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## STAGES IN THE SAGA OF THE INTERPRETATION OF B. FUNDOIANU'S COLONIAL THEORY: FROM E. LOVINESCU UNTIL TODAY

In the present essay I wish to investigate the reception of the thesis according to which Romanian literature is/should be a “colony” of French culture, presented by B. Fundoianu in the “Preface” of his 1922 volume *Imagini și cărți din Franța* [*Images and Books of France*]<sup>2</sup>.

B. Fundoianu (1898–1944), born Benjamin Wexler/Wechsler, Jewish-Romanian poet, essayist, filmmaker and literary critic who emigrated to France in the 1920s, became internationally known especially as an essayist, under the French name Benjamin Fondane (his naturalization as a Frenchman occurs in 1938<sup>3</sup>), and died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz in the first days of October 1944, unwilling to abandon his sister who had been arrested by the French Police and deported by the Nazis, even though he himself could have been saved.

### *The 1920s*

I start the analysis of the reception of Fundoianu's colonial thesis from the interpretation proposed by the “synchronistic” and “modernistic” literary critic and liberal ideologue and historian E. Lovinescu (1881–1943) in some of his works from the 1920s. Then I follow its post-war destiny under Romanian communism (in Mircea Martin's interpretation) and under post-communism (in contributions by Mircea Martin, Roxana Sorescu and others). The selection of references allows me to observe the particularities and variations of this reception, of the way in which Fundoianu's colonial thesis and/or the overall philosophy of the writer, which include this thesis, is either completely or partially rejected or justified and/or nuanced, either subjected to readings from previously unaccepted or

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<sup>2</sup> B. Fundoianu, “Prefață” [“Preface”] to *Imagini și cărți din Franța* [*Images and Books of France*] (1922), in *Imagini și cărți* [*Images and Books*]. Edited by Vasile Teodorescu, introductory study by Mircea Martin, translated by Sorin Mărculescu, București, Minerva, 1980, pp. 23-28.

<sup>3</sup> See Jean-Yves Conrad, “Le dossier de naturalisation de Benjamin Fondane”, *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*, 2005, 8, [https://benjaminfondane.com/un\\_article\\_cahier-Le\\_dossier\\_de\\_naturalisation-de\\_Benjamin\\_Fondane-225-1-1-0-1.html](https://benjaminfondane.com/un_article_cahier-Le_dossier_de_naturalisation-de_Benjamin_Fondane-225-1-1-0-1.html). Accessed September 27, 2024.

unimagined angles or just adjusted to converge with some apparently innovative concepts on the academic market at the time, such as that of “antimodern(ity)” launched by Antoine Compagnon at the beginning of the 2000s.

In the early 1920s, E. Lovinescu – the leader of the *Sburătorul* cénacle and of a homonymous periodical dedicated to the “new” literature – was engaged in a polemic with two contemporary adversaries, post-romantic literary critics and poets themselves. One is N. Davidescu (1888–1954), proficient in the French Symbolist *doxa*, the other is Fundoianu. Davidescu antagonized Lovinescu with the idea, expressed in an article from 1922<sup>4</sup>, according to which Romanian literature begins – as a community, not as a sum of disparate individualities – with Romanian Symbolism. As for Fundoianu, he dismayed Lovinescu by the very thesis that Romanian literature is/must be imagined as a “colony” of French literature, exposed in the above mentioned “Preface”. For Lovinescu, these two points of view are related and say roughly the same thing, which is why he seeks to reject them together, as parts of the same fundamental error. His response to both, concentrated in his 1922 polemical paper “Există o literatură română?” [“Is there a Romanian literature?”], will be inserted, with some minor changes, in the first pages of his 1923 study “Poezia nouă” [“The New Poetry”], and afterwards in his massive *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* [*History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*] (I–VI, 1926–1929).

Here is how Lovinescu handles the “violent” Fundoianu, whose passion for distancing himself from others/from the “crowd” he had noticed on other occasions:

With a violence of thought that could have lacked the violence of expression, Mr. Fundoianu has contested, in a recent study, the individuality of Romanian literature. Launched from the bow, the arrow of the [Eleat] Zeno froze in place; after a century of evolution, our literature would also have remained at its starting point. Zeno denied motion; more categorically, Mr. Fundoianu denies our very existence<sup>5</sup>.

This ironic approach continues in a free indirect style that translates Fundoianu’s thesis – reduced, apparently, to the aporia of Zeno’s movement – through elements or concepts of the future Lovinescian theory of “synchronism”, launched in the *Istoria civilizației române moderne* [*History of Modern Romanian Civilization*] (I–III, 1924–1925):

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<sup>4</sup> N. Davidescu, “Critica veche despre poezia nouă (Dl G. Ibrăileanu și poezia simbolistă)” [“Old Criticism about ‘New Poetry’ (Mr. G. Ibrăileanu vs. Symbolist Poetry)”] (1922), in *Pagini de critică și publicistică literară* [*Pages of Literary Criticism and Literary Journalism*], vol. I. Edited and prefaced by Margareta Feraru. București, Editura Academiei, 2018, pp. 301-306.

<sup>5</sup> E. Lovinescu, “Poezia nouă” [“The New Poetry”] (1923), in *Opere* [*Works*]. Edition by Maria Simionescu and Alexandru George, notes by Alexandru George, vol. IX, București, Minerva, 1992, p. 293. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

Reduced to the role of a colony of French culture, we can only conceive of an undifferentiated literature. Lacking original expression, we have a virtual soul; the movement is only apparent; the arrow is still in the bow. Not integrating universal literature through any specific note, we therefore stand at the threshold of Europe with empty hands<sup>6</sup>.

Fundoianu's thesis – in fact, a criticism of his thesis turned into caricature – is, therefore, reinterpreted by Lovinescu through his own concepts, which will become his trademark. One of them is “differentiation”, which means the adaptation to the frames of national culture of imported models (through “integral imitation”). In the passage quoted above, this concept can be detected in his negative form: “undifferentiated”. It can also be deduced from the context that the “colony [of France] role” – which Fundoianu estimated that Romanian culture can fulfil – reflects what Lovinescu understands by the stage of “integral imitation” which, followed by the potential phase of “differentiation”, would illustrate what from 1924 onwards he would promote as his theory of “synchronism”, that is the two-steps dynamic or dialectical process by which Romanian/young/small cultures can “synchronize” or catch up with the Western/organic/great/ancient cultures.

I stated that Lovinescu prefers to unify, in order to reject them altogether, the theses of Fundoianu and Davidescu, otherwise distinct statements and having different stakes in the context. This refusal to reject them separately must be seen as a strategy: on the one hand, the *Sburătorul* critic spares himself the effort of producing two distinct sets of counterarguments. On the other hand, by contracting the above-mentioned two points of view into a single target, it polemically trivializes their positions by reducing them to a basic anti-national discourse. But, by doing so – by choosing to ignore particularities of the real messages sent by his opponents, their intention, finality and complexity –, Lovinescu also diminishes the quality of his own responses, his own point of view.

Thus, in what regards Fundoianu's ideas, claiming that he “denies *our* very existence” (emphasis mine, Teodora Dumitru) – not the existence of Romanian *literature*, but *ours* as a people, as an entity, etc., literature functioning here as a metonymic term for the nation –, Lovinescu employs sophistry, rigging the opponent's hypotheses. For, as long as he imagined it in terms of a “colony of French culture”, Fundoianu did not, in fact, deny the very “existence” of Romanian culture/literature, but only, let us say, its lack of personality (“the inability” of “making something orderly and ours out of foreign nourishment”) and its persistence in a romantic stage of naïve mimicry. These deficiencies could be improved, according to the young essayist, not (only) by importing models from

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*.

French<sup>7</sup> culture (that is to say not only by “parasitism”), but especially by direct participation in the literature of contemporary France – a goal only possible by achieving the status of a cultural “colony” of France, a stage whose specific differences in relation to “parasitism” remain to be specified:

Our culture counts a genius [Mihai Eminescu<sup>8</sup>], but he did not push the boat of our literary history at all, but left it on the shores of French civilization, towards the Rhine banks. If our literature has been endless parasitism [in relation to France], the fault cannot lie with the culture of France, but with our inability to assimilate it. Moreover, the lack of remarkable talents capable of making something orderly and ours out of foreign nourishment. [...] The appearance – not of geniuses, but of a few outstanding talents, when, between Eminescu and Arghezi<sup>9</sup>, the pattern of our literary speech was established, provides us with a respite and a possibility. [...]. We are out of the category of poor and voluntary imitation and we are entering, with all industriousness, another category. Our culture has evolved, it has drawn a figure and a state, it has become a colony – a colony of French culture<sup>10</sup>.

The concept of “colony” and “colonization” was not unfamiliar to Romanians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: they prided themselves on their own status as descendants of the Roman colonists (of Emperor Trajan) and had various opinions about the “colonists” of modern Romania, from Jews to Germans. However, the idea of becoming a colony of another state was perceived with an irritation that was the opposite of the pride of being descendants of the Roman colonists<sup>11</sup>.

The thesis of the necessity (opportunity) of the evolution from the stage of culture-“parasite” to that of “colony of French culture” is an argument and an ethos obviously opposed to the organicist-conservative theories expressed up to that time in the Romanian space, from the theory of “forms without content” submitted by conservative politician and literary critic Titu Maiorescu (1840–1917) in a study from 1868<sup>12</sup>, to the more acute conservative/reactionary opinions,

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<sup>7</sup> Resolutely French, not of other origin, for sociological, anthropological reasons; the German influence would not have been effective, in Fundoianu's opinion, because it would not have had the force to displace or compete with the Romanians' affinity for France as a Latin culture.

<sup>8</sup> Mihai Eminescu (1850–1889), late Romantic author, praised as the national poet.

<sup>9</sup> Tudor Arghezi (1880–1967), post-Romantic poet, novelist, publicist considered among most relevant Romanian “modernists”.

<sup>10</sup> Fundoianu, “Prefață”, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> On the current Romanian colonial anxieties from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Andrei-Dan Sorescu, *The Infrastructures of Anxiety: Reflections on Anti-Colonial Nationalism and Xenophobia in Nineteenth Century Romania*, lecture at New Europe College, București, May 13 2024 (paper to be published), and “Historicising the ‘Colonial’ in Nineteenth Century Romania”, lecture at New Europe College, București, October 11, 2024 (paper to be published).

<sup>12</sup> Titu Maiorescu, “Against the Contemporary Direction in Romanian Culture”. Translated by Mária Kovács, in Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny and Vangelis Kechriotis (eds.), *Modernism: Representations of National Culture. Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770–1945: Texts and Commentaries*, volume III/2, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2010, pp. 87-93.

at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of populist ideologue and professor Nicolae Iorga (1871–1940), who blamed the import (including, in the proper sense, the import of books) of foreign cultural models, especially French<sup>13</sup>. Under these conditions, even if we do not take into account Fundoianu's thesis itself, at least if we take into account its anti-conservative potential, the "synchronistic" Lovinescu should still have found in it some confirmation or at least support for his own ideas of reforming the intellectual spectrum of the local culture.

The premises and conclusions of Fundoianu's "Preface" to *Imagini și cărți din Franța* are, in reality, neither nihilist-demolishing, nor are they – that is also clear – enthusiastic. They rather illustrate a pragmatic balance between the two states of mind, an equilibrium which, however, it is obvious that neither Lovinescu nor other contemporaries perceived as such. Reducible, largely, but also utterly simplified, to a proto-"dependency theory", Fundoianu's "Preface" describes, as we have seen, a state presumed as a state of fact – the "parasitism" of Romanian culture in relation to the symbolic "host" represented by France –, but it also proposes a solution to overcome this state of affairs: the accession of Romanian culture to the estimated superior status of "colony of the French culture".

The *de facto* state of "parasitism" in relation to French culture, diagnosed by Fundoianu in the wake, apparently, of Iorga et al., says that Romanian literature consumes without producing specific difference, plus-knowledge, etc., without creatively surpassing its models. This state of "parasitism", Fundoianu noted, was not even eradicated by the appearance in Romanian literature of the "genius" of Eminescu (to whom he refers, however, in terms surprisingly in line with the tradition of Romanian criticism: as to a "chemical accident" or as to a "miracle", a scientifically and logically impossible phenomenon. This would lead him to the conclusion that – as a phenomenon without a discernible cause –, Eminescu cannot be responsible for any effective lineage or legacy to feed the literature that followed him). In the estimated higher "colony" stage of French culture, Romanian culture would not only take over the models of the metropolis/empire, but should also be recognized as such by the metropolis/empire. However, it is certain that, for Fundoianu, at the time of the publication of his "Preface", Romanian culture does not yet represent a true "colony" of French culture: the image of a Romanian culture-"colony" of the French culture illustrates, for him, a desirable stage (on which one must reflect "with joy"), rather than a manifest one; that is, it illustrates a status towards which Romanian culture should strive by making efforts (maybe political ones?) in this direction. This is, after all, the real meaning of Fundoianu's message, even if his thesis is formulated, as seen in the above-mentioned passage,

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<sup>13</sup> See N. Iorga, *O luptă literară [A Literary Battle]*. Edited by Valeriu Râpeanu and Sanda Râpeanu, introductory study, notes, and comments by Valeriu Râpeanu, București, Minerva, 1979.

in the present perfect tense: “[our] culture [...] *has become* a colony of the French culture” (e.m., T.D.).

Already achieved or still in the stage of a goal to be pursued, the “colony” status of Romanian culture appears, in any case, to Fundoianu as an evolutionary argument, as a sign of progress: “Our culture *has evolved* [...], it has become a colony of the French culture” (e.m., T.D.). The fact that the “colony” status was, in Fundoianu’s view, more ideal than real (and that the colonial thesis was, moreover, also an import solution, which Fundoianu himself takes from an “obscure” foreign author) also emerges from the comparison of Romania at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with French-speaking Switzerland, which allegedly benefitted from a higher status than Romanian culture in its relationship with France, ensured by the common language. French-speaking Switzerland would represent, indeed, a *true* “colony” of the French culture, a status which Romania/Romanian culture, one infers from this context, would not really possess as long as the authors “sent” by Romanians to France (Alexandru Macedonski<sup>14</sup>, “the Poet Cantacuzène”<sup>15</sup>, Elena Văcărescu<sup>16</sup> et al.) would be a worthless “vassal gift”<sup>17</sup>, and as long as – on the national level, in Romanian literature –, “we imitate [the French, among others] in our ‘narrow circle’” and “do not contribute or benefit to the general culture”:

I was reading last year, in a review, an admirable article on the French-speaking Switzerland. Its author, an obscure name, Delieutraz<sup>18</sup>, recognized in French-speaking Switzerland the situation of a cultural colony of France. It is true that he demanded a certain independence, based on mutual exchange between the two cultures. Switzerland sent Rousseau to France, who prepared a Revolution for it. France sent Calvin to Switzerland, who gave it Reformation. And it is not nothing. We are in the situation of French-speaking Switzerland, without even being able to have its rights vis-à-vis of France. It’s true, since the Phanariote period, in parallel to neo-Greek education so far, we have used the culture of France – and we sent in return vassal gifts [peșcheș] such as Macedonski’s *Bronzes*, the poet Cantacuzène and the *chanteuse*<sup>19</sup> [Elena] Văcărescu. The Swiss poets, however, have the horizon of the

<sup>14</sup> A francophone and francophile Romanian writer and literary critic, Alexandru Macedonski (1854–1920) is known for his special interest in promoting Symbolism. He wrote with equal ease in Romanian and in French. Among the various works he produced in French, some manage to be published in Paris (see, for example, *Le calvaire du feu*, Sansot, 1906).

<sup>15</sup> Charles-Adolphe Cantacuzène (1874–1949), the *nom de plume* of Scarlat A. Cantacuzino, a prolific peri-symbolist poet and diplomat.

<sup>16</sup> Also known under the *francisé* name Hélène Vacaresco, Elena Văcărescu (1864–1947) was a Franco-Romanian writer established in France. *Chants d’Aurore* (1886), her first book of poetry, written in French, was published in Paris and received the French Academy prize.

<sup>17</sup> In Romanian language, “peșcheș”, a word of Turkish origin, refers to a “gift” in money or in kind that the rulers of the Romanian provinces offered to the Ottomans as a consequence of their status of vassalage to the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>18</sup> Possibly Lucien-Albert Delieutraz (1877–1944), translator of D. H. Lawrence among others.

<sup>19</sup> Probably Fundoianu alludes to her debut volume, *Chants d’Aurore*.

world opened up [for them], because they write in French. We do not have it. The cause that binds us to France is subject to a more than inferior condition. We cling to French literature because of our bilingualism – at least that of the upper class. We cannot *write in French, which would be the only logical course of action*, and in Romanian, where we imitate in “our narrow circle”, we do not contribute or benefit the general culture. *As a literature of our own, we cannot interest anyone. We will have to convince France that, intellectually, we are a province of its geography, and our literature is a contribution, in whatever it has superior, to its literature.* If a phenomenon – not cultural, but biological – does not soon change the course of our souls, *we must gladly accept the role – if we are allowed – to be the citizens, less original, but industrious, of the French culture.* (e.m., T.D.)<sup>20</sup>

It is worth noting that, for Fundoianu, the Romanian authors who arrived (in fact, “were sent” – a sign of a state policy) within reach of the French culture, neither of them of Rousseau’s stature, represent only a “vassal gift”. That is, the sign of a unilateral relationship, of vassalage, of unequivocal inferiority, not of an exchange of values/commodities between two “evolved” cultures/entities towards a mutually profitable relationship. Thus, the (estimated *feudal*) relationship of vassalage that would characterize Romanian culture at the time<sup>21</sup> does not express, according to

<sup>20</sup> Fundoianu, “Prefață”, pp. 25-26.

<sup>21</sup> It is a stage that Fundoianu seems to equate with “parasitism” (because we only “used the culture of France”, sending them sham “gifts” in return), although the concepts of “vassal” (provider of “vassal gifts”) and “parasite” are not equivalent, as long as the vassal is obliged by the contract with the senior to offer him support of any kind in exchange for the protection offered, a quality that the parasite – a non-reciprocal beneficiary of his host – does not possess. However, admitting that the sham “gifts” sent by Romania to France can be seen as parasitism, the signs of overcoming this stage, also discussed in Fundoianu’s “Preface”, would exist, too. They would be confirmed, in just a few years, not only by the example of Fundoianu’s own books from the 1930s–1940s, written directly in French and for the French market, but also by the works of other Romanian authors who arrived in France throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If, from the Phanariote era to Alexandru Macedonski or the “poet Cantacuzène”, the Romanian “vassal gift” had been worthless, as Fundoianu claims, with writers like Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionescu/ Eugène Ionesco, Emil Cioran and others, or with artists like Constantin Brâncuși, Romania can be said to have fully redeemed the previously precarious quality of its active participation in French culture. For details about the recipe by which the above mentioned writers managed to become part of French culture, to “export” themselves effectively (by applying, it can be added, convincingly the recipe indicated by Fundoianu in his “Preface”), see Mihai Iovănel, “Temporal Webs of World Literature: Rebranding Games and Global Relevance after World II: Mircea Eliade, E.M. Cioran, Eugène Ionesco,” in Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian (eds.), *Romanian Literature as World Literature*, London–New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, pp. 217-334. Iovănel proposes a solution that is convergent, at least epistemologically, if not sociologically or from other points of view, with Fundoianu’s proposal of colonization – a solution that only changes the poles/centers of reference of the national culture: from the francophone one to the anglophone one – see the last chapter, “The Transnational Specific” in Mihai Iovănel, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990–2020 [History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990–2020]*, Iași, Polirom, 2021. The hypothesis of a pragmatic renunciation – “the only logical conduct”, in Fundoianu’s terms – of Romanian authors to publish in Romanian language and the

Fundoianu, the (supposedly more modern) relationship between a “colony” and a metropolis/empire (even if the bilateral relations between France and Switzerland are tracked by Fundoianu back to the time of Jean Calvin). So, if Switzerland were, culturally, a real “colony” of France, Romania, being in a “more than inferior” condition (compared to France or even Switzerland), even in a desperate condition – because “as personal literature [written in Romanian], we cannot interest anyone...”<sup>22</sup> –, will have to “persuade” that it can become one. The present

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possibility of producing Romanian literature, that is on Romanian themes, but in the contemporary international languages is also problematized here.

<sup>22</sup> The prognosis was invalidated, at least partially, in the post-war period, by the success of some Romanian-language authors translated into foreign languages (Mircea Cărtărescu, among the post-war Romanians, and Mihail Sebastian, among the interwar ones, are eloquent examples) proof of the fact that “we can interest/be interesting [to foreign readers]” in translation, too. However, Fundoianu was working with the existing data in the first decades of the Romanian 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it is true that these did not offer him great hopes of conquering the literary West or at least literary France other than by writing and publishing in foreign languages (primarily in French) or by planning his works as if they should be published in France, intended for the public there. At the beginning of the 1920s, Fundoianu was right to be dissatisfied with the lack of echo of Romanian literature abroad. Moreover, there was a shortage of original novels at home, too, as most of the novels published in Romanian were translations. Only around the 1930s, the scales begin to reach a state of balance, and may even tilt in favour of the original titles (see Andrei Terian, “Big Numbers: A Quantitative Analysis of the Development of the Novel in Romania”, *Transylvanian Review*, XXVIII, 2019, suppl. 1, pp. 55-74; Ștefan Baghiu, “Translations of Novels in the Romanian Culture During the Long Nineteenth Century (1794–1914): A Quantitative Perspective”, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 6, 2020, 2, pp. 87-106. As a study included in the present issue of *Dacoromania litteraria* shows, the interwar period, i.e. the beginning of the 1930s, “is also the time of the first full translations of the Romanian novel into European languages, whether global (English, French), regional (German, Italian), or local (Czech, Hungarian, Polish)”. In some cases, the above-mentioned study claims, Romanian works were translated first into regional/local languages and only later into the main languages (French, German, English): “For example, Liviu Rebreanu’s *Ion* (1920), considered the first Romanian truly modern novel, was translated first into Czech (1929) and Polish (1932 – the second Romanian novel ever translated into Polish), much earlier than in German (1941) or French (1946)” – see Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, Tomasz Krupa, “A Project of Inter-peripheral History of the Romanian Novel: The Polish Case”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2024, 11, pp. 28-55. This state of affairs denotes a different strategy of coverage/conquest of the international world than the one Fundoianu estimated in the early 1920s. In any case, we do not know how close the general phenomenon of translation – inter-war and post-war alike, each with its stages and particularities – came to Fundoianu’s wishes and parameters in 1922, but it must be admitted that translation was indeed a vector of “colonization” or access to the international market, even if not necessarily and not entirely to the metropolitan/central market, i.e. in the direction Fundoianu wanted, but first, in some cases, in regional or local markets. We also learn from the above-mentioned study that the dynamics of the translation (into Polish) of authors of Romanian origin developed a particular twist after 1989, in the sense that some translations are no longer from Romanian, but from a language of the metropolis (in some cases, these works were written directly in the languages of the metropolis: in French, for example, as Cioran’s, so they do not have a Romanian original). Another interesting aspect highlighted by this study – which Fundoianu could not have foreseen in the 1920s – is “a growing interest in the Jewish heritage of Central and Eastern European cultures and the contribution of Jewish authors to the development of modernist literature” – an interest that has grown particularly



perfect tense used by Fundoianu in the previous passage – “Our culture [...] *has become* a colony – a colony of French culture” (e.m., T.D.) – turns out to be, in fact, a simple hypothesis, a thought to be transposed into the conditional/optative regime: our culture *could* become a “colony” of the French culture, but for this we need the power of “persuasion”, i.e. a consistently pursued strategy (on an individual level or as a state policy, by carefully watching, for example, what kind of literary emissaries “we send” to Paris).

Going back to the hostile-polemical interpretation that Lovinescu offers to Fundoianu’s colonial thesis, it should be noted that, by rejecting the thesis of Romanian culture *qua* “colony” of French culture, the advocate of “integral imitation” that Lovinescu would soon become in *Istoria civilizației...* also rejects a status superior to that assumed by the “integral imitation” moment, that is, by the stage of uncritical import of Western models. Under these circumstances, the question arises: by rejecting Fundoianu’s colonial perspective, wasn’t Lovinescu prematurely invalidating his own theory of “synchronism”, since the latter was based, among other things, on the very theory of “imitation” proposed by Gabriel Tarde?<sup>23</sup> For “imitation” culture and “colony” culture may seem, from one point on, similar concepts.

However, on rigorously scrutinizing the two concepts/theses, it can be stated that the anticipated invalidation is premature, because, although they seem similar, the mere taking over of models (respectively the phenomenon of “imitation”), on the one hand, and the status of “colony”, on the other hand, are not the same thing in the usage that Lovinescu and Fundoianu give to these terms. In Fundoianu’s view, they cover two distinct stages (“categories”) viewed from an evolutionary perspective: first, pure imitation (“parasitism”), then colonization; as for Lovinescu, he seems to confuse them when he criticizes Fundoianu’s thesis by reducing it to Zeno’s aporia of movement. To speak in Fundoianu’s terms, “poor imitation” does not characterize a “colony”/colonial status, as Lovinescu seems to think in 1922. However, even only in terms of the usefulness of transiting the stage of “imitation”, Lovinescu might have found support in Fundoianu, who in the same “Preface” states that Iorga – none other than Lovinescu’s constant, long-term opponent – “did a senseless thing when he fought against the influence of French

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after 2000 (this is why authors such as Max Blecher and, again, Mihail Sebastian become of more interest to Polish publishers than others). Finally, from another study in this issue, one can learn how, in the context of the proliferation of migrant literature after 2000 and especially after 2010, interest in “Eurocentric” voices – that is, the kind of neutral-metropolitan voice that we can estimate Fundoianu/Fondane wanted to cultivate – is waning (see Mihnea Bălăci, “‘Lent Voices’: The Politics of Romanian Migrant Life Writing”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2024, 11, pp. 193-206.).

<sup>23</sup> See Gabriel Tarde, *Les lois de l’imitation*, Paris, Alcan, 1890. For details on Lovinescu’s adoption and adaptation of Tarde’s theory in his own theory of “synchronism” see Teodora Dumitru, *Modernitatea politică și literară în gândirea lui E. Lovinescu [Political and Literary Modernity at E. Lovinescu]*, București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2016.

culture in us”<sup>24</sup>. If he does not prematurely invalidate his thesis of the necessity/utility of “imitation” in the process complicated by “synchronization”, Lovinescu still clearly commits, in his 1920s polemic with Fundoianu, a larger *faux pas*: he refuses a concept/status estimated by its proponent as more complex and advanced than the “integral imitation” that he himself, Lovinescu, will soon accept and promote, but beyond which the *Sburătorul* critic will only see as possible the act of “differentiation” as localization or adaptation of the imported model to the national core. For Fundoianu, on the other hand, the stage of imitation/“parasitism” is logically (naturally) followed by the colonial phase of going beyond the national (in this Fondanian frame, the Lovinescian stage of “differentiation” is suspended as unnecessary or unlikely to achieve results).

But why should the status of colony be more advanced than that of “differentiation”, which Lovinescu has no problem accepting and even promoting? Because, as Fundoianu sees it, from a primarily pragmatic point of view only the status of “colony” would allow Romanian literature to contribute “with whatever it has superior, to the [French] literature” – a contribution that, if we translate Fundoianu’s theory into Lovinescu’s terms in *Istoria civilizației...*, would be denied to a culture characterized only by “integral imitation” and not yet at the point of “differentiation”, and even less to a culture that has reached “differentiation”.

However, the hypothesis of a Romanian literature (originating in the Romanian space and culture, but not necessarily written or performed in Romanian language) actively participating in the literature of France, thus conquering the metropolis/empire from within, is not imagined – not even close – by Lovinescu. It does not enter his sociological and critical-theoretical perspectives, either in the 1920s or later. The *Sburătorul* critic believes, in 1922 but also in later writings, that local literati have already succeeded and will succeed even better in “making something orderly and ours out of foreign nourishment” (I synthesized the Lovinescian theory of “synchronism” in Fundoianu’s terms), that is to move from the “integral imitation” stage to the “differentiation” stage, i.e. to the status estimated as superior to that of an organic national literature, a status where the “foreign” is metabolized into the “national”. As for Fundoianu, he has abandoned such illusions. For him, it no longer makes sense to wait for the nationalization of models of foreign origin, the opposite approach being more useful: the de-nationalization of the national, the orientation of the national – with all its cultural heritage – towards the metropolis (here, France, Paris), and camping within its perimeter, so that, by pumping new literary and cultural blood into its heart, the Romanian-born literati can somehow gain a voice beyond the borders of the nation state.

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<sup>24</sup> Fundoianu, “Prefață”, p. 25.

Once these elements established, it becomes obvious that in the polemical paper “Există o literatură română?” and then in “Poezia nouă”, Lovinescu not only simplifies, but also places the reproaches addressed to Fundoianu on grounds unconfirmed by the starting and ending points of his colonial thesis, seeming not to grasp the thrust and the stakes of its argument: namely, the finding of the *de facto* “parasitic” state and the solution, overcoming it by accessing the “superior” condition of “colony of the French culture”. By acting as he did, Lovinescu must have thought of deflating once and for all the aplomb of an inopportune and transitory opponent. However, three years later, in the third and last volume of *Istoria civilizației...*, he will be forced to return, even indirectly, to this supposedly closed case and to revise the architecture of ideas and theories from which Fundoianu’s “Preface” resulted. More precisely, Lovinescu will be forced to approach more judiciously the relationship between modern (young) Romanian civilization and the civilizations considered more advanced. For that, he will have to face criticism and comments that include the terms previously circulated by Fundoianu – namely “parasitism” and “colony” – and that overlap somewhat with the concepts of “dependency” vs. “interdependence” he circulated in *Istoria civilizației...*

From 1925 onwards, after publishing the first two volumes of *Istoria civilizației...*, the critic from *Sburătorul* will be requested to refine his argumentation and to take a clearer stance in a context in which his ideological opponents decide to challenge – *à la* Fundoianu, but without his solution – the theses in the first two volumes of *Istoria civilizației...* where Lovinescu stated that contemporary Romania (that is 1920s Romania) was in a relationship of “interdependence” with other European countries, including the most advanced or organically evolved ones. In this context, adversaries like the literary critic and left-wing ideologue G. Ibrăileanu (1871–1936) or the philosopher and psychologist C. Rădulescu-Motru (1868–1957) will reproach Lovinescu that Romania has not overcome, as the author of the *Istoria civilizației...* claimed, the phase of “dependence” on the West (Ibrăileanu’s reproach) or that it rather illustrates the phase of “parasitism” or involuntary dependence (plastically expressed by Rădulescu-Motru as “the interdependence between the fly and the spider’s web”). As we see, none of these critiques admit that Romania really *is* in a relationship of colonialism (arguably equated by Rădulescu-Motru with a “wilful dependence”), or of quasi-equality or real competitiveness (“interdependence” is the word used by Lovinescu) in relation to the more advanced or powerful cultures of the West:

[...] how did the revolutionary ideology enter the social life of the Romanian people [...]? [...] What are the means that maintained the spirit of the revolutionary ideology? To these questions, Mr. Lovinescu has two answers available to the reader: one expressed openly and which is obvious; another slipped between the lines and which is immediately understood by the skilled reader. The parade one sounds like this: modern Romanian civilization is the creation of the French revolutionary ideology, which

imposed itself on the Romanian people through the moral and material interdependence among the European peoples. However, this answer is not supported by anything. An experienced and talented writer, like Mr. Lovinescu, if he had taken this answer seriously, would have accompanied it with the necessary proof. He would have explained to us, first, why he calls it interdependence, when in fact the Romanian people do not give anything, but only receive: why interdependence and not simple dependence? Even as a simple dependency the connection is still not clear. Is it a simple relationship of parasitism? It would not be impossible, given the premises from which he started, that the Romanian soul itself is forever passive and imitative. But Mr. Lovinescu does not state such a thing. Is it a conscious, wilful dependence, that is, a kind of colonial dependence on France, like the dependence of Algeria? For this, Mr. Lovinescu should have paralleled the history of Romanian civilization with the history of French civilization, which again he does not do. Therefore, not dependence, but still interdependence, not with Romanian participation, but over the Romanian head, or, as they say, like the interdependence between the fly and the spider's web. Be that as it may. But where is the proof? How does Mr. Lovinescu prove to us that civilizations were born in Europe through simple interdependence? By nothing<sup>25</sup>.

Summoned to take a stand, Lovinescu does so in the third volume (1925) of *Istoria civilizației...* The way in which he deals with the problem of “modern” Romania's relations with the more developed West here must be considered not only a specific, explicit response to the critique directed at the first two volumes of the mentioned historiographical work, but also an implicit, hidden response – more nuanced than in “Poezia nouă” and at the same time more firm – to Fundoianu's colonial thesis (with the amendment that, if Fundoianu had in mind primarily the cultural phenomenon and, in particular, the literary phenomenon, *Istoria civilizației...* primarily refers to the indigenous ideological, economic and sociopolitical evolution, and only peripherally and secondarily to the evolution of culture or literature, the latter appearing in his frame as a rather “reactionary” product). And Lovinescu's answer to all this is: “The interdependence between our country and the heart of European life is no longer the ‘interdependence between the fly and the spider's web’, but a *real* interdependence [...]. In the political field, *our collaboration is already effective. Romania has become an appreciable factor of European balance*” (e.m., T.D.)<sup>26</sup> In any case, even limited to aspects of “Romanian civilization”, Lovinescu chooses to promote an eminently optimistic perspective (however, presented as realistic, as describing the *reality* of interwar Romania), opposed not only to the way in which Rădulescu-Motru posed the problem in 1925, but also to Fundoianu's previous perspective stating Romania's

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<sup>25</sup> C. Rădulescu-Motru, “Ideologia revoluționară în cultura română” [“The Revolutionary Ideology in Romanian Culture”], *Mișcarea literară*, 1925, 29, p. 1, 30, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> E. Lovinescu, *Istoria civilizației române moderne*, vol. III: *Legile formării civilizației române* [*History of Modern Romanian Civilization*, vol. III: *Laws of the Formation of Romanian Civilization*], București, Ancora, 1925, p. 61.

“inferior” position (in comparison, once again, not only with France, but also with French-speaking Switzerland, the former’s cultural “colony”). Lovinescu’s last word in a polemic that began in the early 1920s and became chronic until the middle of the decade claims, therefore, without a shadow of a doubt, that “Romanian civilization” has already gone beyond the stage of “imitating” the models of the European West and is experiencing “interdependence”, a competitive relationship with other European countries, not one of subordination/“dependence” or inferiority. Is this optimism, realism or just naivety? On the other hand, Lovinescu accepts that, in terms of a “high spiritual life” – the so-called “high” culture – Romania does not currently have a real contribution to European world, but only a “virtual” one (not yet materialized, but possible at any moment):

In terms of a high spiritual life, our collaboration still remained virtual: the otherwise natural emergence of a great artist would immediately unleash a concentric wave of imitation over the entire continent, and the discovery of a scientist, possible at any moment, would have repercussions in the world’s science<sup>27</sup>.

However, if with regard to “Romanian civilization” and even to Romania’s “spiritual” contribution to European culture, Lovinescu utters such theoretical certainties, regarding the effective strategies by which Romanian culture or literature – the so-called symbolic productions – could access the stage of “interdependence” which, in his opinion, the autochthonous civilization had already accessed, he does not provide details. The critic expresses hopes, if not certainties, only with regard to “differentiation”, i.e. the stage of acclimatization of imported models. Concerning the way they could be relaunched internationally – eventually returned to the metropolitan market – he does not offer any suggestion. However, “differentiation” as Lovinescu theorizes and exemplifies it, not always clearly, does not mean some sort of literary “interdependence”. “Differentiation” does not imply, once adaptation to locality has been carried out, a continuation of the dialogue with the metropolis and access to its markets, but is an approximate correspondent of what Fundoianu understands by “assimilation”. Did Lovinescu imagine that Romanian literature could have reached or at least hoped to reach a stage of “interdependence” at a European/world level – if it had not already done so through the “new poetry” investigated with great hopes by the *Sburătorul* critic since 1920–1922? We don’t know. What we do know is that Lovinescu avoids the topic of reaching “interdependence” or illustrating the “interdependence” between Romania and Europe (the West) through the example of Romanian literature/culture; what concerns him effectively and constantly is what is happening strictly on the national level: ensuring the dynamics of “imitation”–“differentiation”, researching the way imported models are

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

adapted/assimilated to the local frame, i.e. aspects of internal metabolism, free from the pressure of “sending” (as Fundoianu wanted) valuable goods to the center/metropolis/empire. The process or the problem (of the possibility) of going beyond the stage of “differentiation”, of sending goods to the metropolis, does not concern him. There are questions that Lovinescu’s work does not raise, dilemmas that it does not consider. But these are topics that others can investigate, starting from the very way in which his work hides or postpones them.

As as strong as it may have been, the “violence” of Fundoianu’s “Preface” not only did not reach the usual demolishing aggressiveness of the avant-gardes, but can even be placed in a tradition of signalling and interrogating the so-called “complexes” of Romanian literature (potentially of Romanian culture as well)<sup>28</sup>. The young essayist’s diagnosis was not harsher than the identification of a perpetuated and, as such, aggravated lack of individuality, but which needs to be overcome by one strategy or another. If in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the era of the Romantic nationalist-liberal Mihail Kogălniceanu (1817–1891) and of *Dacia literară*<sup>29</sup>, the observation that Romanian literature is only made up of translations had a moralizing, but still empathetic and mobilizing vibe, after almost a century, a similar finding about Romanian literature – which the existence of “miracles” like the “genius” Eminescu or the replacing of translations with works (supposedly) imitating Western models had not substantially ameliorated – sounded alarming and desperate. This explains why at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century some authors looked for solutions sometimes difficult to digest in the first instance, towards other horizons and formulas than their predecessors. It is also true that, in the immediate post-war context, after the achievement of the Great Union in 1918, when Romania’s territory and population almost doubled compared to the situation before the First World War, Fundoianu’s colonial theory did not at all flatter the triumphant nationalist imaginary (although, on the other hand, its implementation required, paradoxically, precisely a national effort – not only individual, but maybe also a state or a cultural community effort – to concentrate resources for the conquest of cultural France). But it is equally true that Lovinescu’s minimization of this theory in the 1920s is a questionable solution, moreover, one that is undermined by its strictly conjunctural quality, which manipulates the opponent’s assumptions or avoids its true stakes.

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<sup>28</sup> A concept stemming from Mircea Martin’s seminal work *G. Călinescu și complexe literaturii române* [*G. Călinescu and the Complexes of Romanian Literature*], București, Albatros, 1981. By accident or not, this is the same critic who authored the introductory study to the volume of Fundoianu’s writings published in 1980. The torch of pointing out the vices/“complexes” of Romanian culture or literature seems to have passed smoothly, naturally, from Fundoianu to Martin, despite the decided disapproval pronounced by the post-war literary historian towards the colonial theory of the interwar critic. (It is possible, in other words, that the young Fundoianu was among the authors who inspired Martin’s reading of Călinescu).

<sup>29</sup> The first Romanian literary magazine, published in 1840 and edited by Mihail Kogălniceanu.

*The 1980s*

B. Fundoianu's work slipped into obscurity in Romania after 1945, and its recovery (i.e. its re-reading and editing) could not be done without a series of caveats. In 1980, in the context of the turn of the current political regime towards national-communism, his colonial theory was rejected by Mircea Martin (as a "wrong and isolated thesis"), but at the same time neutralized (as a moment overtaken by history and by the author's own contradictions) in the following terms:

Today, when our literature has certainly overcome the phase of unilateral enslavement that B. Fundoianu absolutized in 1922, I think we can consider the famous preface as a historical document among so many others, and in spite of that position we should acknowledge the author's equally historical merits. Moreover, the point of view regarding the "colonial" status of Romanian literature compared to French literature was in contradiction not only with the factual realities, but also with so many other statements by B. Fundoianu. And in any case it is unfair, if not actually harmful, that a wrong and isolated thesis should drag into depreciation and oblivion an activity which, as a whole, was so positively effective<sup>30</sup>.

This caveat was pronounced in the first lines of the introductory study Martin authored for *Imagini și cărți* (1980), a massive collection of Fundoianu's works which included his first book *Imagini și cărți din Franța*, and will have been imposed on the editor and the author of the introductory study in order to be able to republish Fundoianu's work in the Romania of the last decade of communism, marked by a rise of nationalism and by Ceaușescu's autonomist/isolationist policy.

Thus, the argument concerning the real or potential tendency of the Romanian culture towards the status of "colony" of French literature is perceived by Martin as "unilateral enslavement", "infamous assessment of Romanian literature", or "[still prolific] error", stunning in its "aberrant, denigrating radicalism". Martin's view comes directly from Lovinescu's interpretation of 1922–1923 of the same thesis by Fundoianu and seems oriented, in the same vein, only towards the prevention of the unfavourable consequences of depending on a metropolis ("the phase of unilateral enslavement", in Martin's words), not to the potential benefits associated with the "colony" status, which Fundoianu clearly had taken into account when formulating his thesis. However, after the sophistry and "violence" signaled by Lovinescu in the 1920s, the "infamy" noted by Martin in the 1980s appears as a sentence in an already closed file. The global and homogeneous discredit of the local critical tradition, from the 1920s to the 1980s, functioned in

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<sup>30</sup> Mircea Martin, "Valoarea pozitivă a negației sau despre publicistica lui B. Fundoianu" ["The Positive Value of Negation, or about B. Fundoianu's Journalism"], in Fundoianu, *Imagini și cărți*, p. VII. The editor Vasile Teodorescu takes good care to point out – in a footnote attached to Fundoianu's "Preface" – that it circulates "erroneous" ideas which are detected and properly addressed by Martin's introductory study (p. 24).

this case as a protective membrane trivializing and sterilizing the subject, mitigating its quantum of risk. (Of particular interest in the case of this prudent-neutralizing recovery operated by Martin is the fact that the critical revisiting of Fundoianu's work is also done by means of arguments derived from the baggage of his interwar critics, not least from that of Lovinescu – himself a constantly disavowed author, at higher or lower levels, and recovered with caveats and forewords signalling his ideological “errors” under the communist regime.)

However, although the colonial thesis as such is unequivocally refuted by Martin from the beginning of his introductory study, some of his interpretations regarding Fundoianu's writings are made in the spirit (and even in the logic!) of the former's colonial theory. The writer of Romanian origin who emigrated to France in the 1920s (without ever returning to Romania) is, for example, presented as an active contributor to the movement of ideas in the French culture of the time, which would ensure him not only a place in the French culture, but even “worldwide”. Thus, Fundoianu's writings published in Paris would be “important in themselves and revealing for the way in which his work, started in Romania, continues and is fulfilled in the French space, by means of which it is included in world literature”<sup>31</sup>. Other details clarify this verdict: among the books published by Fundoianu/Fondane in French, *Rimbaud le voyou* (1933) and *Faux traité d'esthétique* (1938) allegedly “attracted from the start the attention of prestigious authors such as Benedetto Croce, Jean Cassou and Raymond Aron, later joining the essential bibliography on the topics and placing Fundoianu among the European innovators of the critical perspective on poetry, alongside Marcel Raymond, Albert Béguin or Rolland de Renneville”<sup>32</sup>. The same impression is made by his philosophical essays (see *La Conscience malheureuse*, 1937), which “equally contributed to the European reputation of Benjamin Fondane, still cited today among the leading thinkers of the age”<sup>33</sup>. I have no clear indications that, in doing so, Martin was in fact seeking to subtextually – possibly subversively – invalidate the refutation of the colonial thesis, an operation he himself had undertaken in his introductory study to *Imagini și cărți*. The hypothesis can be considered. As it is also possible that such an intention did not exist, but the theory took revenge in a perverse way, producing its confirmation at the very hands of those who reject it. Because what Martin claims, more or less intentionally, by the above observations is the same as admitting that, only by becoming a *colonizer* of the French model, or even by writing in French (and, presumably *only under these conditions!*), Fundoianu manages to achieve a kind of “universality” (or at least “Europeanness”, one may add) that it is not sure he would have otherwise achieved

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. VIII.



by writing only in Romanian. One can say that Fundoianu confirmed his theory by the example of his own work and even his own life, both assimilated to French culture. A work and life, one can add, that unfortunately also became part of the tragedy of the Holocaust. If the French state offered Fondane the chance to be read by giant intellectuals of the moment such as Benedetto Croce and to be placed in line with Marcel Raymond et al., it did not, however, save him from deportation and death in the gas chambers, from which he might have been spared (like Mihail Sebastian and other Romanian Jews, for example) if he had stayed in Romania. Hence, the irony of his destiny and of his French langue choice, which started as a promise to emancipation and inclusiveness and ended as an instrument of exclusion and segregation<sup>34</sup>.

Fundoianu clearly had a program in this sense, a project of conquering the metropolis. He states as early as the “Preface” that he designed his articles in *Imagini și cărți din Franța* to be received by a French-speaking audience. Graciously accepting his “colonized” status, he had already begun the assault in the 1920s, writing in Romanian but planning his works (like Mihail Sebastian, one might add), from the start in French and/or for an extra-national public, familiar with the authors analysed by him, who, for a Romanian public, should have been handled by providing more information and contextualization. The contextualization – redundant in the cultures from which these authors come and in which they circulate intensively – is thus regarded by Fundoianu as superfluous:

We<sup>35</sup> said that our [Romanian] literature is a contribution to the French one. Doesn't a book of criticism fall under the same laws, unchanged still? Our book does not offer biographies, does not talk about the writer's life and does not even insist on the necessary things in a work – when they have been written too many times. *We had the impression, while writing the book, of publishing the articles in France, in a French review*, and that our purpose was to contribute something modest, but ours. This attitude towards the French book was unconscious; now we barely realize what imperious logic we obeyed. [e.m., T.D.]<sup>36</sup>.

His subsequent journey to the French (cultural) territory was – as it can be seen in retrospect – only a confirmation of this route, of this solution that he apparently “unconsciously” or intuitively found.

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<sup>34</sup> See Julia Elsky, *Writing Occupation: Jewish Emigré Voices in Wartime France*, Stanford–California, Stanford University Press, 2020, 30: „[...] the French language was for Fondane both a medium of cultural liberation and an escape from antisemitism in Romania. But over the course of the 1930s, Fondane would again effect a shift in his writing, referring to the French language as the site of his growing unease as a Jewish foreigner. French became not a language of belonging to a community but just the opposite, the language of a loss of community and of a Jewish poetics of exile during the Occupation”.

<sup>35</sup> *Pluralis modestiae*.

<sup>36</sup> Fundoianu, „Prefață”, p. 27.

*The 2000s*

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a judicious revisiting of Fundoianu's "Preface" to *Imagini și cărți din Franța* has been endeavoured by Constantin Pricop<sup>37</sup>. Roxana Sorescu also contributes to a new and welcome hermeneutic of this disputed Fondanian text. She rightly considers inadequate the interpretations according to which Fundoianu would have asserted that Romanian literature is a "colony" of French literature and recommends, instead, decoding Fundoianu's thesis in a desiderative mode: it would be good for Romanian culture to become a "colony" of French culture:

An idea widespread in Romanian criticism, from the first reviewers of the *Privelisti* volume (1930) to the present day, is that Fundoianu would have said, in the "Preface" to *Imagini și cărți din Franța* [...], that Romanian literature is a colony of French literature. That is incorrect. Fundoianu said that Romanian literature should strive towards the ideal of becoming a colony of French literature. The colony, said the 23-year-old, is in an active exchange with the metropolis: it receives a lot from it, but it also sends a messenger to the center, something the Romanian literature of the time had not yet deigned to do. (Fundoianu explicitly denies any value to writers who had published in French: Macedonski, Hélène Vacaresco, Charles-Adolphe Cantacuzène). Very soon he would decide to become that messenger himself<sup>38</sup>.

The interpretation is clearly confirmed by Fundoianu's text, which uses "colony" and "province" with equivalent meanings and in terms of the desired, not of the actual realization of these relations: "We will have to convince France that intellectually we are a province of its geography, and our literature, in what it has of quality, a contribution to its literature"<sup>39</sup>.

Neither after the Second World War, nor during the communist regime or after the fall of communism did Fundoianu escape the negative echo of the statements he made in the "Preface" to *Imagini și cărți din Franța*. Words like "parasitism" and "colony" continued to sound scandalous, unacceptable, regrettable, "infamous" to more or less informed commentators of his thesis. However, while under communism the delimitation from the colonialist hypothesis (especially in the last decade of the 1980s, also marked by the assault of Romanian "protochronism"<sup>40</sup>) was urgently needed in order to republish the works of the

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<sup>37</sup> See Constantin Pricop, "B. Fundoianu și literatura română" ["B. Fundoianu and Romanian Literature"], *România literară*, 37, 2004, 27, pp. 14-15.

<sup>38</sup> Roxana Sorescu, "Un abis pentru fiecare" ["An Abyss for Everyone"], *Observator cultural*, 2013, 685, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/un-abis-pentru-fiecare-2/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Fundoianu, "Prefață", p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> A political-cultural current fueled by the national-communist ideology of the moment, affirming the precedence and superiority of Romanian culture over other European and global cultures, including the Ancient Greek and Roman cultures.

author (in this sense, the rejection of Fundoianu's colonial thesis, reactivated by Martin in 1980, when this action certainly worked as a strategy in order to help editing Fundoianu's works, must be perceived as opportune and even salutary), after 1989 the equally rigid and excessively cautious approach to the thesis is absolutely regrettable if not scandalous, and certainly unprofitable intellectually. Basically, this rigid approach only perpetuates, without new cognitive input, the hostile reading, touched by conjunctural stakes, that Lovinescu in the 1920s but also other interwar exegetes had applied to it, a reading later aggravated by the precautions, justified from another perspective, of the critics during communism.

Bringing Fundoianu's colonial thesis back into discussion, today or yesterday, does not mean either accepting this thesis – and admitting, along with it, the legitimacy of the (post)colonial paradigm – or putting it into practice. However, as the hypothesis of treating Romanian culture in terms of postcolonial and/or decolonialization theories gains some traction after the fall of communism – various theorists investigating, for example, the possibility (or impossibility) of discussing post-communism as a type of “postcolonialism” –, Fundoianu's thesis needed to be re-investigated with new arguments and from new angles. Which is what actually happened, but not by means of a sufficiently consistent body of research to balance the mass of quasi-*a priori* hostile opinions to Fundoianu's thesis and the tradition of its *ab ovo* disavowal. Andrei Terian wrote about the (in)opportunity of discussing Romanian (especially post-war) culture and, in general, cultures from the former socialist bloc (from the so-called “Second World”) in terms of “colony” and “postcolonialism”, by relating them to the centre of power represented by the USSR. In his demonstration, he recalled Fundoianu's “Preface” and concluded that

the evolution of the countries and literatures of the Second World was quite different from that of post-colonial countries: while for the latter colonialism is identified with modernization, the former was already in an advanced stage of modernization when they entered the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union<sup>41</sup>.

From this perspective, it can be further deduced that the colonialist project outlined by Fundoianu assumes from the outset – with all the “parasitism” of

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<sup>41</sup> Andrei Terian, “Literatura eliptică sau hiperbolică? Cazul literaturilor naționale din Lumea a Doua” [“Elliptical or Hyperbolic Literature? The Case of Second World National Literature”], in *Critica de export. Teorii, contexte, ideologii* [*Exporting Criticism. Theories, Contexts, Ideologies*], București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2013, p. 102. See also “Există un (post)colonialism central- și est-european? Pentru o teorie unitară a dependenței literare” [“Is there a Central and East European Postcolonialism? Towards a Unified Theory of Literary Dependence”], in Terian, *Critica de export*, pp. 104-129. See also the versions published in international academic periodicals: “Reading World Literature: Elliptical or Hyperbolic Literature? The Case of Second World National Literatures”, *Interlitteraria*, 2012, 17, pp. 17-26, and “Is There a Central and East European Postcolonialism? Towards a Unified Theory of Literary Dependence”, *World Literature Studies*, 4, 2012, 3, pp. 21-36.

Romanian culture that he also incriminates – a stage of modernization of Romanian culture in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century superior to the countries that have truly experienced the phenomenon of colonization and which must be reflected on from a post-colonial perspective.

The concept of “self-colonizing” launched in 1995 by the Bulgarian researcher Alexander Kiossev<sup>42</sup> also had numerous echoes in the Romanian critical-theoretical discourse after 2000. It was co-opted in disputes against the so-called alienation of native/national “values” and, more transparently, as an argument hiding the preference for a centre of power (perceived as traditional, therefore closer to the “national specificity/identity” of France and of Latin countries in general) to the detriment of another, perceived, even after the fall of communism, as non-adherent or more distant from the local tradition (the Anglo-American models). Thus, a series of approaches, mainly materialized after 2010, interested in reforming and updating the theoretical and methodological Romanian literary research, including through the publication by international publishing houses of studies perceived as irreverent and even scandalous in relation to the “truths” delivered by the tradition of Romanian literary criticism, have been incriminated – more or less transparently – as forms of “self-colonization”<sup>43</sup>, the concept being equated in this context with the absence of “critical thinking”<sup>44</sup>. The adequacy or inadequacy of the (re)interpretation of various cultural leap/progress solutions, from Lovinescu’s “synchronism” theory to more recent solutions, as “self-colonization” phenomena, has been the subject of more or less happily oriented statements. In this context, a set of solid arguments in favour of a distance from Kiossev’s concept were offered by Christian Moraru<sup>45</sup>. Without systematically approaching the postcolonial doxa and questioning the appropriateness of its use for Romanian cases, I, too, have investigated the way in which authors from the last decade of communism – from the so-called 1980 Generation – imported and localized the models provided by the North American power centre (especially by

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<sup>42</sup> Alexander Kiossev, “Notes on Self-colonising Cultures” (1995), in *After the Wall. Art and Culture in Post-communist Europe*. Edited by Bojana Pejić and David Elliott, Stockholm, Modern Museum, 1999, pp. 114-117. See also Alexander Kiossev, “Self-Colonizing Metaphor”, in *Atlas of Transformation*, <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html>). Accessed November 20, 2024.

<sup>43</sup> See Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, Andrei Terian (eds.), *Romanian Literature as World Literature*, London–New York, Bloomsbury, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> See Bianca Burța-Cernat, “Gândirea critică și simulacrele ei” [“Critical Thinking and Its Simulacra”], I–IV, *Observator cultural*, 2018, 908-911, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/autor/-biancaburta-cernat/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

<sup>45</sup> Christian Moraru, “Autocolonizarea: un concept” (“Self-colonization: A Concept”), *Observator cultural*, 2019, 973, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/un-concept-autocolonizarea/>. Accessed March 5, 2024.

the poetry of the *Beat* Generation)<sup>46</sup>. However, there are exegetes for whom the “self-colonization” concept continues to be useful even for revisiting Fundoianu’s colonial thesis<sup>47</sup>.

On the other hand, even Mircea Martin, the greatest Romanian specialist in Fundoianu’s life and work, perpetuated after 1989 the interwar and post-war tradition (from communism) of rejecting the colonial thesis in the famous “Preface”, opting instead for a discourse that, from “nuance” to “nuance” (the critic’s fetish-concept), prolongs the skeptical, distanced and, in the context, nationalist reading key of Lovinescu. Then, even otherwise comprehensive and

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<sup>46</sup> See Teodora Dumitru, “Gaming the World-System. Creativity, Politics, and Beat Influence in the Poetry of the 1980s Generation,” in Martin et al. (eds.), *Romanian Literature*, pp. 271-287. Although I placed the discussion in terms of centres and peripheries (in the line of Immanuel Wallerstein’s world system analysis), seeing the Romanian poets of the 1980s as “peripheral” and the *Beat* poets in the position of representing the (North American) centre, I did not conclude that the import of American models operated by Romanian writers led to the “Americanization” of Romanian poetry (to an effective and efficient “self-colonization”, one could say). On the contrary, I stated that it led to a complicated and sometimes unintentional reconversion of these models upon the logic and terms of people exposed to the experience of decades of rigors and privations in a particular country in the former socialist bloc (each with its own historical and socio-political peculiarities). More precisely, I showed that the anti-capitalist, anti-war and resolutely left-wing message of Allen Ginsberg & Co. did not permeate the literature of Romanian writers inspired by them, the *Beat* poetry being received and instrumentalized by Romanian authors from the 1980s exclusively as a resource for their symbolic *liberation* from the rigors of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s dictatorship, from the national communism *in actu* in Romania of the era – that is, from the constraints of a regime on whose coat of arms, at least in theory, the philosophy of Marxism/anti-capitalism itself was engraved. On the one hand, the fact that Romanian literati living under communism chose not to make transparent, or simply ignored, the anti-capitalist message of the *Beatniks* can be discussed as a separate sociological or anthropological symptom (indicating, among other things, their lack of economic and political culture caused by the general lack of access to commodities and information, especially during the last decade of Romanian communism). But on the other hand, the fact that they take only a part of the *Beatnik* legacy, the formal part, its styles, distorting instead its content, its ethos to provide hints of an anti-communist message, even in terms of subversion, that fact, indeed, can be understood as a creative upgrade. As long as it is not possible to note, in the case of the Romanian poets of the 1980s, an exact and proper reproduction of the centre/metropolis models, as long as the taking over of models is (even involuntarily) imperfect and works to produce new ways of tackling and resisting the world (albeit reduced to living and publishing in Ceaușescu’s Romania), to deliver solutions that are absent or unimaginable in the original data of the models taken over, the creative distance introduced by the Romanian authors in relation to their American models invites the question of their apparent status as “peripheral” (maybe “parasitic”) artists. From this point of view, as I do not think that I have prejudiced, injured, etc. the Romanian subjects I investigate by introducing them into a scheme in which they appear as “peripheral” (on the contrary, the very scheme as such provided me with the arguments to overcome it or to nuance the discussion), I also do not think that accepting the lucid revisiting of the colonial thesis of Fundoianu is the same as legitimizing the “infamous” or “scandalous” anti-nation (possibly anti-state) ideology in whose frame it was caught up.

<sup>47</sup> See Olga Bartosiewicz, “B. Fundoianu și spiritul imitativ în cultura română: între autocolonizarea și autonomizarea literaturii” [“B. Fundoianu and the Imitative Spirit in Romanian Culture: Between Autocolonization and Autonomization of Literature”], *Philologica Jassyensia*, 2018, 1, pp. 15-28.

detail-oriented exegetes such as Roxana Sorescu, the *auteure* of the mentioned caveat, by drawing attention to the deficient decoding of Fundoianu's colonial thesis, reveals her unwillingness to betray the interwar source doxa of the disavowal of the thesis in question by claiming that it was not his opponents and interpreters, but Fundoianu himself that was a "radical" "without nuance", caught up in an inappropriate "excess of denial". However, the same *auteure*, while she understands the restraints to which communism forced the exegetes, deploras, on the other hand, the poor quality (with some exceptions) of the Romanian revisiting and *remise en circulation* of Fundoianu's work in the post-war period and especially after 1989<sup>48</sup>.

It is not surprising that, in this context, the fate of Fundoianu's reception in post-war Romania and even in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century took several strange turns. The philo-colonial author who asked the Romanian culture and its actors to accept "with joy" (but only if they are "allowed"!) the "role" of "being the citizens, less original, but industrious, of the French culture", so an author not bothered by the scenario of giving up "national specificity", even though only that represented by the mother tongue (but potentially also aiming at other aspects of the "tradition"), will be recovered after 2000 as an "antimodern" writer and thinker, in the sense given the term by Antoine Compagnon<sup>49</sup>. Coincidentally or not, Fundoianu/Fondane is placed in this process alongside other writers dedicated to the pragmatic renunciation of writing in Romanian, but revisited as repositories and guardians of the "spirit" or "national identity", such as the historian of religions Mircea Eliade (1907–1986) or the philosopher Emil Cioran (1911–1995), and, from another perspective, alongside N. Steinhardt (1912–1989)<sup>50</sup>, the

<sup>48</sup> Roxana Sorescu, "B. Fundoianu și marile războaie" ["B. Fundoianu and the Great Wars"], *Viața românească*, 2017, 11-12, <https://www.viataromaneasca.eu/revista/2017/12/b-fundoianu-si-marile-razboaie/>. Accessed November 20, 2024.

<sup>49</sup> The impetus for perceiving Fundoianu/ Fondane as "antimodern" was given by Mircea Martin in "Pour un réenchantement du monde et de la poésie", *Cahiers Benjamin Fondane*, 2007, 10, [https://benjaminfondane.com/un\\_article\\_cahier-Pour\\_un\\_r%C3%A9enchantement\\_du\\_monde\\_et\\_de\\_la\\_po%C3%A9sie-302-1-1-0-1.html](https://benjaminfondane.com/un_article_cahier-Pour_un_r%C3%A9enchantement_du_monde_et_de_la_po%C3%A9sie-302-1-1-0-1.html). Accessed September 27, 2024. See also the preface of the Romanian edition of Compagnon's book *Antimodernii*, translated by Irina Mavrodin and Adina Dinițoiu, București, Art, 2008. Martin's suggestion was taken up and expanded by Oana Soare, in order to identify other Romanian "antimoderns". In her work dedicated to that project, she states that Fundoianu, Eliade and Cioran are all "antimodern" writers and thinkers – see Oana Soare, *Ceialți moderni. Antimodernii: cazul românesc [The Other Moderns. The Antimoderns: The Romanian Case]*, București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2017.

<sup>50</sup> See Adrian Mureșan, *Vârstele subversiunii. N. Steinhardt și deconstrucția utopiilor [The Ages of Subversion. N. Steinhardt and the deconstruction of utopias]*, Alba Iulia, OMG Publishing House, 2020, p. 25 *et passim*. For Mureșan the young Steinhardt is an "antimodern" in Compagnon's sense. For details on Steinhardt's less liberal and more conservative style and ethos, see Dan Alexandru Chiță, "Burghezul cruciat" ["The Crusading Bourgeois"], *Viculusorum's Blog*, February 2, 2021, <https://viculusorum.wordpress.com/2021/02/02/burghezul-cruciat/>. Accessed March 3, 2024.

Romanian essayist with Jewish origins, who, however, did not apply/join the colonial solution imagined by Fundoianu in 1922. (The appetite for the rehabilitative instrumentalization of the “antimodern” attribute goes, surprisingly or not, in the view of some Romanian commenters, hand in hand with the propensity to identify in various contemporaries a “self-colonizing” behavior: if the import of French/Romance language concepts became – as not even Fundoianu had imagined – part of the national tradition, or it is just felt as such, the import of Anglophone concepts or concepts of non-Romance origin in general would be simply mimetic, “self-colonizing”).

“Antimodernity” is, in the first instance, an apparently convenient and up-to-date solution for revisiting and sometimes rehabilitating – by placing under the same apparently ideologically neutral umbrella – authors who, in the classical jargon, would be called “reactionaries”, traditionalists/nationalists, conservatives, right-wing or far-right extremists. In the discourse of some recent local exegetes, it becomes a noble title *sans rivages*, but also a completely loose concept (*recte*, inconsistent). The fact that the “antimodern” Benjamin Fondane is killed (symbolically) by the “antimoderns” Eliade, Cioran et al., who chose to push their visions of society and philosophy along a common path with Nazism (which literally killed him) is ignored or repressed by the handlers of this concept, possibly judged as a secondary detail. What separates these authors and people with vastly different biographies and moral choices is cancelled when their supposed common “antimodernity” brings them together in the pages of those same studies.

Thus, the Romanian-French Jew Fondane who was gassed in Auschwitz, and the philo-fascists (in their youth) Eliade and Cioran are placed on the common barricade of Romanian “antimodernity” – an *ad hoc* association and recovery, both epistemologically fragile and morally questionable. As “antimoderns”, they would have contributed together to the preservation of some national and/or spiritual “values” supposedly endangered by the various representatives of “modern” thinking, writing, and strategic politics. However, in this process of Fundoianu/Fondane’s “antimodernization”, his colonial theory is explored less or not at all: the author’s overall recovery as “antimodern” disregards it, just as it does not seem to include the avant-garde theories of his youth. In other words, even in these latter-day receptions, Fundoianu’s colonial theory is treated (when mentioned at all) with the old tools of the interwar or communist periods. More recent works (monographs or introductory studies) mention the colonial theory but without (re)questioning it<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> See Michael Finkenthal, *Benjamin Fondane: A Poet-Philosopher Caught Between the Sunday of History and the Existential Monday*, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2013. See also Bruce Baugh, “Introduction”, in Benjamin Fondane, *Existential Monday: Philosophical Essays*. Edited and translated by Bruce Baugh, New York, New York Review Books, 2016.

Like other broader stakes approaches of the era, for example that of the sociological study *Neoiobăgia* (Neo-Serfdom) (1910) by the socialist literary critic and ideologue C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea (1855–1920), Fundoianu's thesis can be further discussed both as a part of the modernization theory paradigm – the mainstream sociological theory in Romania in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – as well as an alternative discourse to this theory. Thus, without claiming that Fundoianu's thesis anticipates post-war anti-capitalist philosophies dealing with the concept of “colony”, it is still possible to insert his reflection in a line of thought that deals with the anxiety of being peripheral, irrelevant, silenced. That is, in a lineage that intersected the “dependency theory” (Raúl Prebisch; Paul A. Baran, Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, etc.), the theory of “unequal development” (Leo Trotsky, David Harvey) or the emergence of “world-system analysis” (Immanuel Wallerstein). This is possible even if Fundoianu/Fondane – considered to be a conservative existentialist or a “metaphysical anarchist”<sup>52</sup> to the same extent as he was a noted avant-garde member regarding his literature or cinema – does not develop, in his Romanian or French works, a critical perspective on the capitalist system (or not consistently and consequentially), proposing instead, for the benefit of the culture he represents at the time of writing the aforementioned “Preface”, namely the Romanian culture, only a cynical-pragmatic action: the rise from the status of a “parasitic” culture (which only imports, without exporting) to that of a “colonial” one, characterized by an exchange relationship with the metropolis. That being said, instead of revisiting him as dextrorotatory or even as a companion of authors with far-right sympathies, I think it would be more useful for Fondane – for his work and memory – to be, if not “leftized”, at least linked to with left-wing authors and theories with which his colonial theory, if not his entire life and *œuvre*, can enter into dialogue.

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*Appendix.* The present essay, which deals only with the reception of Fundoianu's colonial theory, could have ended here. I choose to extend it with a series of reflections on the usefulness of explaining the entire work and philosophy of Fundoianu/Fondane through Compagnon's concept of “antimodern(ity)” because I find here an exemplary case of epistemological failure.

About the inconsistency of Compagnon's concept of “antimodern(ity)” – too close to the way the Romanian literary critic and theorist Matei Călinescu (1934–2009) theorized aesthetic “modernity” decades ago in his volume from the 1980s<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Bauch, “Introduction”, p. vii.

<sup>53</sup> Matei Călinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1987.



to justify its own place in the current pantheon of literary and cultural theory – and about the risks of its apparently serenely de-ideologized handling I have dealt extensively in another work<sup>54</sup>. I have to add, regarding the instrumentation of this concept in more recent Romanian literary studies, the fact that the “antimodern(ity)” taken over *via* Compagnon by local commentators such as Oana Soare, Paul Cernat<sup>55</sup>, etc. is living proof of the fact that this is a placebo concept, which cannot actually effect any change in the cultural field.

Imagining that the extension of the proximate genre of the “antimodern” can work in its favour, thus proving its power of coverage – but crassly crowding the genres that illustrate it and ignoring the real differences between them (some that marked the life and signed the death of some of these writers) – the exegetes for whom the identification of an author’s “antimodernity” passes as a solution for updating or rehabilitating him lose sight of the fact that, by doing so, they only invalidate the concept as such. Because, if Fundoianu/Fondane and Cioran were both “antimodern”, i.e. had a similar attitude or philosophy towards the values of the present and the past, then what is there to explain the fact that one of them ended up in Auschwitz, while the other became, in the 1930s, a sympathizer of the Romanian interwar far-right organization known as the “Iron Guard” (or the “Legion of the Archangel Michael” or the “Legionary Movement”<sup>56</sup>) and was assigned as diplomat of the Romanian state in Marshal Pétain’s France? After various services to the “Legionary Movement”, including a pathetic “Captain’s Inner Profile”<sup>57</sup>, dedicated to the commemoration of the assassination of the first legionnaire leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (1899–1938), Cioran will indeed be happy to leave in February 1941 as cultural attaché of the Romanian Legation with the Vichy government (even if in conversations with friends Paris remains the centre of reference). His appointment to this sinecure would have been due to the leader of the “Legionary Movement” at that time, Horia Sima, vice-president of the Council of Ministers in the government of the national-legionary state whose “Conducător”/Leader<sup>58</sup> was Marshal Ion Antonescu (1882–1946), a political hybrid in power until the Legionary Rebellion of January 21-23, 1941.

<sup>54</sup> Teodora Dumitru, *Rețeaua modernităților: Paul de Man – Matei Călinescu – Antoine Compagnon* [*The Web of Modernities: Paul de Man – Matei Călinescu – Antoine Compagnon*], București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Cernat, *Vase comunicante: (Inter)fețe ale avangardei românești interbelice* [*Communicating Vessels. (Inter)Faces of the Romanian Inter-War Avant-Garde*], Iași, Polirom, 2018.

<sup>56</sup> For its origins and history, see Roland Clark, *Holy Legionary Youth: Fascist Activism in Interwar Romania*, Ithaca–London, Cornell University Press, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Emil Cioran, “Profilul interior al Căpitanului” [“Captain’s Inner Profile”], *Glasul strămoșesc*, 1940, 10, p. 5. In this radio conference and article published in the legionary periodical of Sibiu *Glasul strămoșesc*, Cioran stated, among other ideas in the same range, that “if I had to choose between Romania and the Captain, I would not hesitate a moment” (in favor of the latter, of course).

<sup>58</sup> Homologous to the German title *Führer*.

This event, at least in the case of Cioran, continued to produce administrative effects for a while even after the end of the collaboration between the legionaries and Antonescu<sup>59</sup>. Between March and May 1941, Cioran corresponded not from Paris, but from Vichy – where he apparently was waiting for a “mission” that never came (nevertheless, he still received a salary that he would later be asked to pay back)<sup>60</sup>. In a letter sent from Paris to philosopher Constantin Noica in November 1941, after the end of his Vichy sinecure, Cioran declares himself willing to receive a “scholarship” from any court – from any “sublunary” state – a willingness that shows him open to collaboration with any type of regime at the time. (He had not hesitated, as we have seen, to allow himself to be paid by the legionaries led by Sima, nor to “function”, at least in theory, as a legitimator, even if only marginally or purely formally, without delegated “missions”<sup>61</sup>, of a far-right government allied with the Axis, such as the Vichy government).

Then the theory according to which Fundoianu/Fondane, arrested in Paris in 1944, could have saved his life by appealing to the authority of Cioran, Jean Paulhan and the philosopher Ștefan Lupașcu/Stéphane Lupasco (possibly also of Eugen Ionescu/Eugène Ionesco, the Press and Cultural Secretary of the Romanian Legation in Vichy at the time)<sup>62</sup> – a theory that circulates in academic circles – has not yet produced more conclusive evidence than some late oral testimonies (curiously, by Cioran himself). But even admitting that Cioran may have contributed to the attempt of rescuing Fondane from the concentration camp, such one-off interventions would not excuse the fact that he had previously – through

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<sup>59</sup> See Mihail Sebastian, *Journal 1935–1944: The Fascist Years*. Translated by Patrick Camiller, introduction and notes by Radu Ioanid, Chicago, Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 2000, p. 303: “This morning I met Cioran in the street. He was glowing.//‘They’ve appointed me.’// He has been appointed cultural attaché in Paris.// ‘You see, if they hadn’t appointed me and I’d remained where I was, I would have had to do military service. I actually received my call-up papers today. But I wouldn’t have gone, no matter what. So, as it this, everything’s been solved. Do you see what I mean?’//Of course I do, dear Cioran...,” (note dated January 2, 1941). Another entry, from February 12, 1941: “Cioran, despite his participation in the revolt, has kept his post as cultural attaché in Paris, a post that Sima gave him a few days before he was ousted. The new regime has even given him a pay increase! He leaves in a few days. Well, that’s what revolution does for you!” (*Ibidem*, p. 323). Cioran had, therefore, benefited from an appointment offered by the government in which Sima was vice-president (in fact, Cioran’s appointment comes from the Ministry of Propaganda) before the break with Antonescu after the Iron Guard’s attempt to seize power in the context of the Legionary Rebellion. Moreover, we learn from Sebastian’s diary that Cioran had participated in the Rebellion – a detail that, after the fierce reaction of Antonescu and the repression of the legionaries, still doesn’t immediately get him out of his already promised job.

<sup>60</sup> See Cioran, *Manie épistolaire. Lettres choisies: 1930–1991*. Edited by Nicolas Cavaillès, Paris, Gallimard, 2024, letters no. 50-52.

<sup>61</sup> See *Ibidem*, letter No 52 to Alphonse Dupront, director of the French Institute in București, sent on April 19, 1941.

<sup>62</sup> Fondane could have returned from the camp of Drancy, where he had been interned at first instance, but he did not want to abandon his sister, Lina Wexler/Wechsler-Pascal, there.

his writings, speeches and actions such as accepting a post at Vichy – *de facto* legitimized a genocidal pro-Fascist/pro-Nazi/Hitlerite political system and ideology<sup>63</sup>. In this vein, it is epistemologically untenable and, in fact, immoral, that the victim (Fundoianu/Fondane) and the symbolic or real aggressor (Nazism, Fascism, Romanian Legionnaires, etc., through their representatives or sympathizers) should be *explained* – possibly *recovered* by transferring relevance and prestige (including moral prestige) from one to the other – through a concept that erases the massive differences between their visions of life and their practical philosophies and feeds instead only on peripheral aspects of their thinking and attitudes, stylistic speculations or marginalia of theoretical philosophy. Therefore, to revisit Fondane alongside Cioran as “antimodern” can only be dismaying. In the same vein, a detail such as the fact that the “antimodern” Fundoianu and the “traditionalist” Charles Maurras (1868–1952) are (only?) separated by their conceptions of romanticism or classicism<sup>64</sup> – when Maurras, a fervent anti-Semite and supporter of the Vichy regime and of Nazism, whose entire world and life view cantered on the ideas and policies that practically sent the Jew Fondane and everything he symbolically represents to the camp and later to the gas chamber – is a conclusion that can best be described as bizarre.

It should also be pointed out that the “antimodern” hypothetical dialectical or “ambivalent” scheme of functioning (as a character dependent on the present in which he is born, but always tempted to look back to the past or towards challenging the *status quo*) had been tacitly taken over by Compagnon from Matei Călinescu’s concept of aesthetic “modernity”. But this theoretical scheme is de-dialecticized in practice by the French historian and mainly used to serve the interpretation or potential recovery of authors who are nothing more than conservatives or right-wing extremists who write well and who innovate stylistically. For whereas Călinescu’s concept of aesthetic “modernity” – born of a dialectic and producer of dialectics, defined by a tense relationship with socio-techno-civilizational modernity, by its acceptance and at the same time by its anguished questioning – allowed literature/art a wide range of reactions (from, say, the art of Gottfried Benn to that of Vladimir Mayakovski), Compagnon’s “antimodern” remains, with all the precautions he took to prevent this impression, merely an opposition to the present and to the type of art supposed to embrace it

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<sup>63</sup> That “une séparation hérmétique” between Cioran’s philosophical texts and his explicitly political ones is fallacious and useless (as well as the thesis of “aesthetic autonomy”, frequently used in the Romanian cultural space to “save” some writers from their own biography) has been observed since the early 2000s, in the context of the polemics sparked by the publication of *Cioran, Eliade, Ionesco. L’oubli du fascisme* (2002) by Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine – see Pierre Pachet, “Seconde lecture”, *Esprit*, 2002, 290, p. 213.

<sup>64</sup> Oana Soare, *Les antimodernes de la littérature roumaine*, 2013, <https://theses.fr/2013PA040114>, pp. 25-26. Accessed September 27, 2024.

unreservedly (i.e. an opposition to the supposed non-“antimodern” “moderns” who happen to be more left-wing authors – Victor Hugo, Émile Zola, etc. – than right-wing ones). In these circumstances, “antimodern” becomes a banal formal substitute for the classic concepts of “conservative”, “reactionary”, “traditionalist”, “right-wing revolutionary”, etc., or simply an alibi for the rehabilitation of right-wing/far-right names or of the right-wing “deviationism” of authors who are otherwise left-wing (Julien Gracq, Roland Barthes). Thus, if – following Călinescu’s classical theory of modernity, but also Roger Griffin’s more recent theories of the 2000s<sup>65</sup>, where Fascism is considered as (a type of) “modernism” – authors like Fundoianu and Cioran can both be described as voices of modernity or even modernism, since, especially after Călinescu, “modernity” contains its own negation and ambivalent relationship with the techno-societal present, they cannot be imagined, in the same logic, as “antimoderns”. This is because Compagnon’s concept leans more towards the encounter with right-wing ideologies, obfuscating the centrist or leftist valences and thus nullifying the supposedly intrinsic tension of the “antimodern” which, tacitly following the example of Călinescu’s aesthetic “modern”, Compagnon had theoretically laid at the foundation of his concept.

That “antimodern(ity)” becomes, in practical terms, a camouflage for dextrorotatory options is also visible from the refusal of Oana Soare, an intensive acclimatizer of Compagnon’s concept to Romanian themes, to imagine varieties of “antimodernity” in Romanian communism. Why wouldn’t there have been “antimoderns” in Romanian communism – more precisely in the state capitalism of the former European socialist bloc? Because, in Soare’s opinion, the “modernization” of communism was a sham and, moreover, a (pseudo)“modernization” achieved under a dictatorial regime (either simulated or genuine, nevertheless it follows that “modernization” is based on left-wing premises in post-war Romania)<sup>66</sup>. Under these circumstances, it would have been

<sup>65</sup> Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

<sup>66</sup> Corroborating all of the above, the “antimodernity” of Romanian or foreign authors revisited by this concept seems just another name for anti-materialism, for the adherence to spiritualist and irrational theories under which part of the legacy of the old idealism is perpetuated (some of them even claiming to this day to be allied with modern science *via* theories of energy and quantum mechanics, etc.). It is an angle of reception strongly encouraged by recent statements by a French disciple of Compagnon, according to which the “antimodern”, in contrast to the “modern”, would assert itself through the ability to distinguish meanings and “secrets” of life beyond matter/materialism, authentic and valuable literature being non-scientific and non-sociological, the representation of an “inner life” that is not perceivable to the scientist, but to other instances: “The modern person does not believe that there is a hidden dimension to existence, something that escapes objective description. Modernity was partly built on the denunciation of certain ‘metaphysical illusions’. The great scientific movements of the late nineteenth century are the caricature of this materialist ideology: the nature of being is material and nothing exists that cannot be explained by scientific methods. From then on, anything that could not be demonstrated rationally, but which was

impossible for antagonistic, *recte* “antimodern” (inherently right-wing)<sup>67</sup> voices to emerge. It follows that only a capitalist modernity (non-communist/non-socialist) and/or produced in non-dictatorial regimes would be an authentic modernity and that, therefore, it alone could favour the development of “antimodern” discourses. Leaving aside the detail that, in order to support such a claim, Soare has to cancel all the bibliography dealing with “socialist modernism” and its related concepts, including those in the field of literary studies<sup>68</sup>, from the explanatory framework she proposes, which bluntly refutes the thesis that communism/socialism has produced modernization, one more issue remains to be clarified. Namely, the indisputable reality that the societal “modernization” of post-war Romania – whether authentic or not – was nevertheless reacted to by contemporary Romanian literati through a wide range of critical approaches, either explicitly subversive, as in the work of dissident poet Mircea Dinescu (b. 1950) in the 1980s, or implicitly so, as in the “postmodern” poets of the 1980s, or through the aesthetic evasion practiced by the Romanian authors of the 1960–1970s. How do they escape the presumption of “antimodernity”? It is clear from Soare’s judgments that none of the post-war writers who have explicitly or implicitly critically referred to this (socialist/ communist) type of “modernization” are suspected of “antimodernism”. This is gratifying, on the one hand, because Compagnon’s concept does not really add value to the critical-theoretical interpretations that could be aimed at authors who wrote during the communist period.

But it is also disappointing, on the other hand, because we cannot suppress the realization that the “antimodernism” of some of the authors revisited as such by Soare (Cioran, Eliade, etc.) was, however, perfectly possible – even flourishing! – in far-right dictatorships: Nazi, Fascist, Legionary. Therefore, the criterion of the type of political regime (totalitarian *vs.* non-totalitarian/democratic) that would favour “antimodern” phenomena or not is in fact unworkable and unstable, an auxiliary hypothesis that attacks the whole argumentative ensemble.

As a conclusion to this *appendix*, I wish to make the following statements, which include a professional *credo*.

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based on another type of conviction (belief, faith, intuition, etc.), was immediately excluded from reality. The modern man is hostile to ‘secrecy’ because he doesn’t understand it and prefers to make fun of it, accusing it of being a form of superstition” – see Matthieu Giroux, “La littérature est intrinsèquement antimoderne car elle cherche à préserver la vie intérieure”, interview by Eugénie Bastié, *Le Figaro*, January 23, 2021, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/matthieu-giroux-la-litterature-est-intrinsequement-antimoderne-car-elle-cherche-a-preserver-la-vie-interieure-20210123>. Accessed on September 30, 2024.

<sup>67</sup> Soare, *Ceialți moderni*, p. 583.

<sup>68</sup> For the use of the concept of “socialist modernism” in Romanian studies, see Andrei Terian, “Socialist Modernism as Compromise: A Study of the Romanian Literary System,” *Primerjalna književnost*, 42, 2019, 1, pp. 133-147.

The fact that Fondane, Cioran and others shared the same readings and theoretical preferences (*Lebensphilosophie*, the existentialists, etc.) and that they produce theories that have a family air should not let us lose sight of another fact, namely, the practical and moral use and purpose that each of them chooses to give to those theories. It is therefore essential to emphasize the fact that Fondane's readings from the common pool of the time, *Lebensphilosophie*, existentialists & Co., point him to the anti-Nazi/anti-Hitlerist barricade (see, for example, his openly anti-Nazi 1939 essay "L'homme devant l'histoire"), while the same readings or some from the same intellectual sphere push Cioran and Eliade to the barricade of fascist sympathizers.

Under these circumstances, I think it's our moral duty as researchers today to (no longer) work with "smoke and mirrors" that miss the important differences between the thought and practical choices, either political to pertaining to moral conduct, of a man who ends up in Auschwitz, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the theoretical and practical choices of a contemporary of the former, who sets off by praising Hitler and accepts the pay of far-right governments in the 1940s. Even if they are both nourished by the same or convergent philosophical trends of the era, even if at some point they crossed paths or even became friends, scholars need to scrutinize their cases from the level of today's knowledge. And when I speak of today's level of knowledge, I refer both to the information about the particular fates of these men, but also to the more and more compact information, as research into these *topoi* progresses, about how philosophy – through certain aspects, authors, theories, sometimes the same ones – has become (has chosen to become) either a collaborationist agent, participating in the moral and intellectual validation of criminal regimes, or a courageous and prompt critical voice, explicit or implicit, of these regimes.

We have, in other words, a duty to extract Fondane from under the conceptual shadows that he would otherwise share with the sympathizers of the political regimes that sent him to his death and, instead, to highlight the specific differences of these thinkers, not the common, less defining and less relevant aspects. This is not only a moral duty, but also an epistemological and professional one. Otherwise, by judging Fondane and Cioran with the same measure and by explaining them by the same concepts (both would be "antimodern", that would be the equation of their life and thought...), by not discriminating between their typologies, we might conclude that existentialism & Co. could only lead to Nazism, fascism, legionnarism or sympathies in their direction, which is an absolutely untenable conclusion, contradicted not only by the example of Fondane's thought, ethics and praxis, but also by others, such as Simone Weil, Albert Camus or Jean-Paul Sartre.

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STAGES IN THE SAGA OF THE INTERPRETATION OF B. FUNDOIANU'S  
COLONIAL THEORY: FROM E. LOVINESCU UNTIL TODAY*(Abstract)*

In this paper I aim to investigate the reception of the thesis that Romanian literature is/should be a “colony” of French literature, put forward by Romanian-Jewish writer and essayist B. Fundoianu (1898–1944) in the “Preface” of his 1922 volume *Imagini și cărți din Franța* [*Images and Books of France*]. I start my investigation by analysing the way the “synchronistic” critic E. Lovinescu (1881–1943) chose to interpret this thesis in some of his 1922–1923 works, then I trace its post-war destiny under communism and post-communism. The selection of references allows me to note the particularities and variations of this reception, of the way in which Fundoianu’s colonial thesis and/or the writer’s philosophy as a whole is either totally or partially rejected, justified and nuanced, subjected to readings from angles not previously accepted or imagined, or merely adjusted to converge with some apparently innovative concepts on the academic market of the moment, such as the “antimodern(ity)” launched by Antoine Compagnon in the early 2000s.

*Keywords:* colonial, synchronism, antimodern(ity), B. Fundoianu/Benjamin Fondane, E. Lovinescu.

ETAPE DIN SAGA INTERPRETĂRII TEORIEI COLONIALE A LUI B.  
FUNDOIANU: DE LA E. LOVINESCU PÂNĂ ASTĂZI*(Rezumat)*

În această lucrare investighez receptarea tezei conform căreia literatura română este/ar trebui să fie o „colonic” a literaturii franceze, expusă de B. Fundoianu în “Prefața” volumului său din 1922 *Imagini și cărți din Franța*. Pornesc analiza receptării tezei coloniale a lui Fundoianu de la interpretarea pe care o propune criticul „sincronist” și „modernist” E. Lovinescu (1881–1943) în lucrări ale sale din anii 1922–1923 și urmăresc destinul ei postbelic în comunismul românesc și în postcomunism. Selecția de referințe abordată îmi permite să observ particularitățile și variațiile acestei receptări, ale modului în care amintita teză a lui Fundoianu și/sau filosofia de ansamblu a scriitorului, din care aceasta face parte, este fie respinsă integral, fie respinsă parțial, fie justificată și/sau nuanțată, fie supusă unor lecturi din unghiuri neacceptate sau neimaginate anterior ori doar ajustată pentru a ajunge la convergență cu unele concepte aparent inovative pe piața academică a momentului, cum este acela de “antimodern(itate)” lansat de Antoine Compagnon în debutul anilor 2000.

*Cuvinte-cheie:* colonial, sincronism, antimodern(itate), B. Fundoianu/Benjamin Fondane, E. Lovinescu.