intrinsèquement liées en contexte numérique (l'écrilecture). (Paveau 2017, 252)

6. Le temps de lecture en ligne

De nombreuses études actuelles sur le comportement des lecteurs en ligne montrent que ceux-ci passent très peu de temps sur les différentes parties des documents qu'ils parcourent sur Internet.

L'Université de Missouri a réalisé une telle recherche, dont voici quelques résultats, évoqués par Isabelle Canivet dans son ouvrage : « Bien écrire pour le web » (que nous avons lu sous la forme d'un fichier Kindle). Le lecteur en ligne, est désigné par le terme de « visiteur ».

> il faut moins de deux dixièmes de seconde au visiteur, pour qu'il se fasse une première impression du site en arrivant sur la page. Il faut 2,6 secondes au visiteur avant qu'il ne se concentre sur une section en particulier. Ses fixations sont de l'ordre de 180 millisecondes avant qu'il ne passe à une autre section. (Chapitre « Speed data », lu en version électronique, paragraphes 3-8 de 221)

Canivet évoque pertinemment la brièveté du processus de réception, en ligne, acte superficiel et sélectif, réalisé sans parcourir les textes dans leur intégralité. Elle parle ainsi de la manière de lire les différents secteurs d'un site. Dans l'acte de lecture en ligne deux gestes se conjuguent : le click et le survol du

regard des blocs textuels et discursifs affichés sur les différentes zones de la page-écran. Cela se passe de la manière suivante :

> « Les sections qui retiennent l'attention des visiteurs, sont, par ordre d'importance :
> - la zone du logo : dans leurs tests, le visiteur y passait 6,48 secondes avant de continuer ;
> - le menu de navigation principal : 6,44 secondes
> - le moteur de recherche : 6 secondes
> - les liens des réseaux sociaux, tels que Facebook et Twitter : 5,95 secondes
> - les images principales : 5,94 secondes
> - le contenu écrit : 5,59 secondes
> - le bas de la page : 5,25 secondes ». (Canivet 2021)

7. La lecture *kaléidoscopique* :

Dans le chapitre 7 « Comprendre le comportement de lecture en ligne » Canivet affirme que l'internaute est un « acteur clé de la visibilité » sur les moteurs de recherche (première partie du chapitre, paragraphe 3). C'est lui qui accomplit des gestes de lecture qui feront que le contenu sera « converti » par les robots informatiques :

> Le but ultime du contenu est d'amener le visiteur à réaliser ce que vous attendez de lui. L'appel à l'action ou *call-to-action* doit être converti en action concrètes ; on parle de « conversion ». Il peut aussi bien s'agir d'un achat que de faire appel à vos services, d'un appel téléphonique, de la lecture d'un autre article, ou encore d'une inscription à une *newsletter.* (Canivet 2021, 16)

Maingueneau parle de *lecture navigante*, guidée par l'intertexte à travers les espaces de la Toile :

> Enfin, l'écran ne propose qu'**une vue partielle** d'une totalité qui ne se donne jamais intégralement : il y a divergence entre les scansions d'Internet et la pagination de l'imprimé. On sait aussi que l'hypertextualité implique une « lecture » qu'on peut dire <u>*navigante,*</u> **le texte étant en fait le produit contingent du parcours de l'internaute, qui fabrique l'hypertexte qu'il *lit*.** [N.S.] (Maingueneau 2016, lu en ligne)

Nous allons appeler ce type de lecture navigante sur la mosaïque textuelle affichée sur l'écran de l'ordinateur : « lecture kaléidoscopique ». Mais nous ne pensons pas que le lecteur d'un hypertexte le « fabrique », au même titre qu'un auteur. Il édite tout au plus un texte –invisible dans une première

étape mais déjà préparé par son auteur. C'est un texte qui va devenir visible (suite à l'activation de l'hyperlien) tant que le lecteur choisit de le parcourir.

Dans ce type de lecture il s'agit non seulement de passer d'un texte à l'autre sur l'écran, lorsque le lecteur y clique. Pendant cette *lecture navigante*, l'internaute peut emprunter plusieurs rôles. C'est ainsi que le lecteur peut devenir 'scripteur' sur la page lue, ou bien rester simple visiteur de site qui peut accomplir un acte en ligne n'ayant pas de rapport avec la lecture (s'inscrire sur un site, acheter et payer en ligne etc.), etc.

8. Rôles de l'internaute dans la *lecture kaléidoscopique*

La personne qui agit sur un ordinateur connecté à Internet, est souvent désignée par les termes de *visiteur*, *utilisateur* ou d'*internaute*. Les dénominations hésitent entre le fait de considérer Internet un monde ayant principalement une fonction utilitaire et celui dans lequel *La Toile* est un univers habitable, où l'on peut vivre et naviguer à différentes fins.

Celui qui se manifeste dans l'espace virtuel ne peut pas laisser passer sa présence inaperçue, il exerce un certain nombre de rôles en y agissant. Il est à même de cliquer, ou de taper sur le clavier afin d'écrire des textes en tant qu'auteur ou commentateur, mais aussi de composer des messages, écrire un identifiant et un mot de passe à cet objectif, ou simplement faire dérouler les pages des œuvres présentes en ligne et affichées à l'écran. « Tout lecteur peut devenir auteur », selon Beaudouin, qui semble se poser le même problème, à savoir celui du rôle à accomplir par celui qui se manifeste sur Internet :

> Les commentaires des lecteurs, leurs appréciations critiques, suggestions, trouvent sur internet un lieu de visibilité inédit. La glose « ordinaire », celle qui restait dans l'espace privé et le plus souvent dans le domaine de l'oralité, sans mémoire, trouve de nouveaux espaces où s'inscrire (livres d'or des sites, messages dans les forums, WebLogs…). Ainsi, *tout lecteur peut devenir auteur, ou du moins commentateur : il écrit dans le texte d'un autre*. [N.S.] (Beaudouin 2002, 207)

En fonction de l'activité de l'internaute, nous proposons de distinguer les rôles suivants :

1. le « *lecteurnaute »*[3], qui parcourt des pages en ligne au moyen des clics, mais n'enrichit pas de manière énonciative les textes qu'il y lit. Il n'y

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[3] Le site https://www.strategies.fr/actualites/medias/r42739W/mon-kiosque-est-en-ligne.html?uid=MTE3Nzcz, consulté le 09/04/2022 propose le terme **: « lecteurnaute » , qui désigne le consommateur d'articles** *numériques* choisis d'un magazine numérique à l'autre : « Voilà qui augure des perspectives brillantes pour les magazines numériques, même si les esprits chagrins objectent que ces versions numériques n'offrent pas un bénéfice évident pour le

ajoute pas de commentaires, il n'y poste pas lui-même de documents dont il soit l'auteur. Il se contente de « survoler » l'univers virtuel qu'il contemple sur l'écran de son ordinateur ou de son smart-phone. Il fait dérouler des pages sur Internet et découvre des fils de textes en activant des hyperliens. Il reste cependant un simple spectateur devant l'univers de la Toile, qui s'offre à lui suite à ses gestes visant seulement à lire ce qu'il y découvre en y naviguant. A notre avis son activité ne peut pas être appelée « écrilecture ».

2. *l'auteur virtuel. L'auteur virtuel* accomplit des actes substantiels d'*écrilecture* en ligne. Il y écrit tout en lisant ce qu'il découvre sur son parcours numérique. Il va avoir un rôle auctorial au moment où il publie sur Internet des contributions textuelles et discursives de la même valeur et importance que celles qui font qu'en dehors de la Toile l'esprit commun y reconnaisse les « auteurs ». Il sera donc un *auteur virtuel* qui va « faire don »[4] de ses textes ou de ses documents dans l'espace virtuel de la Toile. Nous identifions dans ce rôle les auteurs de sites et de blogs, à côté de tous ceux qui publient en ligne des articles de presse, de la littérature, des vidéoclips, des films, etc. tels les *auteurs* dans tous les domaines de la vie réelle.

3. le « *scripteurnaute* » (de « scripteur » = émetteur d'un message écrit » + « internaute »). Un troisième rôle est celui de *scripteurnaute,* à travers lequel l'internaute écrit afin de commenter les textes et les discours auctoriaux rencontrés sur son parcours en ligne. Il manifeste ainsi sa présence en inscrivant des traces langagières dans l'espace numérique où il est présent et en augmentant de manière énonciative les textes lus.

À notre avis, seulement l'activité de l'*auteur virtuel* et celle de *scripteurnaute* sont des actes *d'écrilecture* dans le sens que ce terme prend chez Barbosa et Paveau. Selon nous, le *lecteurnaute* accomplit en ligne seulement de la lecture, un type de *lecture kaléidoscopique (*ou même *linéaire),* mais pas d'*écrilecture*.

La lecture linéaire suppose le fait de lire intégralement comme sur une page en format papier tout ce que le *lecteurnaute* trouve comme textualité sur la page numérique qu'il a sous les yeux. Il n'active pas d'hyperlien, il n'ouvre pas de document vidéo, il utilise seulement la barre de défilement afin de faire dérouler et de parcourir entièrement le contenu qui lui est proposé. Cela se fait en ligne de moins en moins souvent, mais existe comme possibilité.

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lecteur. Faux, répond-on *chez Cyber Press Publishing, où l'on en a identifié un d'un nouveau type : le « lecteurnaute ».* « Dans les années à venir, on va s'orienter vers un achat d'articles plus que de magazines, estime Isabelle Weill. Avec les kiosques numériques, le " lecteurnaute " pourra se composer son propre magazine. Ou découvrir des titres de qualité noyés dans la masse des kiosques » (C'est nous qui soulignons.)

[4] Jean Peytard et Sophie Moirand parlent de l'auteur de littérature comme de celui qui « a une fonction de « donateur » : il propose le produit littéraire » (1992, 203).

9. **Types de *lecture kaléidoscopique* :**

Afin de distinguer trois types de lecture kaléidoscopique, nous allons nous servir des notions de : « texte géniteur » – dans le sens que Saemmer accorde à ce terme (voir 4, plus haut), à savoir le texte où est inséré un hyperlien – et celle de « texte–cible » (ou « texte lié » dans le sens de Saemmer) : le texte qui s'affiche sur l'écran, activé suite au click sur l'hyperlien se trouvant dans l'espace du texte géniteur.

Nous distinguons trois types de lecture kaléidoscopique :

a. *La lecture kaléidoscopique* à parcours circulaire (Figure 1)
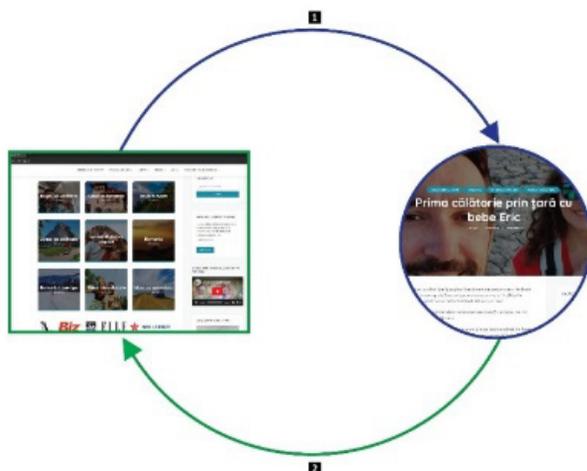
Figure 1. Représentation graphique : lecture kaléidoscopique circulaire

Elle comporte trois mouvements :

1. La lecture du texte « géniteur » inscrit sur la page d'accueil d'un site Internet, muni d'un hyperlien.

2. Le click sur l'hyperlien du « texte géniteur » qui rendra visible un autre texte (« le texte cible ») destiné à la lecture.

3. Le *lecteurnaute* parcourt le texte cible et retourne ensuite sur la page de départ afin de continuer la lecture du « texte géniteur ».

b. *Lecture kaléidoscopique* en 'spirale'. (Figure 2)
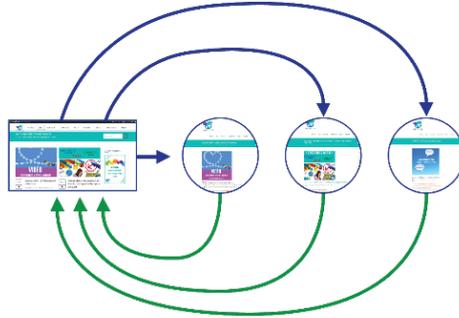
Figure 2. Représentation graphique : lecture kaléidoscopique en spirale

Elle est constituée de plusieurs « parcours circulaires » nés du retour au texte géniteur après la lecture du texte cible. Le retour se fait afin d'activer un autre hyperlien de la page de départ. Ce mouvement de va-et -vient aura lieu autant de fois que d'hyperliens disponibles sur la page contenant le texte géniteur.

c. *Lecture kaléidoscopique* à parcours ouvert (Figure 3)

Figure 3. Représentation graphique : lecture kaléidoscopique à parcours ouvert

Ce type de lecture suppose de parcourir le texte géniteur jusqu'à un hyperlien que le lecteurnaute va activer par le click lui permettant d'arriver à un texte cible. Si ce texte contient à son tour un hyperlien, il devient texte géniteur pour un autre texte cible. Il sera situé sur une autre page dont le contenu va s'activer seulement après le click de l'utilisateur. Et ainsi de suite à l'infini, sans que l'internaute revienne sur la page de départ.

Des croisements peuvent avoir lieu entre ces types de parcours, marqués aussi par le changement de rôles de l'internaute : tout *lecteurnaute* peut devenir *scripteurnaute* ou *auteur virtuel,* en fonction de ce qu'il souhaite accomplir en ligne.

L'écrilecture et la *lecture kaleidoscopique* sont des pratiques manifestées en ligne qui remplacent aujourd'hui la lecture linéaire spécifique aux cadres pré-numériques.

Celui qui écrit un texte sur le web maîtrise, en effet, seulement de manière partielle les limites du contenu discursif mis à la disposition de ses lecteurs. Les contours du matériel consommé par le récepteur sont métamorphosés à travers les multiples lectures possibles.

La lecture kaléidoscopique apparaît avec l'existence d'un nouveau lecteur, appelé souvent « consommateur de contenu » dans les cadres numériques créés par le monde de l'informatique et d'Internet.

Il réalise un parcours de réception discontinu, non linéaire, dans lequel il suit les jalons créés par les liens hypertextes présents dans l'espace de la page affichée par l'ordinateur. C'est une lecture rapide, passant du texte à l'hypertexte et d'un module textuel à l'autre. Elle vise plutôt à familiariser le lecteur avec le matériel parcouru et donne rarement lieu à une lecture intégrale et suivie du contenu.

Avec l'écriture et la lecture sur le web nous assistons, ainsi, à la remise en cause du modèle fonctionnaliste « émission-réception », accusé aujourd'hui comme moins pertinent d'un point de vue communicationnel (Davalon 2003, 7) et à la mise en pratique d'un modèle de la communication basé sur la transformation, la métamorphose du message dans l'acte de réception.

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LA VILLE DE KINSHASA DANS LES ROMANS DE
IN KOLI JEAN BOFANE

ANDREEA BIANCA URS[1]

ABSTRACT. *The City of Kinshasa in the Novels of In Koli Jean Bofane.* Through his novels, *Congo Inc.* and *Mathématiques congolaises*, In Koli Jean Bofane becomes the author of the city of Kinshasa. With its vast and diverse geography, the Congolese capital offers itself to being read like an open book. In her study, using the theoretical lens of Bertrand Westphal's geocriticism, Urs explores Bofane's fictional representation of the Congolese capital, in which she identifies three spaces of refuge. Acquiring both critical and political overtones, these spaces serve as a *mise en abyme* that can illustrate the functioning of literature. Refuge spaces are also living elements in the city, so necessary for the suffering characters.

Keywords: Africa, DRC, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kinshasa, space literature, african city, gecriticism

REZUMAT. *Oraşul Kinshasa în romanele lui In Jean Koli Bofane.* Prin romanele sale, *Congo Inc.* şi *Mathématiques congolaises*, In Koli Jean Bofane devine autorul oraşului Kinshasa. Astfel, prin corpul său vast şi divers, capitala congoleză poate să fie citită ca o carte deschisă. În cele două romane, spaţiul reprezintă atât un element revelator pentru cititor, cât şi o poartă de intrare în universul congolez. Pentru a valorifica datele, în această lucrare am folosit instrumentarul metodologic din *Geocritica* lui Bertrand Westphal care poate reprezenta baza oricărui studiu actual despre spaţiu, apoi am explorat universul literar al capitalei congoleze. În interiorul vieţii scrise, am identificat trei spaţii de refugiu care reprezintă *mise en abyme* a funcţionării literaturii care preiau atât valori critice, cât şi politice. Spaţiile de refugiu, atât de necesare personajelor suferinde, sunt, de asemenea, elemente vii ale oraşului Kinshasa.

Cuvinte-cheie: Africa, RDC, Republica Democrată Congo, Kinshasa, oraş literar, oraş african, geocritică

[1] **Andreea Bianca URS** is a PhD Candidate in Political Science at Faculty of European Studies, board member & researcher at Centre for African Studies (CESTAF), Babeş-Bolyai University. Email: andreea.urs@ubbcluj.ro.

Introduction

Les villes qu'on rêve avant tout, et qu'on visite par la suite, les villes qu'on découvre par la lecture et qu'on arpente à pied, ensuite, les villes qui n'existent plus, mais restent consacrées dans la littérature, villes réelles, camouflées sous des noms fictifs, les villes imaginaires, les villes d'un monde ou d'un univers parallèle, les villes d'une histoire d'un monde qui n'a jamais existé, toutes font le sujet d'intérêt de la géographie littéraire. Si la littérature nous enseigne une autre modalité de comprendre l'espace urbain, la réciproque est également valide : la ville guide le lecteur à comprendre autrement la littérature.

Le regard représente un flux invisible et énigmatique qui assure la transposition du sujet dans l'objet de son intérêt suppose l'existence de deux instances impliquées dans l'acte de regarder : le regardant et le regardé qui sont dans un permanent dialogue « ce que nous voyons et ce qui nous regarde » (Huberman 1992). Il y a plusieurs façons de regarder la réalité, tout comme il y a plusieurs manières de sentir ou de penser un même concept, selon le monde s'ou provient le sujet. Nous essayerons toutefois de changer la manière de regarder la capitale congolaise. La perspective de ceux qui pensent encore que Kinshasa est un lieu insignifiant et sans identité où rien ne se passe sera infiniment enrichie après la lecture d'une littérature qui essaye de le reconstituer. On ne peut pas connaître une ville par l'étude géographique, il faut qu'on apprenne à écouter la voix des témoins et surtout des écrivains qui, par leur talent, restituent une ample image de la ville. Ainsi, à travers ce travail, on se propose d'interroger l'œuvre de l'écrivain congolais en exil à Bruxelles, In Koli Jean Bofane, et surtout sa vision sur la ville tentaculaire de Kinshasa.

La thématique de notre recherche suppose une approche pluridisciplinaire qui réunit la géographie et la géocritique. Nous avons utilisé comme support théorique la Géocritique de Bertrand Westphal mais aussi les outils de la sociocritique et de la narratologie littéraire. La géographie nous offre la possibilité de définir l'espace réel. Le texte anticipe le lieu en cela qu'il semble parfois surpasser sa découverte (l'imaginaire émerge comme la partie immergée d'un iceberg dont le réel n'était que la pointe visible). La notion d'espace dépend de celle du regard, des yeux qui aident l'homme à s'orienter dans l'espace. Dans la première section, nous avons analysé ainsi la théorie de la représentation de la ville dans l'univers littéraire. La deuxième section met l'accent sur les caractéristiques de la ville, en relation avec la description de Bofane. Le point de départ a été composé par les éléments du réel (à propos de géographie, économie et politique) existants dans les deux romans. Puis, dans la troisième section, nous avons identifié et analysé les espaces de refuge et pourquoi ils sont si importants dans l'univers citadin de Kinshasa.

I. Approche théorique de la ville dans l'espace littéraire

Qu'entend-on par espace ? C'est une question qui demeure en suspens : « A priori, l'espace est un concept qui englobe l'univers, que celui-ci soit orienté vers l'infiniment grand ou réduit à l'infiniment petit, qui lui-même est infini(tesimale)ment vaste » (Westphal 2007,14). Bertrand Westphal offre plusieurs définitions de l'espace et, en plus, il réunit la vision de plusieurs théoriciens et crée un ensemble clair et facile à appliquer dans un contexte individuel.

Plusieurs théoriciens ont remarqué les effets spatiaux de l'écriture et quelques-uns ont déclaré leur étonnement à l'égard des implications spatio-temporelles de leur art. Pourquoi la géographie ? Parce que « Le devenir est géographique » (Deleuze, Parnet 1996, 48) répétait Deleuze sans cesse. Il essaye de déplacer l'accent de l'histoire sur la géographie, du passé sur le présent. L'espace est ce qui reste après que l'événement historique s'est produit. Deleuze nomme la philosophie une « géophilosophie » dans une de son dernier livre *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie ?* Bertrand Westphal affirmera plus tard que la géophilosophie deleuzienne a eu un impact considérable sur l'histoire récente des idées spatiales. Le philologue d'origine russe Youri Lotman considère à son tour que la géographie est devenue une forme d'éthique ; de cette façonm chaque mouvement de la géographie est important. Les détails concrets de la géographie relèvent d'une herméneutique spirituelle et pas du tout d'une observation immédiate.

Le théoricien formaliste russe Mikhaïl Bakhtine lance vers 1938 sa théorie du chronotope, qui à son tour s'inspire de la théorie de la relativité d'Einstein. Il s'agit de la « corrélation essentiale des rapports spatio-temporels, telle qu'elle a été assimilée en littérature » (Bakhtine 1975, 237). Le chronotope est principalement un élément structurant de la théorie des genres. On ne peut pas séparer le temps de l'espace. Les formes littéraires dominantes sont déterminées par des coordonnées spatiales et temporelles qui les situent. Bakhtine approfondit l'étude de l'espace du texte sans prendre en considération l'espace référentiel.

Gilles Deleuze et Felix Guattari élaborent une théorie des géographies libidinales et affectives qui sous-tendent nos rapports individuels et collectifs à l'espace et qui conditionnent les identifications formatrices du « moi ». Avec les concepts de « territorialisation » et de « déterritorialisation » est exposée une théorie des pratiques d'appropriation collective des milieux de vie, déterminant les modes de construction et de transformation de ces identités dans le devenir des formations sociales. En remarquant les concepts de Deleuze et Guattari, Bertrand Westphal propose la notion de géocritique (géographie et critique littéraire) qui est une analyse qui a comme but l'orientation du lecteur à une pluralité de perceptions de l'espace. La géocritique implique à la fois des éléments de philosophie, de psychanalyse, de géographie humaine, d'anthropologie, de sociologie et de sciences politiques. Bertrand Westphal souligne que le rôle de la

géocritique est le rapprochement entre le monde réel et le monde fictif, de fournir une interface entre réel et fiction qui permet leur interactivité. La géocritique propose un type d'analyse de la représentation spatiale dans les univers fonctionnels, mais aussi leurs relations subtiles avec la réalité. Les différents aspects de la géocritique sont contenus dans les prémisses relatives à la spatio-temporalité à la transgressivité et à la référentialité (Wesphal 2007, 43). La particularité de la géocritique se trouve ainsi dans l'attention qu'elle prête au lieu.

La prémisse de la théorie géocritique repose sur le fait que le temps et l'espace investissent un plan commun, la deuxième affirme un espace dont la représentation oppose au réel un degré de conformité indécidable. Selon Westphal, la transgression est un processus qui accompagne et motive le mouvement. On estimera que chaque représentation littéraire se réfère à un réel qui devient la capture d'un affaiblissement ontologique, plutôt que d'apprécier qu'aucune représentation spatiale ne soit réelle. La transgression peut exprimer le résultat d'une oscillation. Lorsqu'elle se transforme en principe permanent, elle se transfigure en transgressivité (Westphal 2007, 78).

Pour aller plus loin, Bertrand Westphal affirme que « l'espace oscille entre réel et fiction, sans que les niveaux soient vraiment discernables » (Westphal 2007, 150). Dans certains cas la fiction est supérieure au réel, mais le réel sera l'ambition, le *terminus ad quem* de la représentation. Le réel est aussi l'ambition de Jean Bofane, sa représentation de la ville étant authentique. Le monde fictionnel est un monde possible qui correspond dans une certaine mesure avec le monde réel. Il est intéressant de voir comment les deux mondes (réel et fictionnel) ou les deux variantes d'un même monde se mettent d'accord dans les yeux du lecteur. Le lieu fictionnel maintient une relation variable avec le lieu réel (pour exemple, l'histoire est celle qui produit le roman « historique »). Bofane utilise l'histoire du Congo comme schéma pour bâtir l'image de Kinshasa. Ainsi, à suivre Buata Malela, « le parcours de Jean Bofane est reconstruit à partir de la perception individualiste qu'il se fait du réel, se confondant avec le passé et le présent du Congo et orientant ses choix littéraires pour dire vrai sur le Congo, partant du principe que réalité et fiction ne font plus qu'un » (Malela 2018, 69).

La présence de la ville dans la littérature contemporaine impose l'analyse de sa transformation dans le contexte économique et social ainsi que du rôle de l'écrivain qui a, dans notre cas, la fonction de témoin. L'homme pense la ville, la possède et la transforme en personnage du roman. Le sentiment urbain donne un sens aux hommes qui comprennent qu'une ville cache beaucoup des secrets à découvrir. Lorsque Balzac représente Paris, Dickens Londres, Kafka Prague, Dos Passos New York, Doblin Berlin, Dostoïevski Saint Petersburg, Pessoa Lisbonne et Eliade Bucarest, Jean Bofane représente Kinshasa. Toutes ces relations mentionnées sont marquées par un consensus homotopique, tel qu'observé par Westphal : « le consensus homotopique suppose que dans la représentation du

référent s'agence une série de réalèmes et que le lien soit manifeste » (Westphal 2007, 170). Ici, espaces humains et littérature sont devenus indissociables, et, par conséquent, l'imaginaire est devenu réalité ; l'écrivain à son tour est devenu l'auteur de sa ville.

Les perspectives théoriques de l'espace occidental ne correspondent pas toujours aux représentations socio-idéologiques et spatiales africaines ceux-ci ayant leur propre dynamique et rythme de développement. Pourtant, il est nécessaire que les récits urbains soient poursuivis plus attentivement, ce que nous avons essayé de faire dans les deux sections suivantes.

II. La ville de Kinshasa

Située au cœur de l'Afrique, divisé en vingt-six provinces, avec une mosaïque de parcs naturels avec une richesse inégalée en faune et en flore, la République Démocratique du Congo (dorénavant abrégée RDC), ou simplement Congo-Kinshasa, est un pays extrêmement riche en ressources naturelles, mais ses habitants n'en bénéficent pas. La RDC produit 60 % du cobalt du monde, le minéral de l'avenir utilisé pour la batterie des smartphones et voitures électroniques (Magnan 2019). L'esprit de la modernité s'est constamment défini par rapport à l'expérience de la vie dans la ville moderne – « la ville moderne, comme s'il n'y en avait qu'une » (Kane, 2020). Les capitales africaines ont connu une croissance fulgurante et Kinshasa ne fait pas exception. Kinshasa s'est beaucoup transformée pendant les dernières années, en devenant de plus en plus riche, puissante et globaliste, également une source d'inspiration pour les artistes et les écrivains. Mais tandis que de nouveaux bâtiments et espaces éblouissants sont construits, les environs restent plongés dans la pauvreté (Urs 2020). La capitale congolaise et ses alentours restent au centre du discours de Bofane : dans les deux romans, les espaces de richesse sont mis en contraste avec les espaces de pauvreté, afin de mieux envisager la dynamique urbaine africaine. L'auteur présente dans ses romans la ville de Kinshasa comme elle existe en réalité, en plaçant son action dans des espaces consacrés comme les marchés kinoises, le port Kingabwa, l'Hôtel Continental de Kinshasa, le magasin Kintambo, le boulevard Lumumba, le Boulevard 30 Juin de Kinshasa.

On ne peut pas connaître une ville seulement du point de vue géographique, parce que la ville a une dimension culturelle et symbolique qui est plus complexe que les données géographiques. La littérature, décidément, est le meilleur moyen de comprendre le monde, implicitement les lieux. L'auteur est un observateur attentif de la ville, il présente la capitale telle qu'elle est : une Kinshasa où la mondialisation s'est empressée de recycler les seigneurs de guerre du Kivu en bourgeois costume-cravate. Chez Bofane, les fonctions de la ville sont multiples. Dans le roman *Mathématiques congolaises* la ville apparait comme un espace

improductif, élaboré uniquement sur des éléments négatifs, ressemblant à la vision de Paul Virilio de la ville de plus en plus carcérale. En premier lieu, la mort se cache à tous les coins. A la mort s'ajoutent la maladie, la pauvreté, la faim et, étonnamment, la sorcellerie. La sorcellerie est encore imprégnée dans la mentalité congolaise. On détecte l'optimisme forcé en ce qui concerne la situation de la capitale parmi les personnages. *Mathématiques congolaises* est le roman dédié à Kinshasa, « à ses dix millions d'habitants qui statistiquement, devraient être morts alors qu'en dépit du bon sens, ils se débrouillent pour vivre » (Bofane, 2008), comme le protagoniste Celio Matemona, alias Celio Mathématik.

La manifestation de rue est un élément vital de la vie politique congolaise, d'autant plus que les gens ont peu d'autres canaux pour exprimer leurs opinions et leur mécontentement. Le roman *Mathématiques congolaises* s'ouvre avec la mort de Lofombo Bolenge, alias Baestro, mort dans une manifestation de rue : « Baestro s'éteignit dans le meuble de fer, au milieu d'ustensiles chirurgicaux, inoxydables et froids, comme l'est la raison d'État » (Bofane 2008, 19). Ainsi, l'auteur annonce la réalité atroce de la ville à partir des premières pages avec l'arrivée de Baestro à Kinshasa « cette ville de toutes les perditions, remplie des politiciens qui tuent les enfants » (Bofane 2008, 42). Soit qu'il s'agit des institutions ou des points géographiques, le lecteur est invité dans la ville mortifère. La ville de Kinshasa est une dystopie dans laquelle le danger guette à chaque pas. Dans le roman *Mathématiques congolaises* se projette une image concrète de la capitale, espace chaotique qui attire beaucoup d'événements négatifs. Le chaos est un environnement propice pour l'épanouissement des conjonctures douteuses, comme nous apprenons dès le début du roman : « Kinshasa, écrasée par le soleil et la poussière, vaquait à sa survie » (Bofane 2008, 14). La ville ressemble à un corps malade en phase terminale. L'auteur fait plonger le lecteur dans la vie quotidienne de Kinshasa, il sent les rues, le trafic et la poussière. L'importance du trafic est visible tout au long du roman, ce qui souligne l'idée du chaos.

Congo Inc. est une tragédie moderne dont les événements sont enchaînés de façon réaliste, même cruelle, une écriture qui essaye de reproduire l'atmosphère actuelle qui règne dans la capitale congolaise. Dans ce roman *Congo Inc.* on regarde la capitale depuis d'autres perspectives : premièrement, la capitale est ombrée par les violences de Kivu et par l'exploitation des ressources, deuxièmement la capitale est projetée comme un espace qui progresse continuellement et qui s'améliore chaque jour davantage de point de vue économique. Dans les deux romans, Kinshasa représente l'espace de la stratégie politique, l'espace où les politiciens affichent leur richesse et leur cynisme. Les habitants de Kinshasa, les Kinois, sont manipulés par la classe politique tandis que la population affamée se confronte avec des problèmes sérieux. En plus, le personnage central du *Congo Inc.* passe à travers Mbandaka dans son chemin du retour à la maison, qui est le lieu de naissance de Jean Bofane. Cet aspect augmente la puissance

des romans, car les troubles congolais illustrés dans les romans n'existent pas seulement sur le papier ou sur la carte ou dans l'imagination de l'auteur, mais ils existent en réalité au niveau global (Urs 2021, 2015).

La vision de Bofane ressemble à la vision de Paul Virilio de la ville de plus en plus carcérale, notamment si on regarde la globalisation de la ville décrite par l'auteur. Virilio voit le monde entier tourner rapidement une grande « méta-ville mondiale », dont les « villes locales » ne sont plus que des quartiers ou des banlieues. C'est la « ville virtuelle », la « méta-ville déterritorialisée » d'un monde globalisé, ou, comme il le dit, « globalitaire » où les distances ont été annulé et nous avons assisté à la « fin de la géographie » (Kane 2020). Le phénomène de globalisation a généré une croissance à un rythme insoutenable, posant à son tour des problèmes insolubles. La capitale pèse plus massivement sur les décisions du pouvoir politique à mesure qu'elle grandit selon le modèle de « méta-ville mondiale ». Le choc démographique, ajouté à l'exode rural et aux phénomènes migratoires (les migrations africaines sont migrations de la survie), a produit des villes capitales que politiquement et économiquement les gouvernements ont privilégiées. La dimension politique est prédominante dans le texte de Bofane, tous les événements relatés dans les deux romans, surtout les manifestations dans les rues et les discours politiques, étant étroitement liés à la situation politique du pays au moment de la rédaction (Urs, 2020).

III. Espaces de refuge

a. Le piège virtuel – *Raging Trade (Congo Inc.)*

Le jeu vidéo est devenu une activité extrêmement populaire sur tous les continents. L'avènement de la technologie a affecté même les plus éloignées lieux du monde. *Raging Trade* est un jeu pour l'exploitation virtuel des ressources minières, complété par la hit *Vato* du rappeur Snopp Dogg (« *Run nigga, run nigga / Run mothafucker* »). On remarque une grande influence de ce jeu sur l'esprit et les capacités cognitives d'Isookanga, mais ce n'est pas une influence négative, car il n'est pas du tout agressif, plutôt positif : le jeu agit sur sa capacité de rêver et nourrit son ambition : « le jeu en ligne Raging Trade était devenu sa raison de vivre. Raging Trade, c'était le jeu indiqué pour n'importe quel mondialiste désireux de se faire un peu la main dans le domaine des affaires » (Bofane 2014, 18). Dans cet univers virtuel, il était *Congo Bololo (*ce qui signifie Congo amer, cette appellation vient du nom d'une plante médicinale très amère), il convoitait tout : pétrole, minerais, terres, eau. Le jeu exigeait une attitude combattante, Isookanga le savait : c'était manger ou se faire manger. Pour lui, ce jeu est un exercice pour sa future *business vie*, la vie de ses rêves. Comme dans la vraie vie, dans le jeu, il fallait d'abord prospecter, ensuite obtenir des licences auprès des

gouvernements, s'acquitter de taxes, payer de la main-d'œuvre, construire des infrastructures.

Entre le monde virtuel et la réalité n'est pas une grande différence. Les bombardements intensifs, le nettoyage ethnique, le déplacement de population, l'esclavage, l'acquisition des armes du jeu se situent déjà dans l'échelle de la réalité. L'auteur étonne par son équilibre entre la sincérité et la subtilité auquel il démasque les autorités contemporaines.

> On pouvait bien entendu acquérir des armes, mais aussi des alliés étrangers, des points au Stock Exchange, une "trousse de secours" incluant des traités de paix pour endormir l'ONU – parce que là aussi, comme dans l'existence réelle, on ne pouvait bien mener une guerre qu'abrité par des résolutions de l'organisation internationale –, des conférences pour gagner du temps, des photos satellites, un kit de djihadistes-philosophes en cas de nécessité et, pour préserver le moral des troupes, des esclaves sexuelles en nombre. La guerre sur le territoire du Gondavanaland était une guerre autofinancée mais cela n'empêchait pas la mise en place de pénalités. (Bofane 2014, 20).

La multinationale Congo Bololo est en croissance continue ; à un moment donné, le jeune Ekonda ne distingue plus la réalité et la réalité virtuelle : son cerveau associe la vente de l'eau avec le Congo Bololo, il ne peut plus se détacher du monde virtuel : « Après avoir peaufiné sa stratégie commerciale et exposé quelques principes rudimentaires de la mondialisation, Isookanga double-cliqua sur une icône et la fenêtre d'accueil de *Raging Trade* apparut » (Bofane 2014, 95). *American Diggers. Skulls and Bones, Uranium et Sécurité, Goldberg & Gils Atomic Project, Hiroshima Naga* le suivront partout, surtout dans la mémoire. Il est sûr que s'il gère la situation en ligne, c'est la même chose en réalité. Grâce à l'ordinateur et à la touche Enter, Isookanga a eu la force de quitter la forêt et la vie au village.

Isookanga trouve son refuge dans le jeu vidéo Raging Trade. Il mène une existence parallèle à l'intérieur du jeu qu'il peut contrôler, contrairement à la vraie vie : le monde de Congo Bololo est à ses pieds et il a l'impression que les choses s'arrangeront d'une façon similaire dans la réalité.

> Le jeu vidéo fait primer les interactions sur la narration dans la construction de l'histoire (voire se passe de toute histoire, même si on peut considérer qu'un jeu comme les échecs met en place un scénario minimal et des séquences), le récit interactif est une narration (un récit porté par un narrateur) qui implique des actions de la part du lecteur qui jouent en retour sur la manifestation même du texte donné à lire [...]. (Debeux, 2016)

Le jeu vidéo se mêle à la littérature, l'auteur utilise la mise en abyme comme stratégie littéraire pour nuancer la narration dans la narration. A l'heure actuelle, la littérature a prodigieusement inspiré les jeux vidéo, pour exemple l'univers du premier Assassin's Creed (devenu aujourd'hui un jeu très célèbre) s'inspire de la nouvelle Alamut (1938) de l'écrivain slovène Vladimir Bartol. La première liaison qu'on peut établir entre les deux se situe autour de la notion de fiction : en effet, la littérature et le jeu vidéo reposent sur un principe d'illusion, et l'illusion signifie bien « entrer au jeu » (Debeux, 2016).

L'avènement de la technologie a déclenché une sorte de manifestation réductive parmi les habitants du village : ils pensaient que l'antenne allait attirer la malédiction sur eux, les ancêtres allaient leur tourner le dos et les femmes ne pourraient plus mettre au monde. Son oncle l'avait accusé de scandaliser les ancêtres en regardant les ombres sur un écran. Dans sa compréhension, les ombres symbolisent la mort. Le désespoir du jeune *ekonda* augmentait chaque jour. L'auteur raconte l'épisode en utilisant un ton amusant et les réactions des habitants du village provoquent le rire du lecteur moderne ; mais, si on regarde plus profondément, les réactions sont bien justifiées : dans leur univers parfait, vert, naturel, vierge, apparait un instrument nouvel, bizarre, dont personne n'a jamais entendu parler. A travers les épisodes du jeu envisagé en *Congo Inc.*, l'auteur décrit à la fois l'insécurité des jeunes Africains et leur besoin de déconnexion, mais tire aussi le signal d'alarme sur l'exploitation des ressources congolaises (Urs 2021).

b. L'Eglise de la Multiplication Divine à Ndjili (*Congo Inc.*)

L'église est l'espace de refuge pour l'âme chrétienne et l'espace où on rencontre la présence de Dieu. Jean Bofane atteint la problématique d'une façon brève mais approfondie. Il critique subtilement la transformation de l'église en une affaire rentable pour ceux qui la dirigent. Les « conducteurs » manipulent et font du chantage émotionnel sur les gens pour arriver à leurs fins. L'Église de la Multiplication divine de Ndjili était remplie des gens de la bourgeoisie, chacun avec ses plus beaux atours. Son nom « Multiplication divine » indique l'idée d'enrichissement. L'église occupe le bâtiment d'un ancien night-club et est l'affaire de Jonas Monkaya. L'une des membres de cette église est Adeïto, venue pour retrouver le calme et désirer passionnément la présence de Dieu. Assise dans la première rangée de sièges, Adeïto cherche la paix qu'elle ne parviendra jamais à trouver. Elle est l'une des victimes de la guerre du Kivu, violée puis transformée en épouse d'un seigneur de guerre.

L'auteur attire l'attention que le pasteur porte des costumes griffés des grandes marques comme Versace ou Giorgio Armani. Le pasteur savait comment attirer l'attention de ses paroissiens, il veut expliquer les bénéfices sur la voie moderne. Avec cela il surestime la capacité intellectuelle du public, pensant que leur capacité de comprendre se résume uniquement aux choses en vogue d'aujourd'hui :

> Si Moïse avait vécu de nos jours, vous croyez que Jéhovah l'aurait laissé descendre de la montagne à pied ? Non, le Seigneur lui aurait offert un 4×4 V8 climatisé […]. À notre époque, pensez-vous sincèrement que Marie de Magdala aurait pu laver les pieds du Christ avec ces parfums discount qu'on vend avenue Kato ? Non. Le Seigneur, avec la classe qu'il a, aurait fourni du Guerlain, du Dior, du Chanel, du Nina Ricci. Jésus – toujours lui –, pour la multiplication des pains et des poissons, aurait invité tout le monde dans le plus chic restaurant trois étoiles de Tel-Aviv […] (Bofane 2014, 150).

La mondialisation a accaparé aussi l'espace saint de l'Église, non seulement à Kinshasa mais presque partout. L'homme moderne perd de vue les choses essentielles et au points culminants de sa vie essaye de compenser le temps perdu ; certains ont appris comment gérer cela, voici l'exemple du pasteur Jonas.

L'Église de la Multiplication Divine représente un espace corrompu dans l'univers corrompu de Kinshasa. Cette mise en abyme souligne que la corruption vive et se nourrit dans les petites espaces pour exploser et contaminer tout autour.

Cette Église est un culte inventé, construit autour de l'argent et des fausses promesses :

> — Frère Kas, tu es inspiré par Dieu. C'est l'opportunité que nous allons offrir aux fidèles de l'Église de la Multiplication divine : la multiplication par cent d'une mise de départ. Nous deviendrons la seule Église au Congo où le Seigneur rendra au centuple, en monnaie sonnante et trébuchante.
> — Quoi, révérend ? Ça veut dire que, si je dépose cent dollars, je peux toucher dix mille ?
> — Parfaitement. Mais, attention ! Dieu donne quand il veut, comme il veut, il est tout-puissant […] (Bofane 2014, 151).

Le dialogue entre le pasteur et le paroissien surprend leurs intentions d'enrichissement (pas spirituel) suite à ce culte inventé. Leurs préoccupations et leur but sont d'attirer plus des paroissiens qui représentent plus d'argent. Pour arriver à ses fins, le pasteur Jonas essaye de sensibiliser le public en racontant ses visions, ce que Dieu lui a parlé en ce qui concerne les frères qui ne viennent pas à l'église. Le marketing enseigne qu'il faut bien connaitre la concurrence pour qu'on ait toujours une longueur d'avance, et le pasteur applique les lois du marketing dans ce contexte religieux.

> Ils ont quitté l'Église de la Multiplication divine pour la perdition, chers frères et sœurs ! C'est cela que le Seigneur m'a révélé hier soir. Ces gens-là sont partis pour aller où, me direz-vous ? Mais ils sont allés investir dans cette nouvelle, comment dirais-je, Église, appelée Église de l'Abondance céleste à Masina, voyons ! (Bofane 2014, 147).

Il utilise le chapitre trois (les versets 8 à 11) de la Genèse comme support théorique pour son discours manipulateur. Il interprète le texte dans la direction de ses désirs :

> En occupant et en construisant des colonies dans la vallée du Jourdain, Lot croyait avoir fait le bon choix ; l'affaire du siècle […] Parce qu'il a cru voir l'abondance. Le fleuve qui coulait à flots, le mirage des verts pâturages, la perspective de lendemains qui chantent. Ibrahim, lui, a préféré que le Seigneur décide pour lui […] Le pauvre neveu, installé à Sodome – villa climatisée, piscine bio, marbre partout – avait bêtement pensé qu'Ibrahim, en poussant plus loin vers la frontière égyptienne, allait tâter du désert, de la précarité, et serait obligé de creuser des tunnels pour s'approvisionner. (Bofane 2014, 148).

Jonas Monkaya, le pasteur, est un « Otto Redding ressuscité » (Bofane 2014, 146) qui a décidé de quitter la sorcellerie pour se mettre au service du Dieu. Il se révèle être un bon commerçant, car les kinois attrapaient la foi comme un virus. Son talent manipulateur se reflète aussi dans son goût musical, il a choisi comme chanson de fond : « *Please don't go, Jesus loves you so !* » (Anglais / en français : « s'il te plaît, ne va pas, Jésus t'aime trop »). Avec ce moyen le pasteur dit indirectement à ses paroissiens qu'ils ne partent pas à l'Eglise de l'Abondance céleste à Masina, au cas où il aurait fallu qu'il transmette le véritable message, c'est-à-dire ne pas soustraire, mais rester proche de Dieu.

L'Église de la Multiplication Divine est située sur le lieu d'un ancien night-club du commune Ndjili. Le fait qu'elle est localisée dans un bâtiment d'un ancien night-club et son appellation, le syntagme « Multiplication Divine », écrites avec majuscules, indiquent une grande parodie du marketing de la religion. L'Église de Multiplication existe en réalité mais c'est dénommée « L'Église de Multiplication de pains et de poisson », d'après la merveille de Jésus relatée dans les quatre évangiles canoniques. Jésus a utilisé cinq pains et deux poissons pour nourrir 5.000 personnes. L'Église de la Multiplication Divine de Ndjili a la fonction seulement de multiplier l'argent, s'il était possible, l'argent devrait venir directement d'un compte du Royaume des Cieux. Bien qu'il s'agisse d'un espace corrompu dépourvu de substance spirituelle, L'Église de la Multiplication Divine de Ndjili représente une espace de refuge nécessaire pour les victimes des atrocités de guerre comme Adeïto et beaucoup d'autres.

c. La mathématique et l'humour – *Mathématiques congolaises*

L'auteur a eu la vision d'un jeune homme habité par l'intuition des mathématiques, qui représente un outil inestimable capable de concourir à son ascension sociale. Grace à ses capacités mathématiques, Célio s'approche du

pouvoir politique. Célio est un alter-ego de l'auteur : il avait peut-être besoin d'une charpente inébranlable sur laquelle bâtir ses rêves juste comme l'auteur. Cette charpente inébranlable est représentée par la littérature dans le cas de Bofane, respectivement les mathématiques dans le cas de Celio. Selon les deux, l'univers entier fonctionne d'après leurs principes.

Célio Mathématik cherche son refuge dans le seul souvenir vivant de son père : un vieux manuel de mathématique. Orphelin depuis l'enfance, la mathématique est la seule chose à laquelle il se peut s'accrocher. La mathématique peut représenter un antidote contre la solitude mais aussi un enseignant fort pour quelqu'un qui ne dispose de rien. Un homme est intelligent quand il sait bien utiliser ses ressources. Sa liaison avec cette science est si profonde, qu'il ne peut plus s'en séparer tout au long de la vie. Alors Celio Matemona, un esprit pragmatique, apprend à profiter de son cerveau et transforme l'espace de refuge dans un espace profitable pour lui : « Les mathématiques lui permettent d'exercer un contrôle social » (Bofane 2008, 79).

L'humour est étroitement lié à la mathématique. Pour décrire ce quotidien absurde kinois, l'auteur utilise souvent l'humour. Les épisodes de *Mathématiques congolaises* sont amusants pour le lecteur, le protagoniste étant un drôle mathématique ; il applique les théories dans la vraie vie. Les équations sont mises au service du politique : pour exemple : $x = -y$; x c'est eux (le pouvoir international), $-y$ c'est nous (la République Démocratique du Congo). Les idées de Celio ne sont pas compréhensibles pour ses amis. Voici une banale conversation entre lui et Trickson :

> La politique ne m'intéresse pas. Justement, trop de tactiques, pas assez de pureté. Les mathématiques, elles au moins, sont pures. C'est là qu'apparaissent les véritables révolutions. Vous savez ce que dit le théorème de… ? — Là, je te coupe, Célio. Laisse-nous tranquille avec tes théories, tes paraboles et tes hyperboles. D'ailleurs, hyperbole, quel mot ridicule. Pourquoi n'appellerais-tu pas ta future fille Hyperbole Matemona ? (Bofane 2008, 311).

L'auteur met les choses en parfait équilibre, pour chaque situation critique il a préparé quelques répliques amusantes pour atténuer le choc produit au lecteur. Dans un univers citadin rempli d'éléments comme la famine ou la torture, dont le nombre des morts s'amplifie chaque jour, environnement où l'optimisme semble impossible, l'emploi de l'humour est primordial et essentiel. Les répliques comiques transmettent l'optimisme qui semble perdu au néant.

L'humour, c'est la note distinctive de l'auteur, il choisit de mettre en valeur la souffrance et la solitude du personnage en utilisant des remarques amusantes, cela se ressemble à la vision du Herman Hesse qui révèle le fait que

chacun d'entre nous a besoin d'un refuge, la plupart des gens cherchent ce refuge en Dieu, mais les personnages de Hesse trouvent leur refuge dans le rire (Hesse, 1927).

Conclusions

Ce travail se veut une proposition de recherche et d'exposition de la ville de Kinshasa tel qu'elle apparaît dans les deux romans de Jean Bofane. Le point de départ a été composé par les éléments du réel (à propos de géographie, économie et politique) existants dans les romans. On a commencé avec un excursus de la *Géocritique* du Bertrand Westphal qui peut représenter la base de toute étude actuelle sur l'espace. Nous avons identifié des espaces de refuge dans lesquels les personnages essaient de retrouver leur identité et leur place dans ce monde. Isookanga ignorait tout autour pour se concentrer à attraper le train de la mondialisation généré par le jeu en ligne *Raging Trade*. Celio Mathématik se propose de résister aux violences du système utilisant sa plus grande arme qu'il détient, un cerveau bourré de mathématique. L'Église de la Multiplication Divine est un espace plus virtuel que *Raging Trade,* la seule composante authentique de l'intérieur de cet espace est une victime de la guerre de Kivu, Adeïto, toujours en quête de la paix. Ces espaces de refuge sont des mises en abyme du fonctionnement de la littérature, mais elles prennent chez Bofane des valeurs critiques et politiques à la fois.

Dans ces deux romans on remarque que l'espace joue un rôle colossal, surtout l'espace ouvert, les éléments de la grande ville comme la rue, la marché, les boulevards. In Koli Jean Bofane plonge le lecteur dans la vie quotidienne de Kinshasa, il sent les rues, le rythme des musiques et des images de la ville. *Mathématiques congolaises*, propose l'équation magique d'une ville, de la survie d'un peuple. Une plongée romanesque dans la ville de Kinshasa, où l'on sait que la vie n'est pas un long fleuve tranquille : les personnages des romans luttent chaque jour pour survivre dans une cité en proie à la pauvreté, à la famine, au chômage et à la corruption.

Chez Bofane l'espace représente un élément révélateur pour le lecteur. La forêt vierge nourrit une réflexion sur la richesse qui est sur le point d'être perdue pour toujours ; le Grand Marché indique l'apogée de la pauvreté ; l'Église suscite l'intérêt de vérifier la fausseté d'autour elle. La ville de Kinshasa est la personnification du chaos, ses routes mènent toujours à la confusion, le lecteur ayant besoin parfois d'une « carte » pour déchiffrer ses mystères. L'auteur de sa ville, Jean Bofane, met à la disposition du lecteur les trajectoires d'une ville qui attend toujours d'être lue et comprise.

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BOOKS

Ted Underwood, *Distant Horizons: Digital Evidence and Literary Change*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019, 200 p.

Could distant reading ever work? Could digital archives and statistical tools deepen our understanding of issues that have always been central to humanistic inquiry? These are the very premises of Ted Underwood's latest book, *Distant Horizons*, published in 2021 with University of Chicago Press. This book contains a completely fresh and original approach to literary theory, accessible to both experts and students in the humanities. It shows how digital methods can bring into focus the bigger horizon of literary theory and add to the beauty and complexity we value in literature, as the afterword highlights.

The book is structured in five chapters, each of them addressing an highly topical issue: 1. *Do We Understand the Outlines of Literary History?*, 2. *The Life Spans of Genres*, 3. *The Long Arc of Prestige*, 4. *Metamorphoses of Gender*, 5. *The Risks of*
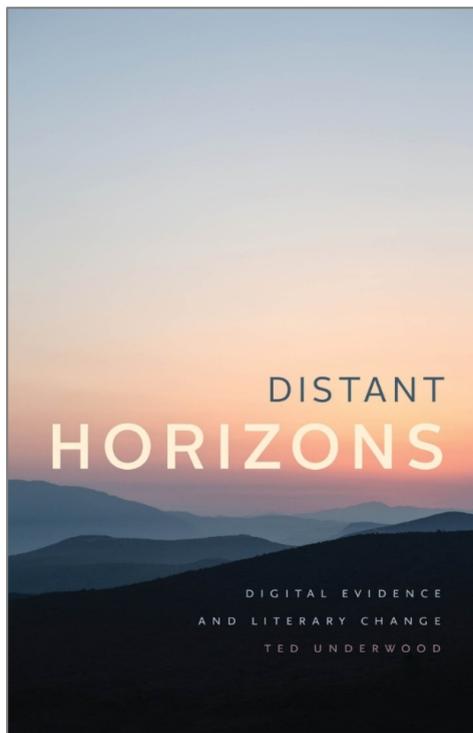
Distant Reading. But as Underwood mentions in the foreword, the methods he will be describing do, of course, have limits. The author's mention makes the work an assumed and conscious project, open to criticism and questioning. What is even more fascinating is the fact that he writes in a way that is not difficult to process—he reaches a "delicate balance," writing about interdisciplinarity without going into too much detail. In other words, the technical details of his methods and approach are explained in an easy-to-understand, but by no means simplified way. Moreover, throughout the book, he uses logistic regression to model the data, producing elegant graphs and (hopefully) reproducible results.

Describing dimensions of literary history, such as reception and genre, in which volumes can be discussed as wholes,

the first three chapters state that topics like plot and character are harder to trace across long timelines because they require divisions below the volume level that are challenging to tease out algorithmically. Thus, with collaborative support from computer scientists, it is also possible to make some progress on those topics (17). The work described here owes something to twentieth-century projects like book history, stylistics, and the sociology of literature, as well as to the more recent fusion of those projects that goes under Franco Moretti's term "distant reading" (11).

The first chapter is, I think, one of the strongest pleas for distant reading, suggesting that that many well-known changes in eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century fiction can be understood as parts of a single differentiating process that defined the subject, style, and pace of fiction through opposition to nonfiction (14). As Michael Falk writes in his own review, Underwood's incredible humility is attractive, in a field where *Wunderkinder* often make extravagant claims about their digital research, and invent silly mystical-scientific names for their normally rather mundane methods—Underwood really cares about getting the right answer. Moreover, he studies how a wide range of artistic movements, often said to conflict with each other, sometimes said to have sought rapprochement with "ordinary language," have all actually pushed fiction farther away from the language, themes, and narrative strategies of nonfiction (14).

Chapter 2 focuses on how these new methods can support a perspectival approach to genre: "Genres are not the only human creations that change their meanings with time. The interpretive problems that confront a history of genre are rooted in the perspectival dimension of history itself, and they run too deep to be solved neatly" (15). Furthermore, the term *science-fiction* is brought up, suggesting the fact that its meaning will depend on an observer's location. This may signify that *science-fiction* itself can have more interpretive resonances as time goes on. And that is exactly where the mathematics aspects come in, because it is all about questions of perspective. The so-called "machine learning," says Underwood, is constantly causing public scandal due to its tendency to be all too sensitive to subjective contexts. This is exactly the reason why, continues the author, institutions that strive to be unbiased might well choose to avoid machine learning (16). Actually, Underwood theorizes a new approach which he calls "perspectival modeling":

> Readers who are familiar with other ways of using machine learning may need to set some assumptions aside. The models created in this book are supervised: that is, they always start from evidence labeled by human readers. But unlike supervised models that try to divine the real author of an anonymous text, perspectival models do not aim simply to reproduce human judgment. They are used instead to measure the parallax between different observers (16).

The third chapter, *The Long Arc of Prestige*, explains how questions of form and genre intersect with grittier aspects of literary production and distribution. For Underwood, textual forms are important aspects of literary pleasure: there is no reason to apologize for studying them. But they are not the only part of history that can be enriched by quantitative

reasoning (68). Until recently, in fact, numbers were far more useful for social questions than for aesthetic ones. That means that unemployment, inequality, and book sales are easy to measure. But it is not intuitively obvious how one would measure literary style. In making it possible to construct quantitative models of genres and styles, machine learning has made it easier to link formal concepts to quantitative social evidence and thus to build bridges between social history and the history of texts (69).

The thesis of this chapter is that a different kind of description is possible, which will combine the rigor of a detailed account with the ambitious scope of a larger narrative. When we train a model using social and textual evidence across a whole century, we can describe long-term patterns that connect social pressures to persistent directions of literary change. This, however, does not make shorter-term trends unimportant, but it puts them in a different perspective. As an example, Underwood portraits the following situation:

> Imagine if we could show, for instance, that food had been getting steadily spicier in the United States for the past century and that the best-reviewed restaurants had consistently occupied the leading edge of this trend. The stories we tell about decade-long culinary trends might still be true. But those stories would also have to be seen as parts of a broader pattern, which would become central to any explanation of long-term culinary change (70).

Also, the third chapter argues that something analogous is true about English-language poetry and fiction between 1820 and 1949. Our received narrative of this period is organized by a succession of discrete concepts defining different criteria of judgment: Romanticism, Victorian realism, aestheticism, naturalism, and modernism. For many observers, this has implied a fairly profound transformation of literary opinion every generation or so. Modernism, for instance, was a "literary revolution" that changed not only how writers created new works but how they evaluated the past, producing "a radical and wholesale revision of the inherited conception of English literature," as Chris Baldick shows in *Modernist Criticism and the English Literary Canon*.

Moving forward on this journey, chapter four explores the history of characterization, looking in particular at the way fictional characters are shaped by implicit assumptions about gender. Underwood goes into some detail about the strategies he used to validate his models, and analyzed a whole series of examples to try and explain how his model related to the reality that it modelled. Statistical tests and data tables make clear exactly what had been modelled and how. He insists that historians of literature obviously need a bit more distance from fiction (102), connecting at the same time our history to readers' experience, which means that we need some way of connecting historical trends to the imaginary people and events inside the volumes. To put it in simple words, we need some way of reasoning collectively about hundreds of thousands of fictional people.

> This chapter takes a few steps in that direction, in order to trace the history of gender roles in English-language fiction from 1780 to the present. But even a few steps toward a history of character will admittedly take us to the

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edge of what is now possible. The methods discussed here are more complex than those discussed in earlier chapters, the evidence often a little noisier (112).

Chapter five concludes the book with a defense of 'distant reading' that perhaps explains why Underwood adopted this unique style for the book. The author expresses some anxiety that putting too many numbers into a work of literary history will turn literary colleagues away, and says at one point that a technical appendix is probably the best place to add the statistical information. In the first decade of this century, many people hoped that quantitative methods could be introduced to the humanities in an equally painless way. Underwood thinks that digital humanists would build tools and that everyone else would use them. Scholars might not need to understand all the details inside the box, any more than we have traditionally worried about the innards of a search engine when fishing for sources:

Foundations invested millions of dollars trying to support this quick, painless kind of change. But for the most part, it didn't happen. Instead, change has taken place slowly, and mostly through laborious retraining. The reason, I think, is that new methods have turned out to be more consequential than was widely believed a decade ago. Search engines can be encapsulated and treated as tools. But statistical models are not well envisioned as tools: they offer new methods of representing and interpreting the world. Scholars cannot adopt a new mode of interpretation without fully understanding the reasoning it implies (145).

To put it in a nutshell, Ted Underwood's *Distant Horizons* is an excellent introduction to the possibilities of quantitative literary history, computational literary studies and distant reading. Underwood's prose is clear, the case studies are interesting and the use of computers to analyze the character traits of novels is a fresh and fascinating method.

MARIA BUCŞEA
Independent researcher
Email: maria_bucsea@yahoo.com

BOOKS

Cosmin Ciotloș, *Cenaclul de Luni. Viața și opera*, București: Pandora Publishing, 2021, 464 p.

Focusing on the 1980s generation of Romanian poets and with the portrayal of a specific sensitivity belonging to these authors, Cosmin Ciotloș proposes an archaeology of the well-known "Monday Literary Circle," within which Romanian postmodernism was born and developed. Not having a unique methodology for exploring this institution of creation and debate, Ciotloș relies on the reconstruction of the group's formative phases, mainly by relating this phenomenon to other factors that exerted a significant influence on this literary circle: magazines such as *Amfiteatru* or *România literară*, the profoundly defamatory opposition criticism, represented by Eugen Barbu and *Săptămâna* magazine, as well as two other cenacles that succeeded the Monday Literary Circle—"Cenaclul Rapid" and "Cenaclul din Tei". Beyond the fine
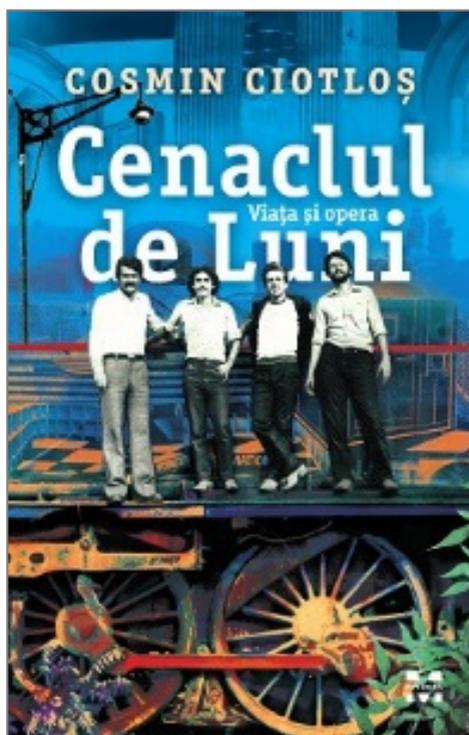
hermeneutics that the author carries out in the last part of the book, through thirteen case studies, the first two chapters, "Marile speranțe" [*Great Expectations*] and "Impactul cu realul" [*The Impact with Reality*], are built by analyzing texts from journal archives, which bring together lesser-known testimonies and details about the meetings that officially began on March 3, 1977, and were banned in 1986. Therefore, one of the researcher's aims is to shed light on the background of this kaleidoscopic inception. The polymorphism of the Monday Literary Circle comes, first and foremost, from its evolutionary character, which shows, in fact, a sinuous trajectory, establishing its landmarks and directions along the way. In addition, its popularity, based on its central geographical and cultural position, and its emulation created historical and

literary confusion, thereby rallying false members, who pretended to be a part of the famous literary circle without ever having been a part of it. The foundations of this "minimal unity of an interpretive community," a phrase by which Stanley Fish calls the "literary circle" and which Ciotloș takes over, are unearthed both in contemporary periodicals and subsequent reception. One of the launch pads of the 1980s young poets was the monthly magazine *Amfiteatru*, "an alternative space" (26) for (under)graduate students who were beginning to come into the light, timidly announcing a new generation's rise. Ciotloș chooses to discuss this opportunity because this publication also had a literary circle. This was an important aspect for the "prehistory of the 1980s poets" (27), since one of the meetings of this quasi-literary circle was attended by Ion Stratan, who gave a poetry reading, and Radu Călin Cristea, who played the role of the critic, commenting on his peer's texts. The observation is important, as the two would later launch the Monday Literary Circle. Some new protagonists in the Romanian literary field honed their critical and poetic spirit during these meetings: M. N. Rusu, "the official critic of the group" (30), Elena Ștefoi, "who was among the most active participants" (29), Viorel Padina, Ion Stratan, Magda Cârneci, whose penname was Magdalena Ghica, Octavian Soviany, Matei Vișniec, Ioan Moldovan, William Totok, Ion Mureșan, Marta Petreu, Dumitru Chioaru, Traian T. Coșovei, Mariana Marin, Romulus Bucur, Mircea Cărtărescu, Liviu Ioan Stoiciu and others. Also, Ion Monoran, a minor poet from Timișoara, was widely recommended by Dinu Flămând in one of the issues of the *Amfiteatru* magazine. On the

one hand, the 1980s generation was beginning to flourish, gathering people from all over the country, and on the other hand, the future nucleus of the Monday Literary Circle was built, almost entirely, around poetic discourse. As Ciotloș states, the policy of supporting young people in the *Amfiteatru* magazine was very significant. The fact that they frequently published new texts, thus burning a lot of stages, causes the accumulation of symbolic capital and the need to seek a fresh new "stage" to perform. Therefore, the poems will benefit critical comments as adjuncts, consequently popularize and build the "new generation". Following the stereotype that each generation has its critics, the 1980s generation seems to be established precisely by this strategy. As a direct effect, the desire to form their own "institution," the Monday Literary Cenacle, was fueled by the effervescent radicalism of their discussions. In the words of Cosmin Ciotloș: "Throughout these years, the poetry of the 1980s generation was accompanied by a series of critical texts (literary reviews, surveys, debates, round tables) signed by the editors-in-chief of the magazine" (35).

A consistent part of the volume explores the denigrating reception of the young poets in the pages of the ideologized press of the time. This was orchestrated by Eugen Barbu, "a disavowable personality" (92) and a controversial writer and journalist. In this chapter, Ciotloș not only reconstructs, based on an analysis of literary publications, how Barbu dismissed young poets to the point of destroying their literary careers but also shows the schizoid character of the communist period, with its two faces: on the one hand, the false, defamatory discourse

of the novelist; on the other, the rebuttals, i.e. young poets' resistance to the harsh criticisms. One of the answers belongs to Mircea Cărtărescu, who, using as a pretext the famous *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, ingeniously blamed the direction proposed by Romanian literary critics and subversively attacked Eugen Barbu: "By stating the old, I do not understand the work of capitalizing on our cultural heritage, otherwise a noble practice, of encouraging epigones, which is something else entirely, and producing a literature based on mimetic forms" (101). Maintaining his distance and assuming the role of a *bricoleur*, given the vast amount of publications he synthesizes, Cosmin Ciotloş demonstrates that the new generation was not at all innocently involved in the ideological power games in the field of literature. At first, a minor evil, without ostensibly major effects for the artistic reception of young authors, Eugen Barbu's literary criticism gradually pursued more sinister purposes, exacerbating his inferiority complexes: he attacked prestigious literary critics and secured a hegemonic position in the literary establishment ("He thus had the opportunity to make and unmake destinies, to place himself, proudly, above the glories of the moment," 97). That being said, the Monday Literary Circle became a small yet strong institution, from which young voices spoke out loud and clear. This came in direct conflict with Barbu's damaging and aggressive mechanism. Despite its inherent dangers, the relationship between these two camps energized the Romanian literary system, on the one hand, and generated a strange phenomenon of pseudo-criticism, which replaced a lucid, ideologically unbiased resistance to what was new and disruptive, on the other

hand. Nevertheless, resistance did spur petty and harmful behavior, stemming from a twofold commitment: before anything else, to communist ideology, then to one's own interests.

The third chapter delves into the aesthetics and ethics of some authors both inside and outside the Monday Literary Circle. From Traian T. Coşovei, Romulus Bucur, Florin Iaru, Alexandru Muşina, to Ion Monoran, Daniel Pişcu or Alexandru Since, Ciotloş highlights the polymorphism of this institution, claiming that while not all the chosen writers were emblematic figures of this group, they nonetheless "shadowed" this literary movement. Ileana Zubaşcu was one of the "outsiders." Although she is not the most fortunate example, the poet illustrated, on the one hand, the prerequisite of affinity to the "spirit of the cenacle" and, on the other hand, the privileged status that membership in this group could ensure. The trend of "retroactive investment in the 1980s poetical group" (338), according to Ciotloş, was a phenomenon that also revealed the "satellites" of the nucleus, *i.e.* writers who were deemed to be peripheral due to their lack of skill or their incompatibility with the promoted new sensibility. The power of the Monday Literary Circle was to be seen later, when many quasi-anonymous writers claimed to have been associated with or members of the main group.

In the same chapter, striving to depict various literary portraits, Ciotloş opts for an unusual hermeneutic approach. Some of the materials analyzed here are unpublished texts that have first seen the light of print in Ciotloş's book. Mariana Marin's poetic framework, for example, is also rendered through nine original poems, which show the poet's

trajectory and the distinctive "behavior" of her texts in parallel with the playfulness or minimalism of her colleagues' poems. Mariana Marin's poetry demonstrates an affinity of ethos rather than of literary devices, which confirms Ciotloş's thesis. According to this, beyond the 1980s postmodernists' debates or Romanian-American young poets' relationship (especially with the Beat generation), this literary circle remains the main space in which this particular spirit emerged and was maintained, a spirit that is difficult to recover through archival research, since, by its nature, it is "doomed to remain exclusively oral" (379). However, Ciotloş summarizes, according to a detective scheme entitled "coded dialogues," how the fraternity of the members of the circle manifested itself in their poems, creating "a true underground system of legitimation" (379).

With the ambition to broach exhaustively a very complex literary phenomenon, Cosmin Cioloş delivers a book about the Monday Literary Circle's infrastructural network, managing to analytically and synthetically restore its group identity, its roots, as well as a kind of "emulation," which records the impact that the cenacle run by the critic Nicolae Manolescu had on the Romanian literary system.

TEONA FARMATU
MA Student, Babeş-Bolyai University
Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: teona.farmatu@stud.ubbcluj.ro

BOOKS

Bianca-Livia Bartoş, *Le* Thésée *d'André Gide* : *entre tradition et innovation*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2022, 166 p.

Placé dans la continuation des recherches qui prennent en compte la figure d'André Gide et son œuvre artistique, le livre de Bianca Bartoş propose une nouvelle piste d'interprétation du roman *Thésée* en tant que récit qui reflète l'esthétique gidienne. L'auteure s'intéresse au mythe de Thésée et à sa réécriture dans la version gidienne afin de révéler le roman comme art poétique et expression du credo artistique de l'écrivain. Cet aspect est visible au niveau de la structure du livre qui compte deux parties : la première qui s'intitule « André Gide et la tentation du mythe » et une seconde avec un titre significatif pour ce travail « *Thésée*, synthèse de l'esthétique gidienne ».

Dans la première partie du volume, l'auteure fait une incursion dans le domaine de la mythologie où il s'agit de trouver une définition adéquate au mythe parmi celles qui ont été proposées par des critiques littéraires et des théoriciens comme Mircea Eliade, Danièle Chauvin, Roger Caillois ou Raymond Trousson. En effet, la définition proposée pour le mythe s'avère être une synthèse de celles identifiées chez les théoriciens et les critiques littéraires mentionnés : « nous pouvons définir le mythe comme le récit des actes des héros mythiques ou des dieux. Il s'agit d'une histoire sacrée toujours rapportée à une création. En connaissant le mythe, nous avons accès à l'origine des choses et pouvons en disposer ensuite à notre gré » (p. 23).
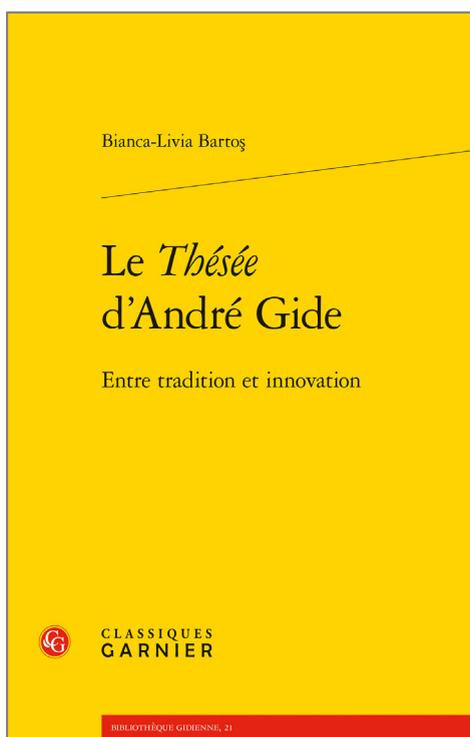
Il est à noter également que la transition vers le roman de Gide se fait d'une manière graduelle, suivant le principe d'un raisonnement déductif, c'est-à-dire du général vers le particulier. Tout d'abord le lecteur se familiarise avec des concepts de la sphère de la mythologie,

comme « mythème », « mythocritique » et « mythanalyse ». Par le biais du *Dictionnaire des mythes littéraires* de Pierre Brunel et des *Vies* de Plutarque, on accède à la biographie du héros mythique pour observer ensuite la reprise du mythe dans le cadre de la littérature universelle.

Dans le but de remarquer l'affinité de Gide pour la mythologie, en particulier pour la figure de Thésée, il y a deux subdivisions dans cette première partie (« De la mythologie au mythème » et « *Thésée*. Questions de genre et de structure »), très bien documentées, qui présentent les récurrences du mythe de Thésée dans l'œuvre de Gide à partir des analyses de la critique littéraire antérieure et des écrits de Gide, voire des témoignages de son journal.

Après ce survol extratextuel, le lecteur est introduit à l'écriture gidienne par quelques remarques préliminaires de nature narratologique et paratextuelle. Repoussant dès le début l'idée de *mimesis* entre le mythe de Thésée et le roman de Gide, l'auteure tient à préciser que l'écrivain « (ré)interprète » le mythe parce qu'il « reprend des mythèmes qu'il introduit dans un nouveau décor, marqué de sa touche personnelle » (p. 43). Symptomatique dans ce contexte est l'analyse comparative placée à la fin de la première partie, qui est consacrée à l'identification des ressemblances et dissemblances entre le mythe et le roman. Il s'agit d'une analyse minutieuse, faite par étapes, qui éclaircit certains aspects du roman. Par exemple, une différence entre le mythe et le roman est représentée par le fait que le personnage recréé par Gide doit faire face à l'odeur des herbes, mais aussi à la beauté du monstre. C'est l'un des aspects qui permet de faire ensuite des remarques sur l'éducation puritaine de Gide et sur « la tentation homosexuelle », qui ont laissé leur empreinte sur la manière de (re)penser certains mythèmes.

La deuxième partie interprète la scène de la rencontre entre Œdipe et Thésée comme un art poétique. Leur dialogue laisse transparaître deux visions différentes du monde et de la littérature, une qui appartient à la tradition et l'autre à la modernité. C'est justement cette mise en perspective qui permet de confirmer la position de l'écrivain entre la tradition et la modernité.

Un des points forts de cette démarche scientifique est constitué par l'entreprise de définir l'esthétique gidienne à partir de l'égotisme, de la sincérité et de la disponibilité. Ces concepts sont appliqués au récit de Gide par le biais d'une analyse qui part des aspects théoriques et s'appuie sur des exemples pertinents tirés du roman. En ce sens, lorsqu'on évoque la sincérité de l'artiste on se rapporte tout d'abord à la personnalité de Gide et à son journal, qui représente la marque absolue de cette qualité. L'auteure passe ensuite au protagoniste du roman, en mettant en évidence que la sincérité dans son cas prend « une tournure humoristique » lorsqu'il confond Géryon avec Scyron ou devient « source de comique » lorsqu'il décrit le repas à la cour de Minos et les tentatives d'Ariane d'attirer son attention. La marque de la sincérité s'entrevoit aussi lorsque le personnage laisse transparaître ses faiblesses, suggère Bianca Bartoş. C'est en raison de cela que le protagoniste du roman est considéré comme une incarnation de l'écrivain ou, plus précisément, comme une incarnation de ses principes moraux et esthétiques, car le roman s'approche plutôt d'une autofiction que d'une autobiographique, comme le pense l'auteure.

L'analyse de Bianca Bartoş comprend aussi des réflexions sur « les jeux de langue » et les « innovations stylistiques » du roman. À partir des références à Henri Bergson (*Le rire. Essai sur la signification du comique*), Vladimir Jankélévitch (*L'Ironie*) ou Anna Freud (*Le Moi et les mécanismes de défense*), l'auteure dédie un chapitre à l'ironie et à l'autodérision, qui entrent dans le nouveau paradigme de lecture qu'elle propose au texte gidien.

En fin de compte, le plaisir de la lecture procuré par *Le* Thésée *d'André Gide* : *entre tradition et innovation* provient aussi de l'élégance du langage utilisé, mais aussi de l'imbrication des réflexions théoriques avec des réflexions personnelles qui valident la démarche entreprise. Imprégné par la rigueur scientifique, le livre de Bianca Bartoş, paru dans la collection « Bibliothèque générale » dirigée par Peter Schnyder, s'avère être un support excellent pour les lecteurs et les chercheurs qui s'intéressent à André Gide et à la mythologie.

ADRIANA GUŞĂ
*Etudiante en Master à la Faculté des Lettres,
Université Babeş-Bolyai de Cluj-Napoca
Email: gusaadriana@yahoo.com*

BOOKS

Milan Kundera, *Un Occident kidnappé. Ou la tragédie de l'Europe centrale,* Gallimard, 2021, 77p.

S'il m'était donné la possibilité de choisir le titre de cet article, je choisirais sans aucun doute celui-ci : « Les nations centre-européennes et le désir d'Europe ». Kundera met en regard ce désir kidnappé par l'Occident. Dans sa présentation de cet ouvrage de Milan Kundera (*Le Débat*, 1983) transformé en livre et publié aux éditions Gallimard en 2021, Pierre Nora note : « La valeur du texte ne vient pas seulement de sa force démonstrative, mais de la voix si personnelle et angoissée de l'auteur [...] » (p. 36). Effectivement, la valeur de ce texte vient de la voix interrogative et sceptique de l'auteur de *L'Insoutenable Légèreté de l'être* qui défend sans complaisance l'Europe centrale « coincée » entre la Russie et l'Allemagne. Il s'agit aussi d'un plaidoyer pour la culture comme condition *sine qua non* du développement sociétal. Kundera met en lumière le désir d'Europe
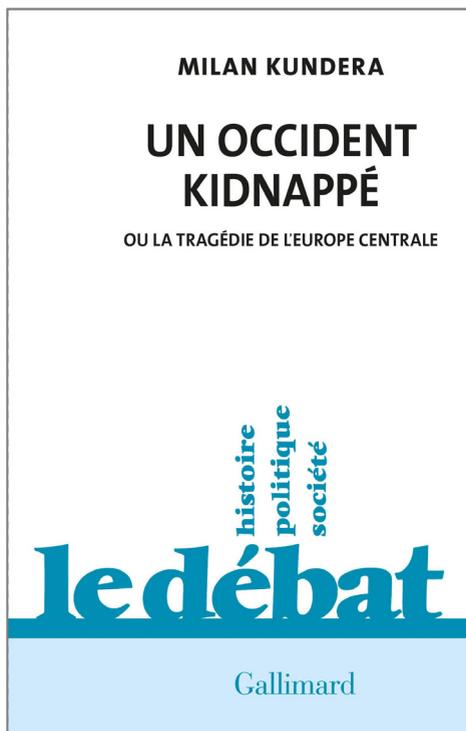
exprimé constamment par ces petites nations réduites au bloc de l'Est et à leur régime politique, raison pour laquelle dans ces nations la vulnérabilité est visible, d'autant plus qu'elles sont toujours menacées par la Russie qui cherche à les russifier, et qu'elles subissent la méconnaissance de l'Occident qui n'a même pas – selon Kundera – aperçu leur disparition puisqu'il ne ressent pas son unité « comme unité culturelle » (p. 66).

En d'autres termes, il considère que les pays qu'on a appelés de l'Est ont été rejetés injustement par l'Europe. Or, ces pays appartiennent – selon Kundera – à la tradition européenne. « Par son système politique, l'Europe centrale est l'Est ; par son histoire culturelle, elle est Occident. Mais puisque l'Europe est en train de perdre le sens de sa propre identité culturelle, elle ne voit dans l'Europe

centrale que son régime politique ; autrement dit : elle ne voit dans l'Europe centrale que l'Europe de l'Est » (p. 76). Pour cet auteur, l'identité de ces petites nations ne réside ni dans leur régime politique, ni dans leurs frontières géographiques ; leur force et leur identité viennent de la culture, ce qui explique la destruction de celle-ci pendant l'invasion russe de la Tchécoslovaquie et le rapport conflictuel entre les intellectuels et l'Etat. Lors de sa rencontre avec Milan Kundera en 1968 à Prague, Carlos Fuentes raconte dans *Géographie du roman* (1997) que l'auteur de *La Plaisanterie* avait été provocateur lorsqu'il avait employé le terme d'Europe de l'Est pour parler de la Tchécoslovaquie : « N'avais-je jamais regardé une carte du continent ? Prague se situe au centre de l'Europe ; pas à l'Est. L'Est européen, c'est la Russie, Byzance en Moscovie, le césaro-papisme, le tsarisme et la religion orthodoxe. » (p. 112). Ces deux grands romanciers, Milan Kundera et Carlos Fuentes, incarnent d'ailleurs deux pôles importants du roman contemporain.

L'auteur révèle que les chars russes mettaient en danger la Hongrie, et avec elle toute l'Europe ; c'est-à-dire que la Hongrie incarne l'esprit de l'Europe. En outre, la disparition de l'Europe centrale implique celle de toute l'Europe. Dans cette perspective, il s'interroge sur les assises sur lesquelles se fonde l'Europe pour souligner les liens spirituels qui lient ces pays à l'Europe : « [...] qu'est-ce que l'Europe pour un Hongrois, un Tchèque, un Polonais ? Dès le commencement, ces nations appartenaient à la partie de l'Europe enracinée dans la chrétienté romaine. » (p. 40). Pour Kundera, l'Europe centrale n'est pas alors à la périphérie de l'Europe, au contraire elle est au centre et elle partage la même histoire

culturelle avec l'Europe ; l'en exclure revient à lui faire perdre sa mémoire culturelle et appauvrir pareillement l'Europe, d'autant plus que les pays de l'Europe centrale ont enrichi l'Occident par leurs traditions culturelles et littéraires. Kundera donne l'exemple des écrivains viennois Robert Musil et Hermann Broch qui ont introduit une intelligence inouïe à l'intérieur du roman.

Dans le livre paru chez Gallimard fin 2021, cet article est précédé d'un texte inconnu du public français, le discours du jeune Kundera au Congrès des écrivains tchécoslovaques de 1967, en plein Printemps de Prague, présenté par Jacques Rupnik. Dans ce discours, Kundera insiste sur le rôle incontournable de la culture et de la traduction. Le traducteur est considéré comme acteur majeur de la vie culturelle d'un pays et il est ainsi le garant de la vitalité culturelle de son pays. Pour lui, la culture est à l'origine des révoltes qu'a connues l'Europe centrale. Cet épanouissement culturel a préparé le Printemps de Prague ; c'est dire que celui-ci ne se réduit pas à sa dimension politique. Kundera ne cesse de révéler l'aspect dérangeant de la culture pour l'*homo politicus*. Il va même jusqu'à lier le sort d'un peuple à sa culture. Il écrit : « [...] Pour certains la culture et le peuple sont deux notions incompatibles. L'idée de culture se confond à leurs yeux avec l'image d'une élite des privilégiés. » (p. 45.) Kundera critique aussi l'élitisme tout en soulignant le rapport entre culture et peuple : « L'identité d'un peuple ou d'une civilisation se reflète et se résume dans l'ensemble des créations spirituelles qu'on appelle d'habitude „culture" » (p. 43). Ainsi, les années soixante représentent l'âge d'or de la culture tchèque. Notons que le poids culturel d'une langue peut garantir sa

survie. Kundera cherche à hisser la culture nationale à l'international, tout en conservant ses spécificités. Dans *Le Rideau* (2005), l'auteur prolonge la leçon de Goethe, celle de la *Weltliteratur* comme stratégie pour réhabiliter les cultures nationales et les inscrire dans le grand contexte de la littérature-monde. Il s'agit là de penser la littérature au-dessus des querelles nationales. En effet, l'œuvre comme projet esthétique ne peut avoir un sens que dans un contexte supranational.

L'Europe centrale a été victime de l'Histoire, ce qui explique que « Toute la grande création centre-européenne [...] pourrait être comprise comme une longue méditation sur la fin possible de l'humanité européenne » (p. 65). C'est dans cet esprit qu'il établit une nuance entre le fascisme et le communisme. Le premier a créé « une situation relativement simple sur le plan moral. » (p. 28). Il se révèle dès le début comme l'antithèse des vertus antihumanistes. Le communisme, quant à lui, « [...] fut l'héritier d'un grand mouvement humaniste [...] » (p. 29) Selon Kundera, ce mouvement s'est transformé en son contraire engendrant en effet une grande cruauté. Cette expérience terrible du communisme explique la méfiance - dans cette géographie européenne - à l'égard de l'Histoire perçue comme monstre.

Drd. ABDELOUAHED HAJJI
*Université Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah de Fès, Maroc*
Email : abdelouaheddhajji@gmail.com

BOOKS

Traduction et transmédialité (XIXᵉ – XXIᵉ siècles), sous la direction de Gaële Loisel et Fanny Platelle, *Lettres modernes Minard*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, coll. « Carrefour des lettres modernes », 2021, 233 p.

La collection « Carrefour des lettres modernes » de la maison d'édition Lettres Modernes Minard est conçue comme un projet qui réunit des travaux de recherche sur des sujets concernant la littérature et la culture moderne et contemporaine. Parmi les treize volumes déjà publiés dans la série, on compte aussi *Traduction et transmédialité (XIXe-XXIe siècles)*, paru sous la direction de Gaëlle Loisel et Fanny Platelle. Lancé avec le soutien du Centre de Recherches sur les Littératures et la Sociopoétique (CELIS) et de la Société des amis de l'équipe Lumières et romantismes, le livre rassemble les actes d'un séminaire de recherche, « Traduction et transmédialité », organisé auprès de l'Université Clermont Auvergne en 2018.

L'enjeu du volume est d'éclaircir les marges, parfois volatiles, qui séparent l'acte de la traduction et la transmédialité, comprise en tant que processus de transfert d'un medium culturel (la littérature) à un autre (la musique, les arts de la scène, les arts visuels). Ce travail regroupe onze études inédites, organisés en trois séquences thématiques, selon leur domaine culturel. Ainsi, une première partie comprend trois études concernant la littérature et la musique : « Debussy, lecteur de *Pelléas* » (Éric Lysøe), « La musique absolue et sa traduction dans *Consuelo* de George Sand » (Ningfei Duan), « Traduire la musique et la peinture. L'exemple de Paul Klee et Wassily Kandinsky » (Violaine Anger). La seconde partie est dédiée aux arts de la scène et groupe quatre essais d'un grand intérêt littéraire et dramatique : « Traduction et transmédialité chez les frères Hanlon. Le cas du *Voyage*
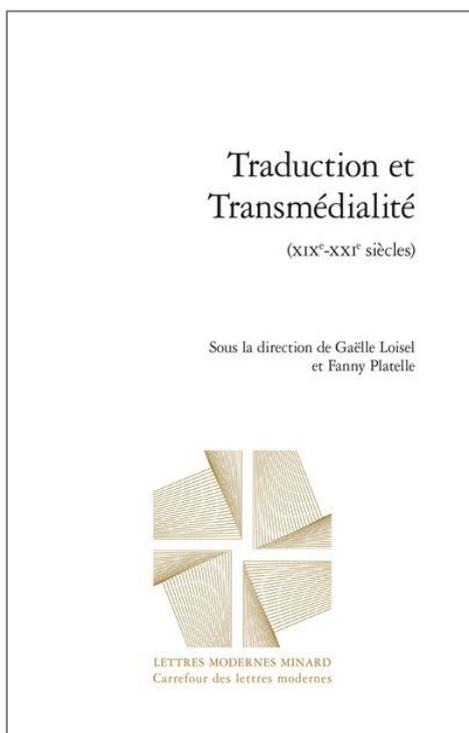
en Suisse » (Leisha Ashdown-Lecointre), « L'*Electra* de Hofmannsthal et ses premières adaptations en France. Limites de la traduction et triomphe de la pantomime » (Audrey Giboux), « Du ballet russe au grand écran outre-Atlantique. Que reste-t-il du *Casse-Noisette* d'E.T.A. Hoffmann ? » (Ingrid Lachney), « *The Virgin Suicides* du texte à la scène. Genre et transmédialité » (Priscille Wind). Finalement, une troisième partie questionne le transfert culturel de la littérature vers arts visuels : « *Le Robinson suisse* de Wyss à l'épreuve de la transmédialité. Métamorphoses d'un mythe entre représentations littéraires et iconographiques » (Laurence Olivier-Messonnier), « Traduction (Galland, Mardrus, Benedeikh et Miquel) et adaptation cinématographique (Pasolini) des *Mille et Une Nuits* » (Mounira Chatti), « Destination : *Solaris*. Transposition narrative et intermédiale dans le corpus *Solaris* (Lem, Tarkovski, Soderbergh) » (Hugo Hengl), « *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013). Réseaux et sentiments, ou la question du post-cinéma » (Christophe Gelly). L'inventaire des études dévoile la richesse des ressources culturelles interrogées grâce à un intérêt gnoséologique et épistémologique de découvrir les modalités de transposition d'un medium à un autre, qu'il s'agisse de la musique (vocale, instrumentale, l'opéra), des arts de la scène (théâtre, pantomime, ballet) ou bien des arts visuels (cinéma, illustration, peinture).

L'hétérogénéité des auteurs et des œuvres invoquées assure la réussite de ce volume qui s'est proposé de montrer les moyens par lesquels une création artistique serait « traduisible » dans un autre art, au-delà des inévitables phénomènes de résistance. De surcroît, des ouvrages de nature différente comportent un potentiel relationnel *in nuce*, qui s'actualise par un front commun ou par un espace conceptuel de translation. De ce point de vue, l'intervention de l'auteur-traducteur revêt un rôle capital, car la réussite du transfert entre ces oeuvres dépend directement de son talent de « médiation » d'un champ créatif à un autre. Autrement dit, le passage d'un medium à un autre peut être considéré comme traduction en tant que travail d'adaptation d'un code à un autre. Les fondements théoriques de cette jonction conceptuelle ont été explorés par Roman Jakobson, qui avait examiné la traduction dans sa dimension intersémiotique. Umberto Eco élargit la théorie de Jakobson en problématisant la « traduction entre langues naturelles » et la transmutation. À vrai dire, chaque mutation ou adaptation nécessite toujours une interprétation inter-systémique. Cet aspect devient plus visible au moment où les traducteurs, les compositeurs, les peintres et les cinéastes songent de traduire/transposer/adapter une œuvre littéraire. La difficulté qu'ils rencontrent c'est de médier d'un langage à un autre le message de l'auteur. Ainsi, les musiciens traduisent dans une langue instrumentale, ils mettent le texte en musique, et cet effort demande aussi bien des techniques spécifiques, que de l'intuition afin d'obtenir une traduction bien réglée, satisfaisante à la fois pour le système des signes verbaux et celui des sons. La réussite découle par l'emplacement de la source linguistique dans une matrice musicale. Le *skopos* du traducteur est d'honorer le raisonnement, les affectes, le protocole technique, les conventions du système-source, les coutumes du système-cible. Pour le dire autrement, la traduction d'un art à un autre nécessite un transfert de code et une modification du récepteur, sans pourtant affecter le message de

l'œuvre. Par exemple, c'est ce qui fait que les variantes introduites par Debussy « font système » et consacrent l'opéra comme une véritable traduction. Dans le cas de *Consuelo*, et selon la suggestion de George Sand, la musique est « absolue » dans sa dimension romantique, car elle comprend en elle-même son essence, sans prendre en compte les rapports qui existent entre les mots et les émotions. À leur tour, Paul Klee et Wassily Kandinski ont repensé le rapport de l'image au son pour traduire le langage pictural, obligeant le spectateur de regarder le blanc, le point, la ligne dans ses nouveaux rapports avec l'espace, l'énergie, la force. Cette fois, le spectacle est soutenu par l'adaptation du sonore au visible. Dans la mise en scène d'Epstein et de Strozzi, de 1908, la mimique et les gestes du personnage Elektra rendent les nuances poétiques de l'œuvre d'une façon plus expressive que la traduction verbale. Le spectacle de 2017, de Susanne Kennedy, *The Virgin Suicides*, devient exemplaire pour la transposition du passage de la vie à la mort dans l'esthétique théâtrale du medium scénique. La traduction littéraire et la transmédialité dans le cas de *Mille et Une Nuits* exigent également des métamorphoses afin de maintenir la ressemblance avec l'œuvre-source. À cette occasion, la transposition littéraire nécessite un arpentage et un effort de création artistique afin d'exprimer les particularités du medium originel. L'œuvre cinématographique en tant que transposition situe

le narratif dans un contexte artistique qui permet des éclaircissants de contenu et des actualisations par la représentation du medium spécifique. Voir par exemple le cas du corpus de *Solaris*, où le hypotexte travaillé par les réalisateurs (Lem, Tarkovski, Soderbergh) offre des portées visuelles qui dépassent largement les possibilités sémantiques de la textualité. De plus, avec chaque vision cinématique, la traduction et la transmédialité contribuent à la popularisation du texte-source et ont aussi le rôle de réorienter le spectateur envers l'œuvre d'origine.

Grâce aux contributions qui le composent, ce volume repense depuis une double perspective, critique et créative, les rapports entre la traduction et la transmédialité. À la différence de l'intermédialité, qui met tout simplement en relation les œuvres, la transmédialité est un processus centré sur la traduction, vue comme transfert, et se caractérise par l'emploi combiné de plusieurs médias, dont le résultat consiste dans une expérience unifiée et harmonieuse. Jusqu'à présent, dans ce domaine théorique, il n'y a que deux autres ouvrages collectifs publiées, mais celles-ci traitent plutôt de l'intermédialité : *Intérmédialités*, publié en 2015, sous la direction d'Amélie Florenchie, puis *Formes et (en)jeux de l'intertextualité dans l'espace éuropéen*, de 2020, sous la direction de Patricia Viallet. Par conséquent, cette récente parution est bienvenue dans un champ de recherche qui est loin d'être suffisamment exploré.

Dr. LAURA ILINESCU
Université Babeș-Bolyai de Cluj-Napoca
*Email: laura.ilinescu@stud.ubbcluj.ro*

BOOKS

David Damrosch, *Comparing the Literatures: Literary Studies in a Global Age*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021, 392 p.

Harvard professor of comparative literature, director of the World Literature Institute, and researcher in comparative studies, David Damrosch is one of the "founding figures" of World Literature. His latest work, *Comparing the Literatures*, published in 2020, seems to start from the following idea: "Comparative literature today is experiencing a paradigm shift of the sort that occurs only once or twice in a century, and an effective response will require us to rethink the grounds of comparison from the ground up" (5). This study may appeal to all those interested in engaging in comparative approaches, regardless of their field. Thus, *Comparing the Literatures* is announced as a book about the comparative *method*.

From the very beginning, the paper raises several questions about comparative literature. These questions are asked either by the author himself or by other writers and theorists he quotes and discusses: "what do we really mean by comparing" the literatures? […] what resources should we draw on as we respond to the changes sweeping across literary studies, the humanities, and the public sphere? […] what is the unit of comparison? Is it language community or its awkward sister, the race?" (2) etc. The answers to these questions are articulated around the main theme of the volume, which the author himself announces as "the long-standing tension between inclusive and exclusive visions of comparative study" (9).
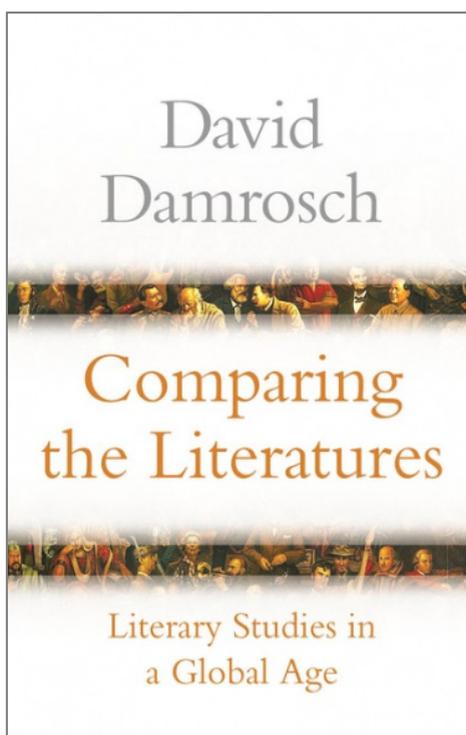
Regarding literary theory and its relation to comparative studies, Damrosch states that "given the many varieties of theory, what each of us needs to know is not a set theoretical canon but how best to use whichever theories are

most suited for the questions we want to ask. Used badly, a theoretical lens may distort as much as it reveals" (126). The inherent danger asserts the very power of literary theory. In this context, literature is also seen as a way of dislocating the gaze on the real, which means that studies of comparative literature will only double this effect: "Literature's alternative worlds can help us see through the repressive conventions that society presents as the natural order of things and to envision other ways our world could be" (108). An additional aspect through which Damrosch highlights the connection between the theoretical lens of comparative studies and reality resides in the analogies he makes. They "translate" the raised issues into easy-to-understand terms: "today the careful reading of challenging literary works has something of the oppositional force of the slow food movement in a world dominated by artery-clogging fast food" or "In world literature, as in some literary Miss Universe competition, an entire nation may be represented by a single author" (229).

Clarity is certainly a feature of Damrosch's style, which has been evident since his earlier works. In addition to this clarity, and from a stylistic point of view, the author seems to follow a kind of pattern—which always has worked—in addressing all the issues he discusses. He usually starts with the presentation of the discussed subject's context. Every time new writers are introduced, their biographies and interventions in the field are presented. Writers' gestures and attitudes can be understood precisely through this process of contextualization and of putting everything *in relation*: "De Staël developed her ideas on literature and society under the shadow of her exclusion from the Parisian circles essential to her intellectual vitality and even her mental health" (15) and "Posnett doesn't appear to have known of Meltzl or his journal," etc. (39). Then, the context is detailed until the links between the events become visible. Thus, by re-establishing the "path" by which a certain situation was generated, one can understand, in fact, the presented situation.

This pattern stands out as the way David Damrosch works in terms of both content and form. On the one hand, the author defines his construction and the possible lenses through which he relates to the presented topics: "My own perspective is that of someone raised and teaching in the United States, though also with a strong awareness of German Jewish immigrant roots, and with parents who vividly recalled their early days in the Philippines, where they met. I am a liberal humanist by outlook [...], I am a structuralist in recovery" (8). Of course, this presentation is completed by the personal appreciations he makes in the book, the recommendations he proposes etc. Damrosch presents the filter through which he is going to examine the ideas discussed. He is well aware of the differences between him and his readers: "every reader of this book will have an individual set of formative figures to explore" (8). On the other hand, the same technique can be identified in the way the whole book is structured. It begins with a historical overview of the discipline of comparative literature, so that the present state of the art can be understood. The author insists on the areas of *becoming* precisely to make the connections between events clearly visible and to support comprehension as a *process*. He captures the moments before and after writers became known in the field of comparative literature studies, for example, in the case

of Michel Foucault or Gayatri Spivak. The areas of becoming are therefore highlighted because they do not follow canonically consecrated figures or texts, but ideas.

The fight against the canon is evident, in terms of both content—the types of canon (canon and hypercanon) and literature (national, international and supranational)—and the text itself. Damrosch demonstrates his mastery of an enormous area of literary studies, offering examples of literature considered minor and non-European. Through his own text, Damrosch epitomizes comparative literature research.

Through the detailed analyses he carries out, Damrosch follows the history of comparative literature in its unfolding and, praising or sanctioning various writers' practices or critical attitudes towards them. An example of the latter would be omitting graphic accents in the names of certain authors. Although this may seem an insignificant detail, it highlights the difficulties of assimilating cultures perceived as (too) foreign. Damrosch treats this issue with the same seriousness as he approaches weightier topics, which indicates a democratized gaze and understanding of literature. Many of these critiques concern attitudes towards feminism: every time he discusses the case of a woman writer, he presents the problems she had to face in becoming a writer; when discussing works of comparative literature, he emphasizes the absence of female authors in them, etc. In addition to these revisions, which are always formulated in a "politically correct" spirit, Damrosch often makes more personal assessments, grounded in irony or humor, with the same purpose: for example, "wouldn't it be better to stick with two neighboring national traditions, one period, one genre, a manageable comparison of three or four novels, using the familiar theoretical framework your advisor was taught thirty years ago?" (6).

Solutions to these historical issues are often offered directly and presented in a clear way: "in this chapter, I propose three ways of dealing with the problems that arise when theory travels to new times and places" (130). These solutions can be deduced from the actual text he proposes, the examples he uses, his openness to non-European cultures, his constant attempt to understand events in their contexts, the quotations he provides both in the original and in translation, the numerous examples of writers, etc. The book itself becomes a paragon of comparative literary studies, epitomizing the principles that Damrosch supports.

In conclusion, in *Comparing the Literatures*, David Damrosch explores comparative literature and world literature especially as a *method* for both doing research and understanding the surrounding reality. The book is also a guide for the application of this method. For any reader, *Comparing the Literature* is certainly a real opportunity to come into contact with an impressive variety of literatures and with an extremely broad view on the subject.

ADINA LUCA
Independent researcher
Email: adina.luca23@yahoo.com

BOOKS

Călin Teutişan, *Scenarii ale criticii. Protagoniști, metode, interpretări,* Cluj-Napoca: Școala Ardeleană, 2021, 276 p.

Bringing together a series of scientific articles published between 2011 and 2019, Călin Teutişan's book, *Scenarios of Criticism. Protagonists, Methods, Interpretations*, aims to map the critical spirit of the so-called "Şcoala de la Cluj" [Cluj School], represented by a series of emblematic figures analyzed in detail. Călin Teutişan's analytical hypotheses start from empirical data, namely a series of dictionaries and monographic studies published in co-authorship, thus demonstrating "the readiness of these critics to work together" (10). Assuming the concept of *la communaute inavouable*, belonging to Maurice Blanchot, Călin Teutişan demonstrates that beyond differences between these scholars, there is a certain feeling of "incompleteness" whose counterpart is the feeling of belonging to a community, developing common ideas, obsessions, and methods. The effort to bring together ample critical portraits of Dumitru Popovici, Ioana Em. Petrescu, Liviu Petrescu, Ion Pop, Mircea Muthu, Corin Braga, Alex Goldiş, Emanuel Modoc, Daiana Gârdean, Ovio Olaru, and others is doubled by the welcome contextualization, both historical and theoretical, of each figure or school of thought. This means that a theoretical framework accompanies the deliberately exhaustive and engaged presentations of some *Opera Omnia* (in the case of well-established critics). One of the merits of this book is bringing forward a productive intellectual dialogue with these critics. Therefore, Călin Teutişan's critical portraits combine in-depth analyses with synthetic approaches, contextualization, and cultural dialogue. What distinguishes each author analyzed is the style and methodology by which critical works are approached.
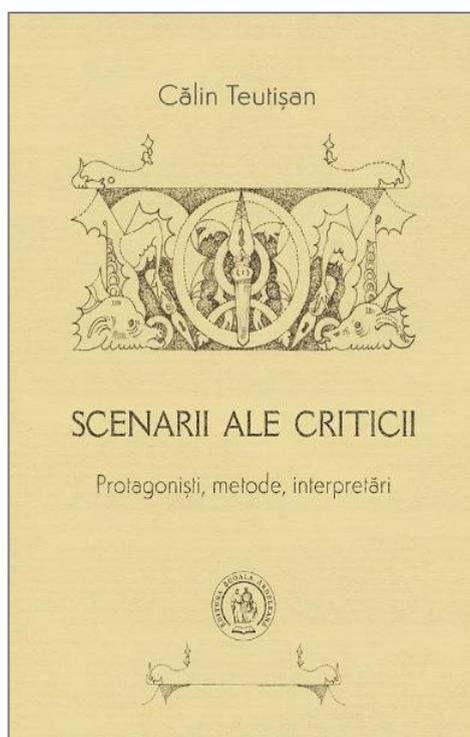
The book, structured in seven chapters, focuses on the structural commonalities of the Cluj-based critical tradition, striving to go past the idiosyncrasies of individual works. In the last chapter, dedicated to the generation of literary critics from the 2000s and onward, Călin Teutişan identifies the main directions of the "Cluj School" perpetuated by the young literary scholars: 1) "critical monographism with theoretical expansion" (211), 2) "critical and historical-literary synthesis" (212), and 3) "quantitative studies and *world literature*" (212). Reconstructing the relationships between these critics, at the macrostructural level, it becomes easy to see how Ion Pop, Corin Braga, Ioana Em. Petrescu, Cosmin Borza and Adriana Stan are dependent on some forms of monographic literary criticism, focused on an analytical and theoretical discourse around a single writer. Then, syntheses of history and literary criticism are exemplified by authors such as Mircea Muthu, Liviu Petrescu, Dumitru Popovici, Alex Goldiş, etc., whose scientific approach is based on methodological heteronomy, often combining, with remarkable success, aesthetics with the extra-aesthetic. The last direction emerges in the Romanian literary field thanks to the so-called "digital turn," doubled by the popularization of Franco Moretti's *distant reading*.

Some deep affinities, related to the theme, methodology or vision remain to be decrypted by the reader himself. For example, the vocation of *synthesis* is an ambition often targeted by critics from Cluj. Dumitru Popovici, a post-Lansonian thinker, as described by Călin Teutişan, has the merit of having documented Romanian romantic literature from a historical point of view, according to the principle that the social shapes cultural evolution. Against a very well-articulated theoretical

background (retracing the trajectory of Lansonian criticism via Roland Barthes, Patrizia Lombardo or Antoine Compagnon), post-Lansonism is defined by the author as "historicism to which the rhetoric of literary discourse is added" (19). The same heteronomous, but synthetic approach is also present in the case of Alex Goldiş's book (*Criticism in the Trenches*) on the negotiation of aesthetic autonomy during communism. The strategies of historical and ideological negotiation are detailed and researched by Alex Goldiş through a hermeneutics of suspicion, blending aesthetic criteria with cultural, historical, social, political, and ideological ones. As in the case of Dumitru Popovici and Alex Goldiş, Mircea Muthu's critical and theoretical projects are channeled through this vocation of *synthesis*, in two well-known fields: Balkanology and aesthetics. Mircea Muthu proposes a syncretic Hegelian reorganization of the arts, while also creating bridges with the strong sciences. Moreover, the same tendency towards reuniting the *ethos* in a synthetic and syncretic form is recognizable in the ample studies dedicated to Romanian literary Balkanism. Dealing mainly with cultural morphology, Mircea Muthu's books are placed in the broader context of Edward Said's Orientalism and, more closely, of Maria Todorova's post-Ottoman hypothesis. Muthu's theoretical framework starts from the hypothesis that *homo balcanicus* originates in the Byzantine man, "in the structure of which there are four layers: the Roman idea, the Orthodox faith, the Oriental influence, and Hellenism" (138). If the historical-literary synthesis is fundamental to Ion Pop, one of the specialists in the field of the Romanian historical avant-garde, too, it is no less true that the same author can deal with local cultural phenomena from a

dialectical perspective in his monographs. The specific difference in Ion Pop's brand of criticism is—according to Teutişan—that he applies the dialectic Hegelian evolution of literary forms to the system of literature, inherited from the interwar critic E. Lovinescu, to which he adds rhetorical and stylistic criticism, cultural morphology and comparatism.

For Ioana Em. Petrescu and Liviu Petrescu, literary criticism is based on the ontological horizon. Whether it is *cosmological models* or *pure intuition of form*, whether it is the *poetics of postmodernism* and its completely ontological charge, the common denominator of the Petrescu family's critical core is to identify an infratextual level, which belongs either to the metaphysical or to the "general essences" of literature. Placing it in the tradition of abysmal criticism (Gaston Bachelard or Gilbert Durand), Călin Teutişan reveals the nucleus of Ioana Em. Petrescu's metatextual projects, namely the effort to offer, through hermeneutic reading, a model of return to the metaphysical foundation of literary works. In other words, in this case, whether it is about Eminescu's poetry, monographic projects, or whether we are considering theoretical projects (about the configurative levels or postmodernism), we are dealing with "*revealing* kinds of criticism, but based on a *rationalist* apparatus" (34). Almost in parallel, beyond its explicit essentialism, Liviu Petrescu's literary criticism reveals a certain appetite for (post)impressionism, the writer himself having declared in several texts his adherence to the "essay," rather than to literary studies centered on facts. In other words, Liviu Petrescu approaches what Roland Barthes calls "the science of literature" or what Gerard Genette describes as "pure criticism." For Liviu Petrescu, aesthetic-literary meditation must combine with philosophical concepts, without altering the concreteness of critical discourse, but, rather, pushing it towards an essentialist critique. However, psychocriticism, another hermeneutical direction of the Cluj School, acquires a decisive turn with Corin Braga's work. Synthesizing and restoring all the nodes of his critical outlook, Călin Teutişan notes that "psychoanalysis, psychocriticism, psychogeography, psychohistory, psychobiography on the one hand; dreams, lost paradises, 'enchanted' maps, utopias and counter-utopias on the other hand, this is Corin Braga's network of imaginary meanings and signifiers" (146). Closer to the modernist episteme of research and grasping literature, Corin Braga, in his books about Nichita Stănescu (a neomodernist poet) and Lucian Blaga (a modernist-expressionist poet), tries to identify the subjective, abysmal self and its interior movements, as it is reshaped in poetry. Also with the tools of psychoanalysis, more Jungian than Freudian, Corin Braga sees the morphology of culture as a complex system, namely a form of "refulare-defulare-întoarcerea refulatului" [repression-expression-the return of the repressed]. Călin Teutişan's vocation as a theorist and comparatist is highlighted by the systematics of the concepts proposed by Corin Braga's work: archetypology, anarchetype, eschatology, eutopia, outopia, dystopia and counter-utopia. Finally, as in the case of Ion Pop, Călin Teutişan exercises his appetite for completeness and tests the adhesion between text, context and metatext. In other words, he tries to validate the fact that the aesthetic creed that belongs to the critic overlaps with the fictional creed of the prose writer and poet.

At the end of his book, Călin Teutişan opens his critical, analytical and descriptive spirit to the new horizons of the post-2000 generation of literary critics. Covering both the strengths and the resistance levels, the chapter dedicated to the emergence of *digital humanities* confidently welcomes the projects of the younger critics, who, through upgraded tools of literary theory and criticism, can render new hypotheses on the hidden part of the iceberg of literature. Ultimately, Călin Teutişan's book is a synthesis of the Cluj School's critical *ethos*, whose full merit is to have identified similarities where there were differences and to have mapped divergences where only analogies were obvious.

EMANUEL LUPAŞCU-DOBOŞ
*MA Student, Babeş-Bolyai University*
Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: emanuel.lupascu@stud.ubbcluj.ro

BOOKS

Cosmin Ciotloș, *Cenaclul de Luni. Viața și opera*, București: Pandora Publishing, 2021, 464 p.

Theoretical contributions about the 80s literary generation converge towards defining their poetics and fuelling terminological debates around postmodernism. The critical reception of these writers' works has been shaped both by the members of this generation and by scholars outside it. The former category includes, among others, Mircea Cărtărescu's volume, *Postmodernismul românesc [Romanian Postmodernism]*, and Ion Bogdan Lefter's *Flashback 1985: Începuturile noii poezii [Flashback 1885: The Beginnings of the New Poetry]*. The topic is interesting not only from a literary point of view, but also from a sociological point of view. On the one hand, it portrays the bohemian lifestyle within the totalitarian regime, and, on the other hand, it explains how a literature that does not satisfy the requirements of the system can survive, functioning underground.
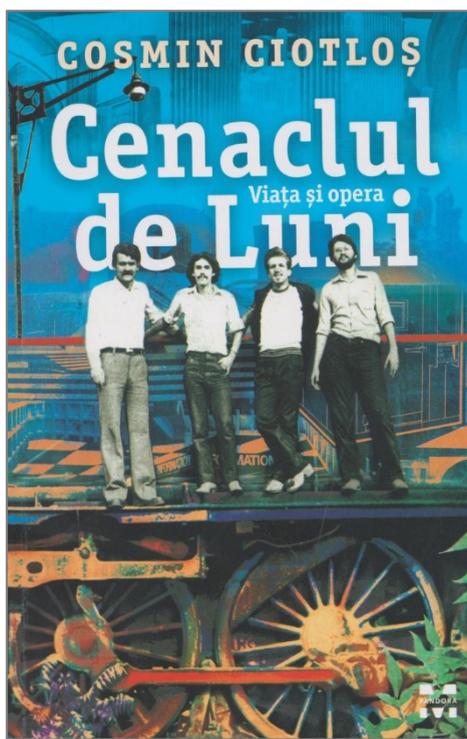
Among the relatively recent studies dedicated to the topic, Mihail Vakulovsky approaches the phenomenon from a dual perspective: a critical look at poetry, in *Portret de grup cu generația 80. Poezia [Group Portrait with Generation 80. Poetry]*, completed, in another volume, by interviews with members of the group, but also with those who were influenced by the particular atmosphere from the Monday Literary Circle. Analyses of this generation's literary output have also explored foreign influences. For example, Teodora Dumitru's study included in the collective volume *Romanian Literature as World Literature* discusses the impact of the Beat generation. Cosmin Ciotloș's volume, *Cenaclul de Luni. Viața și opera [The Monday Literary Circle. Life and Work]*, continues this line of contributions with a biographical-oriented approach, as the title announces.

The fact that Ciotloş aims to overcome the commonplaces in the theoretical discussions about the topic is obvious, as he relies on new information in order to reveal that "particular sensibility" (9). For example, the way in which the critic refers to labels attached to poetry, preferring other concepts that have been overlooked, such as *lyric associativity*, introduced in an essay signed by Ion Stratan. The well documented, exhaustive perspective of the critic explores the complex relations between the members of the 80s generation, as well as the opposition to the official system. Ciotloş's understanding of the literary circle is worth discussing, as he draws on Stanley Fish's concept of "interpretive communities," to explain why, although there were many reading circles at the time, they did not survive or have a decisive impact. "Lack of an autonomous critical vision" would be the main cause of value degradation.

Convinced that "the poetry of this generation means, first of all, the poetry of Bucharest" (8), Ciotloş is mainly interested in the Monday Literary Circle founded in 1977. However, he extends the area of investigation, as he wants to reveal the way the poets of the 80's expressed themselves before joining the circle, but also how their project continued after the circle was closed in 1983 and which forms of camouflage were used. For the first direction, *Amfiteatru [The Amphitheater]* magazine, but also the meetings within the eponymous circle, offered a space for self-assertion. Moreover, the magazine also published poems, whose impact was quantified through reviews. What is interesting, referring to this part of the foundation of the circle, is the way in which Ciotloş resemanticizes the figures of some writers

who contributed to the formation of the group. Constanţa Buzea's case thus activates a position often neglected by critics (the writer's "commentator position").

Returning to the camouflage of the Monday Literary Circle that I mentioned earlier, the critic evokes the meetings within Cenaclul Rapid [The Rapid Literary Circle] and Cenaclul din Tei [The Tei Literary Circle]. Regarding the former, the attention paid to the name—which encourages an association with the football team—suggests a solidarity that worked not only within the alternative literary field, but also beyond its boundaries. Particular attention is given to the denigratory initiatives led by the *Săptâmâna* [*The Week*] magazine that pleaded against the poetry of the Monday Literary Circle's members. As for poetry, the chapter dedicated to Eugen Barbu demonstrates how the importance of the new poetic style was diminished and how the message was distorted, through comments applied on the text (see the episode involving Liviu Ioan Stoiciu). In fact, the aim was to deconstruct the new manner of making poetry and also the poets' individual contributions. This practice applied also in the case of *Caietele debutanţilor [Notebooks of Beginners]*, which functioned as a collective volume meant to neglect the individual voices and the aesthetic value of the texts, through "the intention to standardize" (142).

In addition to the nuances it brings, Ciotloş also refers to some clichés attached to the generation. One of them concerns the poets' unity of perspective which, taken over by the opponents, threatened to attenuate the differences. In fact, "their literature was not written in one voice, as their opponents claimed. Remarkably homogeneous, however, was

the way of reading it" (56). The practice of reading creates, explains Ciotloș, a mythology of the literary circle which allowed, in the interviews with members of the generation, the association with the Beat poets. However, Ciotloș tones down the foreign influences, finding, instead, influences inside the Romanian space. Thus, he refers to Junimea, noting that a common practice of the foundation was to create a mythology. According to this hypothesis, the critic explains the absence of exact data in the interviews of the participants in the Monday Literary Circle. The practice worked, by extension, in the case of some writers who projected a legendary aura, postponing the publication of their volumes (see the case of Daniel Pișcu) or, later, when writers from other generations turned to the literary circle, in order to achieve validation.

Beyond the attention paid to the literary circle as a form of sociability, Ciotloș aims to reveal individual contributions in an important section of the volume dedicated to poetry. Ciotloș also relies on biographical inserts meant to explain the position of the writers. For instance, Coșovei's case is discussed through the lens of a volume published by his father, which makes possible some analogies between the writer's biographical events and the atmosphere of the Monday Literary Circle. However, the analogies between certain gestures made by Coșovei as a child and the photo placed on the fourth cover of the volume *Air with Diamonds* appear a bit forced. In other cases, Ciotloș starts from the less frequented theoretical texts of the writers, refuting the labels attached to them in their literary reception. This is what happens in the case of Romulus Bucur or Bogdan Ghiu.

One of the merits of the volume is related to the interest in less visible writers. On the other hand, the book also discusses unjustified recoveries. The former category includes the poet Ion Monoran, while the latter analyses the case of Ileana Zubașcu. Ciotloș convincingly rejects the idea of Zubașcu as a forerunner of the generation, proving that the idea is, in fact, grounded in protochronism. Not only was she not a forerunner of the poets from the Monday Literary Circle, but her poetry does not fit into the mindset of this generation. Viorel Padina's recovery is also symptomatic insofar as it explains the conditions for entering the literary field, but also the consequences of late debuts.

Other writers have a rather restrictive approach, through a single volume, as is the case of Alexandru Mușina. Although Ciotloș refers to Mușina's practice of moving lyrics from one volume to another, the critic's attention is focused on a single volume, *Strada Castelului 104 [104 Castle Street]*, annotated by another colleague of his generation. Mircea Cărtărescu has a similar approach, in an otherwise exemplary chapter, by developing references from *Levantul [The Levant]* that confirm an in-depth analysis of the text.

Following Ciotloș's analytical sections, revealing the system of relationships between poets seems to matter more than individual contributions, as the goal is to reconstruct "networks of relationships" (10). Hence the interest in the dialogue that writers initiate in texts, the way they respond to each other, contributing to the creation of an "underground system of legitimation" (379) exposed in the last section of the book. However, the typology that Ciotloș proposes in the introduction in order to mark the differ-

ences between poets remains at a theoretical level. Although the critic states that he does not conceive his volume as a textbook, that "it is more about trends than categories" and that he focuses on new aspects, these trends that he identified—from "nostalgic restitutive" poets to "centrifugal"—deserved further explanation. On the contrary, they remain almost inoperative.

The indisputable merit of the volume comes from registering new aspects in order to complete or to redefine the literary space and its extensions, avoiding common places and overcoming clichés often conveyed in discussions about the topic. In this sense, *The Monday Literary Circle. Life and Work* is—taking an idea that the critic introduces—a volume of "cross-references" and an important contribution for those interested in how the poetry of the 80's developed in the Romanian space.

IOANA ONESCU
PhD Student, Babeş-Bolyai University
Cluj-Napoca, Romania
E-mail: ioana.onescu@ubbcluj.ro

BOOKS

Agnès Desarthe, *L'Eternel fiancé*, Paris, Éditions de l'Olivier, 2021, 211 p.

Née en 1966, Agnès Desarthe est déjà reconnue sur la scène littéraire française comme écrivaine et traductrice de Virginia Woolf. Les prix reçus par ses romans en sont la meilleure preuve : prix du Livre Inter en 1996 pour *Un Secret sans importance*, prix Renaudot des lycéens en 2010 pour *Dans la Nuit brune* et prix littéraire du « Monde » en 2015 pour *Ce Cœur changeant*.

Proposé lui aussi pour la première sélection du prestigieux Prix Goncourt, son dernier roman, *L'Eternel fiancé*, suit l'histoire d'une narratrice sans nom qui est dans une permanente quête de son premier amour d'enfance et de soi-même. La narration à la première personne invite le lecteur à être le témoin de l'histoire de sa vie et à s'y identifier.

Le livre commence avec un concert de Noël où la jeune fille de quatre ans rencontre Étienne, un petit garçon qui lui avoue ses sentiments. À cette confession, elle lui répond avec « je ne t'aime pas » (p. 10), phrase qui va la hanter pour le reste de sa vie, car l'amour découvert à l'âge de l'innocence a le pouvoir de résister à l'écoulement du temps. Les deux se retrouvent de nouveau pendant l'adolescence, dans l'orchestre du lycée. Cette fois-ci, c'est la jeune fille qui aime Étienne, mais lui, il l'ignore, en aimant une autre, Antonia, celle qui va ensuite devenir sa femme et la mère de sa fille. L'héroïne cherche son amour inaccompli dans la figure du frère d'Étienne, puis dans celle d'Yves, un professeur qu'elle épousera plus tard.
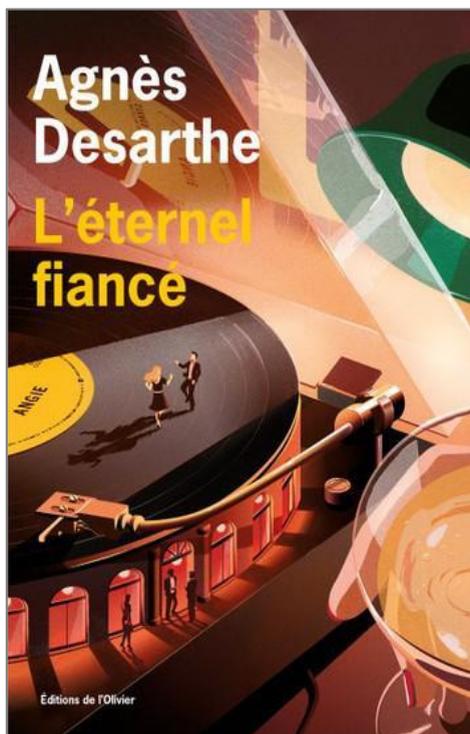
Beaucoup d'années après, les deux se rencontrent de nouveau par hasard, deux adultes dans les rues de Paris, mais lui, il ne la reconnaît plus. Chacun a sa vie à lui : Étienne est veuf, il mène une existence un peu particulière car, puisqu'il élève seul sa fille Rita, il gagne sa vie en tant que gigolo ; par contre, la narratrice

a un mariage presque parfait, elle se réjouit de l'amour et de l'attention de son mari Yves. Même s'ils ont deux enfants ensemble, dans l'âme de l'héroïne subsiste encore la nostalgie de l'amour l'innocent qui a marqué son enfance et l'impression que sa vie aurait été tout à fait autre si cette histoire d'amour avait survécu. Cette interrogation restée sans réponse et la mélancholie qui en découle passe de la narratrice au lecteur.

En entrant dans cette histoire d'amour qui ne s'accomplit jamais, le lecteur se voit confronté à une tranche de réalité qui pourrait être la sienne : même dans les aspects les plus simples, la vie a pourtant une complexité qui la rend difficilement digérable notamment pour une jeune fille et ensuite une jeune femme. D'autres thèmes soulignent cette complexité existentielle : l'écoulement du temps comme source de nostalgie, l'inquiétude devant l'oubli, la quête d'une permanence, le drame de la séparation des parents et la destruction du noyau familial vécue en silence par l'adolescente, l'image de soi toujours ressentie comme inférieure à celle des autres du même âge, le départ à l'internat de la sœur aînée, la solitude, la maladie grave, l'encéphalite, qui marque la fin de l'enfance de la narratrice : « Quand je sors de l'hôpital, l'enfance a pris fin et j'ai l'impression que c'est à cause de moi. » (p. 34) Un autre thème, celui de la musique vue comme échappatoire, marque le texte comme un fil rouge et peut devenir pour le lecteur une sorte de recette pour le maintien de l'équilibre dans la vie, à côté de la routine, douée elle aussi du pouvoir magique de mettre en ordre l'univers intérieur.

Au-delà des événements racontés, le livre a une dimension philosophique qui le recommande : comme tout être humain, l'héroïne se confronte dans la vie avec le peu d'importance que les autres lui accordent et se sent oubliée par eux. Chacun d'entre nous se croit important dans les yeux de ceux qui nous entourent et la destruction de cette illusion provoque de l'inquiétude, de la souffrance et le sentiment de sa propre insignifiance. Par cela, le livre d'Agnès Desarthe invite le lecteur à s'identifier à la narratrice dont l'introspection est compliquée par le jeu du va-et-vient entre le présent et le passé.

Le livre s'impose par son style fluide et rythmé, mais aussi par les descriptions assez poétiques qui trahissent une sensibilité à part. L'écriture féminine d'Agnès Desarthe déborde de musicalité, de nostalgie, de mélancolie, étant construite sur le flou de la conscience de la femme qui s'écrit elle-même, ce qui donne au lecteur l'impression de lire un roman intime du XXIe siècle.

MARIA-LORENA RACOLȚA
Étudiante en Master à la Faculté des Lettres,
Université Babeş-Bolyai
Cluj-Napoca, Roumanie
Email: maria.racolta@stud.ubbcluj.ro

BOOKS

Michi Strausfeld, *Mariposas amarillas y los señores dictadores. América Latina narra su historia*, traducción de Ibon Zubiaur, Barcelona, Debate, 2021, 576 p.

A comienzos de 2021 se publicaba bajo el sello editorial de Debate *Mariposas amarillas y los señores dictadores. América Latina narra su historia*[1], el magistral ensayo que la reputada filóloga, editora y latinoamericanista alemana Michi Strausfeld dedica a la fascinante historia cultural de América Latina desde Colón y los conquistadores hasta la complicada tesitura sociopolítica actual. Cabe mencionar que fue precisamente la entusiasta labor de Strausfeld como editora y agente cultural, a partir de los años setenta y por espacio de cuatro décadas, lo que contribuyó de manera fundamental a la recepción de la literatura latinoamericana en Alemania, donde, a diferencia de otros países, «recaló con considerable retraso» (p. 18)[2]; así, gracias a su colaboración con las reconocidas editoriales Suhrkamp y Fischer y a su especial relación con las principales voces literarias de América Latina, se llevó a cabo la traducción y publicación de los títulos más destacados del momento, y en más de una ocasión los lectores alemanes pudieron disfrutar en vivo de sus autores favoritos.
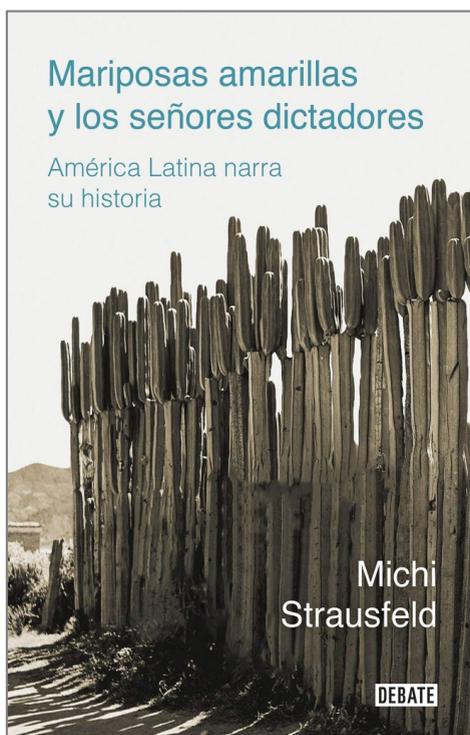
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[1] La traducción al español de *Gelbe Schmetterlinge und die Herren Diktatoren. Lateinamerika erzählt seine Geschichte* (S. Fischer, 2019).

[2] La numeración de las páginas corresponde a la versión electrónica del libro: Michi Strausfeld,

Mariposas amarillas y los señores dictadores. América Latina narra su historia, traducción de Ibon Zubiaur, Barcelona, Debate, 2021, 576 p., ISBN 9788418056116, Google EPUB.

El amplio y a la vez minucioso recorrido que la autora emprende por quinientos años de historia, literatura, cultura y política latinoamericanas, y que «aspira a difundir algunos hechos básicos desde el punto de vista de los latinoamericanos» (p. 24), nos coloca ante dos perspectivas de lectura entrelazadas: una diacrónica, objetiva y externa, que sigue la línea temporal de los tumultuosos acontecimientos que han moldeado el devenir histórico latinoamericano, y otra sincrónica, subjetiva e interna, pero no menos rigurosa, que desvela su íntima y fuerte relación con América Latina, «esa región emocionante e inspiradora» (p. 7) que lleva medio siglo explorando. Y lo que aglutina este apabullante quehacer histórico-cultural es la literatura.

Ya desde el título Strausfeld se encarga de aludir a ese inextricable vínculo, tan idiosincrásico de América Latina, que une la ajetreada historia del subcontinente con su no menos efervescente literatura: las mariposas amarillas garciamarquianas —una constante simbólica del realismo mágico— y los dictadores, «"el único personaje mitológico que ha producido América Latina"» (p. 2) y que ha engendrado la más elocuente materialización narrativa del difícil y cambiante equilibrio entre literatura e historia: la novela del dictador.

El doble enfoque en torno al cual se articula este ambicioso libro — no un «tratado histórico o académico» (p. 24), sino el fruto de «lecturas y viajes...» (p. 24)— queda meridianamente ilustrado por su misma estructura: en cada una de las tres partes del ensayo Strausfeld entreteje, con erudición y una extraordinaria capacidad de síntesis, los capítulos destinados a narrar la historia tanto política como literaria de América Latina a

través de «textos literarios [...] ensayos, poemas y, sobre todo, [...] novelas que han escrito la historia y cuyo eco ha hecho historia» (p. 8) con una serie de entrañables semblanzas que esbozan a grandes figuras del mundo cultural y literario latinoamericano de las que la autora fue amiga y confidente: Alejo Carpentier, Carlos Fuentes, Isabel Allende, João Ubaldo Ribeiro, Gabriel García Márquez, Augusto Roa Bastos, Juan Rulfo, Mario Vargas Llosa, Octavio Paz, Darcy Ribeiro, Manuel Puig, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Carlos Onetti, Julio Cortázar, Tomás Eloy Martínez o Elena Poniatowska. Así es como estos «breves homenajes» (p. 24), salpicados de recuerdos y vivencias personales, se convierten en la prueba de gratitud que Strausfeld desea mostrarles por haberle enseñado a «conocer y amar su fascinante continente» (p. 24).

La primera parte, precedida por una sugerente introducción titulada «Novelas que escriben la historia», abarca todo el siglo XIX, desde el descubrimiento y la conquista hasta la independencia y el caudillismo, mientras que la segunda y la tercera se desarrollan a partir de los dos hitos revolucionarios que marcaron histórica y socialmente el siglo XX en América Latina: el mexicano y el cubano, respectivamente. A modo de colofón, Strausfeld intenta aproximarse a la compleja actualidad sociopolítica del subcontinente y lo hace con una mirada panorámica, enfocándose de modo especial en resaltar lo frágiles e inestables que todavía resultan las democracias latinoamericanas.

El profundo y refinado conocimiento que la estudiosa alemana prodiga al desgranar las intrincadas realidades históricas, sociopolíticas y culturales de América Latina se ve potenciado por el despliegue de sensibilidad que manifiesta a la hora de dar testimonio, con afecto y

admiración, de los privilegiados encuentros y fecundas conversaciones que ha mantenido a lo largo de varias décadas con prominentes intelectuales y escritores de la élite cultural y literaria latinoamericana.

Su vasto periplo arranca con los insignes precursores del *boom* y la nómina de este gran fenómeno cultural y recala en la actualidad donde Strausfeld saca a la palestra a un buen número de autores del *posboom* y la nueva literatura latinoamericana, fuertemente concienciados de los males de su tiempo: Fernando Vallejo, Héctor Abad Facionlince, Jorge Franco, Rodrigo Rey Rosa, Evelio Rosero, Yuri Herrera, Jorge Volpi, Sergio Álvarez, Juan Gabriel Vásquez, Santiago Roncagliolo, Juan Pablo Villalobos o Daniel Alarcón. Los acompaña el así llamado «*boom* latinoamericano de mujeres» —un nutrido coro de voces femeninas empoderadas y talentosas, como Laura Restrepo, Gioconda Belli, Lina Meruane, Guadalupe Nettel, Mariana Enríquez, Samanta Schweblin, Karina Sainz Borgo o Fernanda Melchor, entre muchas otras.

Ahora bien, la doble perspectiva de lectura que proporciona el texto está supeditada a un elemento estructural e ideológico clave, que la autora da a conocer en la introducción: «Desde hace ya más de cinco siglos hay un diálogo entre Europa y América Latina [...]» (p. 8). Se propone averiguar «cómo se llevó a cabo este diálogo y cómo se lleva» (p. 8), identificar «qué conocimientos serían deseables para que discurra al fin de igual a igual» (p. 8) e indagar acerca de «cómo han afrontado y afrontan los autores su historia y sus (auto)obligaciones literarias y políticas» (p. 19), «[...] en resumen, cómo narran de forma crítica su "historia"» (p. 20).

Más aún, lo que Strausfeld busca con este análisis exhaustivo es cuestionar desde el prisma descolonial y antiimperialista «la perspectiva eurocéntrica y estadounidense» (p. 8) para «empatizar con el otro» (p. 8). Por consiguiente, y en línea con este objetivo, consideramos que el discurso asumido por la autora desdibuja parcialmente, cuando no elude, los elementos culturales constructivos y nada desdeñables que las potencias colonizadoras —y nos referimos particularmente a los españoles— implantaron en sus provincias de ultramar.

Tras pasar revista a las realidades históricas y literarias de las primeras cuatro centurias, la autora se detiene en examinar algunos de los temas acuciantes que han estado ocupando los espacios discursivos (político, social, literario) latinoamericanos desde el siglo XX hasta hoy día: la búsqueda de la identidad, la herencia negra en Brasil y el Caribe, la urbanización desaforada y la catástrofe medioambiental, las dictaduras militares, las guerrillas y el narcotráfico, las guerras civiles en Centroamérica o el imperialismo estadounidense. Pero también señala otros de los problemas lacerantes de América Latina: la pobreza y la desigualdad social extremas, el racismo, el clasismo, la migración, la omnipresente corrupción o la violencia incontrolable.

Todo esto queda lúcidamente reflejado en un nuevo género que escritores y periodistas como Juan Villoro, Alma Guillermoprieto, Martín Caparrós, Jon Lee Anderson u Óscar Martínez, entre otros, han venido desarrollando y consolidando en las últimas dos décadas: la «crónica» —un texto híbrido donde la investigación periodística se entrecruza con el relato literario. Junto a las «crónicas», imprescindibles para conocer

y comprender la polifacética actualidad latinoamericana, Strausfeld sitúa las novelas policiacas —otro género que ha llegado a afianzarse, con representantes como Leonardo Padura, Claudia Piñeiro o Santiago Gamboa—, que también se encargan de bucear en los problemas pasados o actuales del subcontinente.

Desde luego, para lograr esta visión totalizadora de cómo ha intentado la literatura pensar y contar la historia de América Latina, la editora se sirve de una cantidad impresionante de novelas y ensayos; obviamente, por razones diversas, no todos los textos ocupan en igual medida su atención: mientras algunos reciben tan solo una mención, otros se benefician de resúmenes críticos bastante elaborados. Asimismo, la contextualización histórica rigurosa nunca falta en sus análisis, lo cual demuestra su habilidad en cribar y dosificar la información, así como en saber mantener el balance entre crítica literaria, comentario personal y dato histórico.

No obstante, la autora admite que, pese al auge que está experimentando la literatura latinoamericana contemporánea, Europa lleva varios años mostrando su falta de entusiasmo en acoger a la nueva ola de escritores. Al final, Strausfeld apuesta por la necesidad de restablecer ese diálogo histórico-cultural que tras el relumbrón del *boom* parece haberse interrumpido y anima a ejercitar nuestra mirada europea, quizás demasiado anclada en lo canónico, para superar el embrujo del «realismo mágico».

ALINA ȚIȚEI
Profesora titular,
Universidad "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" de Iaşi
*Email: alina83titei@yahoo.com*

BOOKS

Florina Ilis, R*omanul japonez în secolul al XX-lea [The Japanese Novel in the 20th Century]*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2022, 225 p.

In recent years, a continuous interest for Japanese culture, language, values and literature can be noticed in the West, including in Romania. With numerous Japanese writers becoming the favourite authors of numerous people, a desire to understand Japanese literature on a deeper level can be felt. The volume *The Japanese Novel in the 20th Century* comes as a response to the need for exploring the development of Japanese literature, as it provides the readers with all the necessary information on the literary trends and their progress in the 20th century.

The author wants not only to provide an outlook of the literary tendencies of the time, but also to understand them to their very core and provide the necessary tools to visualise the big picture and the various factors which led to the changes.
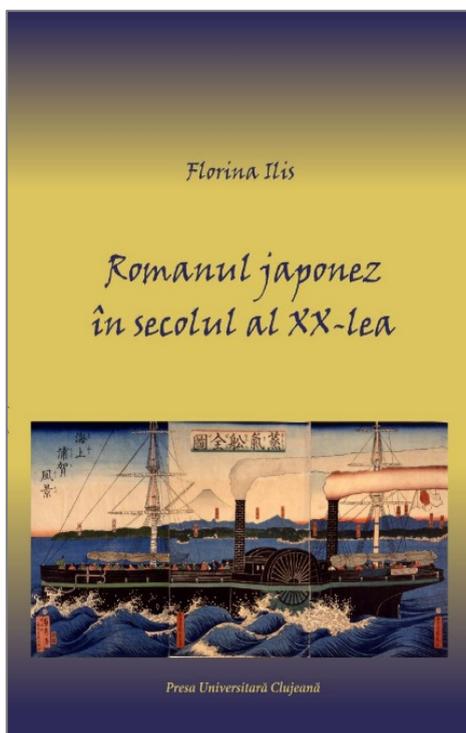
The author manages to provide a deep, intricate background for the literary works analysed, which aids the reader in understanding a culture different from theirs.

The volume follows multiple evolutionary threads: cultural, social and political, and manages to create a systematic analysis of them and their influence on the way literature was perceived and created. In order to illustrate the main directions of thought of the 20th century, the authors and the novels discussed in the volume have been carefully selected, offering a clear image of the 20th century literary scene.

The first chapter (*Către o nouă ordine socială. Tradiționalism vs. Occidentalizare.* [*Towards a New Social Order. Traditionalism vs Westernization*]) highlights a very important period, not only for literature, but for Japanese history

and society altogether. The chapter pays special attention to the social and cultural events that led to the development and shift in the literary scene, as these events are the catalyst that set in motion the literary perspective of the 20th century. Focusing on the changes of the Meiji era (1868 – 1912), the chapter explores the works of three famous writers: Mori Ōgai, Natsume Sōseki and Enchi Fumiko, each having a subchapter dedicated to their craft. In order to help the reader understand the complex phenomena of the Meiji era and how the conflict between modernity and tradition influenced the works of the three authors, the first subchapter (*O nouă ordine socială? Contextul literar* [*A New Social Order? The Literary Context*]*)* provides the historical, cultural, political and social background of the main events and changes that the Meiji era brought. In order to properly highlight the importance of the Meiji transformations, Florina Ilis starts the subchapter with the context of Tokugawa or Edo era (1603-1868) and its "strict social hierarchy" (29), an era in which Japan had little contact with foreign countries. As shortcomings of Tokugawa's system (such as deepening social differences or maintaining feudal relationships) started to become more and more noticeable, in the new Meiji era the focus shifted towards modernisation, as "the idea of modernisation was almost synonymous with the idea of civilization" (32). While some were welcoming the new changes, others were reticent, seeing the benefits of the old, traditional ways. This clash of views gave rise to a complex dialogue between new and old, modern and traditional, that could be noticed on all levels of culture, including in literature. Florina Ilis provides the readers with some of the most important

figures (such as Fukuzawa Yukichi) and their beliefs, as well as reforms from the period, but also with scholars who, under Western influences, started seeing the literary novel from a new perspective, such as Tsubouchi Shōyō, helping to shift the view towards the inner life and feelings of the characters (under the influence of the European realist novel). These new perspectives opened the path to innovation for writers like Mori Ōgai or Natsume Sōseki, later discussed in the chapter. One last important historical element explained in the subchapter is the end of the Meiji era, a period that deepened the discourse of the benefits and shortcomings of modernity and tradition. The Meiji era ended with Emperor Meiji's death, followed shortly by the suicide of General Nogi Maresuke, who committed *junshi*, a type of voluntary death in which one follows their master in death. A gesture of loyalty difficult to understand for foreigners, Florina Ilis explains clearly and in an easy-to-understand manner the meaning of the general's deed for the Japanese people and why it may seem inexplainable to the Western public. Seen as a gesture that reminded people of the importance of the traditional values in an era of rapid modernisation, the dilemma of tradition and modernity grew stronger, these events and their consequences being reflected in the literature of the time.

Successfully managing to explain the complex socio-historical changes of the Meiji era and how these influenced the Japanese mentality, the volume *The Japanese Novel in the 20th Century* continues to further analyse in the upcoming subchapters how these phenomena were reflected in literature. The next three subchapters focus on three important authors of the time: Mori Ōgai, Natsume Sōseki and Enchi

Fumiko. In the second subchapter (*Mori Ōgai*), Mori Ōgai is highlighted as one of the adepts of modernisation through his novels, being influenced by the European Naturalism literary movement. However, after Emperor Meiji's death, Mori Ōgai's style changed drastically, giving up on his consecrated style and his "vaguely romantic thematic" (46) in favour of a literature that is inspired by historical facts, problematizing the clash between two different mentalities. Influenced by General Nogi's *junshi*, Ōgai wrote several works themed around voluntary ritualic death and its implications and meanings, the Japanese writer using the historical context to shed light on the relationship between the past and the present, and ultimately balancing the traditional Japanese education and Western thought. Florina Ilis proceeds to present in the third subchapter (*Natsume Sōseki*) another Japanese author who was also preoccupied with the difference between modernity and tradition, as "Natsume Sōseki's whole work can be understood as a sign of this oscillation between modernization and tradition" (60). The subchapter brings forth not only his literary works, but also his theoretical texts, analysing the state of literature and its directions. An in-depth analysis of the novel *I Am a Cat* presents to the readers not only the plot of the book, but also the way in which Sōseki cast a unique light upon the society he lived in, subtly underscoring the issue of traditional literature in contrast with modern literature. Through the analysis of the novel *Kokoro*, the subchapter rekindles the issue of General Nogi's death, Florina Ilis managing to capture in a concise manner the differences between Mori Ōgai's and Natsume Sōseki's vision. Although *Kokoro* was written under the influence of General

Nogi's *junshi*, the novel is not a historical one, but rather one that reframes concomitantly the state of society at the time, as well as the issue of individuality and the self. The last subchapter (*Enchi Fumiko*) presents Japan's modernisation from a new perspective: the issue of femininity in a modern society in which patriarchal values were just as important as in the traditional society. The thorough analysis of the novel *The Waiting Years* reveals that although the Meiji era was one of modernisation, the social system remained fundamentally unchanged, with women living difficult lives in a society of patriarchal privileges. The novel *Masks* is examined through parallels with *nō* theatre, the subchapter explaining essential theatre elements that support the readers in understanding Enchi Fumiko's multi-layered novel and the complex mentality of the feminine characters. Through the last subchapter, the chapter *Towards a New Social Order. Traditionalism vs Westernization* manages to give an elaborate explanation of the Meiji era and reflect the struggles of its modernisation process in novels from three different authors (Mori Ōgai, Natsume Sōseki and Enchi Fumiko), therefore providing the public with three different perspectives on the issue of modernisation and tradition.

Similar to the first chapter, the second chapter (*Către o nouă ordine literară.* [*Towards a New Literary Order*]) presents the social and cultural context of the era (the end of Meiji era and the Taishō era [1912-1945]), before going in-depth about the most important authors of the time and their works. Florina Ilis masterfully explains the shift from novels that depict the social context, towards novels focused on the self (*shi-shōsetsu*), having an intimate outlook on the thoughts and

feelings of the characters. In order to illustrate these changes, in the upcoming chapters, the vision of Nagai Kafū, Dazai Osamu, Abe Kōbō, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and Kawabata Yasunari are analysed. In the first subchapter (*Nagai Kafū*), Nagai Kafū's relationship with *shi-shōsetsu* is discussed through his work, particularly within *Something Strange Across the River*, in which the relationship between narrator-author-protagonist takes a unique form, as the boundaries between the three are difficult to distinguish. The novel focuses on the inner world of the protagonist, depicting a nostalgic Edo (former Tokyo) within the fast-changing country. The second subchapter (*Dazai Osamu*) depicts how *shi-shōsetsu* was further developed by Dazai Osamu, who went beyond its properties, by creating an "authentic literature, without construction artifices or stylistic flourishes" (124). However, Florina Ilis's analysis of Dazai Osamu's style goes further than his contribution to the new writing genre, highlighting the way he constructs his characters and how his personal style evolved. Further developing the post-war literary scene, the third subchapter (*Abe Kōbō*) presents Abe Kobō's work, defined by the exploration of the theme of freedom, particularly in relation to a strict system. A new perspective is shed upon the literature of the time through the analysis of *The Woman in the Dunes*, a novel that managed to convey a political and a social message at the same time, relating the issues of the time and feelings of ordinary people. A new facet of the literary genre is shed through the works of Tanizaki Jun'ichirō and Yasunari Kawabata, as these are defined by a delicate aesthetic sense. The fourth subchapter (*Tanizaki Jun'ichorō*) proves that through

his works, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō managed to see through an aesthetic lens everyday life and its peculiarities, as he explored "from an aesthetic point of view the possibilities of art to express even the most unusual situations" (146). The theme of *beauty* and aesthetics is also predominantly used in Yasunari Kawabata's works, as the last subchapter (*Yasunari Kawabata*) indicates. Through the analysis of *The Sound of the Mountain* and *Snow Country*, the last subchapter analyses the connection between the modern man and everything around him, including his relationship with nature. Although the volume depicts the literary scene of the 20th century, Florina Ilis manages to create for the readers an intricate image of Japanese literature, from its beginnings to the 20th century. In doing so, she analyses the novel *The Sound of the Mountain* through a parallel of one of its chapters with one of the episodes of *The Tale of Genji*, written in the Heian era (794-1185), illustrating the continuity and the links between different literary genres.

The third chapter (*Noua ordine politică* [*The New Political Order*]) starts with a description of the post-war society and the discourse of what made the Japanese people unique, a discourse known as *nihonjinron*. The complex events that followed the Second World War and their effect on the Japanese society and mentality are further developed in the first subchapter (*Mishima Yukio*), where the analysis of the author's works is mixed with an analysis of Mishima Yukio's convoluted life and strong political views. This approach offers the public a better understanding not only of the way in which Mishima's novels are constructed, but also of his tragic death. Florina Ilis carefully parallels events from the author's life

with how they influenced his writing and literary views, offering a multifaceted perspective of the novel *Confessions of a Mask* and the tetralogy *The Sea of Fertility.* The last subchapter (*Ōe Kenzaburō*) illustrates a new perspective on the political situation of the country. If Mishima Yukio was devoted to militarist discourse, Ōe Kenzaburō is situated on the opposite side of the spectrum, critiquing the militarist politics from the Second World War. As a result, his works may prove uncomfortable for the readers, as they directly approach controversial or taboo topics. The subchapter analyses the novel *A Personal Matter*, observing the way in which society and the characters react to the birth of the protagonist's son, who was born with a brain malformation. Ōe's works prove to tackle sensitive topics without any reservations and illustrate human nature at its lowest points: "the authenticity preached by Ōe renders the humanity in man precisely when he criticizes him and represents him in the lowest degradation point" (191).

The last chapter (*Noua ordine mondială. Postmodernismul* [*The New World Order. Postmodernism*]) depicts the need to re-evaluate the past, analysing the merits and the shortcomings of modernism. Under the *retrospective* thought, a need to recover the links with the 19th century and to readjust the balance with modernity was felt throughout different areas of culture. In the case of literature, Florina Ilis identifies and later analyses two different attitudes: *soft postmodernism* (the oscillation between reality and the imaginary, that manages to bring forth the "fragility of the world" [195]) and *hard postmodernism* (which approaches difficult themes, such as violence, sex, alcohol, etc.). For each type of postmodernism, the volume analyses a representative author, further elaborating on the characteristics of the two. Therefore, the first subchapter (*Postmodernismul soft. Murakami Haruki* [*Soft Postmodernism. Murakami Haruki*]) analyses the way in which Murakami Haruki manages to "solve the crisis of the self through fiction or through the fictionalisation of a world already fictionalised through media discourse" (203), creating works in which the real and fictional world interact and intertwine. The subchapter explains not only the literary style of Murakami, but also his popularity and what sets him apart from his contemporaries (Ōe Kenzaburō and Murakami Ryū), thoroughly presenting the Japanese author's view on globalisation and analysing his writing style, accused of resembling direct translation from English, rather than Japanese prose. *Hard postmodernism* is analysed in the last subchapter (*Postmodernismul hard. Murakami Ryū* [*Hard Postmodernism. Murakami Ryū*]), through the novel *Coin Locker Babies*, which explores heavy themes, such as violence, sex, homicide or drugs, within the story of two children who have been abandoned in a coin locker. The subchapter offers a clear image of the way in which a text can create different worlds, while explaining and exploring the inner and outer struggles of the two protagonists. Through clear analysis and thorough explanations, Florina Ilis manages to end the subchapter—and the volume—by offering a consistent view on postmodernism and its implications.

Through its intricate presentation of Japanese literature in the 20th century, the volume *The Japanese Novel in the 20th Century* paints an elaborate image of not only the literary scene, but also the historical, cultural and social events of the

time. Florina Ilis creates a historical foundation on which the literary arguments are built, helping the reader understand complex phenomena, different from the Western culture and, therefore, at times difficult to understand.

In the volume, Florina Ilis engages in a constant dialogue with numerous other literary critics, explaining their perspectives and bringing new arguments to their discourse. By doing so, she offers the readers a complete overview of the literary works discussed and the way they have been perceived by both Japanese literary critics and foreign literary critics. This makes *The Japanese Novel in the 20th Century* a suitable book for a wide audience, from Japanese language and literature students (to whom the author dedicates the volume), and literary critics or experts, to anyone interested in Japanese culture, literature, or history.

The volume *The Japanese Novel in the 20th Century* is remarkable not only through its literary analysis, but also through its storytelling, painting the cultural, social and politic image of Japan in the 20th century. In doing so, a clear, complete image of the literary currents and tendencies is painted against the background of the main events of the time. The volume is a valuable study on a fundamental period in Japanese history and literature, bringing close to the Romanian public an exotic, fascinating culture.

IOANA-CILIANA TUDORICĂ
PhD Student, Babeș-Bolyai University
Cluj-Napoca, Romania
ciliana.tudorica@gmail.com

BOOKS

T.V. Reed, *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Postmodern Realist Fiction: Resisting Master Narratives*, New York: Bloomsbury, 2021, 274 p.

T.V. Reed, the Lewis E. and Stella G. Buchanan Distinguished Professor of English and American Studies at Washington State University, opens his wide-ranging survey of "postmodern realist fiction" with an intriguing statement: "There is no such thing as postmodern fiction." This is because postmodernism is "not one agreed-upon thing" (15), but rather "a notoriously slippery category," "a global phenomenon, with writers hailing from all continents," except for Antarctica (1), and according to its first major theorist, Jean-François Lyotard, "a recurring historical phenomenon," arising "whenever segments of a culture develop an intense self-consciousness about language as a force in creating the world" (5). Both the origins and endpoints of postmodernism have been intensely debated, while the lines separating it from other forms of representation have been drawn and redrawn in ways that allow for but are not limited to what Reed calls *postmodernist realism*: a body of late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century works that "while still critical of 'realism' as a conservative ideology, tend to retain more recognizable elements of traditional fiction" (12), along with the imprint of their social and historical locations. As such, these narratives stand in sharp contrast to, on the one hand, "distorted versions of postmodernism" that have been dismissed as "empty formalism" (10), as "obscure and cynical worldplay, lacking both substance and moral values" (2, 3), and, on the other, to "white supremacist, misogynist, anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, and Islamophobic discourses" that have been on the rise in the last decade or so (2-3).
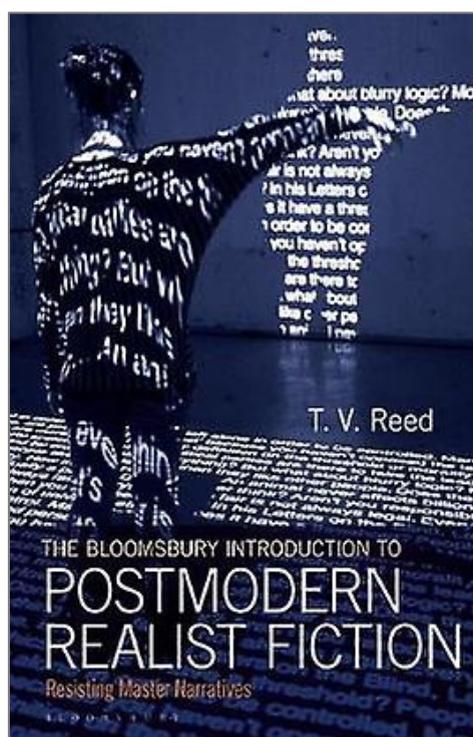
Reed builds up the complex picture of postmodernism with brush strokes at first, clearing up the "terminal confusion" surrounding three interrelated concepts—*postmodern theory*, *postmodernist aesthetics*, and *postmodernity*—and outlining several "conditions and styles" before he focuses on specific topics and texts. The evolving "story" of postmodernism that emerges from Reed's account is one of change and continuity, more like a spiral than a straight line, swirling around the recognition, which underlies postmodern theory, that language shapes our interpretation of an "imperfectly knowable reality" (5). Hence the questioning of "all absolutes, all fundamentalisms—religious, philosophical, and political" (5), the "assault on naïve realism" (36), and the foregrounding of "different kinds of knowledge embedded in different kinds of experience, thought, and feeling" (6). Drawing on Donna Haraway's concept of "situated knowledges" (45), Reed highlights the subversive and transformative power of those "other, multiple stories" that "offer essential tools for survival and resistance" (214) to "*gran récits*" (Lyotard), to "single stories" (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie) about cultural "others," and last but not least, to the false, mass-mediated narratives of our post-truth era (12). "Novels alone," he argues, "do not change the world, but they can play a role in shaping the sensibility of those who resist master narratives, those who engage in social movements and the other forces that bring about real change" (9).

Reed devotes the second chapter, perhaps the book's most useful one from a theoretical perspective, to the interplay of "postmodern conditions and postmodernist styles" in order to show how aspects of the former, "both liberatory and dangerous ones," have "shaped the literary imagination from the 1960s to the present" (32). In pursuit of this goal, he covers a lot of ground, on "roads" taken by other postmodern theorists, starting with Lyotard, whose seminal study *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) set the tone and terms for theorizing the postmodern era as one defined by "'incredulity toward *gran récits*" (20). Generally translated as "metanarratives," these "big stories," as Reed colloquially dubs them, are totalizing belief systems—religious, philosophical, political—which foster illusions about reason, order, unity, scientific progress, human perfectibility, etc. Not only did Lyotard foresee the "proliferation of *petit récits,* more modest stories, more partial or local truths," but he also "presciently argued" that advances in digital communications would play a major role in generating "competing, irreconcilably different narratives" (20, 21). Reed meticulously catalogues the economic, political, and social conditions of postmodernity, tracing both the transformations they have undergone since the post-Second World War era and their cultural implications: the decolonization struggles and revolutionary movements that "profoundly reshaped both the Global South and the Global North" (22); the morphing of *postcolonial* conditions into *neocolonial* relationships, especially driven by the United States and accelerated by the forces of neoliberal corporate globalization, which have contributed to enviromental degradation (23), economic inequality, *cultural imperialism* by the overdeveloped nations (24), terrorism, nuclear warfare, "massive migrations," and "increased multiculturalization" (27). In turn, these last two conditions brought "both highly positive forms

of diversity and deep ethno-racial tensions" (28), and together with decolonization and social movements "challenged the centrality of a *liberal humanist self* that claimed to be universal," coherent, and autonomous, rather than fluid and fragmented, relational and intersectional, historically and culturally constructed (28).

In the second half of Chapter 2, Reed highlights those stylistic techniques—many of them recycled modernist devices (unreliable narrators, irony, shifts in tone and time frames, disjointed plots, open endings, genre bending and/or blending, intertextuality, magical realism, etc.).—whereby postmodern realists have sought to capture a more nuanced understanding of identity and history by "disrupting" what Roland Barthes dubbed the "reality effect" of traditional realism (34). A key tenet of postmodern aesthetics invoked by Reed holds that form and content are "inseparable," and thus "deeply political because *literary conventions* not only reflect but also *shape social conventions*" (33). Therefore, he notes, for postmodern realists, "artistic resistance" to what we take for granted as "natural" or "normal" is bound up with "political praxis" (35). Precisely because it draws attention to "the processes by which the 'real' is invented through narrative," science fiction/speculative fiction/fantasy has led critics like Brian McHale to see it as emblematic of postmodern fiction that revolves around "questions of ontology," positing a "*multiverse*" made up of "multiple, incompatible worlds," as opposed to "different angles on the same world" employed by modernists (50). Unlike the latter, postmodernists embrace openness, uncertainty, and fragmentation, but, Reed concedes, just like the modernist aesthetic, postmodern style can

become "commodified, tamed, made to serve the very forces it seeks to critique" (14). Thus, he maintains, "it is up to us as readers to work with these texts, to create contexts of reception that release their power to help bring about much needed changes in the world" (52).

Reed urges readers to "[k]eep this task in mind" as he turns to his selection of postmodern realist novels, all written in English, by critically acclaimed, canonical postmodern writers, but also lesser known ones, and tackled under distinct yet flexible thematic rubrics. For instance, works that explore the fluidity of identity and "sociopolitical bases of identity formation" under postmodern conditions include those covered in Chapter 3 (Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote*, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, to name but a few) and the hybrid "autofiction" discussed in Chapter 8 (Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Olivia Laing's *Crudo*, among others). Since the different facets and transformations of the postmodern self are interwoven with those of the body, the next chapter maps out the intersections of "gender, sexuality, race, and the body" in works by Jeannette Winterson, Angela Carter, Katherine Dunn, Shelley Jackson, Daisy Johnson, and Akwaeki Emezi. Chapter 5 traces the shift from the nuclear family model to extended, cross-generational family structures within communities of color (99), richly represented in novels by Anna Castillo, Junot Diaz, Eden Robinson, among others. The presence of the past and the "emplotment" (Hayden White) of both history and fiction are evident in works of "historiographic metafiction" (Linda Hutcheon), perhaps "the most characteristic form of the postmodern novel," which

Reed samples in Chapter 6, with emphasis on Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, and Leslie Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*. Chapter 7 centers on the critical practice of rewriting the canonical stories of the past in revisionary novels by Jean Rhys, Bharati Mukerjee, Salman Rushdie, A.S. Byatt, Jessica Hagedorn, and Sherman Alexie. The last two chapters take up key issues concerning human and ecological survival in the present and future, respectively: the dislocations of people caused by war, famine, poverty, globalization, political repression, terrorism, religious extremism, and new technolgies figure prominently in Tommy Orange's *There There*, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, Rabih Allamdenddine's *Koolaids: The Art of War*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's A*mericanah*; just as important, the perils and possibilities of AI, the threats posed by surveillance states, biotech, and climate crises, find expression in s/f and CliFi novels, including Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014) that projects a dystopian vision and participates in the cultural movement of Afrofuturism (227).

The brief but illuminating introduction to each of the aforementioned chapters lays out a historical/cultural framework within which to consider variations on that theme and set them alongside or against each other. Most importantly, Reed insists, his overviews cannot substitute for reading the novels themselves, so "this book exists only to point [readers] toward the real books" (17). To echo his assessment of A.S. Byatt's novel *Possession* (1990), Reed's own book is "rich with love—love of literature, of the past, of [memorable characters]," even as it mounts a compelling "critique of the excesses of some strands of postmodern theory" (162). Rigorously researched and packed with keen insights, this introduction to postmodern realist fiction is bound to resonate with scholars, teachers, students, and literature lovers.

LAURA WALKER SAVU
Adjunct professor, Columbia College
Columbia SC, USA
Email: lesavu@gmail.com