

COMPTEs RENDUS / BOOK REVIEWS

CORIN BRAGA (coord.), *Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România*, vol. I. *Imaginar literar* [*The Encyclopaedia of Romanian Imaginaries*, vol. I. *Literary Imaginary*], Iași, Polirom, 2020, 472 p.

The Encyclopaedia of Romanian Imaginaries. The Literary Imaginary is part of an ambitious collection aiming to map centuries of local civilisation: literature, religion, art, history, language. The volume edited by Corin Braga focuses on the various components of the literary imaginary, from folklore to postmodernism, diasporic writing and fantastic worlds, arguing for the study of the imaginary as a productive manner of (re)viewing literature, as well as a way of comprehending its crucial role in the negotiation of identity and alterity.

In this sense, Braga's introductory essay explains that, throughout the book, the literary imaginary is seen as comprised of "imaginary constellations" and "semantic basins", according to the model imagined by Gilbert Durand, rather than authors, literary periods, or currents. Because, to quote Braga, the imaginary has "its own logic of internal development", so that the encyclopaedia focuses not on isolated archetypes but on entire "figurative galaxies" and their systemic functioning. On the one hand, this resonates with the tenets of imagology (as defined by Beller and Leerssen, among others), as the main object of analysis is precisely the textual codification of certain mental images, with their occurrences and recurrences in Romanian literature. On the other hand, if it is our representations of geography, history, nature, and humanity that lead to the formation of knowledge and imbue the world with meanings and values, then the very structure of space and time in literature requires constant decoding. Let us take for instance the complementary chapters written by Cosmin Borza and Ligia Tudurachi, on the rural and urban imaginaries, respectively: Borza writes about the amalgamation of tradition, quaintness, oppression, and social protest that has become typical of the rural, while Tudurachi demonstrates that the urban imaginary can only be understood by contrasting its modernist configurations and the proletarian ones; thus, both essays reveal how the dominant narratives of Western modernity have been celebrated by Romanian literature (urban life as adventure, self-discovery, emancipation), demythologised (urban life as precarity, illusion, misery) and criticised (rurality as a complicated counterpart to the simplistic ideal of progress).

Despite the broad scope of inquiry, the volume also has a chronological structure, with the chapters forming an alternative history of Romanian literature – religious texts and revolutionary writing come first, while textualism and postcommunist fiction are among the last subjects. It is not an exhaustive historiography, nor is it meant to be; but it provides another way of conceptualising and visualising the evolution of literary themes, as well as detailed explanations of the factors contributing to the mutations of the imaginary. More precisely, the chapters present the birth, the development, the point of maximum irradiation, and the waning of the most important imaginary structures in Romanian literature. For example, Laura Zăvăleanu's analysis of the religious imaginary begins with 16th century moralistic texts but concludes with novels published only a few years ago, proving that certain aspects of this semantic basin – such as the principle of continuity or life as an intergenerational tale – span centuries and affect our understanding of literature today. Similarly, Sanda Cordoș structures the social imaginary on two axes, the literature of the oppressed and that of the revolutionaries, investigating the literary configurations of the revolution from the so-called birth of the nation in the 19th century to its supposed rebirth in 1989 and pointing out the apparently superficial changes (in clothing, for example) which suggest deeper, ideological differences.

Circling back to the introduction, Braga claims that the study of the imaginary today should primarily address the tension between globalisation and local specificity, that is, the phenomenon of *glocalisation*, since it is precisely the decrease in imaginary production and exploration that hinders integration, unity, and the celebration of difference. This imperative is reflected in the selection of the

most suitable methodologies for the investigation of each imaginary constellation, such as Eleonora Sava's chronotopic mapping, meant to reveal the most prevalent patterns of Romanian folklore. It also drives the exploration of widespread, transnational literary phenomena which had unique manifestations in the Romanian context. For instance, Adriana Stan's chapter focuses on the local emergence and development of the imaginary of authenticity, from its birth in the 19th century (under the influence of Romanticism and nationalism) to its latest rekindling by the 2000 generation (catalysed by the postrevolutionary obsession with memoirs and diary writing in the 1990s). Likewise, the postcommunist depiction of individual and collective trauma in Romanian literature is explained by Alex Goldiș through the unprecedented, radical nature of the 1989 revolution and regime change, unlike any other in the Soviet sphere of influence.

Finally, glocalisation impacts literary theory, as well, as proven by Mihaela Ursa's article on the theoretical imaginary of textualism, in which a mental image – the so-called "woven fabric" of the text – becomes the central metaphor of a local semantic basin, indicating and determining the status of the critic and the theorist in relation to the literary works they are evaluating. Just like Goldiș, who argues for the need to look at postcommunist Romanian literature through the prism of text and context, adding a historical dimension to the psychological direction of trauma studies, Ursa also shows that, when it comes to theory, the exploration of the imaginary must be supplemented by an anthropological perspective akin to the New Historicist one. Far from invalidating or abandoning the study of the imaginary – its inner workings, its specific mutations – these methodological twists help make the discipline more effective and relevant than ever.

Last but not least, the Romanian literary imaginary is discussed in terms of its transnational ties and internal cultural diversity, both of which complicate the formation of local identities, making them subject to constant dialogue, across borders, languages, and communities alike. Levente T. Szabó proposes one such transnational, *longue durée* approach in his analysis of Hungarian literature written in Romania as compared to pre-1918 Hungarian literature published abroad, with a focus on the imaginary of the Transylvanian regional identity. In her turn, Dana Bizuleanu engages with the imaginary of German-language literature produced in the same space, explaining that the geographical dispersion, religious plurality and diverse traditions of the German ethnics caused this particular semantic basin to be defined by cultural interference and hybridity. At the same time, the author mentions the marginal status of this literary niche in relation to both Romanian literature and German literature written in the West, which allows her to connect the close reading of various texts – uncovering the restructuring and reinvention of the German language by authors like Herta Müller or Oskar Pastior – to the issue of peripherality. As for the production of Romanian literature abroad, Laura T. Ilea posits the existence of a *metasporic canon* of belonging, referring to those authors who do not perceive themselves as part of the Romanian canon, while also eluding perfect integration into a secondary literary system. Looking at a significant number of writers whose relationships with the homeland and their adoptive culture are extremely different and nuanced, Ilea argues that the imaginary of the diaspora and exile should not be reduced to the local-universal dichotomy, considering instead the alternative forms of belonging developed by these authors as coping mechanisms and creative strategies.

While *The Encyclopaedia* is too thematically diverse and ambitious in scope to present exhaustively, these are a few of its strengths and worthy pursuits: an ability to combine the traditional study of the imaginary with other useful methodologies, a well-documented, chronological approach to an otherwise overwhelming wealth of information and literary phenomena, as well as a constant focus on globalisation, the endurance of local specificity, and the consequent mutations of the imaginary.

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MIHAI IOVĂNEL, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990–2020* [*History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990–2020*], Iași, Polirom, 2021, 711 p.

Given the absence of critical syntheses on the post-communist Romanian literary system, Mihai Iovănel's project comes to make up for this deficiency by starting from an ideological dichotomy: left wing and right wing, the latter dominating the literary and critical field after 1989. In the same vein, the author emphasises a relationship of inclusion of two terms, which, with the radical change of the political regime, become malformed: one is a right-wing intellectual group, with a desire to preserve the reactionary elitism of the communist period, which is imposed by the second component, derived from the first. It is the *anticommunism* that has become the predominant ideology of the post-1989 years and that "does not represent a critique of real communism, but a discourse of self-legitimization that uniformly opposes bad communism to good capitalism" (pp. 36-37). Clearly, the perspective that Iovănel adopts in framing the evolution of Romanian literature over the last 30 years is essentially leftist, hence the materialist criterion he has in mind: *realism* as a "transgenerational operator", more precisely "the writers' relation to reality through a set of theoretical, rhetorical conventions, etc." (p. 11). However, there are also some unresolved inadequacies in the construction of the post-communist panorama. Firstly, Iovănel initially asserts that the transition from communism to post-communism is, in fact, the transition "from a stable system to an unstable system" (p. 25). It is well known that the last years of the ninth decade were among the most dysfunctional in socialist Romania. Secondly, the term "capitalist realism" is taken rather formally (not content-wise), as well as out of the need to have a theoretical framework within which some writers from a new wave, the one after 2007, when Romania joined the European Union and NATO, can be accommodated.

The second part of the book focuses on the evolution of the Romanian literary system and literary criticism. After all, Iovănel maps a cultural landscape that is not only heterogeneous and conflictual, but in which power struggles are at play more than new methodological directions or new ways of making literature are being debated. One of the problems from which the fetishism of literature derives, as well as the polemics between previous generations of critics (from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s) and the generation of critics of the 2000s (otherwise, a quarrel that is still going on today) is the "autonomy of aesthetics" – an opportunity to revise the Romanian literary canon. Rooted in the deeply conflictual relationship between the two nineteenth century critics, T. Maiorescu and Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea, this principle of judging the value of a work is malformed over time, becoming, in fact, "more of a slogan, a simple template, in the name of which critics will seek to avoid referring to a reality outside the literary-autonomous one" (pp. 97-98). However, with the 2000 generation, the "fetishism of aesthetic autonomy" is abandoned, which entails, as Iovănel notes, the historicization of this principle, which is less and less important for a plethora of young critics and writers who relate openly, critically, politically committed to the socio-economic environment, to social inequalities of both class and gender. In the light of the latter idea, it is also no coincidence that women critical voices (Adriana Stan, Teodora Dumitru, Mihaela Ursa, Andreea Mironescu, Ioana Macrea-Toma) are rising from this generation, a fundamental aspect in the complexity of the Romanian critical system, deeply patriarchal until the 1990s-2000s.

The following parts of the *History* are devoted to the evolution of fiction and the evolution of poetry. From the perspective of prose, the post-communist period seems to be rather unfriendly to fiction, which makes biography gain an important place in the Romanian literary field, all the more so as in the 2000s authenticity becomes the main direction in both prose and poetry. After all, fiction seems to be affected by what is extraliterary: "The main pressure on fiction in the 1990s comes from two sources: gazetting and autobiographical nonfiction. Both point to a competition of fictionally

unmediated – or poorly mediated – reality to which after 1989 literature, and fiction in particular, must adapt” (p. 347).

Moreover, Mihai Iovănel works with a traditional dichotomy: realism and materialism. If in the nineteenth century one can find samples of realism in the Romanian novel still in its infancy (*Ciocoii vechi și noi*, 1863), later concretized in Ioan Slavici’s *Mara*, considered by Iovănel “the first great Romanian novel”, in the second part of the century two directions of realism develop: on the one hand, an “idealist-Hegelian” one, and, on the other, a “materialist-national” one. Influenced by the French movement *Le Nouveau Roman*, the writers of the 1980s generation embraced materialism as their method of working: “the materialism of the writers of the 1980s is a forced consequence of late communism [...]. They maintain a relationship of suspicion not so much with reality (which they claim to expose in more authentic versions than the writers of the previous generation) as with the method of the old omniscient and totalizing realism” (p. 357). In addition, Iovănel also exposes the ideological ambiguity underlying this preference of the 1980s generation of prose writers: because the textualist import from *Tel Quel* has a Marxist charge, Romanian authors have to put right this issue, since it was precisely against a regime (“at least in theory Marxist”) that they wanted to be subversive. Hence the reproach of escapism, which Iovănel immediately links to metafiction – the favourite sub-genre of these prose writers. This is the preamble to the years after the fall of communism, when materialism is strengthened by academic writers such as Ion Manolescu and Caius Dobrescu, then by Daniel Bănuțescu, Simona Popescu, Florin Chirculescu, Adrian Oțoiu and Răzvan Rădulescu. Under the same umbrella, the following two sub-directions are also underpinned by Iovănel’s ordering of the still not very innovative trends in the literary field in the prose of the 1990s: postmodernism – which melts reality into textual and bookish games – and “miserable realism”, which is much more in line with the precarious and unstable reality of post-communist Romania.

The situation changed in the early 2000s, with authors like Dan Lungu, Sorin Stoica, Ioana Bradea, Florin Lăzărescu, Lucian Dan Teodorovici. The notion under which they are gathered is the one I also noted in the objections at the beginning: the concept of “capitalist realism”. Their prose is uninhibited, designed to dislodge taboos and conservative attitudes. Another important year for the evolution of Romanian prose is 2010, when writers like Lavinia Braniște and Radu Pavel Gheo change direction in the sense that the protagonists are no longer people with an extremely precarious material condition, victims of the transition from communism to capitalism, but people with fairly stable jobs, with a material condition, if not very good, at least better than those in the prose of the 1990s. As far as poetry is concerned, the first two directions that dominate the period immediately after the fall of communism are postmodernism (as in prose) and neo-expressionism.

While the resources of postmodernism are also being exhausted rather quickly in poetry, the second trend has a longer life and a tradition behind it. Thus, poets like Mariana Marin and Angela Marinescu – established as highly appreciated writers before 1989 – are models for poets of the 2000 generation like Elena Vlădăreanu, Ruxandra Novac and Claudiu Komartin. For Radu Vancu, his forerunners are two poets from different generations: Mircea Ivănescu from the 1960s and Mircea Cărtărescu from the 1980s. So, as far as poetry is concerned, the bias and the networks are more clearly stable. Besides, poetry is the “section” where some important changes of optics occur grace to some new outlooks as the next ones: “exploring toxic hypostases of masculinity becomes a creative challenge” (p. 610), and the feminist direction takes a meaningful shape through poets as Svetlana Cârștean, Elena Vlădăreanu, Medeea Iancu, Iulia Militaru, and Gabriela Feceoru.

Last but not least, Mihai Iovănel also certifies a certain “posthuman moment” of Romanian poetry, which has its pioneer in Andrei Peniuc. Although, as a theoretical grid, posthumanism is still not very well defined in the Romanian literary field, Iovănel remarks a poetic phenomenon, born around 2010, relevant due to “the inevitable dispersion of references that had composed the canon until now, an opening towards more marginal and even extraliterary sources” (p. 618).

The Iovănel’s *History...* ends rather pessimistically with a chapter entitled “The Transnational Specific”, which deals with some models and strategies by which Romanian authors end up being exported and even gain symbolic capital outside Romania’s borders (Norman Manea, Paul Goma,

Mircea Cărtărescu). Of course, one of the current crises of Romanian literature is related to the (im)possibility of its export, or at least the failure to popularize Romanian authors abroad. Attempting a futurological view, Iovănel diagnoses the place and role of Romanian literature on the “World Republic of Letters” (Pascale Casanova) rather precariously: “Before it discovers Romania, the culture of Europe will have to integrate – as the United States does today – the cultures of Asia and Africa, and in a few decades, it will no longer recognise itself in the old photographs of the 20th century. Most probably, Romanian literature will survive, in the margin of future photographs, as a secondary character and an echo” (p. 680). It remains to be seen and analysed whether it will be so.

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MIRCEA ANGHELESCU, *Literatura în context*
[*Literature in Context*], Bucureşti, Spandugino, 2020, 288 p.

“Literature, in its entirety, is the only way to get to the knowledge of the past and implicitly to ourselves, the ones who live today” (p. 7) is the view of literature that Mircea Angheliescu defines at the beginning of his book, and also the perspective from which the critic approaches all the topics discussed. Providing a wide overview of the literary events, the monographies and the authors he discusses, the critic always places them against a historical and political background, thus offering a complete image of recent Romanian literary movements while also keeping in touch with the past.

As a collection of articles and book reviews published by the literary critic from 1970 (only one article published long ago) to 2020, the book covers a variety of topics with the merit of offering a wide image of the latest literary publications and monographies relevant to the development of the Romanian literary field.

Despite the variety of the topics discussed, what all the articles have in common is the rigorous structure that proves the thorough method of the critic based on two dimensions of the analysis. The articles comprise both textual analyses that systematically succeed in highlighting the distinctive points or credits of each book discussed, and especially the accurate placement of these texts in the historical or political context to which they are related. What is specific to the critic’s method is the interweaving of the two dimensions by correlating the literary phenomenon to the its background, thus obtaining a complete and accurate volume of research about literature placed in the context of and analyzed according to its circumstances. The textual analysis identifies the main subject of the books discussed by the critic, places them in the literary framework and sharply brings into focus the specific and main points of each one. The contextualization of the topics proves that the goal of the critic is to place literature against its context and emphasize the interconnection between literature and the background against which it is projected.

The only biography topic – Annotations on a library card – conjures up the critic’s experiences in the great libraries of the world, especially at the National Library in Paris. The rest of the topics are diverse, but can be identified by some common themes.

A recurring topic of the critic’s reviews is the literary texts related to – or about – the experience of exile. Exile is analyzed in the context of the Communism Regime in Romania and its implications for the lives of the writers forced to leave the country, such as Sanda Golopenția, Emil Cioran, Virgil Nemoianu or Constantin Eretescu. In these articles, the exile theme is discussed as a historical phenomenon affecting both the writer’s lives and their writings. The analysis of Cioran’s writings in particular is interesting as the critic follows the changes in the literary texts generated by the linguistic transition from Romanian to French. While discussing the political exile in *Dumnezeu s-a născut în*

exil [*God Was Born in Exile*] commented on by Constantin Eretescu, Mircea Angheliescu points out its ethical dimension by referring to the way exile literature manages to artistically transpose suffering into art: "Exile therefore leads to a metamorphosis where initiation represents the gain or compensation for whatever was lost to the world of pain" (pp. 104-105). Another reviewed book written by an exiled author, Theodor Cazaban, is *Coloane* [*Columns*], presented as another piece of literature that should be recovered by Romanian literary history. The critic pleads for the recovery of these writers, arguing two perspectives. On one hand, he brings into focus the values of the literary texts and their connections to the Romanian language and on the other hand he signals the writer's connections to Romania and the ways the political regime has wronged them. Their integration in Romanian literary history could become, thus, a form of redemption.

The same direction related to ways in which literature reflects life, especially its hard moments, is betrayed by the review of Geo Bogza's novel *Țări de piatră, de foc și de pământ* [*Lands of Rock, Fire, and Earth*] describing the most brutal, unfair and bloody tragedies in the lives of marginalized Romanian communities. The critic considers that the value of this novel consists in its power to offer a literary reply to a human and political matter. Another topic that belongs to the same moral dimension of literature is entitled "Romanul nescris al suferinței" ["The Unwritten Novel of Suffering"]. Mircea Angheliescu believes that it should have been written about the suffering of the Romanian people of Bessarabia, deported to Siberia after WWII. Even though these subjects are present in some confessions and documents, they remain unknown to most readers. That is why the critic asserts his need to write about the volume entitled "Arhivele memoriei" ["Archives of Memory"], which stands as a testimony to the troubled history of Romania.

The same category comprises the volume of essays and reviews "Revanșa literaturii" ["Literature's Retaliation"] to which the critic attributes the merit of projecting literature against the historical and cultural context that generated it in order to reflect larger aspects of reality. Another similar topic is Liliana Corobca's monography about the communist regime in Romania, which should be publicized "to pay tribute to the courage and perhaps the talent of certain writers whose bones were left in the prisons of that time, along with their manuscripts forgotten in the censors' drawers" (p. 210).

A particularity of this book consists in the two instances of recalling the personality of Alexandru Macedonski, the Romanian poet with a passion for velocipedes. These episodes describe two moments in the poet's life: his journey to Italy as a young man and his record of it, and his 300-kilometer-long journey from Bucharest to Brașov and back on a velocipede. These biographical events reflect the critic's interest in lesser-known aspects of writers' lives, and provide at the same time a perspective for a more complete insight into their personalities and works. Another interesting topic is the city of Bucharest in life and literature. The parallel between the ways in which Bucharest appeared in literary and non-literary texts in the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, and the ways modern times effected changes to the city is an invitation for the reader to contemplate the way in which reality is transposed into literature.

Another topic of these articles are the reviews and book analyses belonging to lesser-known authors who deserve to be brought to the reader's attention or whose valuable literature deserve to be incorporated into Romanian literary history. To this category could belong Grigore Cugler, Sanda Nițescu, Horia Bădescu, Radu Ciobanu, Horia Bădescu, Toma Pavel, Vintilă Ivănceanu, Cezar Baltag and Marin Sorescu as an essayist. The same direction integrates articles dedicated to the activity of literary critics, valuable intellectuals or mentors who contributed to Romanian literature and especially to Romanian culture, such as Paul Miron, Alexandru Ruja, Matei Călinescu, Marta Petreu, Mihai Dinu, and Dinu Pillat.

The book also contains reviews of anthologies and criticism, such as the Sibiu Literary Circle seen from Italy, Nicolae Manolescu's article in *Enciclopedia literaturii române vechi* [*The Encyclopaedia of Old Romanian Literature*], edited by Eugen Simion in 2018, and the review of *Antologia poezilor minori din epoca Alecsandri & Bolintineanu* [*Anthology of the Minor Poets from*

the Alecsandri & Bolintineanu Era]. These articles cover theoretical and literary-historical topics, demonstrating the author's widespread knowledge of the field.

The novels *Ion* and *Țiganiada* are examples of how the critic analyses a literary work by highlighting the specificity of each book. Regarding the work of Budai-Deleanu, the critic believes that the author created his characters starting from an archetypal scheme reflecting the human condition longing for universal harmony, explaining why the novel is described as the first modern writing work in Romanian literature. *Ion* is described as “romanul dăinurii”/ “the novel of permanence” (p. 56).

As a whole, despite its varied topics, the book has the merit of painting a broad fresco of the Romanian literary and cultural field, with the ambitious aim of highlighting some authors or subjects that the critic believes should be more widely known. In Romanian literary history and research, the volume represents an important step towards the recognition and recovering of such cases. It is a modern book, in the sense that the subjects approached are actual and relevant for the latest literary movements, and, at the same time, it is anchored in the past, following the historical thread that generated these publications. Literature is placed in context and this book achieves his goal, taking us a step further towards a better understanding of history and the way in which it is reflected by – and in – literature.

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MAGDALENA RĂDUȚĂ, *În context. O lectură sociologizantă a literaturii române din ultimul deceniu comunist* [*In Context. A Sociological Reading of Romanian Literature from The Last Communist Decade*], București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2019, 202 p.

Magdalena Răduță is currently one of the most relevant researchers in the Romanian theoretical practice of literary sociology. Trained in the sociology of literature at EHESS, there she started to research the Romanian literary field during the Communist period through a sociological lens, her methodological formation and competences proved in her works are undeniable. Her sociological reading is focused on the 1980s generation, reclaimed from a symbolic ordering principle opposed to the politically engaged and ideologically submissive factions. These themes, explored through a series of exhaustive studies developed by Magda Răduță over the years, have been compiled in her 2019 book *In Context. A Sociological Reading of Romanian Literature from The Last Communist Decade*.

Two enormous merits of the book should be highlighted from the start: first of all, this book had been written from both a sociological and a philological perspective at the same time. As such, her consistent methodological competences are manifest. Secondly, Magda Răduță has written this study not only from an academic perspective, but as a professor of sociology of literature as well. Thus, her study is especially valuable from two points of view: as academic material, it can serve as an aid to acquire a deeper understanding of Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical reflections and their theoretical and ideological limitations; on the other hand, the book contains a rigorous explanation and illustration of the practice of the sociological approach to the literary phenomenon, as well as to the reading of literary texts.

Magdalena Răduță's work endeavours to depict the dynamics of the Romanian literary field during the 80s, when the literary activity was mainly supposed to react to the political and economic pressures marking the whole mechanism of publication, circulation, and legitimation of literary goods. Against this background, confrontations are explored between the heteronomous and autonomous factions, between the protochronistic group and those agents reclaiming themselves from an aesthetic position, as well as the generational confrontations and agents' particular interests in different types of gain. The dynamics of the field are followed from the evolution of the young generation of writers having asserted themselves during the 1980s, styled as the "young wolves", who quite quickly capitalised the pole of disinterested temporal recognition. The adoption of a critical position with regards to the political regime, as well as a chaotic literary system marked by the institutional anomalies determine the strength of polarisation within the field.

From this standpoint Magda Răduță's study comprises four major parts. Whilst the first chapter of her study includes a short history of the theoretical import of the discipline of literary sociology into the local literary studies, the second and the third chapters cover a sociological analysis of the Romanian literary field during the 1980s. Finally, the last chapter of the book proposes a "Flaubertian reading" of Mircea Nedelciu's novel, *Tratament fabulatoriu* [*Fabulatory Treatment*] (1986).

As revealed in Magda Răduță's studies, the sociology of literature was greeted with reluctance after 1989, due to the local misunderstanding of systemic and contextual reading implicitly related to the Marxist (another concept misleadingly used in the Romanian literary space) literary criticism imposed during the 1950s. As an effect, all sociological approaches are perceived as Marxist practices, and as such strongly discouraged by the established practices of literary criticism as implicitly related to the Communist past of literary criticism in Romania. In this vein, she highlights the demarcation of Bourdieu's methodology from the Marxist sociological approach, avoiding the concept of capital in its narrower Marxist understanding. Moreover, the present study points out the boundaries and delimitations of the new post-Bourdieuian theories (practised by G. Sapiro, E. Pinto, Denis Saint-Jacques, Alain Viala etc.). At the same time, Magda Răduță generously discusses the methodological reformulation required by the analysis of an ideologically and politically infused literary field.

While analysing the route of consecration of the "young wolves", the research focuses in turn on several main characteristics and directions that have defined the assertion of the 1980s generation of young writers: their subversive and anti-systemic agenda, the literary and intellectual ethos that mobilised their writing activity, the *esprit de corps* cohesion emerging from belonging to a guild and from informal literary gatherings. Lastly, an important part of Magda Răduță's research is dedicated to the literary polemics that capitalise the debates in the cultural press. The delimitation of the young generation occurs at the level of public polemics, but instead of perpetuating these polemics (which quite quickly become undesirable as they reveal individual positions and assertions), they promote and legitimise, by means of these debates, their own legitimacy and the validity of their *esprit de corps*, as well as their disinterested ethos.

The "Flaubertian reading" of Mircea Nedelciu's novel is a didactic and rigorous demonstration of how Bourdieusian reading works. Moreover, the sociological reading of *Fabulatory Treatment* proves an undoubtable illustration of how this methodological lens can explain the entire literary phenomenon through the text, since the main literary sociologist's perspective proposes a reading from text to context, and I would say that Magda Răduță's sociological analysis of Nedelciu's novel is the first rigorous demonstration of Flaubertian reading applied to a Romanian literary text. Her sociological reading is not limited to the text but embeds a short history of the paratextual elements and the book's publication history, which contain many important keys to understanding the novel.

Finally, as already mentioned, *In Context. A Sociological Reading of Romanian Literature from The Last Communist Decade* constitutes one of the most important literary sociological studies published about the Romanian literary field and one of the most relevant recent works of sociological studies dealing with the cultural phenomenon during Communism, along with Ioana Macrea-Toma's book *Privilighenția. Instituții literare sub comunism* [*Privilighentsia. Literary Institutions in*

Romanian Communism]. The singularity of Magda Răduță's study is ensured by three important points in her work: firstly, the special temporal focus on a specific period and on a specific literary faction, which allows a rigorous analysis of these aspects; secondly, the meticulous methodological explanations and illustrations and finally, a certain didactic dimension. Taken together, these render *In Context. A Sociological Reading of Romanian Literature from The Last Communist Decade* an important reference work and a required title in the academic bibliographies of the local literary studies. Unfortunately, the present study has gone largely unnoticed by the public, and I would say this is real proof of the poor adherence of literary sociology to the local field of literary studies, as well explained and argued in the present work.

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IOANA BOT, *Icoane și privazuri. 7 studii despre figuralitatea literară [Icônes et chambranles. 7 études sur la figuralité littéraire]*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2021, 218 p.

Publié en 2021, le volume *Icoane și privazuri. 7 studii despre figuralitatea literară [Icônes et chambranles. 7 études sur la figuralité littéraire]* est signé par Ioana Bot, critique et historienne de la littérature, professeure à l'Université Babeș-Bolyai de Cluj-Napoca, qui propose, à la lignée de ses préoccupations antérieures pour l'étude des formes littéraires et pour la poétique historique, une recherche passionnée, centrée sur la *figure* et le *figural* dans la littérature roumaine.

Avant de suivre le fonctionnement de ces deux concepts dans les œuvres des écrivains roumains choisis (tels que Mircea Nedelciu, Radu Cosașu, Mircea Cărtărescu), dont certains d'expression française (comme Lena Constante, Marthe Bibesco, Matéi Vișniec), l'auteure réalise d'abord dans le premier chapitre du livre un éclairage théorique extrêmement dense. Elle retrace admirablement l'histoire de la notion de *figure* en partant des études fondatrices d'Erich Auerbach, qui avait observé la dimension dynamique du terme à commencer par les définitions de l'Antiquité latine, et continue avec les recherches de Laurent Jenny, qui opère une différenciation entre *figure* et *figural*, qu'il comprend comme processus esthétique-sémantique, à la fois tensionnel et représentationnel. Le troisième repère théorique substantiel ayant contribué, selon Ioana Bot, au développement de la notion de *figuralité* dans le champ des études littéraires est, finalement, Paul de Man, puisqu'il associe le mot avec l'allégorie, expression elle-même de l'indécidabilité du sens.

Tout en apportant ses propres observations judicieuses visant les questionnements théoriques du *figural* en littérature, l'auteure tire des conclusions convaincantes et se lance ensuite à l'analyse de plusieurs ouvrages différentes de point de vue générique – qu'il s'agisse de mémoires, de la prose ou du journalisme littéraire. Selon le cas, la démarche critique interroge soit la capacité du *figural* de garder l'indicible de l'expérience humaine (chez Lena Constante), soit la capacité subversive du *figural* par rapport au contexte socio-politique (chez Mircea Nedelciu ou Radu Cosașu), soit, dernièrement, la capacité du *figural* à transformer la rhétorique consacrée en poétique actuelle (chez Mircea Cărtărescu), sans oublier, bien évidemment, les stratégies du *figural* chez les écrivains bilingues franco-roumains (Lena Constante, Marthe Bibesco, Matéi Vișniec).

Même si d'étendue inégale, les sept études sont également captivantes, à commencer par la première, très riche en commentaires et en exemples, portant sur les mémoires carcérales de Lena

Constante, cette « Schéhérazade de l'enfer » qui utilise la formule du journal intime comme *figure* littéraire pour évoquer une souffrance qu'elle a pu surmonter seulement grâce au pouvoir inépuisable des mots. Les deux études suivantes changent de direction, se dressant d'un côté vers la prose fictionnelle, pour expliquer le mécanisme subversif (et ses pièges inhérents) dans l'écriture de Mircea Nedelciu qui avance à l'époque communiste une fausse « transmission directe » des faits, et de l'autre côté vers la prose journalistique de Radu Cosașu qui convertit stylistiquement l'énumération cumulative dans en *figure*, une figure du réel s'opposant foncièrement à la mise en narration des événements. L'œuvre de Mircea Cărtărescu jouit de deux approches critiques qui visent l'attraction de l'écrivain pour le sonnet comme *figure* de la perfection, mais aussi la *figure* de l'expression des sentiments dans le texte littéraire, qui implique à son tour un jeu conscient avec les clichés afin de résoudre l'impasse de l'incapacité du langage de transmettre de manière authentique le vécu. Enfin, la dernière étude du livre réunit trois auteurs roumains d'expression française – Lena Constante, Marthe Bibesco, Matěj Višniec – pour souligner l'emploi du *figural* dans le cas particulier des écrivains exilés.

Docte et sagace, le travail critique de l'auteure réussit ainsi à montrer que devant les « icônes » de la littérature le geste de l'interprète ne doit jamais être celui de l'acceptation docile du sens ostensible, mais celui du dialogue intrépide avec le texte et ses *figures* les plus profondes.

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ANDREI LAZĂR, *L'Autobiographie entre le texte et l'image*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2021, 478 p.

La collection « belgica.ro », accueillie par la maison d'éditions Casa Cărții de Știință depuis 2003, grâce à une très fructueuse collaboration avec le Centre d'Études des Lettres Belges de Langue Française de l'Université Babeș-Bolyai de Cluj-Napoca, compte à ce jour plus d'une quarantaine de titres. Dirigée par Rodica Lascu-Pop, professeur émérite à la Faculté des Lettres, la série se propose de rassembler des études critiques, des thèses de doctorat, des traductions littéraires et des textes inédits pour les lecteurs roumains et francophones. Ainsi, le volume signé par Andrei Lazăr, *L'Autobiographie entre le texte et l'image*, vient enrichir cette collection singulière dans le paysage éditorial roumain. Issu d'une thèse de doctorat soutenue en 2013, le volume reprend, reconferme et renforce les hypothèses critiques d'une minutieuse recherche menée par l'auteur dans le domaine des études autobiographiques. L'enjeu d'Andrei Lazăr est ambitieux et généreux, car le livre est le résultat d'une analyse des causes, des modalités, des fonctions et des mutations engendrées par le passage du discours autobiographique littéraire vers le langage des images et des médias alternatifs-filmiques. L'architecture du livre intègre un champ très vaste d'étude, qui traverse les domaines de la philosophie, de l'anthropologie et de la littérature, en explorant les œuvres de Jean-Paul Sartre, Marguerite Yourcenar, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida et Hervé Guibert. En effet, l'originalité de cette approche résulte justement du choix de réunir pour la première fois sous une seule problématique des auteurs relevant des espaces différents de la pensée.

Centré sur le cas du récit autobiographique, le travail se propose comme un véritable exercice d'arpentage herméneutique qui dévoile les stratégies de la transmédialité. Ainsi, Andrei Lazăr poursuit d'un part le phénomène de la migration du récit autobiographique de la littérature vers les médias et dévoile les transformations inhérentes reçues par le support de l'œuvre. D'autre part, il interroge les conséquences des stratégies de production, de diffusion et de réception au niveau de

l'auteur, du narrateur, du sujet et de la représentation du soi. Chaque instance de migration oblige l'auteur à s'appropriier des instruments critiques spécifiques, c'est-à-dire capables de gérer le code esthétique du médium recevant. Cependant, l'approche transmédiatique agglutine des outils transdisciplinaires qui rendent possible un discours intersémiotique commun à l'analyse littéraire, photographique et cinématographique.

Pour ce qui est la structure, trois grandes séquences articulent cette recherche qui prend en compte l'autobiographie en tant que forme intermédiaire : la première partie vise « L'autobiographie au miroir de la théorie. Rhétorique de l'objectivité », la seconde porte sur les « Postures et impostures autoréflexives. Poétiques de la subjectivité » et la troisième concerne « La traversée des miroirs. L'espace autobiographique intermédiaire ». Chronologiquement, la démarche recouvre l'intervalle compris entre 1964, à savoir l'année de la publication chez Gallimard du volume sartrien *Les Mots*, et 2002, l'an de la sortie du film *Derrida*, réalisé par Amy Ziering Kofman et Kirby Dick. Apart les cinq auteurs qui forment le corpus d'analyse, il faut remarquer également la richesse des références aux études récentes portant sur la narratologie transmédiatique et l'automédialité. Andrei Lazăr met en équilibre l'hétérogénéité référentielle par l'entremise d'une charpente théorique et conceptuelle parfaitement équilibrée dès le début jusqu'à la fin de la recherche. L'exercice s'avère méthodique, consistant et s'adresse aussi bien au lecteur avisé, qu'au celui qui est en train d'approfondir ses études en sciences humaines.

La première partie vient éclaircir le cadre théorique et institutionnel qui circonscrit le genre autobiographique. Le terme d'« autobiographie » s'est imposé pendant la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle comme un synonyme pour les confessions. Les usages « classiques » emploient le concept dans le sens plus strict d'une biographie rédigée par une personne sur soi-même. Après les années 70, le récit autobiographique s'est intégré dans le système littéraire comme un genre qui détient une structure propre, qui a une histoire et un statut spécifique. À présent, le « moi » qui se dévoile par l'intermédiaire de ce genre littéraire n'est plus à confondre en termes d'identité et rapport entre le soi et les autres avec ce « moi » rousseauiste du XVIII^e siècle. Le « moi » qui surgit après la « mort de l'Auteur » représente l'effet d'un iconoclasme structuraliste qui lui donne la possibilité d'exister entre les marges du langage et de l'écriture. Comme l'auteur le montre dans la deuxième partie de sa recherche, ce « moi », noyau de l'écriture autobiographique de Jean-Paul Sartre, Marguerite Yourcenar, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida ou de Hervé Guibert, se constitue par la force de la mémoire et par les astuces d'autoréflexivité purement subjective qui annule l'exigence de la véridicité et la nécessité d'un pacte. Ces énormes ressources intérieures nourrissent sa vulnérabilité, mais aussi son unicité et lui confèrent un contenu spéculatif avec un grand potentiel intermédiaire.

L'analyse menée par Andrei Lazăr saisit, dans la troisième partie du volume, la tournure de l'autobiographie littéraire classique vers l'automédialité désignée en tant que capacité d'un sujet d'utiliser plusieurs médias (l'écriture, la photographie, le cinéma) pour achever un nouveau « rapport à soi » et des « pratiques de soi » inédites. L'autobiographie intermédiaire se constitue comme un réseau de « produits médiatiques » autonomes, mais qui relèvent d'une cohérence d'ensemble garantie par la présence de l'écrivain. Les médias alternatifs offrent des possibilités différentes pour la manifestation du récit de soi. La conséquence de cette diversité créative et expressive affecte directement le nouveau statut de la littérature, qui n'est plus la forme définitoire pour la construction de soi, mais seulement une option parmi les autres. En même temps, l'autobiographie s'affranchit des restrictions objectives et des limites stables du décidable, en gagnant une liberté fictionnelle, structurelle et symbolique qui légitime la pluralité de lectures fragmentaires. Le corpus porté par l'intermédialité fonctionne d'une manière rhizomatique, en tant que composite dont les parties s'articulent dans un réseau dynamique de structures arborescentes qui ont la capacité d'engendrer des significations multiples et inédites.

À la fin de l'analyse des œuvres investiguées, Andrei Lazăr expose un paradoxe constitutif du récit autobiographique qui est rendu cohérent par le recours aux stratégies métatextuelles et par l'emploi des supports documentaires visuels, mais qui contient également une « non-adhérence de soi à soi » et une coexistence du passé et du présent. L'espace autobiographique intermédiaire contient

l'œuvre littéraire et ses transformations médiomorphosées, à savoir la photographie et le film autobiographique, mais il requiert toujours le regard questionneur du lecteur-spectateur capable de saisir dans toute son ampleur l'exercice inter-artistique et créatif de l'auteur. C'est pourquoi l'écriture restera le point d'ancrage qui confère l'intelligibilité de chaque projet et de toute possibilité intermédiaire de mise en scène du soi.

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ANDREW HUSSEY, *Speaking East. The Strange and Enchanted Life of Isidore Isou*, London, Reaktion Books, Limited, 2021, 324 p.

In 1999, British historian Andrew Hussey was working on Guy Debord's biography and thus needed to speak to a septuagenarian Isidore Isou (1925–2007, the Romanian father of Lettrism), given that the two writers' former friendship had quickly turned to sheer hatred. The result was, of course, somewhere along the lines of what should have been expected by anyone who ever approached one intellectual to ask about another, who (adding insult to injury) is also a mortal rival. The discussion thus diverged towards "another, altogether more compelling story" (p. 8). This one.

There are no two words better suited to be in the title of this book. *Strange* and *Enchanted* truly form the best mixture to cover and define its contents. At the same time, one would not be too far off the mark by extending the list of attributes with additions such as highly entertaining, spicy, informative and utterly horrifying, not necessarily in this order, but successive enough so as to easily turn *enchanted* into *enchanteing*.

The story begins in Botoşani (*Yiddishland*, or even the-place-formerly-known-as *little Leipzig*), Isidore Isou's birthplace, which "was once a handsome town", *once* being the operative word here. Thus, part one of three, "A Romanian Youth (1925–45)", details the social and political context of the Jewish communities in Romania at that time. The fear and misery present in the provincial town, caused by mouth-foaming anti-Semitism, are placed within the larger Romanian historical context, with the mention that Isou almost actively avoided approaching this facet of his very early childhood, with one exception in the form of the quasi-fictional novel, *Adorable Roumaine*, written in 1975 and published in 1978, which was "commissioned by a soft-porn publishing house and Isou wrote the book to make some money, which at this point in his life he badly needed" (p. 28).

After 1933, Isou's family moves to Bucharest and, from this point on, the voice of the narrator reaches its full volume. The tone that encompasses the story is jarringly captivating and the narration is almost movie-like. The all-knowing resounding voice of the narrator often resembles different forms of the "but little did he know..." trope. One such example would be "Soon Bucharest was to be convulsed by an earthquake, a mini-civil war, anti-Jewish riots and finally deportations and massacres of Jews [...]. But for the first months in the capital after finishing his school exams he was haunted by an image: the ghost of a girl he had tried to kill" (p. 36). The girl in question was part of a failed ploy – an attempt to drive her to suicide, her corpse then representing his first work of art, in a Duchamp ready-made fashion. The plan never came to fruition, but the episode did find its way into a strongly fictionalised version, in his *L'Agrégation d'un nom et d'un messie*.

This first part follows the tumultuous years of Isou's youth in Romania and it is a highly detailed recount of his group's *evolution* (a questionable word choice, I suppose) to full-fledged hooliganism

– mostly pertaining to sexual assault, sexual harassment, theft, fraud, destruction of property, to put the all too graphic examples of the manifestations of the “freedom” and “adventure” sought in the name of their anti-philosophy into today’s legal terms (rather than merely slapping a “thrill-seeking” label on the criminal actions of youth). The targets were usually the (apparently) all too gentle and thus vulnerable and easily-intimidated members of the bourgeoisie, but there is one example in which they pushed the limits into truly dangerous territory – “The plan was to go into a brothel and sleep with the most expensive girls without paying. The very real danger here was that they were no longer taunting the genteel bourgeoisie of polite society but tricking gangsters and pimps who knew how to use knives and guns. The ‘adventure’ was to occur in a place called Crucea de Piatră (The Stone Cross), where the most notorious and expensive brothels in Bucharest were to be found” (p. 41). And it succeeded. The manifestations of anti-philosophy applied to real life did actually have their limits, and these limits are equally graphically described as having been witnessed by and repulsed Isou: “[Bif] was as cruel as ever. His final act, or boast according to Isou, was to impregnate a sixteen-year-old virgin with syphilis [...]. He literally fucked her to death. Finally – at last – Isou was shocked. This was not an avant-garde prank – a ‘hilarious trick’ – but simple murder” (p. 44).

All recounts of the Pogrom are soul-shattering, and those of Isou’s experiences are equally so. As the large-scale events of the greater history become increasingly more brutal, the storyline gains two narrative planes – the background, i.e. the overwhelmingly large chain of events that became *the* history, and the foreground, i.e. the (bio-)story. Although parallel, the two communicate constantly, the explosions going off in the background either damaging or illuminating the foreground. The story under scrutiny here illustrates a stylised take on the idea of *scalar* history, from the ground up, from the lower, subjective memory, to the aerial – agreed-upon – objective history. As opposed to first-person recounts, which rely heavily on the limited foreground bound within the singular field of vision, Hussey’s biography uses the historical scalar gaze in combination with the re-focusing mechanisms of his own prose. The resounding voice of the storyteller is capable of both: “It was around this time that Isou had his first case of gonorrhoea” as a result of a somewhat sexually disappointing encounter (p. 66), and “Isou now felt as if his body were on fire. The rubber truncheon was like a torch that lit fires in his lower back and buttocks. He was reduced to a throbbing piece of meat, barely a human being” (p. 52), a result of the anti-Semitic beatings. The first part ends with the ominous and, by now, characteristic voice of the narrator: “By daybreak, he would be in Paris”.

The second part, “Paris Seen by a Stranger (1945–68)”, outlines the context in which the literary destiny of Isou was in a *nowhere to go but up* type of a situation: from “Isou had now been in Paris over four months and was still not famous” (p. 139), to the immense failure that was the first conference meant to replace surrealism with lettrism – attended purely by accident by “the inmates of a local orphanage” who “did not understand that Isou was reading lettriste poetry; they simply thought that he was speaking Romanian, which they did not understand.” (pp. 140-141).

History continues to happen in the background of what is truly in focus – for instance, after painting the picture of the real world of 1947, with the power plays between Moscow and the former Allied forces, with the Marshall Plan and French politics, Hussey follows up by pointing out that “In the opening weeks of 1947, however, all of this was secondary to a singular event of world-historical importance: on 26 January, Isou and the lettristes were featured in an article in the *New York Times*” (p. 153). The Parisian literary social life has always been a subject that stirred the interest of one and all, especially if it came with the promise of offering a narrative glance into the scandalous back alleys of the savoury lives of writers and artists. Hussey does indeed offer the readers the expected zest in this regard, by narrating an episode that took place in Café de la Place Blanche, which extended the list of people towards whom, for Isou, there apparently could be no other feeling than deep hatred – as was the case of his hatred for Victor Brauner, who was an “arse-licker” and who, with his one good eye, “squinted fiercely at Isou”, or Andre Breton, who “was actually a deeply mediocre man” and “a ridiculous fat vegetable” (p. 173).

As with most forms of daring and transgressive manifestations that come into the public view, these too tend to come under aggressive moral and legal scrutiny, interspersed with outraged support.

The somewhat predictable trajectory of writings that (quite willingly) injure the surrounding sensibility is condensed in the fairly self-explanatory subchapter “Sex, Prison and Revolution”, which obviously depicts Isou’s clash with censorship and prudishness in the moral climate of post-war Paris. The waves and subsequent short imprisonment were caused by *Isou ou La Mécanique de femmes*, since Isou *pioneeringly* considered that “nothing could be more fundamental and important in the sexual act than knowledge of how women enjoyed sex. [...] Making women enjoy sex was, however, an art that everybody could master if they followed Isou’s rules and principles” (p. 180). The badge of honour thus gained (the public reprimand was met with support from those who opposed censorship of sexual material) laid the grounds for the image of the martyr, the genius and the self-declared Messiah. Part two also recounts his trips to Israel and his marriage to a Christian woman for whom he *allegedly* converted to Christianity. Moreover, it would appear that it was for her that he ever wrote the only poem in proper French, entitled *À ma femme, pour lui prouver que je sais faire un poème à mots*. The painstaking quest for fame, with its ups and downs, takes place within the whirlwind of the Parisian Left Bank, all the while drenched in Isou’s relentless (over?)confidence in his genius. Lettrism eventually does walk the path of failures and successes and does indeed gain the recognition necessary for the establishment of a literary genre.

Part three, “The Divinity of Isou (1968–2007)”, follows the period of his psychiatric treatment and his pursuit for eternal life. The Epilogue, however, explains the biographer’s choice of title: “in this tradition, language is not only ultimately the word of God, but the pathway towards God. So *lettrisme* is not simply a new technique in art, poetry or painting, but literally the voice of the Absolute. [...] Isou’s life and work, seen in this way, is simply the twentieth-century version of an old tradition: a rejection of failed Western rationalism in favour of the irrational as the way towards divinity – literally ‘speaking East’” (p. 299).

Andrew Hussey narrates a life in a form that is by no means exclusively tragic, crushed by hardship, struggle, pushed and tugged by the violence of history and whatnot (although it was, and this aspect is definitely neither overlooked nor shrugged off), but one that is truly ‘strange and enchanted’, the story of which follows a delightful strolling pace, interrupted by moments of shock and awe. *Speaking East* is far from a heartstring-tugging approach to the brutal events that befell a people in the context in which the world was a truly terrible place. All that is there, of course, but it does not necessarily aim to emphasize the “correct” stance that needs to be taken by a reader moved to tears. It inflicts a combination of delight and discomfort (if we were to avoid more extreme pairings such as amusement and sheer horror) - a sort of discourse that wraps the reader in a warm, but slightly moist blanket, all while continuously (and secretly) increasing and decreasing the temperature in the room.

One would think that taking a sledgehammer to the thick layer of fiction covering a story that employs large-scale historical events and small-scale biographical truth may seem like an easier task when speaking to the creator who had poured the layer there in the first place. One would be wrong. *L’Agrégation* is one piece of fiction in particular which Hussey approaches as the layer that needs to be slowly chipped away from the historical block beneath. Biographies come in all shapes and sizes, whether they are assumed as such or not, but they do tend to both pile on top of and uncover the details rooted in reality, which makes the navigation between the two actions that much more difficult. But along comes the biographer’s prose, in all its compensating glory. The narrative is filled with short, matter-of-fact-like utterances that, due to their contents, knowingly urge the reader to keep reading. One such example would be “Isou decided to become a prostitute” (p. 135) – straight to the point and, albeit not entirely surprising, given the nature of the story, intriguing enough to incite in the reader an *oh, goody* type of somewhat conspirative excitement.

The tone and style are not meant to lecture or to convey a set of bio-bibliographical data on Isidore Isou. This is a task adequately covered by literary anthologies, dictionaries or encyclopaedias. Andrew Hussey’s style is miles away from that of a near-sighted, sweater-vest-wearing scholar. The genre itself seems to have moved into climates in which such garments would be unbearable and

unnecessary – the newer approaches call for the intelligent combination between puckishly lighthearted and meticulously researched. *Speaking East* is both.

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IULIA TEGGE, *Mirajul reflectării. Spre o istorie a metaficțiunii în romanul românesc* [*The Mirage of Reflection. Towards a History of Metafiction in the Romanian Novel*], Alba Iulia, OMG Publishing, 2021, 250 p.

Iulia Tegge's study shows that metafiction is not only a postmodern style of prose, but a phenomenon that has been present in the earlier forms of novel in Romania. She also addresses the way literature and art in general discuss the idea of creation (both as a final product and as a process). Tegge defines metafiction as the fluid process of an author's "narcissistic narrative". Tegge discusses Linda Hutcheon's approach to metafictional discourse, according to which metafiction could be pinpointed to the 18th century and Romanticism. Iulia Tegge remarks that Romanian studies only discuss metafictional discourse from a one-sided perspective, considering it a product of postmodernism. Thus, she takes into account Patricia Waugh's study *The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, where the author claims that metafiction is linked to the "novel's identity". However, her main argumentation point is Linda Hutcheon's perspective on the metafictional novel, according to which by way of metafiction one can understand the relationship between fiction and reality.

The book is divided in two parts. The former presents theoretical approaches and the latter describes the way the author surrogate is embodied in the Romanian novel. In "Premise teoretice" ["Theoretical Premises"] Iulia Tegge theorizes metafiction from a chronological point of view. She mentions the fact that European theoreticians working around 1950s–1960s started to address the idea of the *Nouveau roman*, with Robert Alter focusing the discussion on metafiction in 1975. However, Tegge highlights that forms of metafiction were present long before the 1970s and that metafiction could be understood as "fiction about fiction". She also mentions the way the authors usually create an *alter ego* in their writings that generates confusion for many non-specialized readers. Iulia Tegge considers metafiction a complex phenomenon also to be found in certain forms of *Bildungsroman* or more precisely *Künstlerroman*, focused on the artist's life journey.

The second part, "Recurențe ale personajului scriitor în romanul românesc" ["Recurrences of the Writer-character in the Romanian Novel"], shows the fact that metafiction is linked to the writer/artist-character trope by analyzing novels by D. Bolintineanu, Pantazi Ghica, Anton Holban, Camil Petrescu, Mircea Eliade and H. Bonciu. The 1840s mark the beginning of the Romanian Romantic movement, with authors imitating different popular forms of literature from France or Europe and presenting different perspectives on how the novel emerged in the Romanian literature. Iulia Tegge discusses the way in which *Manoil* by D. Bolintineanu addresses the relation between the author and the character, mentioning that N. Iorga acknowledged *Manoil* as the first important Romanian novel, while also noting that D. Bolintineanu's next novel, *Elena*, is better written. Tegge notices that the author's surrogate, Manoil, is an aspiring writer who strives to be recognized as such, but another aspect is that through Manoil, D. Bolintineanu reveals the writer's status in 19th century Romania. Many critics have not discussed this dimension of D. Bolintineanu's novel, arguing that Manoil lacks plausibility, yet G. Călinescu stated that *Manoil* and *Elena* mark the beginning of the Romanian novel. Fiction becomes a pretext in Bolintineanu's novel. As Tegge would point out in her

analysis, Bolintineanu discusses the marginal status of the writer and offers his insights on the state of the National Literature.

Tegge also analyses the novel *Un boem român* [A Romanian bohemian] by Pantazi Ghica. While D. Micu and Ion Rotaru consider Pantazi Ghica's writing devoid of any literary value, Ștefan Cazimir commends Pantazi Ghica for his efforts of theorizing the novel in Romania. Tegge mentions that there is only one monographic study concerning Pantazi Ghica, the one written by Viorica Diaconescu, with the author interested in the relation between the author and the main character and in the fact that Pantazi Ghica could be one of the first theoreticians of the Romanian novel. While discussing *Un boem român*, Tegge notices that Pantazi Ghica oscillates between realism and romanticism and argues that using literature as a topic in different writings strengthens the idea that metafiction is not a product of postmodernism. Pompiliu Constantinescu considers that the interwar novel is a result of the social changes inherent to the times, switching from confession to reflection on what society looks like at a particular moment. Iulia Tegge also mentions that N. Manolescu divides authors into those that problematize the political and social changes, and those that write in a more subjective manner and who are interested in the psychological effects and changes in society. Even though during that period E. Lovinescu was promoting the objective prose, Tegge mentions that an important change defining the interwar period was how the novel started to approach different subjective perspectives.

Iulia Tegge's analysis continues to focus on Anton Holban's novels, where the author's life resembles the main character's, Sandu. The novels *O moarte care nu dovedește nimic* [A Death That Proves Nothing], *Ioana* and *Jocurile Daniei* [Dania's Games] are written in a subjective manner, enhanced by the first-person perspective. N. Manolescu and Alexandru Călinescu discussed the way the first-person perspective of the narrator gets confused with the real-life author's perspective, but E. Lovinescu and Pompiliu Constantinescu considered Anton Holban's writings closer to a *pseudo-diary* because of the confessional manner employed. Tegge highlights the fact that by writing about Sandu's ideas about literature, authorship, and even about the process of writing, Anton Holban employs a metafictional approach. Tegge discusses the distance between the main character and the real-life author in Holban's writings, and the way this distance keeps getting smaller, as Sandu faces similar issues about writing as Holban does. Iulia Tegge remarks that Holban resorts to intertextuality and concludes that his style of writing is influential in modernizing the Romanian novel.

Further on, Tegge analyses *Patul lui Procrust* [Procrustes's Bed] by Camil Petrescu, focusing on how subjectivity and authenticity are approached in this novel. She points out that the role of the narrator is only to encourage the other characters to write. However, what the author also managed to achieve in this novel is a discussion about how novels should be written and approached. Like Anton Holban in his use of intertextuality, Camil Petrescu mentions other texts he has authored, such as *Ultima noapte de dragoste înțaiia noapte de război* [The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War] or his play *Suflete tari* [Strong Souls]. Tegge argues that this method enhances the authenticity of the text, noting that the narrator's insertion and the motivation to convince Lady T or Fred Vasilescu to write mark Camil Petrescu's role as a predecessor of postmodern literature. Tegge also mentions that *Patul lui Procrust* [The Procrustean Bed] aims for a plural perspective, and that every one of the four central characters (the narrator, Lady T, Fred Vasilescu and Ladima) could easily be considered an *alter-ego* of the author.

Iulia Tegge goes on by analysing Mircea Eliade's approaches to a pre-metafictional novel. As in the case of Camil Petrescu or Anton Holban, authenticity plays a major role in the construction of the novel, with Eliade's writings on the edge between fiction and journal. Here, Tegge analyses *Romanul adolescentului miop* [Diary of a Short-Sighted Adolescent], *Nuntă în cer* [Marriage in Heaven] and *Șantier* [Worksite]. She notices that Eliade's approaches are usually subjective and influenced by realism and that *Romanul adolescentului miop* resembles a diary. Unlike the authors mentioned before, Eliade uses writing as a process of self-discovery. Tegge proceeds to analyse *Șantier*, which also is on the verge between journal and fiction, as it describes the time Eliade spent in India. Nonetheless, it is considered a novel because Eliade himself thought about it that way. Perpessicius

and Mircea Handoca consider *Şantier* a very important novel because of its focus on Eliade's process of writing rather than on his personal life. Like Petrescu and Holban, Eliade resorts to intertextuality, mentioning two texts still unpublished at the time. Tegge finds *Şantier* relevant for the metafictional discussion because of the way the Author-Narrator and the authenticity-intimacy relationships are approached. Furthermore, she notices that many critics have failed to discuss the writer's condition in *Nuntă în cer*, focusing on the love plot between Andrei Mavrodin and Ileana instead. Even though Tegge also finds the love plot to be the central plot of the novel, she believes that *Nuntă în cer*, as well as Eliade's previously mentioned novels, showcase the relationship between the Author and the Narrator.

In her process of outlining metafiction, Tegge also mentions the avant-garde writer H. Bonciu. Even though his writings are surrealist, resorting to different symbols, he still discusses the writer's condition and how literature is perceived. Tegge mentions that Bonciu uses a more hybrid style of prose, blending different forms of expressionism, avant-gardism, surrealism and even autobiography and authenticity in *Bagaj. Strania dublă existență a unui om în patru labe* [*Baggage. The Strange Double-Life of a Man on All Fours*] and *Pensiunea doamnei Pipersberg* [*Mrs Pipersberg's Guesthouse*]. The narrator is the link between these two novels, bearing the same name as the author. Tegge indicates that H. Bonciu's novels encourage the reader to identify the real-life author to the narrator. In this part of the analysis, Tegge concludes that metafiction could not be completely attributed to postmodernism, since throughout history many authors have discussed literature in their own texts.

In "Concluzii. Spre o istorie a metaficțiunii" ["Conclusions. Towards a History of Metafiction"], Iulia Tegge emphasizes the fact that Robert Alter is one of the first theoreticians that attributed metafiction to modernist fiction, while in fact it can be encountered even in earlier novels such as Cervantes' *Don Quixote* or Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*. In Tegge's study, Linda Hutcheon's contributions are relevant for the matter of metafiction, as she not only continued to expand Robert Alter's theory, but also argued that the role of the Author-Narrator relationship is important in metafiction. Furthermore, Tegge acknowledges Anamaria Blănuș's thesis about contemporary metafiction, pointing out that studies about metafiction are scarce in Romania. As the border between the author and the narrator is slowly fading, Tegge discusses the role of self-reflexivity in literature, and how every author analyzed created different characters that questioned what literature is. *Manoil* and *Un boem român* are for Tegge two of the most representative novels that mark the origin of metafiction. Moreover, she continues by showcasing the importance of Holban's and Petrescu's characters, who try to define literature in their own terms, erasing the fine line between the real author's and the narrator's credo. Finally, by analyzing Eliade's and Bonciu's novels, Tegge demonstrates that metafiction has been strongly highlighted in prose long before postmodernism.

Iulia Tegge's study aims to describe and demonstrate that metafiction is not only a postmodernist process, as it is encountered in different periods of time, from the beginning of the Romanian novel. She analyses some peaks of Romanian literature, emphasizing the fact that self-reflexivity, subjectivity, the confessional manner and the Author-Narrator relationship are usually found in earlier stages of the Romanian literature. She offers an extended bibliography pointing to the fact that she is not only trying to define metafiction in Romanian literature, but also to research it from a historical point of view. Taking all this into account, Iulia Tegge's study is relevant for the Romanian novel, offering a broader perspective on the phenomenon of metafiction outside the boundaries of postmodernism.

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