

COMPTEs RENDUS / BOOK REVIEWS

RADU MÂRZA, *Călători români privind pe fereastra trenului. O încercare de istorie culturală (1830–1930)* [*Romanian Travelers Looking Out of the Train Window. An Attempt at Cultural History (1830–1930)*]. Foreword by Ovidiu Ghitta, Polirom, Iași, 2020, 211 p.

Travel writing (travel literature), which has been around since ancient times, is characterized by its ability to portray reality from the travelers' perspective. As with other forms of writing, travel literature has been influenced by a number of factors – political, economic, cultural, religious, social and even human (see Percy G. Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*, 2015). For this reason, travel literature includes numerous textual forms/types which may or may not be similar to each other. In line with these observations, Percy G. Adams identifies three subcategories of travel literature: a. "travel letters" – formal or informal narrative travel writing with a single addressee; b. travel diaries/*récit de voyage* – non-fictional writings, organized by days and hours (e.g. the logbook); c. narrative writings proper – not always written in the first person, but providing a lot of information and place names; most of the time, they precede the description of the trip, often including essays about nature or the advantages of the journey. Radu Mârza discusses precisely this last category in his latest book, *Călători români privind pe fereastra trenului* [*Romanian Travelers Looking Out of the Train Window*].

Like all nineteenth-century activities, travelling increases the need for modernization, for a "fundamental change in mentality [...] and in society" (as Mircea Angheliescu emphasizes in his 2015 study *Lâna de aur. Călătorii și călătoriile în literatura română* [*The Golden Fleece. Travelers and Travels in the Romanian Literature*]). It is known that Romanians began to travel by train outside the Principalities long before the development of the railway industry in Romania. In the first decades of the 19th century, contact with the West and with the landscape they travelled through required a "travel ceremony" (preparing the route, renting the stagecoach, travelling the route) which influenced the travelers' perception of the whole journey. We are talking about a change in the travelers' perception of time and space, which changes with the arrival of the "iron road" (p. 18).

Radu Mârza's research looks at Romanian travelers in the Kingdom and in Transylvania in relation to rail travel. "What does the traveler see when he looks out of the train window?", "What does he think about?", "What interests him when he describes what he sees out of the train window?", "How does he see the other travelers on the train or on the platform or how does he see the station?" (p. 15) are just some of the questions that arouse the historian's curiosity. The volume reveals a first century of rail travel – between 1830 and 1930 – captured by the man of letters: 1. the first Romanian travelers (Petrahe Poenaru, Ion Codru Drăgușanu, George Bariț, Ion Ghica, N. Filimon); 2. the *Belle Époque* period (A.D. Xenopol, Iosif Vulcan, Nicolae Iorga); 3. the interwar period (Liviu Rebreanu, Demostene Botez).

With the development of the railway industry in Europe there was also a change "of a social and cultural nature" (p. 15). The individual's (traveler's) way of relating to space changed completely, as contact with the West led to an awareness of the differences between civilizations, critical comparison ("not like ours") and the impulse towards progress and imitation (see, in this respect, Adrian Marino's *Carnete europene. "Însemnare a călătoriei mele făcută între anii 1969–1975"* [*European Notebooks. "Notes on My Travels from 1969–1975"*], 1976). Just as Dinu Goleșcu was "frightened" by the West, Romanian travelers looking out of the train window were surprised by the way the "iron road" became a living constant of the journey, marking the perception of the individual.

Following closely the travel of 19th century Romanians, Radu Mârza has captured the effects of rail travelling on the traveler. In the individual's relationship with nature, the train is a means of communication, which "modifies not only his visual perception, his perception of the nature travelled

through, [...] but also that of time and space” (p. 18). Seen through the train window, the landscape becomes much more dynamic. As with photography or cinema, the perception of space and time changes. In front of the traveler, a film unfolds in which the foreground changes rapidly; the traveler becomes a witness, a close observer of the events unfolding.

The experience of travelling by train, the dazzling mass of images and the detailed notes on how the train works (Petrache Poenaru, Ion Codru Drăgușanu) amplified the traveler’s feelings. Of course, the development of the railway industry led not only to a democratization of travel, but also to a social reconfiguration of the individual. The 19th century saw a social change: the birth of the middle class. In line with these historical events and as a result of the industrial revolution, the train is amplifying the emergence of new areas of activity (industrial, commercial, administrative, etc.).

At the same time, the aristocracy of the mid-19th century increasingly travelled by train, investing time in social activities. There is a change in leisure habits. From indoor and outdoor leisure facilities (cafés, restaurants, clubs, casinos, theatres, boulevard walks, etc.), the traveler begins to “prefer” new social spaces such as the platform, the compartment, the station restaurant, the waiting room. Thus, the development of transport, and in particular of train travel, has influenced the social process of democratization of travelling (p. 27). By agreeing to travel in a train carriage, the passenger is constrained by the confined space of the compartment. As a result, socialization occurs between people from different social, cultural and professional backgrounds (as the experiences of N. Filimon, N. Iorga and Liviu Rebreanu show).

The railway industry has also led to the construction of new premises. As urban planning took place around the “iron road”, 19th century railway stations were not seen as mere buildings, but as real “gateways to cities” (p. 30). Railway history thus marks new forms of socialization, in which the railway station begins to be a social and cultural institution of great significance for the 19th century. Romanian travelers capture both the constant development of society (Petrache Poenaru, Ion Codru Drăgușanu, Mihail Sadoveanu, Liviu Rebreanu) and the actual construction of the railway (George Bariț, Alexandru D. Xenopol), as well as the change of the political regime – Liviu Rebreanu (p. 35). At the same time, the extension of the railways intensified the problem of territorial domination. For example, in Romania the desire to unite the historical territories grows as the railway transforms the territory into a “nation-space” (p. 32).

Just like the cinema, the train becomes a place of uninhibited intimacy and love affairs. Unfortunately, the historian has not considered fictional literature. This could have given him many details of how the train becomes a place of intimacy (as in I.L. Caragiale, Liviu Rebreanu, E. Lovinescu, etc.). The railway references used are taken from memoirs, correspondence, press reports and travel books. They provide information on the dating of the main railway projects (in 1842 the railway line between Bucharest and Giurgiu, in 1856 in Banat, in 1860 in Dobrogea, in 1868 in Transylvania, etc.), but also details on the development of terminology (an adaptation of neologisms or even linguistic calques): “debarcader”/ “imbarcader” for platform, “saloane” for waiting rooms, “drum de fer”, “trăgan” for the train lining (p. 52), “viaduct” etc. (especially for the first Romanian travelers: Petrache Poenaru, Ion Codru Drăgușanu, George Bariț, Ion Ghica, N. Filimon).

One would have expected to find a detailed study of the space the traveler crosses; a poetics of space along the lines of the dialectic proposed by Gaston Bachelard: inside-outside, of closed and open space. As such, one could follow the way in which the space of the train shapes the passenger’s intimacy, on the one hand, and, on the other, the transformation of the train into a space of passage (between openings) between civilizations and cultures. The accounts of Romanian train travelers from the early decades of our railway history present little detail about the landscape (p. 189). Taking into account the travelers’ descriptions of the interior spaces of the station, the technical details and the advantages of train travel, the space of the train can also be analyzed from this point of view.

Certainly, historian Radu Mârza’s attempt at cultural history has the merit of opening up new research perspectives. Like other historians (Mihai Chiperi, Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu), Mârza offers a complex picture of the modernization of the Romanian space throughout the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century. On reading the pages of the memories and impressions of

Romanian travelers, the reader easily enters the world of train travel between 1830 and 1930, where the Baedeker (the travel guide) – replaced, this time, by the writers' travel notes – accompanies him/her from one setting to another.

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ANGELO MITCHIEVICI, *Farmecul vieților distruse. Câteva reflecții despre ratare [The Charm of Destroyed Lives. Some Thoughts about Failure]*, București, Humanitas, 2022, 348 p.

The latest book signed by Angelo Mitchievici proposes a reflexive approach, through the perspective of self-knowledge, to a sufficiently challenging and unusual theme, that of failure. The natural tendency, moreover, of human nature to write, record and focus more on a positive, central existential side, that of fulfillment, imposes in itself the exploration of the reverse side, natural and human, of his reflection in the mirror, where he faces the other. Far from being consolidated in the form of a concept or negative pedagogy, as the author himself states, the theme of failure is presented in Angelo Mitchievici's book on the fictional and neutral field of literature, starting from Cioran's philosophy, where failure is the core, obsessive idea, and particularizing each individual case. Once again, literature manages to achieve its noble goal of offering perspectives, variants, cases, without imposing and without condemning.

With its entire suite of synonymous terms, from non-fulfillment to derealization, failure crosses the literary field in multiple forms, all coming together under the common sign of the ontological, since failure concerns the totality of existence down to the roots of one's destiny. The taste of reading this “intellectual investigation”, in Ioan Stanomir's terms, reveals a horizon of lives apparently dissolved of all meaning, drained of any possibility of reaching the fulfillment organically craved by human nature, which paradoxically, precisely by omission, gives meaning to their existence. From *The Desert of the Tatars* to *The Great Gatsby*, *Macbeth* or Mihail Sadoveanu's *Locul unde nu s-a întâmplat nimic [The Place Where Nothing Happened]*, from Voltaire to Mircea Eliade, Mircea Cărtărescu and the adventures of the comic strip hero Corto Maltese, Angelo Mitchievici's book conducts a survey of fictional underachievers who either accepted failure in their lives or not, who either resigned to it or fought to learn something from it, who evolved cognitively and spiritually or gave in to failure. Are failure and the feeling of failure the same thing? Is there an equivalent relation between the two terms, or not? A man who perceives affectively the emotion of failure, is he necessarily a loser? Reading the text reinforces the idea that the relationship between the two terms is one of an adversarial nature. It is possible to live with this sense of failure without ever really knowing it. Perceiving the feeling of failure leads to the nostalgia of *what if*. Questioning the present in relation to the echoes of past failures, as is the case with the feeling of vocational failure. A telling example in this regard is Professor Gavrilescu from Mircea Eliade's *La țigănci [With the Gypsy Girls]*, who lives permanently in the shadow of a life that will not have been, which fuels this sense of failure. At the same time, a fundamental notion emerges from the lines covered so far: at the organic level, the feeling of failure is by definition opposed to the rational, therefore, it is located deep in the soul, from where it never disappears.

Another interesting aspect touched upon in Angelo Mitchievici's study is failure viewed through the lens of philosophy and literature alike. In the struggle between philosophy and literature, philosophy is the loser – in thematic terms. In the chapter devoted to Voltaire's work, it is not Candide who misses his existence, but philosophy itself. As long as philosophy dictates the moral

course of the character's existence – a character emptied of content at that, failure is inevitable. Accepting life outside the philosophical system is the first step towards healing and, why not, towards fulfillment. Candide finally manages to anchor himself in a fragment of existence, which is impossible to do without renouncing the principles that influenced him up to that point in life. Could Candide be a loser? Perhaps, but as long as there is a sense of failure at the center of the catastrophe, Candide remains a defeated winner of fate.

In the same seductive manner of the text, literature is joined by examples of nuances of failure from the world of cinema, in the films *The Big Cracker* (Marco Ferreri) and *The Fatal Passion* (Louis Malle), both ruled by the sign of decadence, a familiar theme to the author and addressed by Angelo Mitchievici in his previous research. The decadent landmarks from the first film come together under the umbrella of epicureanism, the *dolce far niente*, but also that of saturation, a morbid excess that forms a single meaning towards a single destination: failure. In the case of *La Grande Bouffe*, where fulfillment, the equivalent of maximum happiness, is reached, where all that could be added is exhausted, the whole system is stifled, so the vacuum of suicide becomes the exceptional attraction. Erotic decadence is illustrated in *Fatal Passion*, where failure wears the mantle of the *femme fatale*, the enigmatic and destructive heroine of the decadent era of the late 19th century. What emerges here is a splendid image of failure in its erotic, almost enchanted essence, which leads to the decline of only one candidate for failure: the man who is predestined to failure in the form of the *femme fatale*. In this way, his life acquires a particular charm, the charm of destroyed lives.

Whether we are talking about fictional worlds or biography, one thing is certain: failure implies the sharpening of the assumed non-fulfillment, appropriated by the process of existence. The loser is perfectly aware not only of his experiences, but also of the way in which the loss gave him the key to self-knowledge. On the one hand, in his perpetual restlessness, Cioran has a deep dissatisfaction with the ephemerality of everything that exists, with the lack of eternity, transposing the idea in his reflections on failure: the failed man is crowned with the aura of wisdom precisely through the fact that he realizes the perishability of existence and, paradoxically, this gives him peace and comfort in the midst of failure: nothing is worth the effort. On the other hand, the book concludes with the theological perspective on failure in the parable of the prodigal son, where failure becomes the path to salvation, the triumph against failure through failure. Thus, self-knowledge is complete and success takes the place of failure. The charm and, why not, the balance and harmony of destroyed lives are installed, all recoverable in a book whose pages fascinate and invite day-dreaming.

Alongside Angelo Mitchievici's previous books dealing with decadence and Decadentism – *Mateiu I. Caragiale. Fizionomii decadente* [*Mateiu I. Caragiale. Decadent Physiognomies*] (2007), *Decadență și decadentism în contextul modernității românești și europene* [*Decadence and Decadentism in the Context of Romanian and European Modernity*] (2011), *Simbolism și decadentism în arta 1900* [*Symbolism and Decadentism in 1900's Art*] (2011), the present volume undoubtedly captures a reflexive-aesthetic expression of these themes, which transcends the didacticism of intellectual research by its much more intense, much more confessional character. The author assumes this personal approach as a consequence of the assimilation of the discursive metabolism of the themes of decadence. Dandyism, *la femme fatale*, the Moldavian Crepuscularism in *The Place Where Nothing Happened* are evoked and analytically revisited, this time in a manner that suggests a deep meditation on the human condition. Also, the references to cinematography are not accidental; they are due to the profile of the author as a film critic, Angelo Mitchievici being also the columnist behind the film chronicle in the cultural magazine *România literară*.

Therefore, the present book is the image of a refined essayistic regrouping of the arts, literature and film under the discreet, almost intimate pen of the prose writer.

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ȘTEFAN BAGHIU, OVIO OLARU, ANDREI TERIAN
(eds.), *Beyond the Iron Curtain. Revisiting the Literary System
of Communist Romania*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2021, 274 p.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, intellectual elites – regardless of their ideological alignment at the time of the totalitarian regime – created a discursive community based on an anti-communist ethos, manifested mainly in literary historiography. The outcome is visible, first and foremost, in terms of the construction of the scholarly canon and, consequently, the reception of literature after December 1989. As Alex Goldiș points out in one of his books (*Critica în tranșee: De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului* [*Criticism in the Trenches: From Socialist Realism to Aesthetic Autonomy*]), the birth of the “autonomy of aesthetics” in the melting pot of anti-communist literary criticism (in order to prevent political interference) has survived to this day, as evidenced by the school curricula or the outdated methodologies used to teach literature in schools. A series of clichés have proliferated in the Romanian consciousness and discourse, metonymically substituting “communism” for “murder”, thereby leaving no room for interpretation, nuance or revision.

In these circumstances, *Beyond the Iron Curtain*, edited by Ștefan Baghiu, Ovio Olaru and Andrei Terian, aims to revisit the system of Romanian literature during communism, “beyond anticommunist interpretative commonplaces” (p. 21). At the forefront of the studies is Andrei Terian’s article, which deconstructs the anticommunist ideology of post-revolutionary Romanian historiography (Nicolae Manolescu, Eugen Negrici and Marian Popa providing relevant case studies). Using the concept of a “metahistorical” perspective, which is a priori to the discourse of literary criticism and history, Andrei Terian investigates the mechanisms by which literary history is highlighted from a metanarrative point of view. Socialist Realism (1948–1964) is a hiatus in the “development” of Romanian literature, due to the interference of political and ideological apparatuses in the cultural field. It is also the reason why, Andrei Terian explains, post-communist literature is seen as decadent, as a downgrade after the 1960s and 1980s generation had re-established a unit of measurement of real “value”. At the end of his considerations, Terian questions Hayden White’s theory because it derives from the idea that “the acknowledgement of a certain ‘logic’ of history also entails its unconditional acceptance” (p. 39). In order to overcome this paradox of historical evolution taking completely different metahistorical forms, the author establishes that the *perspective* (personal value system) of historiography plays an important role in shaping the metahistorical component. In this regard, there can be empathetic, antipathetic, apathetic or pathetic perspectives.

The rurality and “the formula” of socialist realism in the Romanian novel have often been overlooked by literary critics for at least two reasons: being subordinated to politics, socialist realism has not yielded any “great masterpiece” (ergo, it does not deserve to be explored in detail) to Romanian literature. Secondly, the vulgus argues that ruralism becomes a minority issue with the urbanization of modernity or, when it is performed, it falls prey to idolization. In her article, Daiana Gârdan reads the Romanian novel from the Stalinist period through quantitative investigations in terms of themes or stylistics. What she demonstrates is that, in essence, the distinct formal characteristics of this sub-genre make it possible to discuss a widespread literary phenomenon with a complex thematic texture (corporeality, temporality, and the human condition) and a high level of formalization that cannot be overlooked. Emanuel Modoc begins his analysis of the functions of the rural milieu in the Romanian novel from 1948–1989 with a rather interesting statement from the point of view of canonical construction: “we can now retrospectively acknowledge that the strategy of vilifying perhaps the most representative theme indicative of Romanian identity – rurality – has led to the consolidation of a literary canon that is nonetheless modern” (p. 84). Modoc’s study shows the different “sides” of the rural decorum (which means that the use of rural tropes does not imply an assimilated ruralism) negotiated through different narrative formulas: as a utopia in the first phase of the dictatorship, then as a counter-utopia (in the case of novels that thematized collectivization) and as a background to the import of magical realism, for example, through which the communist project

was demystified. Cosmin Borza's purpose in "The Faces of Rural Modernity in the Romanian Novel of the Agricultural Collectivization" is to question platitudes about collectivization as a "war against the peasantry" by investigating "vulnerable categories and the bureaucratization of the relationship between the individual/community and the state" (p. 68). If Borza comes to the pertinent conclusion that the collectivization process and the ideological thaw contributed to the expansion of the social universe of the Romanian novel, Andreea Mironescu demonstrates that gender hierarchies were reinforced throughout socialist modernism, by applying a gender studies analysis to Nicolae Breban's most well-known novel.

The year 1968, when Nicolae Ceaușescu refused to invade Czechoslovakia despite the Warsaw Treaty, is of great historical importance for the Romanian literary system. The second group of articles focuses on the types of cosmopolitanism exercised by post-1968 literary groups or productions. Doris Mironescu uses the concept of "vernacular cosmopolitanism" to analyse the subversive mechanisms of the Iași Literary Group, which was neither heroic nor fully opportunistic. Moreover, as Mironescu concludes, "performative conviviality was an instrument for the group manifestation of dissident attitudes" (p. 129). While Imre József Balázs explores the way in which the values of the West and capitalism were recontextualized in the trilingual magazine *Echinox*, precisely as subversive political mechanisms, Ștefan Baghiu and Costi Rogozanu provide a thorough analysis of the myth of the superstar in the communist period, with an application to (the death of) Marin Preda, who epitomises the Eastern European correlative of the Western "bohemia". In the spirit of detective inquiry, Ramona Hârșan demonstrates how metafiction (along with its adjacent forms such as the pluristratified autofictional extension) was imported from Western (postmodern) culture as an alibi for anti-communist ideology that passed invisibly through unofficial censorship. Finally, Mihai Iovănel observes how translations of UFO (non)fictions have seen an inflation since 1968. These narratives were imported thanks to the "epistemological metaphor" that was compatible with the communist metanarrative during the Cold War: there are aliens behind capitalist governments plotting against their own citizens. However, Western borrowing weakens with the 1970s and 1980s because of the isolationist measures imposed by Ceaușescu.

In the last section of the book, Adriana Stan, Ovio Olaru, Alex Goldiș and Costi Rogozanu contribute with case studies on Romanian literature under communism in a transnational context. Ovio Olaru's article focuses the debate on the ideological "history" of German microculture during the totalitarian régime, distinguishing three periods (an ethnocentric one, one that adopted ideas from Western Marxism during Ceaușescu's ethno-nationalism, and an internationalist one), and the reasons why it dissolved after the downfall of communism. Adriana Stan traces the import of structuralism across the Iron Curtain and how it was assimilated by Romania or Hungary, for example. She shows that French theory respects core-(semi-)periphery transfers and is shaped by local idiosyncrasies when imported. After analysing the impact of translated French and Latin American novels on Romanian culture, Alex Goldiș provides a few useful observations on Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory, among which the fact that translations establish intercultural relations but do not define them entirely. Costi Rogozanu's study draws parallels between different cases of dissidence (Petru Dumitriu, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Czesław Miłosz), attempting to propose a rereading of the Gulag experience from the perspective of the West's fascination with Eastern violence.

In conclusion, *Beyond the Iron Curtain* is the first volume in the history of Romanian criticism to open its analysis to the ill-famed communist period, which needs to be looked at through so many lenses and methodologies relevant to 21st century theory, such as gender studies, distant reading, criticism of suspicion or world-system analysis.

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CĂLIN TEUTIȘAN, *Scenarii ale criticii: protagoniști, metode, interpretări* [*Scenarios of Criticism: Protagonists, Methods, Interpretations*], Cluj-Napoca, Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2021, 276 p.

Published in 2021, the volume *Scenarii ale criticii: protagoniști, metode, interpretări* [*Scenarios of Criticism: Protagonists, Methods, Interpretations*] by Călin Teuțișan represents the author's plea in favor of various members of the Cluj academic community, aiming to outline clear directions regarding the interpretative hypotheses they promote.

Right from the title, the work announces a complex theme due to the plurality of perspectives for approaching "scenarios of criticism" within the academic space of Cluj. In this regard, the objectives set by the researcher and highlighted from the beginning ("Argument: Pentru o comunitate critică" ["Argument: For a Critical Community"], pp. 7-12) target the identification of connections, whether superficial or deep, among certain Cluj critical figures. Furthermore, the argument seeks to highlight the "turning points" (p. 7) located between generations of critics, with an emphasis on the relationship established with predecessors and the way they deviate from the options promoted by them. Călin Teuțișan's merit lies in tracking the evolutionary paths of a critical community consisting of critics from different time periods associated with the Cluj school of literary studies, each with sometimes divergent interpretative perspectives.

Regarding the adopted methodology, the researcher opts for an analysis from the perspective of the "categorical" on one hand (p. 8), and on the other hand, he focuses on "historical recovery". The parameters underlying this approach are exclusively of a conceptual-theoretical nature. The following seven chapters, under a process of detailed analysis, map out the architecture of the book, articulating the evolution of Cluj literary criticism based on different historical periods.

The first chapter, "Sinteza critică a unui postlansonian" ["A Critical Synthesis of a Post-Lansonian"] (pp. 13-29), focuses on the literary historian and comparatist D. Popovici, who adopts a specific critical typology of "historical scientific determinism" (p. 14). However, his interpretive practice is influenced by the deep model taken from Gustave Lanson, which explains the critic's post-Lansonism orientation. Among the identified surface models are the French professors M. Roques and Paul Hazard. Under the influence of these models, D. Popovici's merit for the Cluj school lies in highlighting the role of synthesis before text analysis, as well as that of the theory of criticism before applied criticism, ultimately echoing the idea of an alternative canon.

The next chapter focuses on "Critica între metafizică și raționalism. Utopia organică" ["Criticism between Metaphysics and Rationalism: The Organic Utopia"], subjecting to analysis Ioana Em. Petrescu's critical discourse. Due to the cultural object benefiting from an "intuitive translation" (p. 32), the critical formula adopted by Ioana Em. Petrescu aims at revelatory criticism, operating with rationalist tools. Rationalism becomes the very method of operation, while metaphysics serves as the finality, and their formative energy is exerted on the poetic. Thus, the discussion touches on the transition from the category of the individual to that of the rational, allowing for a definition of postmodernism as a mode of "rehabilitation of the category of the individual" (p. 37). This view sees the individual as a dynamic system that complements modernism through a partial coincidence of the two directions, rather than a mere continuation of a cultural phase that has already concluded. The critic also focuses on clarifying the concept of a "cosmological model" through a more explanatory and systematizing type of criticism.

Another perspective on paradigm shifts, focusing on the transition from modernism to postmodernism, is outlined in Chapter III ("Tentațiile metodei. Între 'critica pură' și 'știința literaturii'" ["The Temptations of Method: Between 'Pure Criticism' and 'Literary Science'"]) from the perspective of the critic Liviu Petrescu. With an interpretive practice rooted in the field of literary science, the volume *Poetica postmodernismului* [*The Poetics of Postmodernism*] provides a theoretical framework for postmodernism, analyzed with essentially modernist tools. Directed

towards the model of postmodernism's definition proclaimed by Jean-François Lyotard, Liviu Petrescu describes this postmodern phenomenon in terms of the episteme emerging against the backdrop of an internal erosion process. In this context, the postmodern fragmentism is investigated by the critic in opposition to the modernist totalitarianism.

In Chapter IV, titled "Poetici și stilistici. Istoria literară ca mediere critică" ["Poetics and Stylistics: Literary History as Critical Mediation"], Călin Teuțișan examines the critical discourse and analytical competencies of Ion Pop, largely derived from the perspectives of the Geneva School. The status of Ion Pop as a critic is much more evident through his monographic work in volumes dedicated to Nichita Stănescu and Lucian Blaga, revealing the stakes of the critical act, oriented towards "synthesis" and "periodization". Later, the monographs dedicated to Ilarie Voronca, Gellu Naum, or Ioan Alexandru are examined from the perspective of the relationship between the ontological and the aesthetic, with an emphasis on the dialectics of the avant-garde and the neo-modernist. However, the map of avant-gardism is re-evaluated with the volume *Avangarda în literatura română* [*The Avant-Garde in Romanian Literature*], published in 1990, which, connected to the features of the European avant-garde, highlights the specific nuances of Romanian avant-garde manifested in its "political engagement", "eclectic nature" and "modern synthesis" (p. 90). Ion Pop's construction of the avant-garde is based on the idea of synthesis. The critic's mediating capacity is evident through the excessive use of the term "neo-modernism" applied in the analysis of the poetic generation of the 1960s and 1970s in the volume *Poezia românească neomodernistă* [*Romanian Neomodernist Poetry*]. The reader's attention is also drawn to Ion Pop's roles as a "mentor of the Echinox poets" (p. 95) and a poet himself.

Mircea Muthu's history and theory are also organized between mediation and synthesis, according to the research in Chapter V ("Morfologia culturală, între estetică și balcanologie" ["Cultural Morphology: Between Aesthetics and Balkanology"]). This chapter begins with the two research directions proposed by the critic, namely aesthetics and Balkanology. From the perspective of the first direction, the merit of the critic lies in distinguishing between the two categories, general aesthetics and applied aesthetics, with his inclination towards general aesthetics. The influence of aesthetics in Muthu's Balkan studies is based on the relationship between written and oral culture, or in other words, between the visual and the auditory. His Balkanological research allows for a differentiation between "Balkanism" and "Balkanness", followed by a mapping of the meanings of Balkanism. As noted by Călin Teuțișan, Mircea Muthu's panoramic view provides a systematization of the issues related to the identity of the Levant in relation to Western Europe, and later the debate extends to self-identity as well.

Chapter VI, which occupies a significant part of the work (pp. 145-210), presents Corin Braga's perspective on "the archetypology of the imaginary and the archetypology of culture" (as the chapter is titled). Viewed from the perspective of the phenomenological analysis of the imaginary, the volume *Lucian Blaga. Geneza lumilor imaginare* [*Lucian Blaga: The Genesis of Imaginary Worlds*] contains a series of interpretations influenced by psychoanalysis. Meanwhile, the monographic study *Nichita Stănescu. Orizontul imaginar* [*Nichita Stănescu: The Horizon of the Imaginary*] benefits from an analysis with psychoanalytic tools and is seen as a "psychoanalytic criticism thesis" (p. 153). These concepts are later detailed in Braga's critical approach, oriented towards theoretical exercises synthesized in the work *10 Studii de arhetipologie* [*10 Studies of Archetypology*], where the debates focus on the synapses established between the age of psychoanalytical criticism and the age of psychohistory/psychogeography. In the analysis of the volume *De la arhetip la anarhetip* [*From Archetype to Anarchetype*], carried out by Călin Teuțișan, the transition from the concept of "archetype" to that of "anarchetype" in Braga's work is considered. Operating with the latter concept allows for the discussion of the distinction between postmodernity and post-postmodernity. Another conceptual innovation by Corin Braga and a different form of operation of the work is that of "eschatype" (p. 166), through which a work becomes capable of "archetypal invention" (p. 167). In the series of cultural analyses of the imaginary, psychoanalytical criticism studies, psychohistory, and psychogeography are not overlooked. These studies allow for the definition of utopia, but find their

functionality in Corin Braga's work under the generic concepts of "anti-utopia" and "counter-utopia" (p. 179). Additionally, Corin Braga's investigations benefit from a psychoanalytic reading, focusing on the "psyche of the authors studied" (p. 186), which enables a change in the interpretation vector, the analysis now starting from the author's perspective. Braga's output as a prose writer is summarized as oniric literature which takes shape in the cycle of novels *Noctambulii* [*The Noctambulists*] and in the dream journals *Oniria* and *Acedia*.

The last chapter, "Sinteze douămiiste și postdouămiiste" ["Syntheses of the 2000s and Post-2000s] deals with a series of critical approaches including representatives of the Cluj School of Literary Studies who have organized their research in one of three directions: critical monographism, critical and historico-literary synthesis, and quantitative and World Literature studies. In the second orientation, we find Alex Goldiș' study, *Critica în tranșee: De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului* [*Criticism in the Trenches: From Socialist Realism to Aesthetic Autonomy*], a "cultural morphology" (p. 218) focused on the crisis that marked the discourse of local criticism after 1948. To provide a deeper analysis of political and aesthetic discourses from the 1960s and 1970s, Alex Goldiș resorts to a suspicious critique and implicitly to ideological symptomatology. More recent literary studies focus on "distant" readings", in the terms of Franco Moretti, which allows them to be incorporated into the sphere of the concept of *World Literature*. Initially applied to comparative literature, this concept transcends boundaries and also finds functionality in literary history, literary theory, and literary criticism. Before considering the applicability of this concept in contemporary Romanian literary studies, Călin Teuțișan provides an overview of quantitative research methods promoted by Moretti, with an emphasis on digital schemes reduced to graphs, maps, and trees. Among the post-millennial critics of the Cluj School interested in quantitative studies and *World Literature* are Emanuel Modoc, who revisits avant-gardism in *Internaționala periferiilor* [*The International of Peripheries*], Ștefan Baghiu, who focuses on translated literature, Daiana Gârdan, who conducts quantitative analysis of the novel from a spatial perspective, and Ovio Olaru, who conducts research in the field of *Digital Humanities*.

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Robert CINCU, *Postmodernismul în teoria literară românească* [*Postmodernism in Romanian Literary Theory*].
Foreword by Ioana Bot, Alba Iulia, OMG Publishing, 2021, 232 p.

Mapping the efforts to define, delineate, and clarify a controversial literary concept carries an unmistakable canonizing dimension. The theoretical and methodological disputes inherent in postmodernism research have, from its earliest attempts at conceptual circumscription, emphasized an awareness of the work-in-progress nature of the studied cultural phenomenon. Within the field of Romanian literary theory, segmented by the limitations of a political context that precluded synchronization with the most current Western debates, the belated adoption of the term and the initiation of efforts to quantify the permeability of native culture to postmodernist literature ensued.

In *Postmodernismul în teoria literară românească* [*Postmodernism in Romanian Literary Theory*], Robert Cincu chronicles the evolution of the postmodernism concept in Romanian literary theory from a chronological perspective. Positioned at a considerable temporal distance from the "battles" waged to circumscribe the features of the postmodernist cultural phenomenon, the critic objectively analyzes the contributions of Romanian theorists and assesses their impact on what could be defined as the theoretical canon of postmodernism. The critic consistently employs canonization

techniques, selecting a group of representative authors whose theoretical insights have been validated and have influenced the consolidation of other such insights.

Starting from the second half of the 1980s to the present day, Romanian literary criticism has predominantly focused on defining and individualizing the postmodernist movement. The theoretical field has diversified and been nuanced, crystallizing into a genuine Romanian theoretical canon. Robert Cincu reconstructs the stages of the postmodernism concept in Romanian culture, highlighting the most important sequences in the Romanian biography of the concept. The shaping and reshaping of the canonical configuration of Romanian postmodernism theory undergo the interpretative frameworks provided by the stylistics of critical discourses, focused on clarifying a concept in the making for Romanian literature. The readings proposed by the author in various theoretical texts clarify the rise of the theoretical canon of Romanian postmodernism and broaden perspectives on the domestic space's synchronization efforts with a central subject in Western debates. By expressing the intention to reconfigure "a history of postmodernism theorizing in Romanian culture", Robert Cincu not only conducts a literary analysis but, through a remarkable dissociative spirit, captures the interconnections between literature and theory, between the object and subject of critical discourse. As a literary historian concerned with the comprehensive impact of the researched ideas, the author of the volume takes sufficient methodological precautions. The author chronology meticulously structures his argument, and his own definitions attributed to postmodernism take a secondary role, complementing the critical scenario of evaluating and confronting various theoretical perspectives put forth by writers.

This panoramic view of theoretical discussions in the Romanian space is masterfully achieved by Cincu, demonstrating how the specificity of theoretical hypotheses crystallized over more than two decades adapted to the dismantling of demands imposed by totalitarian ideology by using stylistic strategies that relied on subversiveness and discursive ambivalence. The first part of the volume is dedicated to the rise of the postmodernism concept in Romanian culture, with the cultural phenomenon's biography beginning between 1974–1985. The reconfiguration of the postmodernist theoretical canon starts from its very foundations, simultaneously integrating a cultural recovery initiative. The first theoretical contribution to defining postmodernism in the Romanian culture is identified by the author as belonging to the Americanist Andrei Brezianu. His article, "Post-modernii americani. O traiectorie spre viitor" ["American Post-Modernists: A Trajectory towards the Future"], was published in 1974 in the cultural magazine *Secolul 20*, overturning the prejudice about the lack of information regarding this literary phenomenon, given that "in 1986 many Romanian theorists still spoke of postmodernism as a poorly known trend" (p. 26). Following the innovations of American prose characterized as postmodern, Brezianu identified key features of the cultural phenomenon: its "isolated" nature, nonconformism, intertextuality, the aesthetic reactualization of old literature, permeability to new means of communication, and a "self-sufficient" register that presaged the abandonment of the "Romanian strictures of the past centuries" (p. 27).

The analysis of theoretical discourse not only acts as a catalyst for Robert Cincu's endeavor but also represents one of the most challenging strategies of canonizing theories, supporting the ingenious observations of the literary historian, and providing a possible explanation for the genesis of ideas and potential influences leading to their consolidation. Thus, Brezianu's article "partially appears as a report on the main topics discussed at the seminar where we can assume the author participated" (p. 28). Through another stylistic observation, highlighting the incompatibility between Brezianu's enthusiastic argument and the final paragraph, written in a "wooden language, typical of communist magazine editorials", the critic subversively explains the discursive mechanisms the article's author employs to publish his text by outwitting censorship. Andrei Brezianu's text represents a somewhat obscure foundation of the Romanian theoretical canon of postmodernism, a fact that can be explained by the author's intention to highlight some particularities of the cultural phenomenon as it manifests itself in the American prose, without delving into the then thorny issue of the existence or possibility of Romanian postmodernist literature.

However, the generality of his contribution is complemented by the following pieces of the theoretical canon. Ion Bogdan Lefter's text, which opens the volume *Postmodernism. Din dosarul*

unei “bătălii” culturale [*Postmodernism: From the File of a Cultural “Battle”*] (2000), provides a biography of the term *postmodernism* in Romanian culture, attempting to establish its initial occurrences. The critic correlates the term’s appearance in Romanian literature with the essays by English scholars who introduced it in the prefaces and studies accompanying translations. Ion Bogdan Lefter cites, as an example, the preface “Poemul ca gest” [“Poetry as Gesture”], written by the English scholar Ștefan Stoescu, which accompanies his translation of Frank O’Hara’s poems (1980). Robert Cincu notes that postmodernism is not analyzed as a bundle of distinct features or as a generative source of literary forms; instead, it becomes a label meant to justify placing Frank O’Hara’s poetry “in a broader context, so defining postmodernism constantly remains in the background” (p. 31). The critic also draws attention to the imprecision of the attribution of the term, which starts to encompass numerous frames of reference, a point also suggested by Ion Bogdan Lefter. With Alexandru Mușina, the Romanian theoretical canon of postmodernism gains greater precision in defining the senses of the concept through the description of the new type of sensibility that led to the emergence of the concept of everyday poetry. The new sensibility is augmented by a “new anthropocentrism”. Robert Cincu identifies in Alexandru Mușina’s theory a clever strategy to alleviate the methodological difficulties of defining the postmodernist cultural phenomenon and notes that “Mușina sometimes prefers to describe postmodernism not by what this trend specifically entails, but especially by what this literary trend failed to capture” (p. 34). Also relevant is Mușina’s theoretical discourse evolution from the enthusiasm of establishing a new cultural paradigm to skepticism and insistence on its unfulfilled promises by highlighting the need to describe and individualize the trend in relation to something else. It is worth mentioning that Jean-François Lyotard defined postmodernism as a series of changes in modernist literary style and expression. While Fredric Jameson emphasized the schizoid nature of postmodern art, which he believed reflects the fragmentation of the self, Lyotard’s definition focuses on the existence of a complex artistic paradigm that combines multiple meanings of the past and the plurality of postmodern contemporary realities.

The 1983 edition of *Caiete critice* brings together a series of theoretical contributions by some of the most representative critics of the 1980s. According to Nicolae Manolescu, postmodernism is directly related to two other artistic movements, the avant-garde and “mannerist modernism”. Since it fails to create new literary forms, the postmodern cultural phenomenon “constitutes a form of tempered avant-garde aesthetic exercise” (p. 38). Robert Cincu demonstrates that generalization and relativization are not only tempting but also risky for theorists aiming to decipher the mechanisms supporting the functioning of a system. The critic shows how, despite its coherence, the terminological framework employed by Manolescu is imbued with semantic instability. The methodological choices guiding Manolescu’s argumentation have a positive effect, extracting another set of emblematic features for postmodernist literature: irony, intertextuality, the bookish trait, self-citation, and the excessive use of clichés. Magdalena Ghica (a pseudonym for Magda Cârneli) adds consumerism and fragmentation to the list of characteristics, intuitively completing the descriptive “geography” of the concept upon which future contributions to the analysis of the postmodernist phenomenon will be based. In this initial stage of configuring the theoretical canon of postmodernism in the Romanian context, the main intention is to define the phenomenon and capture its facets, manifestations and characteristics.

After an initial period of intuitive theoretical exploration, it is time to test the first hypotheses and evaluate their adaptation to Romanian culture. The 1986 volume of *Caiete critice* marks the integration of the cultural phenomenon into Romanian literature. Consequently, it is “entirely dedicated to the theoretical clarification of the concept of postmodernism” (p. 45). The core of the debates revolves around a Western bibliography that becomes known and disseminated by Romanian theorists in their own studies. This issue of the *Caiete critice* gathers Romanian initiatives to clarify the concept, interviews with writers, and translations of some of the most important contributions of Western theorists. Translations of texts by John Barth, Gerald Graff, Jean-François Lyotard, Ihab Hassan, or Guy Scarpetta mark another stage of permeability of the local cultural milieu to the postmodernist phenomenon. The debates are no longer purely intuitive but are supported by an

awareness of the importance and cultural relevance of a trend that successfully avoids the possibility of being conventionally defined by explanations of its specificity and limitations.

Robert Cincu meticulously analyzes the theoretical contributions of the writers present in the volume, paying attention to the methodological toolkit, conceptual clarity and stylistic nuances of each discourse. From Eugen Simion's demonstration highlighting the impossibility of articulating a definition of postmodernism, to the articles by Livius Ciocârliu or Nicolae Manolescu emphasizing the ongoing nature of postmodernism as a cultural phenomenon and the richness of perspectives from which it is approached, this literary trend emphasizes the volatility of scientific definitions and the methodological arsenal. The postmodern essays written by Mircea Cărtărescu, Călin Vlăsie, and Ioan Buduca blend various applications of the main features of the trend, which the author of the volume identifies as "a discourse occasionally metaphorized/confessional, constructed from short phrases that give the impression of universally valid truths, namely aphoristic sentences" (p. 63). The relationships between theorists and Western bibliography are interpreted and integrated by the critic into the hermeneutic equation aimed at explaining the mechanisms supporting this performative complexity of postmodernist manifestations. Contributions by Andrei Pleșu, Radu G. Țeposu and Monica Spiridon amplify the performative nature of the trend and relativize the possibility of the existence of a "definitive" and entirely edifying bibliography, as postmodernism is still evolving and undergoing conceptual clarification.

The sensitive points of Romanian postmodernist theory are unveiled by the author of the volume, who critiques the digressions, inconsistencies, and heightened doses of conceptual abstractions, explaining their genesis. Robert Cincu analyzes the theories put forth by Ioana Em. Petrescu, Liviu Petrescu, Gheorghe Crăciun, Carmen Mușat, or Mihaela Ursa and reveals the network of interactions and theoretical contaminations with various critical orientations that panoramically depicted the cultural environment in the second half of the 20th century. The influences of textualism and deconstructivism reveal the dimension of generational fracture implicated by the postmodernist cultural phenomenon, as it pertains to "not an entire generation, but an important segment within that generation", with postmodernism dissociating itself from the "neo-modernist, late-modernist, neo-avant-garde" tendencies present within the same generation (p. 184).

The end of the debates underlines the necessity for systematizing and synthesizing the conclusions of the discussions, leading to the emergence of dictionaries proposing interpretations of key terms used in discussing the postmodernist movement. This event marks the canonization of the movement and its theoretical extension. The author of the volume demonstrates that the diversity of opinions, contradictions and conceptual inconsistencies correspond to the ethereal physiognomy of the postmodernist cultural phenomenon. The Romanian theoretical canon only serves to show that "a hallmark of postmodernism itself" lies precisely in the "fact that a consensus cannot be reached regarding the classification of Romanian theories on postmodernism" (p. 218).

A cultural phenomenon that has acquired the guise of a new episteme in which language, knowledge and literature function in a novel and diversified manner, postmodernism attracts a range of theoretical reflections that best reflect the harmonization strategies of a particular cultural space with a subject that poses serious conceptualization difficulties. In the volume *Postmodernism in Romanian Literary Theory*, Robert Cincu highlights all the nuances of configuring indigenous theories of postmodernism and, implicitly, all the stages of articulating a theoretical canon meant to reflect the cultural and ideological specificities of the cultural milieu, by attempting to define it in relation to the shaping force this culture exerts upon it, and adapt it to this culture's social-political and artistic realities.

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