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A NEW CONCEPT OF LITERARY HISTORY. ROMANIAN LITERATURE AND THE NETWORK STRUCTURES

If we take into account the new technologies of the 21st century, could we imagine a concept of literary history which, in terms of its structural criteria, is fundamentally different from the traditional concepts we are accustomed to? Could we imagine the content of an alternative literary history abandoning the usual classification (based on literary epochs, literary currents or literary moments) and functioning on a network of interdisciplinary intersections between authors and texts? The present study attempts to draw the picture of a literary history based on network structures which connect authors and texts belonging to different epochs and currents by means of hypertextual nodes and links, rather than through linear chronologies.

There are two possible starting points for such an endeavour, compatible with one another.

The first starting point is related to the field of hypertextual theory. This type of non-linear theory can be associated, on the one hand, to the contributions of the Tel Quel group, particularly to those of Gérard Genette, on the categories of transtextuality¹. On the other hand, it has to do with the hypertextual structures encountered in computer science. The transtextual theories developed by the Tel Quel group suggest a tree-shaped, interrelated, trans-historicist model of the literary text. It could benefit the field of literary history via a selection of authors and texts quite different from the chronological, historicist pattern. The hypertextual structures identified in computer science project a 3-D model of textuality, based on the “depth” of the digital text and on its star-shaped structures.

¹ In *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré* (1982), Gérard Genette defines *transtextuality* as “everything that connects, directly or indirectly, a text to another text”. Genette identifies five types of transtextuality: *intertextuality* (“the presence of a text within another text”, be it a quotation, an allusion or a type of plagiarism), *paratextuality* (associated with everything that accompanies a text: title, subtitle, preface, epilogue etc.), *metatextuality* (the nonnominal relation between texts, which excludes quotation), *architextuality* (the most abstract and implicit kind of transtextuality, represented by the typological definition of the text: novel, short story, essay, etc.) and *hypertextuality* (“everything that connects a text B (hypertext) to a text A (hypotext) in a manner different from that of a comment”). See Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La literatura en segundo grado*. Traducción de Cecilia Fernández Prieto, Madrid, Taurus, 1989, pp. 9-10. The translation of Genette’s quotations from Spanish to English belongs to me.

They could also be used in order to depict a non-linear, geometrically variable structure of literary history. In both these theoretical perspectives, the very concept of literary history may become relative or even irrelevant.

The second starting point for shaping an innovative literary history deals with network science, a relatively new field of research theorized, among others, by physicist Albert-László Barabási in his volume *Linked. The New Science of Networks*. Barabási discovers and validates the existence of apparently chaotic, still regular, mathematical structures, conventionally called *networks*. These networks can sometimes have a fractal aspect, as mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot called them in the seventies and are, nowadays, in use in fields such as biology, sociology, economics, Internet science. Hence, why would literature and, more precisely, the history of literature, not be possibly structured on the basis of such models that rely on self-similarity, self-organization, self-reproduction or, in other words, on organized chaos? In order to observe the differences and the potential for success of a chaotically organized history of literature, let us first see what traditional literary history looks like and on what criteria authors and texts are being regarded as eligible.

In Romanian culture, but not only, the customary way to structure the content of a particular literary history is to take into account order, fluency and a deterministic organization, as in: an epoch follows another epoch, a literary current generates a literary counter-current and so on. From this perspective, the most frequently used criteria in Romanian literary histories, either separately or combined, are *historicism* (the content of a literary history is structured according to periods, epochs, decades, moments), *typology* (the content of a literary history is divided into parts that reflect the way in which authors and their texts illustrate one typology or another) and *ideology* (the content of a literary history takes into account the authors' affiliation to a specific ideology or the manner in which their texts illustrate or reject that specific ideology).

For instance, literary histories such as those written by G. Călinescu or I. Negoïtescu follow a linear, chronological frame (a decade follows another decade, a century another century and so on). On the other hand, the historical, chronological criterion is almost unavoidable when conceiving the structure and content of a literary history, as not only our perception of the cultural field, but also that of time are, traditionally, linear (the so-called arrow of time: from year 0 to present).

However, from the second and third decades of the 20th century onward, quantum physics and quantum mechanics did come up with a new model of space and time, called space-time, from which linearity, regularity and the principle of causal determinism (A generates B) are excluded. For instance, from a quantum perspective, it is normal for multiple strips of space-time to coexist without having any direct, perceivable contact points. Obviously, such a potentially variable model is far from the network one, which still has to connect its components via star-shape 3-D links, but this model can help understand the way in which *history* (as in

literary history, for instance) does no longer or not necessarily represent a succession of moments, events, authors and texts.

The usual literary histories are, in fact, histories in the literal sense of the word (linear, successive, deterministic), applied to the field of literature. Consequently, the authors of literary histories who use other criteria (such as typology or ideology) are forced to take into account a chronological organization of content. On the other hand, the network perspective and structures diminish or even dismiss the role of chronology and linearity in content organization by making use of leaps over the expanse of what is conventionally known as past, present and, once again, past.

A non-linear history of literature, one based on network structures, would establish connections between “reticular” authors and texts belonging to epochs and currents far apart from each other. It would profit a critical and theoretical debate and could lead to an innovative mapping of Romanian literature. One of the interesting aspects of this seemingly chaotic cartography would be that non-linearity not only becomes a feature of such a star-shaped history of literature, but also what we might call a *hub*, a node of multiple links between authors illustrating different aesthetic currents and tendencies. These authors’ texts are themselves a reflection of the non-linearity principle, as both their structure and their content follow the “chaotically ordered” pattern. Further on, we will provide examples to testify to this particular aspect. But first, let us examine the defining features of non-linear literary structures.

Narrative non-linearity is usually associated to a network structure consisting of multiple textual nodes and links. These nodes and links are visible both in individual texts and in the connections between different texts and authors who do not necessarily find themselves in temporal, aesthetic or ideological proximity. The unifying element would reside in the hypertextual manner in which some texts are being structured as networks, generating an effect of “star-shaped resonance” (a kind of inter- and trans-textual “controlled echo effect”, in the words of postmodernist fiction writer Mircea Nedelciu). From the standing point of the new theories of communication, the term *network* would no longer be defined as an *ensemble* made out of criss-crossing lines, but as a 3-D structure which deconstructs and reshapes linearity in the form of a hologram.

For instance, Ion Budai-Deleanu’s “mock-heroic, satirical” epic poem *Țiganiada* [*The Gypsies’s Camp*] can be regarded as the first example of non-linear literature in Romanian culture. The oldest of the poem’s versions was published by Teodor Codrescu in the *Buciumul Român* magazine of 1875 and 1877, while a second version was later published, în 1925, by Gheorghe Cardaș². Should we apply a postmodernist perspective to *Țiganiada*, it could lead to a textualist reading of the poem, similar to the Tel Quel group’s transtextual theories. Such a

² See D. Popovici, *Studii literare I*, Cluj, Dacia, 1972, p. 465.

perspective would confirm both the complexity of the textual network used by Budai-Deleanu and the distant connections it establishes with postmodernist texts written a couple of centuries later.

If we analyse the footnotes that accompany Budai-Deleanu's poem, the hypertextual structure of *Țiganiada* becomes obvious from the very first pages. Here, the term *hypertext* could be associated to two different meanings. We could consider either Gérard Genette's *hypertext* and its connections with the *hypotext*, which is any text originated by a previous text via simple transformation or imitation³, or the digital *hypertext* we are accustomed to in the *online* world. The latter is generally defined as a *software* system allowing the deep, simultaneous crossing from one section of a text to another, or from a text to a different visual content (photograph, video etc.).

Should we establish a network connection between epochs and non-linear texts placed in different time frames, Budai-Deleanu's *Țiganiada* would find itself in the vicinity of another significant epic poem, equally rich in inter-, meta- and hypertextual references: Mircea Cărtărescu's *Levantul* [*The Levant*], particularly attractive from a hypertextual standpoint in the 2016eEdition of Cosmin Ciotloș. Although Budai-Deleanu's and Cărtărescu's texts are not fiction works, their epic component, together with their hypertextual structure, show strong similarities with the Romanian postmodernist fiction of the eighties and nineties.

Taking one step ahead in illustrating network structure literary texts, we can find at least a couple of Romanian modernist fiction authors who are relevant in terms of star-shaped literature: Camil Petrescu, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, Anton Holban. Their works are all published in the first half of the 20th century.

Although Camil Petrescu's *Patul lui Procust* [*The Bed of Procrustes*] may seem the most obvious example due to the number of self-explanatory footnotes in the novel, network structures of narrative may also be found in Petrescu's *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* [*The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War*] (1930), in Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's *Femeia în fața oglinzii* [*The Woman in front of the Mirror*] (1921) and *Concert din muzică de Bach* [*A Concert of Music by Bach*] (1925) and in Anton Holban's *O moarte care nu dovedește nimic* [*A Death That Proves Nothing*] (1931), *Ioana* (1934), and *Jocurile Daniei* [*Dania's Games*] (1971). The narrative structures of these novels and novellas are all of the hyper type, allowing the reader to make deep-level connections in each text, rather than surface ones.

Let us take the example of the characters Lică and Sia in Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's novel *Concert din muzică de Bach*. First, the reader is told, via an observer watching from a distance, that Sia might be Lică's girlfriend. Later on, another character in the novel explains that the two of them are, in fact, father and

³ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestos*, pp. 9-10.

daughter. The alternative, fluctuating, “multiverse” reality provided to the reader in terms of narrative information and textual structure may be associated with the star-shaped structures in Mircea Cărtărescu’s later postmodernist fictions.

Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu may also be considered a pioneer of the postmodernist non-linear literature because of the frequent presence in her fiction of multidimensional characters, as far as perspective is involved. For instance, reflecting characters play an essential part in the author’s texts, as they always submit conflicting perspectives on events and on the other characters. The information provided by these self-aware characters distorts reality, bending it into the shape of a type of multiple consciousness which, in turn, leads to a sort of *quantum reality* of the narrative. Such characters may be regarded as *node-characters*, as they help form the network links of the text through irradiation of fluctuating realities and permanent multiplication of the narrative perspective.

As far as Anton Holban’s novels are concerned, their non-linear features can be mostly found in the relative, contradictory information provided to the reader by the main character, Sandu. In all three of Holban’s novels, Sandu’s thinking is, in itself, non-linear, based on conflicting assumptions, radical changes of action and a fluctuating perspective on the events that are being narrated in the first person. Contradictions, the clashes of variants, the displaying of information on two opposing mental screens (Irina, in *O moarte care nu dovedește nimic*, is on some occasions smart, on others stupid; Ioana, in *Ioana*, sometimes has no taste at all in choosing her clothes and sometimes shows great taste in similar circumstances; the narrator’s emotions in *Ioana* are always subject to a two-fold split) are just some of the mental hypertexts shaped by Holban in his novels.

A brief analysis of Camil Petrescu, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu and Anton Holban’s fiction show that all three modernist authors may be better understood if we take into account their networking relation with distant texts and authors. They may be either considered predecessors of the postmodernist non-linear fiction, in which case we would be able to discover solid and convincing links between epochs and currents which have little in common, or regarded as autonomous authors of non-linear fiction, to whom postmodernist authors are related rather by coincidence, than by filiation. Only a detailed analysis of each novel and novella could tell us which one of the two perspectives is closest to the realities of their texts.

A step further from modernist fiction, at the crossroads of Romanian late modernism and postmodernism, that is in the seventies, we find a new writer illustrative of non-linear fiction: Mircea Horia Simionescu, a member of the so-called Târgoviște School. In the cycle entitled *Ingeniosul bine temperat* [*The Well-Tempered Wise Guy*], Simionescu experiments with non-linear fiction by suggesting a kind of reading very similar to that of dictionaries and of the future Internet hyperlinks. Both the narrative chronology and the reading order of Simionescu’s fiction are shattered and recomposed in the depths of a multidimensional textual game.

A decade later, in the eighth decade of the 20th century, postmodernist fiction authors Mircea Nedelciu and Gheorghe Crăciun also testify to the hyperlink structure of narrative content. From Mircea Nedelciu's display of the text on two separate paper columns, to Gheorghe Crăciun's networking text appearing on a wall which protagonist Vlad Ștefan discovers, in *Alte copii legalizate* [*Another Certified Copies*], as his own life story, the narrative non-linearity shown by these two authors has mostly to do with arranging and rearranging the text in its typographic variations of form.

On the other hand, this particular form of non-linearity is less present in the nineties, when other Romanian postmodernist fiction writers tend to abandon the formal approach to narrative and replace it with a more content-centred approach: the 3-D star-shaped perspective in constructing a text. As a result, the networking feature of these authors' texts shows fewer similarities to the *Tell Quel* patterns of transtextuality and more to the network patterns of the Internet, as well as to the neural networks of hyperlinks in the human brain. Consequently, we could identify a *virtual quality* of such texts, underlined by the presence of virtual reality technologies (as in Sebastian A. Corn and in Adrian Oțoiu's novels), mental hyperstructures (as in Ion Manolescu's *Derapaj* [*Sideslip*] or in Simona Popescu's *Exuvii* [*Exuviae*]) or phantasmatic networks of perception (Mircea Cărtărescu's *Orbitor* [*Blinding*] trilogy and his novel *Solenoid* [*Solenoid*]).

The project of an alternative history of literature, based on non-linear connections between authors and texts, is still dependent on the fact that each author and text is situated in a specific timeframe (epoch, publishing year, etc.). This specific detail is generally used by the traditional literary historians in order to create the necessary, familiar arrow of time of their work. However, a star-shaped history of literature would differ substantially from the traditional linear model, since its structure and even its graphic concept would look more like a hyperlinked 3-D website than like a flat paper book. Consequently, in order for the project to become effective, the definitive shape of a new, alternative literary history could possibly be that of a digital hyper-book.

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A NEW CONCEPT OF LITERARY HISTORY.
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(Abstract)

If we take into account the new technologies of the 21st century, could we imagine a concept of literary history which, in terms of its structural criteria, is fundamentally different from the traditional concepts we are accustomed to? Could we imagine the content of an alternative literary history abandoning the usual classification (based on literary epochs, literary currents or literary moments) and functioning on a network of interdisciplinary intersections between authors and texts? The present study attempts to draw the picture of a literary history based on network structures which connect authors and texts belonging to different epochs and currents by means of hypertextual nodes and links, rather than through linear chronologies.

Keywords: literary history, hypertextuality, network structures, postmodern literature, nodes, links.

UN NOU CONCEPT DE ISTORIE LITERARĂ
LITERATURA ROMÂNĂ ȘI STRUCTURILE DE TIP REȚEA
(Rezumat)

Pe baza noilor tehnologii ale secolului XXI, am putea imagina un concept de istorie literară care să nu funcționeze după criteriile structurale cu care suntem obișnuiți? O istorie literară alternativă, al cărei conținut să nu mai fie clasificat în funcție de epoci, curente sau momente literare, ci în funcție de intersecțiile sale interdisciplinare, atât cu alți autori/texte, cât și cu domenii conexe? Pornind de la aceste întrebări, lucrarea de față își propune descrierea și analiza unei istorii literare structurate asemenea unei rețele, în care autori și texte ce aparțin unor epoci și curente diferite să poată fi uniți prin intermediul unor noduri și legături hipertextuale.

Cuvinte-cheie: istorie literară, hipertextualitate, structuri de tip rețea, literatură postmodernă, noduri textuale, conexiuni.