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## TRANSLocal MODERNISM: THE ROLE OF PRIVATE SPACES IN SHAPING NARRATIVE DYNAMICS

“I dreamt that I woke up.  
It’s the oldest dream of all, and I’ve just had it.  
I dreamt that I woke up”<sup>1</sup>

The way we approach modernism today is connected to an undeniable cultural heritage that has been recycled and repositioned in new paradigms by most literary currents. Even a vehement denial of a literary tradition implies, implicitly, a deep understanding of it, with new literary productions containing an indirect reference to it, dealing precisely with this subtlety that aims to do it justice and balance what congruence or incongruence with literary models means, in any period<sup>2</sup>. Thus, we must consider the organic evolution of literature in the Romanian space, permeable to various influences, cultural confluences and intersections that have led to active reverberations of certain literary currents or movements and their local transformations. This type of transfer that constructs a translocal kind of modernism is all the more interesting to explore as it pertains to a literary space from a peripheral region.

The fundamental thesis of our study is that the modernization of Romanian literature occurred on the ground inaugurated by the writings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whether we are speaking of indigenous literary works or translations that served as models for, for example, mystery novels. Everything that was written after the 19<sup>th</sup> century is indebted, whether explicitly or implicitly, to the literature – even the awkward literature – of that period. Whether referring to the Romanticism and Classicism that gathered multiple examples during that time, or to the Modernism that began to develop its directions towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Romanian sphere, or to Neomodernism, the Romanian Postmodernism of the 1980s, or contemporary Metamodernism, the initial reference is made to the seeds of the coagulation of the early literary product. This permanent return occurs for two reasons: on one hand, due to the need to find a term of comparison that opposes, is ironized, or complements the present; and on the other hand, the search for a balance that serves the human being’s desire to operate primarily within a system characterized by coherent organic structures. Thus, even if each new

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<sup>1</sup> Julian Barnes, *A History of the World in 10 ½ chapters*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1989, p. 283.

<sup>2</sup> Carl Tighe, *Tradition, Literature and Politics in East-Central Europe*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2021, p. 16: “On the contrary, what was left of the inteligencja again shouldered an enormous social, political and moral burden in what Miłosz called the business of ‘the nation and productivity’”.

movement appears to be reactionary, aiming to position itself in opposition to tradition, after some time, a new movement will take its place, becoming tradition itself. In “Rethinking Peripheral Modernisms”, the role that spaces considered peripheral can play in establishing a much more coherent definition of “modernisms” is discussed. Following Laura Doyle’s theory, Benita Parry elaborates on what she calls the “coproduction of cultures” as the proper source of creativity<sup>3</sup>, underlining „an arena within which the ‘European’ and ‘non-European’ cultures, cognitive traditions and literatures had interacted cordially as equals and continue to do so in amicable transnational exchanges”<sup>4</sup>. Thus, Romanian modernism, which finds its starting point in the “long 19<sup>th</sup> century,” proposes such a translocal formula.

We note that for countries in the Eastern European space, the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about the most significant changes, as well as orientations that sometimes led to ideological deviations. In a volume that seeks to provide an overview of the literatures from Central and Baltic Europe, Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev identifies the seeds of constant references to Western values in the desire to clarify the national identity:

Intellectual elites, forming an immature and inexperienced academic group, were primarily occupied with the “Romanization” of the country, discovering and nurturing the so-called *specific național* (national specificity), and the identity myth built around the Dacian and Roman past. This atmosphere was the basis for the development of all the extreme ideologies in the young, multinational state, obsessed with its history – the obsession resulting from its inferiority complex, while the complex itself resulted from the intensified cultural, political and industrial contact with Western Europe. After the paradigm change in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, caused by the “constitutive overthrow of reference from the Orient to the Occident”, the latter became the only correct and valuable reference point for Romania. The question, “What does it mean to be Romanian and how can our national specificity and historical continuity be explained?”, gained strength. Romanian culture needed to determine the national path for itself, constantly comparing itself to the Occidental significant other<sup>5</sup>.

In this climate rooted in the turbulent 19<sup>th</sup> century, Romanian modernism begins with the identification of embryonic seeds in the cognitive models proposed by the entire European spectrum, as well as in the tradition linked to translocal principles.

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<sup>3</sup> Laura Doyle, “Modernist Studies and Inter-Imperiality in the Longue Durée”, in M. Wollaeger and M. Eatough (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 678.

<sup>4</sup> Benita Parry, “A Departure from Modernism: Stylistic Strategies in Modern Peripheral Literatures as Symptom, Mediation and Critique of Modernity”, in Katia Pizzi, Roberta Gefter Wondrich (eds.), *Rethinking Peripheral Modernisms*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Olga Bartosiewicz-Nikolaev, “Counter-narratives in Greater Romania: Polemical Social, Political and Cultural Engagement in the Avant-Garde Literary Magazine *Contimporanul* (January–July 1923)”, in Aistė Kučinskienė, Viktorija Šeina, Brigita Speičytė (eds.), *Literary Canon Formation as Nation-Building in Central Europe and the Baltics. 19<sup>th</sup> to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Leiden, Brill, 2021, p. 137.

Audrey Wasser summarizes the foundation of any literary writing, regardless of the era, an idea that actually connects the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the 21<sup>st</sup> century: „the idea that literary works arise in response to problems”<sup>6</sup>. It is, therefore, a connection that never ceases between the thinking, knowledge, and complex cultural factors of a space and their mediated transposition into the work of fiction: “It means that these works articulate local transformations within already-existing ideational, symbolic, and affective fields. [...] The ‘expression’ of a problem in a work is a reading, by the work, of the work’s conditions”<sup>7</sup>. Thus, literature is seen as a response to various types of problems identified at a given time, in a certain era, for which the literary work constructs a solution. The reader engaged in this relationship reconstructs, remakes, or identifies what a reconstructed fictional reality proposes. The return to modernism, even from the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, seems to be justified by the so-called “bad modernism”, as the elements that shocked, that provoked revolt, and that suggested a break from traditional thinking become anchors for the contemporary writer:

Could it be, then, that the new-old appeal of modernism lies partly in a consolation of this sort, emerging from its very negatives? If so, we will not be surprised to find modernism holding special allure in times when the future of thinking seems uncertain, when anti-intellectualism seems ascendant, when resistance to all but the simplest positions and solutions has arrogated to itself the mantle of the good<sup>8</sup>.

This permanent return, reference, and sublimation of previous literary movements into those of the present, regardless of antagonistic positioning or descent, represent the essence of understanding how the 19<sup>th</sup> century should be considered the mechanism that propagated literature as we understand it today. Gerald Graff observed that even the definition of postmodernism should be revised, from the superficial interpretation that sees it in direct opposition to Romantic and modern traditions as “an overturning of romantic and modernist traditions” to what it actually represents, namely, “rather as a logical culmination of the premises of these earlier movements”<sup>9</sup>, a sum of the literary ideas of previous literary movements. Just as it had happened with these movements, the death of postmodernism too was announced in 2002. Linda Hutcheon did it, and what follows also revolves around the distant past. In cultural studies, several definitions have emerged, including “pseudo-modernism”, “post-postmodernism”, or “metamodernism”. Ihab Hassan’s theory discussing the simultaneity of modernism and postmodernism is well known. Also, David Antin defines the postmodern

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<sup>6</sup> Audrey Wasser, *The Work of Difference: Modernism, Romanticism, and the Production of Literary Form*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2016, p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas Mao, Rebecca L. Walkowitz (eds.), *Bad Modernism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2006, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Gerald Graff, *Literature against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 12.

condition as “cheerful chaotic ignorance”, indicating the distance that it appears to take from modernism.

We have seen since 1968 the collapse of virtually every necessity to which modernism bravely responded. There is no coercive dominion of reason over our other faculties... We have no measure of how constraining conventionalized discourse is, because we hardly know what discourse is, or representation, or narration, and what roles they play in the real human psychic economy and transactions... I would like to suggest that this cheerful chaotic ignorance is the postmodern condition<sup>10</sup>.

However, the idea of permanently revisiting earlier moments is also expressed by Toma Pavel, who noted in his well-known study the inefficiency of definitive formulations in describing certain moments in cultural history:

it is far from assured that historical changes in one location on the map of the imaginary spread with sufficient rapidity and uniformity to count as genuine transformation. Older forms coexist with, and sometimes outlive, new adventures; we all still come into contact with folktales, mythological constructs, or the classics<sup>11</sup>.

The contact with traditions and the recourse to some images of the past, sometimes very distant, contains the aspect of integrating them into the paradigms of the modern<sup>12</sup>. What Pavel called “kaleidoscopic multiplicity” contributes to defining literature itself, considering the fact that, fundamentally, “history itself is but the surprising sway of colours radiated by the same few shiny splinters”<sup>13</sup>. This definition should not reduce everything to the idea that the artist/writer/creator cannot ultimately bring forth anything new. There are recycled forms even in contemporary literature; the confessions of major writers from both the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries are often related to literary models that are not necessarily from their temporal proximity. However, there will always be ways to integrate the old into the new, fundamental themes into the current sensitivity of the contemporary reader.

This essay starts from the hypothesis that through literature, we can demonstrate the existence of a *translocal Romanian Modernism*, valid for different eras, where there is a high percentage of amalgamated elements, always using new rules. The resulting literary product thus becomes a synthesis of the cultural, social, economic factors into which it is fully integrated.

We must also mention the Romanian literary context, which leads to the identification of such an analytical model. Thus, Eugen Lovinescu’s theory

<sup>10</sup> David Antin, “Is There a Postmodernism?”, in Harry R. Garvin (ed.), *Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism*, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1980, p. 134.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas G. Pavel, *Fictional Words*, Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 137.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 148, “Distance, relevance, and dizziness, mixed in various proportions, give each period its peculiar flavor, but hardly ever is any of these components missing. Cultural arrangements may well attempt to stabilize these recurrent fictional components into durable consensual patterns”.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 147.

regarding the modernization of Romanian literature has determined numerous analyses centered, on one hand, on the discussion about the transition from the subjective to the objective, and on the other hand, on the reductionist vision of urbanism as an essential condition for a relevant discussion about new literary products. However, beyond these ideas presented in *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* [*The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*]<sup>14</sup>, the studies of Sorin Alexandrescu, from *Paradoxul român* [*The Romanian Paradox*] and *Privind înapoi, modernitatea* [*Looking Back, Modernity*]<sup>15</sup> are worth mentioning with regard to the coexistence of seemingly antagonistic directions. So are the theories of Virgil Nemoianu, both regarding Romanticism and *O teorie a secundarului. Literatură, progres și reacțiune* [*A Theory of the Secondary. Literature, Progress, and Reaction*]<sup>16</sup>, or those of Matei Călinescu in *Cinci fețe ale modernității. Modernism, Avangardă, Decadență, Kitsch, Postmodernism* [*Five Faces of Modernity. Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*]<sup>17</sup>.

The discussion about Romanian prose also begins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, starting with Titu Maiorescu and, specifically, in 1890, with Nicolae Iorga's article *De ce n-avem roman?* [*Why Don't We Have a Novel?*]<sup>18</sup>, which attributes this absence to certain social elements, with its ideological direction being one of rejection of modernism in favor of the traditional. The controversies continue with Mihail Ralea's article regarding the causes of the delayed emergence of the already established genre of the novel in the West. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nicolae Manolescu, in his well-known *Arca lui Noe. Eseu despre romanul românesc* [*Noah's Ark: An Essay on the Romanian Novel*]<sup>19</sup>, and somewhat later, Eugen Negrici in *Iluziile literaturii române* [*The Illusions of Romanian Literature*]<sup>20</sup>, classify and explain the evolution of the Romanian novel from the perspective of its relation to the ideas

<sup>14</sup> E. Lovinescu, *Opere. Istoria literaturii române contemporane* [*Works. The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*], vol. I-II. Edition by Nicolae Mecu, introduction by Eugen Simion, București, Academia Română, Fundația pentru Știință și Artă, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Sorin Alexandrescu în *Paradoxul român* [*The Romanian Paradox*], București, Univers, 1998, and *Privind înapoi, modernitatea* [*Looking Back, Modernity*]. Transl. by Mirela Adăscăliței, Șerban Anghelescu, Mara Chirițescu and Ramona Jugureanu, București, Univers, 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Virgil Nemoianu, *O teorie a secundarului. Literatură, progres și reacțiune* [*A Theory of the Secondary. Literature, Progress, and Reaction*]. Transl. by Livia Szász Câmpeanu, București, Univers, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Matei Călinescu *Cinci fețe ale modernității. Modernism, Avangardă, Decadență, Kitsch, Postmodernism* [*Five Faces of Modernity. Modernism, Avant-garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*]. Transl. by Tatiana Pătrulescu and Radu Țurcanu, postface by de Mircea Martin, Iași, Polirom, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *De ce n-avem roman?* [*Why Don't We Have a Novel?*], *Lupta*, 1890, 1090, pp. 2-6.

<sup>19</sup> Nicolae Manolescu, *Arca lui Noe. Eseu despre romanul românesc* [*Noah's Ark: An Essay on the Romanian Novel*], I-III, București, Minerva, 1980-1983.

<sup>20</sup> Eugen Negrici, *Iluziile literaturii române* [*The Illusions of Romanian Literature*], București, Cartea Românească, 2008.

that had emerged and developed in European literary movements. In an essay from 2009, Paul Cernat noted

the way the mentality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was modernized à rebours by the prose writers of the interwar period [...]; a different modernism than the prospective one, oriented towards innovation and contemporaneity, a retrospective modernism; [...] a retro modernism (which should not be confused with “antimodern modernity” in Compagnon’s sense, although they partially overlap)<sup>21</sup>.

Taking the example of Romanian literary productions, I believe it is justified to assert that antimodernism, in the sense understood by Compagnon<sup>22</sup>, refers precisely to this impossible break from tradition, even if through a return that is not entirely acknowledged.

#### *Private Space: Evolution and Modernism(s)*

Given that these successive returns in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are meant to construct a model of modernism, we will analyze this relationship from the perspective of private space. This direction was chosen because, typically, in the definition of modernism, the main assertion, at least in the Romanian context, is related to urbanism. My demonstration aims, therefore, to show that not only urban space but also private space constituted a form of modernization for the novel, a major reference of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the second thesis of this study emerges from the first, namely that the reflection of private space in literature becomes a means of observing the literary movements of different eras, in this particular case, that of modernism. Victoria Rosner, who provides an important theoretical background, writes, summing up the relationship of private space to modernism:

These spaces compose a kind of grid of social relations that shifts and slips, often upending the individuals who traverse it. Modernist spatial poetics are attuned to architectural dynamics of privacy and exposure, spatial hierarchies demarcating class, the locations and routines surrounding the care of the body, and the gendering of space. But if literary modernism is explicitly preoccupied with the structure of private life, it is also shaped by the discourse of space in more subtle ways. The modernist novel draws a conceptual vocabulary from the lexicons of domestic architecture and

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Cernat, *Modernismul retro în romanul românesc interbelic* [*Retro Modernism in the Interwar Romanian Novel*], București, Art, pp. 11-12.

<sup>22</sup> Antoine Compagnon, *Les antimodernes. De Joseph de Maistre à Roland Barthes*, Paris, Gallimard, 2016, p. 18, “Contre-révolution, anti-Lumières, pessimisme, ces trois premiers thèmes antimodernes sont liés à une vision du monde inspirée par l’idée du mal. C’est pourquoi la quatrième figure de l’antimoderne doit être religieuse ou théologique [...] on peut associer celle-ci à sa cinquième figure, le sublime. [...] Aussi la sixième et dernière figure de l’antimoderne sera-t-elle une figure de style : quelque chose comme la vitupération ou l’imprécation”.

interior design, elaborating a notion of psychic interiority, to take one example, that rests on specific ideas about architectural interiors<sup>23</sup>.

Victoria Rosner highlights the intricate relationships between architectural concepts and the thematic preoccupation of literary modernism with private life. The design of private spaces, such as the arrangement of rooms and the choice of furnishings, became a means of expressing individuality and social aspirations. Rosner also points out the significance of spatial hierarchies demarcating class and the routines surrounding bodily care. The gendering of space is another critical aspect of Rosner's argument. Modernist literature often critiques and deconstructs traditional gender roles through the depiction of space. For example, the notion of "psychic interiority" in modernist texts often parallels the design of architectural interiors. Just as rooms are designed to accommodate specific functions and evoke certain moods, characters' inner lives are depicted with similar attention to detail and atmosphere.

For this demonstration, we will consider how this blending phenomenon occurs in two fictions: one from French literature and other from Romanian literature, a comparative approach between the private space imagined by Gustave Flaubert in *Madame Bovary* and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's *Fecioarele despletite* [*The Disheveled Maidens*].

The first choice I made, although it is a very well-known work, is based on how it relates to Romanticism and the construction of modernity. In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert proposes a new vision, but one that still maintains what critics have described as a kind of "kinship" with modernism. In the article "Madame Bovary: Romanticism, Modernism, and Bourgeois Style", William A. Johnsen observes the relationship with Romanticism in this manner:

Flaubert's attempt to go beyond the derivative romanticism of others only exposes, once again, his kinship to the bourgeois. Bourgeois style is the attempt to mask one's belatedness by slavishly imitating or competing with the modernity of others who are themselves masking their anxiety by compulsively rehearsing their antipathy to the bourgeois. By fulfilling his worst fears of self-exposure, du Camp and Bouilhet help Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary*, to render the bourgeois and the antipathy to the bourgeois as a single phenomenon endlessly repeated, to reveal Modernism as bourgeois style<sup>24</sup>.

The choice of Flaubert's novel was also determined by its insufficient break from tradition; despite the innovations, there is a constant relation to the classics<sup>25</sup>. His

<sup>23</sup> Victoria Rosner, *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> William A. Johnsen, "Madame Bovary: Romanticism, Modernism, and Bourgeois Style", *MLN*, 94, 1979, 4, p. 844.

<sup>25</sup> Dominick LaCapra writes in *Madame Bovary on Trial*, New York, Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 105: "Modernism in Flaubert came bound up with a deep respect for the classics, a conviction that they alone merited intimate study, and a belief that modern art would have to seek different paths in

“modernism,” therefore, is born from a gentle reaction to the Romantic attitude, an attitude evident in the construction of the female character. *Madame Bovary* (1856) employs the technique of modernism, as it includes elements of both the traditional and the new in both its narrative structures and thematic insertions.

A representative scene serves as the starting point of our discussion: the moment when Emma Bovary enters the common room after her marriage and notices another bridal bouquet, belonging to another woman, wilted: „It was a bride’s bouquet, the other one’s bouquet! She stared at it. Charles, noticing this, picked it up and took it away to the attic. While her belongings were being arranged round the room, Emma sat in an armchair, thinking about her own bouquet packed in its box, and wondering dreamily what would be done with it if she were to die”<sup>26</sup>. The wilted bouquet represents, in this context, the old and the ephemeral, a trace that will always remain with the couple, just as any past experience permanently marks the human being. Emma and Charles’ marriage is a typical example of a traditional union, lacking passion or lofty goals, centred instead around social expectations and accepted norms. Emma embodies modernity as she dreams of the freedom she had read about in modern novels and a life offering exceptional emotional and intellectual satisfaction, such as romantic adventures and urban living. She is caught between a traditional role imposed by society and her marriage to Charles, and her modern aspirations, fuelled by literature and the romanticization of a life inaccessible to her. Charles notices Emma’s reaction, but his response is purely functional, formal, and lacking in emotional understanding. The wilted bouquet of “the one before” becomes a harbinger of Emma’s unfulfilled destiny.

During one of her visits to the manor, Emma’s gaze catches the old Marquis’s father-in-law, the old Duc de Laverdière, once the favourite of the Comte d’Artois: “and Emma’s eyes kept returning involuntarily to this old man with pendulous lips, as if to something extraordinary and majestic. He had lived at Court and slept in the bed of a queen!”<sup>27</sup>. The old Duc de Laverdière symbolizes the aristocratic and traditional past, tied to the glory and splendour of the old French nobility. He is a relic of a bygone era when high social ranks provided access to unparalleled luxury and privileges. Associated with the Court and royalty, he embodies the aristocratic heritage and traditional values of honour, protocol, and royal brilliance. This involuntary gaze towards the Duke can be interpreted as an acknowledgment that the modernity she seeks is built upon the ruins and idealizations of a past which now seems outdated.

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part because it could not equal them. Their time had passed, and the difficulty was to take leave of them in the attempt to find a way in modern times to produce significant art”.

<sup>26</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*. Transl. by Lowell Bair, introduction by Malcolm Cowley, Oxford, Oxford Classics, 2005, p. 31.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 45.



An extremely powerful and modern scene due to its militant component is that of Emma noticing the peasants looking through the window at the ball, with their faces pressed against the glass: “Madame Bovary looked round and saw, in the garden, pressed against the windowpanes, the faces of peasants, staring in”<sup>28</sup>, in a grotesque image meant to capture both the stances of the poor, watching, and those at the ball, dancing.

The ball represents a space of opulence, modernity, and refinement, accessible only to those of a certain social standing. It is a world Emma longs for, where she can be surrounded by wealth. Upon seeing the peasants, Emma is reminded of Les Bertaux, her father’s farm, and her simple childhood. This nostalgic return highlights her continuing connection with her past, despite her efforts to deny or hide it. However, amidst the dazzling brilliance of the new world, these memories begin to fade. The present splendour of the ball makes Emma doubt the reality of her former life, suggesting that her desire for a different life is so strong that it overshadows and distorts her perceptions of the past. The moment symbolized by the maraschino ice and the festivity of the ball creates the illusion of a life filled with luxury and refinement for Emma. Still, the presence of the peasants and her brief reflection on her past outline the tension and dissonance between her romanticized ideals and her current reality.

Modernity in this context means luxury, sophistication, and a break from the norms and limitations of rural life. The ball thus becomes a symbol of this modernity that Emma yearns for, even if it is fleeting and illusory. The main feature of the scene is simultaneity: it captures two social categories in the same space and brings Emma’s rural childhood memories into the present.

The “multiscopic” vision is constructed through the imagery of the chateau’s rooms: “She gazed for a long time at the windows of the chateau, trying to guess which were the rooms of the people she had particularly noticed during the evening. She longed to know all about their lives, to penetrate them, be part of them”<sup>29</sup>. Gazing at the windows of the chateau for a long time represents her intense desire to scrutinise the lives of others and be part of their world. The fact that Emma tries to guess the specific windows and rooms of the people she observed suggests a way of seeing the world multiplied, in fragments.

Each window represents a different story, a different life, a different angle of reality. This multiscopic approach anticipates the tendencies of modern literature, where narratives become more complex and multiple perspectives are explored to provide an understanding of human existence and society. Flaubert uses this technique to underscore a dual vision: on one hand, the breaking of a single perspective and the modernization of narrative vision, with the novel being a turning point in the evolution of the European novel, echoing traditional

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 49.

techniques; and on the other hand, the introduction into the novel of urbanization, the representation of rising social classes, underlying revolts, the modernization of society, and the condition of women.

The nurse's room is described in this passage from *Madame Bovary* and reflects a distinct type of domestic space that is simple, functional, and typical for a modest dwelling of the common man's social class. The fact that this is the "only room in the house" underscores the modest conditions, a lack of privacy, contrasting with the opulence of the wealthy:

The room – the only room in the house – was at ground level, with a big uncurtained bed standing against the back wall. The kneading-trough occupied the side with the window, one pane of which had been mended with a round of blue paper. In the corner, behind the door, under the stone slab for washing, stood a row of stout boots with gleaming hobnails beside a bottle of oil with a feather in its mouth. A Mathieu Laensberg almanac lay on the dusty mantelpiece among gun flints, candle stumps and bits of tinder. As a final superfluous touch, the room boasted a picture of Fame blowing her trumpets, no doubt cut out of some perfumery advertisement; it was nailed to the wall with six cobbler's tacks. Emma's baby lay sleeping in a wicker cradle<sup>30</sup>.

Other private spaces are linked to Charles's profession, with the consulting room being a hybrid space in which "cooking smells filtered through the wall during consultations, and, from the kitchen, you could hear the patients coughing in the consulting room and describing all their symptoms"<sup>31</sup>, suggesting an olfactory intrusion of the private into the professional. Through the lens of domestic space theory, Victoria Rosner emphasizes the importance of distinguishing and separating spaces to maintain personal equilibrium. In this context, the odours passing through the wall metaphorically represent a constant and unpleasant interference that undermines Charles's professional authority. The remnants of the past are not discarded but rather placed together, amalgamated, they are present in the house but futile, with a "large dilapidated room with an oven in it", "empty barrels", "disused garden implements", and other things "thick with dust".

#### *The Elements of "Bravado" in the Works of Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu*

In the well-known book *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, Victoria Rosner notes that modernism began with an element of "bravado", highlighting the audacious and often defiant spirit that characterized the early narratives of this movement. This "bravado" often manifested itself in bold storytelling techniques, innovative narrative structures, and a willingness to address complex themes such as identity, social change, and the fragmentation of reality:

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

The anecdotal history of modernism is strewn with evidence of this involvement, from Lytton Strachey uttering the word “semen” aloud in the drawing room, seemingly for the first time in English history; to James Joyce’s representation of Bloom on the toilet; to Natalie Barney’s lesbian expatriate salon in her own home on Paris’s Left Bank; to Woolf’s famous claim to a room of her own on behalf of all women writers. All these moments are flavoured with bravura. They are flourishes designed to call attention, provoke controversy, and signal an unwillingness to carry on with things as usual. They are rebellions located in that most sacred and custom-bound site, the home<sup>32</sup>.

The choice of the Romanian writer Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu is used to demonstrate the dual perspective: one looking towards the past, towards Romanticism, and the other towards the future, through innovations at the level of the novel. The author did not have a well-defined program and did not write manifestos about the novel: “The innovation of new forms in Romanian literature did not occur through the negation of what came before but, on the contrary, through an integration into their lineage. Therefore, the consciousness of the Romanian prose writer was never revolutionary until the two world wars, but rather integrative”<sup>33</sup>.

The writer portrays the sideboard in the Halippa family of parvenus, showcasing her deep insight into social categories of class defectors that heavily populate her prose. The novel we are discussing, *Fecioarele despletite* (1926), predominantly focuses on various female characters during the interwar period in Romania, delving into themes related to social ascension, social and economic transformations, industrialization, and urbanization. The author does not miss any opportunity to critique the parvenu status of her characters, which serves as the focal point of her narrative:

If that sideboard, now twisted by time, had been acquired from a good home 20 years ago, today the Hallipa family’s living room would have been highly prized, but it was likely ordered from the best carpenter in Mizil... perhaps at most from Ploiesti, and its huge proportions, intricate yet poor sculpture showed not only the clumsiness of the craftsman but also the luxurious desires of the order. The Hallipa sideboard was a parvenu<sup>34</sup>.

An old piece of furniture purchased decades ago is used to pass judgment on the family’s current situation. The lack of noble roots and snobbery are characteristics

<sup>32</sup> Rosner, *Modernism and Architecture*, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Maria Luiza Cristescu, *Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, portret de romancier [Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, a Portrait of a Novelist]*, București, Albatros, 1976, p. 10. See also Alina Bako, “Cognitive War Cartographies in Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu’s Novel”, *Dacoromania litteraria*, 2023, 10, pp. 65-85.

<sup>34</sup> Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, *Opere [Works]*, vol. I: *Romane [Novels]*. Edited by Gabriela Omăt and Eugenia Tudor Anton, București, Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă, 2012, p. 12.

of those who brought the sideboard, kitschy and crafted amateurishly, to the fore. Described as coarsely manufactured and ostentatious, the sideboard becomes a symbol of the Rim family's attempt to buy respectability by showcasing luxury, lack of cultural refinement, and noble roots. The "complicated" yet "poorly" crafted sideboard reflects the tension between the desire to display prosperity and the actual absence of taste and refinement, the signs of belonging to a family with solid roots in tradition. The author uses the sideboard to illustrate forms of parvenuism in literature, adding layers of modernist interpretation that reflect changing tastes and evolving aesthetic tendencies. The urban space created by Papadat-Bengescu in the narrative contains both traditional and modern elements simultaneously. While modernism generally incorporates the idea of the "public sphere", recent studies have shown that even the private space/home is one that challenges tradition<sup>35</sup>.

The specificity of the writer's modernism lies in this amalgamation of old and new elements. This idea is portrayed vividly in the novel *Fecioarele despletite* through the observation of two domestic constructions: an old, small house surrounded by a garden and a new block of six stories, one of many that were to be built in interwar Bucharest. The "new house" of six stories symbolizes progress and innovation, in contrast to the traditional, modest cottage, symbolizing old structures and traditional values. There is an eruption of new urban plans "into the old picturesque" landscape, which may trigger identity conflicts and tensions between preserving tradition and embracing modernity: "From remnants and innovations, the Citadel was gathering its character through its and its inhabitants' changing aspects, constantly altering it through hasty adaptations caused by the eruption of new plans into the old picturesque" landscape<sup>36</sup>. Mini, a reflective character, observes the concreteness of the two houses in which the self lives: the one made of brick and the one made of feeling. A metaphorical transposition of the concrete house and the abstract one is expressed, as an analogy between body and soul, between the physical being and the ethereal one. Time and space dissolve their boundaries, turning into successive layers that overlap, into experiences: "Sporadically in space and time... To Mini, each being's two abodes, the house of brick and the house of feeling, seemed equally concrete"<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> Victoria Rosner provides in a historical account of this idea "With its origins thought to lie in urban culture and flânerie, modernism is widely considered an art of the public sphere. But like Reed, literary critics have recently begun to think through modernism's relationship to the domestic. Jessica Feldman characterizes domesticity as 'an important artistic accomplishment' of both Victorian and modernist writers, whose work she sees as continuous. Thomas Foster argues that works by modernist women writers 'should be read as a transitional moment between nineteenth-century domestic ideologies and postmodern concepts of space'. For these critics, domesticity is central to modernism in terms of ideology, aesthetics, materiality, and gender" (*Modernism and Architecture*, p. 13).

<sup>36</sup> Papadat-Bengescu, *Opere*, p. 140.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

Another embodiment of a construction containing elements of the traditional and the modern, seen as a dialogue between urban and rural, is the estate house. The one who observes it is again Mini, who associates the intimate space with a décor reminiscent of a Shakespearean tragedy:

Mini thought of the estate house, neither rustic nor modern, with its solid, regular architecture; with its urban and yet homely comfort [...]; nothing there framed that tragedy. Suddenly, she remembered the new, deserted vestibule, where she walked in her solitary wanderings. There was the Shakespearean decor of the tragedy<sup>38</sup>.

The Hallipa family house, with its original symmetries, has a crack: an unfinished vestibule that becomes a manifestation of the vulnerability of the female character, unable to confess her sin of having a child out of wedlock with an Italian bricklayer. The discrepancy between the image presented to others is transposed to the level of the house, which is seen as new and renovated. However, the construction remains incomplete, hiding the remnants of a life devoid of truth:

The architect's linear drawings flattered his ambitions as a homeowner, and the house, as you came from the estate, towards the Ploiesti road, had a completely renovated and beautiful appearance. He immediately started working with enthusiasm. In the course of one summer, everything was almost ready. The decoration of the vestibule, which his wife had wanted according to her taste, slowed down the process a bit. [...] The unfinished vestibule remained unused, and the rooms above, unfurnished, served only as storage for various tools of the courtyard<sup>39</sup>.

The elements that do not fit into the image of a "finished house" are the unfurnished hallway and rooms serving as storage for everything that should have been discarded. Extrapolating, they become a storage of a chaotic memory, preserving remnants of moments that ultimately lead to the family's imbalance.

A character who initially maintains an apparent state of balance is Elena Drăgănescu, who makes an observation related to the perfection of the house: "It's the only house in Bucharest where all the faucets work", boasted Elena. Her room doubled as an office. She declared that household management was "true ministry". "From 7 in the morning until 11 at night, she had work to do: order, calculations, inspections, verifications! One could not imagine how demanding household administration was"<sup>40</sup>. However, this domestic component becomes a subterfuge for an unfulfilled love life, leading to an imbalance in the form of an extramarital affair.

Another element related to modernism and seen from the perspective of integration is that of rupture. The domestic, intimate space is the means through which the characters are described, including the discussion of mental health

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 169.

concerning the illegitimate daughter, Mika-Le. The word serving as a warning is “overgrown”, suggesting the idea of a rupture that has left traces:

... and Hallipa pointed to the white walls, stained here and there with strange charcoal drawings, without perspective or modelling, devoid of life, primitive and absurd drawings of various imaginations: people, devils, animals, flowers, made by Mika-Lé. So, the vestibule was indeed the forest of that Puck, with hair like black moss and golden eyes, pale as faceless coins, with a dull shine like steam... – That’s what happens when you overgrow the house,” he looked at it amazed and shrugged<sup>41</sup>.

This reference to the absence of the real father is considered a trait of modernism. “In Modernism, the necessary first step – the break with historical values – begins with the absence of the father”<sup>42</sup>, explains Ricardo Quinones, and Mika-Lé is such a character who breaks away from the family tradition, is rebellious, and violates all social rules. The simultaneity of tradition and modernity is seen at the level of the duality of urban/lively city – rural/tradition/folklore: “The proximity of the lively city had pulled Mini away from the fairy tales of the stars”. The decay of the Prundeni estate is followed closely: “In the bourgeois manor of the Halippas, ancient fatalities reside; the deserted vestibule resembled a parody of a temple, and Mika-Lé a wooden doll, like the ones found in the baggage of poor sarcophagi”<sup>43</sup>. The lack of appreciation leads to a caricature of the dwelling, which reflects onto the characters.

This type of translocal modernism, as seen in the discussed novel, proposes a constant tension between heritage – even at the level of ideas – plunging into the tradition of the past, and a spectacular return to the present through transformations that involve “integration”. The transformation occurs gradually, from objects that need renewal to people who need to accept new social transfigurations: “Ideas, as well as appearances, took clear, measured forms today. The estate, the garden, the house, the bright vestibule, with patches of matte white on the laundry, everything separated lights from shadows, everything was static, not circulating, not infused as it once was. [...] She watched admiringly once more, and for the last time, the portrait of Mrs. Calliope, the grandmother”<sup>44</sup>. The use of the artistic image of the grandmother’s portrait becomes a way of preserving the past, but also implies an aesthetic positioning towards it.

The analysis of translocal modernism reveals a sophisticated mechanism that integrates traditional and innovative elements, blending local and imported narrative forms to highlight their dynamic coexistence. In his scholarly works, Toma Pavel elucidates the way in which fictional worlds are constructed and

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 170.

<sup>42</sup> Ricardo J. Quinones, *Mapping Literary Modernism. Time and Development*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 56.

<sup>43</sup> Papadat-Bengescu, *Opere*, p. 47.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 154.

mirrored through distinct rules and structures, creating self-contained yet reflective narrative universes. This interplay of fragmentation and juxtaposition between traditional and modern elements fosters a complex fictional landscape where the past and present continuously interact.

In Gustave Flaubert's oeuvre, this complexity manifests itself through fragmented perspectives, achieved via the successive layering of experiential dimensions. A notable example is the delineation of private and public spheres, underscored by class distinctions, as exemplified in the scene where peasants, faces pressed against windows, observe the aristocratic couples dancing at a ball. This tableau encapsulates the simultaneous coexistence of disparate social strata within a single narrative plane. Similarly, the concept of "kaleidoscopic multiplicity", as articulated in the works of both Flaubert and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, is expressed through the fragmented depiction of characters' lived experiences and elements, creating a multifaceted narrative texture. Furthermore, the analysis of spatial dynamics in Papadat-Bengescu's *Fecioarele despletite* reveals the way modernity infiltrates picturesque urban settings, appropriating remnants of the past to forge a distinctly modern aesthetic.

The forms of "modernisms" discerned through the examination of the two literary works are deeply rooted in 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary trajectories, which serve both as a foundation and as a catalyst for subsequent innovations. The authors engage with these earlier traditions not through outright rejection but by selectively integrating and transforming their components. This approach reflects a respectful acknowledgment – what may be termed a "benevolent engagement" – with the literary currents of the past, as the authors build upon their predecessors' contributions while adapting them to new contexts.

For instance, thematic concerns such as identity, societal transformation, and the complexities of human experience, which are central to 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature, are reinterpreted in these works to resonate with 20<sup>th</sup>-century sensibilities and beyond. The authors employ innovative narrative techniques – such as stream-of-consciousness, nonlinear storytelling, and fragmented perspectives – to challenge conventional narrative structures, thereby crafting a modernized mode of storytelling that aligns with contemporary readership.

Moreover, the geographical diversity of these authors enriches the literary landscape, fostering an intersection of influences that underscores the interconnectedness of global literary movements. This diversity positions modernism as a multifaceted, evolving phenomenon that transcends national boundaries, weaving a rich tapestry of narrative innovation and cultural dialogue.

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## TRANSLOCAL MODERNISM: THE ROLE OF PRIVATE SPACES IN SHAPING NARRATIVE DYNAMICS

(Abstract)

This article aims to demonstrate that modernism is closely linked to the way literature began to use private space as a narrative framework for character development. Whether we consider dissociations such as private space versus public space, or whether we refer to the characterization of social relations as seen in private space and outwardly, modern prose reveals real observations emphasizing the definition of this space. Literary modernism proposes a new way of observing the domestic interior while simultaneously constructing the female character, who evolves through her clear connection with this décor. A translocal modernism, in my opinion, refers to a literary approach that combines elements of traditional styles with innovative techniques and themes characteristic of European modernist literature. In the works of authors such as Gustave Flaubert and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, modernism may manifest as a fusion of conventional narrative structures with experimental storytelling methods, the exploration of complex psychological depths alongside social critiques, and the integration of multiple perspectives to depict a layered and nuanced understanding of human experience within evolving societal contexts. The present demonstration concerns a comparative approach between the private space imagined by Gustave Flaubert in *Madame Bovary*, and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu's *Fecioarele despletite [Disheveled Maidens]*. Although unequal in terms of notoriety, the chosen texts illustrate a real relationship between private space and the construction of modern fiction.

**Keywords:** Translocal Modernism, novel, Flaubert, Papadat-Bengescu, private space.

MODERNISM TRANSLOCAL: ROLUL SPAȚIILOR PRIVATE ÎN  
CONFIGURAREA DINAMICILOR NARATIVE  
(Rezumat)

Acest articol își propune să demonstreze că modernismul este strâns legat de modul în care literatura a început să utilizeze spațiul privat drept cadru narativ pentru dezvoltarea personajelor. Fie că luăm în considerare disocieri precum spațiul privat versus spațiul public, fie că ne referim la caracterizarea relațiilor sociale așa cum sunt văzute în spațiul privat și în exterior, proza modernă dezvăluie observații reale care pun accent pe definirea spațiului interior. Modernismul literar propune o nouă modalitate de a observa decorul domestic în timp ce construiește simultan personajul feminin, care evoluează printr-o legătură clară cu acesta. Un modernism translocal, în opinia mea, se referă la o abordare literară care combină elemente ale stilurilor tradiționale cu tehnici și teme inovatoare caracteristice literaturii moderniste europene. În operele unor autori precum Gustave Flaubert și Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, modernismul se poate manifesta ca o fuziune a structurilor narative convenționale cu metode experimentale de narare, explorarea profunzimilor psihologice complexe alături de critici sociale și integrarea unor perspective multiple pentru a ilustra o înțelegere stratificată și nuanțată a experienței umane în contexte sociale în evoluție. Demonstrația de față privește o abordare comparativă între spațiul privat imaginat de Gustave Flaubert în *Madame Bovary* și de Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu în *Fecioarele despletite*. Deși inegale în ceea ce privește notorietatea, textele alese ilustrează o relație reală între spațiul privat și construcția ficțiunii moderne.

*Cuvinte cheie:* modernism translocal, roman, Flaubert, Papadat-Bengescu, spațiu privat.