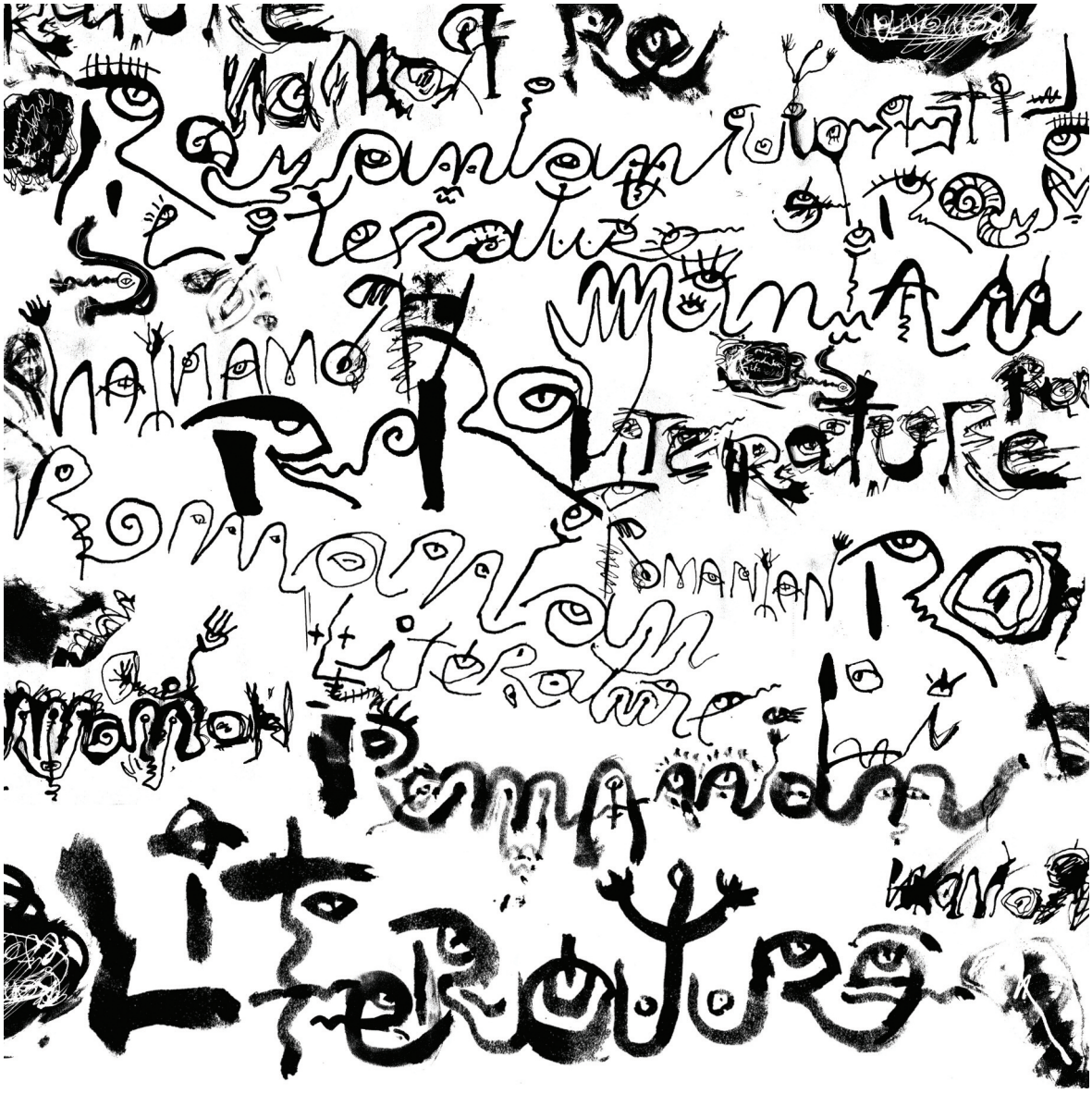

Romanian Literature
for Beginners and Advanced Students
in 18 Essays and 18 Poems

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Introduction

In recent years, whenever I have talked to various publishers, literary agents or translators of Romanian literature about a particular book by a particular Romanian author and we have got on to the literary and historical context of the work in question, the discussion has taken a complicated turn. Who were Slavici and Sadoveanu? What about Marin Preda? Who wrote most credibly about Romania in the 1930's? What was with socialist realism and Stakhanovism in literature? What about the five decades of literature under communism as a whole? In mid-flow I would have to start making classifications and conjectures, and adding sharp and flat notes. How good it would have been to have a short, clear and explicit handbook to clarify the literary contexts of the last century, I once said to myself when, after a long discussion about the classics of Romanian literature, I realised that many foreigners genuinely interested in our literature do not possess any simple tools whereby to inform themselves.

The catalogues recently compiled by the Romanian Cultural Institute (via the National Book Centre) and the Ministry of Culture (via the Cultural Policies Department) have mainly included brief information about authors and excerpts from books of theirs that might be of interest to foreign publishers. Important for Romanian literature's image and responding to a real demand to know more about it, the catalogues in question still have a practical importance and precise aim. But there is also a new trend in the European cultural space, to do with the publication of informational materials: making a literature known via short, themed, and sometimes chronological essays on the living tendencies in a given literary space. By placing authors and their books in the native and (eventually) the European literary context, what is achieved is better communication with potential publishers, translators, and literary agents from other spaces, and with cultivated people who are interested in the functional particularities of different literary regions.

The themed catalogue of contemporary Romanian literature here put forward by the Romanian Cultural Institute and Ministry of Culture brings together eighteen essays by leading critics, academics, and well-known writers from Romania, who map out a large part of the literature of the past century. Aimed specifically at foreign interlocutors, the essays are intended to be both analytical and synthetic, both literarily convincing and informative. And the eighteen poems I have selected from living Romanian literature, which is to say, what is read and talked about, what has fermented in the compost of multiple present-day literary trends, is a miniature personal anthology (how else could poetry be?), for which I gladly take responsibility.

Simona Sora



Essays



Brief Introduction to the History of the Romanian Avant-garde

The first inklings of the Romanian avant-garde arose in the late nineteenth century, within small circles of adepts of aestheticism, and took the form of openness towards a nebulous "art of the future." Eclectic and heterogeneous, the circle around *Literatorul* magazine, owned by poet Alexandru Macedonski (1854-1920), emulated the new post-romantic insurgencies of the French-speaking West, in opposition to the neoclassical canon of the time, which was dominated by an ethnocentric conception of literature and centred on the idea of the rural. The opposition between art for art's sake (supported by Macedonski) and art with a moralising tendency, in the sense of social education, was mirrored by the opposition between international art, immune to ethnic determinism, and national art, defined as emblematic of the native specificity. The influence of cultural modernity in the neo-Latin countries was to be stimulated by philologist and literary historian Ovid Densusianu (1873-1938), whose *Vieaţa Nouă* (New Life) magazine lent impetus to the taste for innovation and urban literature after 1905, while at the same time academicising it. But within groups of bohemian young symbolists, the danger of academicisation was to generate attitudes of rebellion. These mainly manifested themselves in the virulent programmatic articles that appeared in the ephemeral publications founded by Ion Minulescu (1881-1944), a poet and histrionic bon viveur, an admirer of Jules Laforgue and the author of a successful volume (*Ballads for Later*, 1908) whereby the taste of the Bucharest bourgeoisie assimilated the initially bizarre and exotic decadent movement. But the titles of the magazines – *Revista Celorlalţi* (The Others' Review), 1908, and *Insula* (The Island), 1912 – expressed the young innovators' will to originality, as opposed to what they saw as the vulgar, backward and tasteless mainstream. From 1909, Minulescu was also to be a tireless promoter of Italian Futurism in Romania. From 1912, Symbolism itself became mannered, a *depleted culture*. The new spirit of the age needed attitudes other than the defeatist, dreamy, refined amoralism of doomed artists.

From these years onward it is possible to speak of the existence of an "export" avant-garde of Romanian artists and writers who, for various reasons (the lack of a cultivated public, the need for an international audience, anti-Semitic or political persecution), preferred to manifest their radicalism in the major cultures of the West, and in France in particular. Such was the case of sculptor Constantine Brancusi, who was from a village in Romania's Oltenia region and established himself as a pioneer of abstract art in Paris. After a post-Symbolist phase, Tristan Tzara became a brand of the Zurich Dada movement (1916), and his more moderate colleague, plastic artist Marcel Janco, joined German Constructivist groups before returning to Bucharest to forge, alongside Ion Vinea (1895-1964), Romania's first avant-garde movement. In the decades that followed, writers Benjamin Fundoianu (Fondane) (1898-1944), Ilarie Voronca (1903-1946), Eugène Ionesco, Paul Celan, Isidore Isou (1925-2007), Gherasim Luca (1913-1994) and Paul Păun (1915-1994), and artists Victor Brauner, Jacques Herold (1910-1987), Trost (1916-1966), Jules Perahim (1914-2008) and others all emigrated to the world's cultural capital. The dominant attitudes in pre-war Romanian literature – the refusal to adapt to modernity and the fatalistic contentment with provincial pettiness – were rejected in favour of activist solutions: escape from the provinciality of overwhelmingly rural Romania, emancipation through love of the new, artistic and political, anti-bourgeois, anti-nationalist, anarchist or communist revolution, and subversive affirmation of everything that was reactionary and repressed.

Overall, the Romanian avant-garde may be viewed as an extreme instance of a culture of synchronisation with European modernity's forms of the radically new. The first Romanian avant-gardists mutated from being symbolists, preserving symbolism's urban cosmopolitanism and ostentatiously amplifying it. The old conventions and languages under the impact of modern technology were denounced in vitalist, Nietzschean terms by the adepts of Italian Futurism, which F. T. Marinetti launched in a number

of countries simultaneously, including Romania, in February 1909. The explorers of a new world (and languages and attitudes), contested the culture of decadent depletion from the positions of a culture of regeneration, virility and youthful authenticity, dominated by the sense of a new dawn, illustrating the sensibility of the new modern age (rhythm, speed, directness, intensity). Whether it manifested itself in the pages of their own publications (the post-symbolist *Simbolul* (The Symbol), *Fronda* (Rebellion), *Versuri şi proză* (Poems and Prose), the pacifist *Chemarea* (The Call)) or in the pages of moderate conservative magazines, the subversion of poets such as Ion Vinea, Tristan Tzara and Adrian Maniu (1891-1968), who after 1916 turned to neo-traditionalist poetry, was already avant-gardism *en herbe*. Stimulated by the polemical journalism of socialist N. D. Cocea (1880-1949) and his friend Tudor Arghezi (1880-1967), the most important poet of Romanian modernity, the young militants who had stayed behind in Romania were forced to break off their activity for the duration of the First World War, however. The expatriots manifested their anarchist and anti-militarist revolt in neutral countries (Switzerland) or in the capitals of the major European powers that were at war (Paris, Berlin). It was not until 1920, when Marcel Janco – the first Maecenas of the Romanian avant-garde – returned to Bucharest that artistic radicalism regrouped, through inconclusive magazines at first and then through *Contimporanul* (The Contemporary) (1922-32), the longest-lived magazine of the Romanian avant-garde. Originally socio-political in bent, along the lines of the independent intellectual left, the magazine in effect became avant-gardist in 1924, when Ion Vinea published his *Activist Manifesto for Youth* in its pages. Apart from its Futurist gesticulations ("Down with Art / for she has prostituted herself / (...) Let us kill death!"), the manifesto is noteworthy for its national constructivism ("Romania is being built today!"). This was the direction the group was to take, preoccupied as it was with legitimising the local avant-garde at home and promoting it abroad. Its syncretic performances of poetry and new music, its major international exhibitions of plastic art in 1924 and 1935, its contributions to the field of theatrical aesthetics, architecture and design, and its multiple contacts established with avant-garde movements all over the world were the magazine's main achievements. Vinea, an un-dogmatic spirit (the same as Marcel Janco), was not a soldier of the avant-garde, but a higher ally, with broader cultural horizons. As a writer, he practised an interiorised lyricism, akin to that of the abstractionist Ion Barbu (1895-1961), an important contributor to *Contimporanul*, but without the latter's hermeticism. The eclectic and constructivist line of *Contimporanul* was very quickly contested by a number of young radicals: Stephan Roll (1903-1974), Ilarie Voronca, Mihail Cosma (1902-1968). Under the patronage of pro-communist aristocrat Scarlat Callimachi (1896-1975), they brought out the abrasive *Punct* (Point) magazine in 1924. In its pages they posthumously published a number of strange, absurdist texts by Urmuz (penname of Demetru Demetrescu-Buzău, 1883-1923), who had mysteriously committed suicide in 1923 and who was discovered by Tudor Arghezi and became a mythic icon for the whole of the Romanian avant-garde. While leading the existence of a schizoid, Kafkaesque functionary, around the year 1908 Urmuz wrote an absurdist opus just a few dozen pages long, but which was startlingly original and explosive; he became the unknown forerunner of all Europe's artistic revolutions. By the 1920s and 30s he already had a number of disciples (Jacques G. Costin, Grigore Cugler, Jonathan X. Uranus), but the book publication of his *Bizarre Pages* (1931) was to have a significant critical impact, which was amplified by his fanatical admirers. The influence of the Urmuzian absurd was later to shape the theatre of Eugène Ionesco.

Far from leading to the coagulation of the avant-garde movement, the merger between *Contimporanul* and *Punct* in 1925 was to generate, through plastic artist M. H. Maxy (1895-1971), the first internal dissidence, motivated by the divorce from the mainstream line of the Vinea-Janco tandem, who were preoccupied with the native assimilation of the avant-garde, at the price of its domestication. The visual-poetic experiment that was the sole issue of *75 HP* magazine recouped the ludic radicalism of Futurism and Dadaism through an exuberant paean to the technical-artistic revolution (worthy of note is the partnership between painter Victor Brauner and Ilarie Voronca, who published together a manifesto of "pictopoetry"). Along the same lines, between 1925 and 1928, *Integral* magazine put forward an original "modern synthesis" between Futurism, Constructivism, Dada and Surrealism. Animated by plastic artists M. H. Maxy and Corneliu Mihăilescu, poets Stephan Roll, Ion Călugăru, Mihail Cosma (in Italy) and Benjamin Fondane (in Paris), and legitimised by its admiration for major figures such as Brancusi, Minulescu and Arghezi, the publication succeeded in imposing a poet-figurehead (imagist Ilarie Voronca, author of the lyrical urban epic *Ulysse*) and a number of revelatory manifestos. Dissidence relative to *Contimporanul* did not represent a rupture properly speaking, however, or at least not yet. The Futurist-Constructivist line was maintained and extended. All that was absent was the tolerance that Vinea and company showed towards non- and even anti-avant-garde collaborations. The real divorce was marked by the publication of *unu* (1928-32), first published in Dorohoi by Saşa Pană (1902-1981) and Moldov, an emulator of Urmuz. Having moved to Bucharest, the magazine poached contributors to *Integral* and launched new names, the most important of whom was Geo Bogza (1908-1993), who, together with poet Al. Tudor-Miu (1901-1961), had published a surrealist magazine titled *Urmuz* in Cîmpina in 1928.

At a different level, the officialisation of Italian Futurism by Benito Mussolini's fascist regime, combined with the exhaustion of Constructivism's innovative potential, precipitated a reorientation on the part of militants towards French Surrealism, whose pro-communist revolutionary fervour, modelled on Marxism

and psychoanalysis, became an alternative for numerous Jewish artists (most of them from the Romanian avant-garde) and for all those mobilised by the rise of fascism. The choice of the radical left was generally camouflaged aesthetically, for multiple historical reasons. The birth of the Romanian avant-garde in 1924 had coincided with the banning of the Communist Party of Romania, which was denounced as an arm of the Komintern whose aim was the dismemberment of the Greater Romania created by the Union of 1918. Nationalist and bourgeois framework discourse of the period translated into vigilant repression of Bolshevik actions, including artistic actions suspected of having Bolshevik sympathies. In addition, the constructive enthusiasm of the 1920s had held avant-gardist art at a distance from radical politics. With the Great Depression of 1929 and the rise of far-right movements, things were to change.

The Surrealist identity of Saşa Pană's magazine was trenchantly asserted in 1930, in an article by Ilarie Voronca, in which the closeness of Vinea's publication to the parties of government and the publication in its pages of neotraditionalist texts were vehemently condemned. Nevertheless, the surrealism of the *unu* contributors was superficial and deliberately provocative in nature, taking the form of imagistic delirium and exuberant non-figurativeness. Geo Bogza was surrealist in attitude, but not in form, in his manifestos *Creative Exasperation* and *Rehabilitation of the Dream* and in his violently erotic poems, partly reproduced in the volumes *Sex Diary* (1929) and *Invective Poem* (1933). Charged with pornography, he was jailed for these poems twice, in 1933 and again 1937. The charges masked a political trial: the authorities had (correctly) perceived the proletarian, deviant, apocalyptic eroticism of Bogza's poem-reportages as a social danger, given their accusatory, anti-bourgeois and anti-system side, and as an affront to not only the institution of Poetry, but also the ultra-conservative institution of public morals. Very young disciples such as Gherasim Luca, Paul Păun, Aureliu Baranga and Jules Perahim followed the same blasphemous line. They pushed the surrealist revolt further in *Alge* (Seaweed) magazine and its obscenely titled supplements *Pulă* (Cock) and *Muci* (Snots), taking part in the construction of an avant-gardist mythology in which, besides the rebellious, ludic gestures of the likes of Pană, Bogza and Roll, Urmuz was deified and the Secolul (Century) Milk Bar, owned by Stephan Roll's father (Gheorghe Dinu), became a place for conspiratorial meetings.

Nor was *unu* magazine spared internal conflicts, replicating the split between Stalinists and Trotskyites that had arisen within the international Surrealist movement at the Congress of Revolutionary Writers held in Kharkov in 1930. In 1932, intensification of official repression aimed at communist sympathisers of the avant-garde led to cessation of the magazine. A year later, *Viaţa Imediată* (The Immediate Life) magazine, published by Geo Bogza along with his sympathisers from *Alge*, was blocked after the appearance of just one issue. The proliferation throughout the country of kindred publications made the authorities step up their repressive vigilance and from 1934, with the intensification of far-right actions, the last refuge of the Romanian avant-gardists was *Meridian*, a cahier-review published in Craiova by lyceum teacher Tiberiu Iliescu.

A part of the militants became social reporters (Geo Bogza, F. Brunea-Fox, Miron Radu Paraschivescu) or political journalists for the left-wing press (Gheorghe Dinu, D. Trost, Ion Călugăru, Gherasim Luca). These were years when the spirit of the avant-garde stimulated important cultural directions. We find it allied with the existentialism of the Eugène Ionesco, Max Blecher, Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran generation. We may also identify it in the protest realism of the young anti-fascist poets of the Albatross group (1941), in Geo Dumitrescu (1920-2004) and Ion Caraion (1923-1986), among others. After the Stalinist-inspired communists came to power, a part of the avant-gardists adhered to the official dogma of the proletarian revolution, jettisoning artistic originality as a bourgeois vice and embracing political collectivism. The terminal point of the historical avant-garde was 1945-47, represented by the Romanian surrealist group: Gellu Naum (1915-2001), Gherasim Luca, Paul Păun, Virgil Teodorescu (1909-1987), D. Trost. Their manifestos, slim volumes of poetry and poetic prose, and magical-psychoanalytic experiments displayed a philosophically mature surrealism, but one that was not in step with the by then exhausted French surrealism. The group's activity led André Breton, the movement's world leader, to claim that the centre of surrealism had shifted to Bucharest. The young Roland Barthes, a French cultural attaché in Bucharest after the War, was also up to date with the discoveries of Trost and company, and the thinking of poststructuralist philosopher Gilles Deleuze was to be stimulated by the revolutionary and anti-Oedipal schizo-poetics of Gherasim Luca, an émigré to Paris. After a conformist interlude in the 1950s, Gellu Naum made a name for himself as one of the last major surrealists (his poetic novel *Zenobia* is a personal reply, after a lapse of fifty years, to André Breton's *Nadja*). After the official abandonment of socialist realism, the historical avant-garde became a productive model and reference for all Romania's innovative literary groups, from the "oneirism" of Leonid Dimov and Dumitru Tsepeneag to the post-surrealism of Nora Iuga and Virgil Mazilescu and the neo-surrealism of émigrés Andrei Codrescu, Sebastian Reichmann and Valery Oisteanu. In the version of the kaleidoscopic imagism of Ilarie Voronca and the reportage poetry of Geo Bogza, the inter-war avant-garde has made its mark on the postmodern poetic of recent decades. Since 2000, the phenomenon has become institutionalised, according to the co-ordinates of globalisation, becoming a new mainstream. But the authentically rebellious, anti-system side of the avant-garde spirit persists, seeking alternative channels for itself.

Paul Cernat



Canonical and Non-canonical Inter-war Writers: The Mainstream and Oddities in Pre-communist Romanian Literature

Romanian literature from 1920 to 1940 seems animated by an enthusiasm and productivity that would be hard to match in subsequent periods. The reasons must have been multiple: besides adoption of modernist experimentalism and the temptation of the avant-garde, writers were fascinated by the society in which they lived, its on-going processes of modernisation, the survival of archaic husbandry and tillage in the era of the radio and motorcar, and the clash between East and West that seemed to take place on every street corner of Bucharest. The nationalist inspiration that had predominated in the literature of previous periods, even in the work of the great writers, was discouraged (without completely disappearing) by the inopportunity of chauvinism in a country that had achieved territorial unity in the aftermath of the world war. In the new situation, cosmopolitanism gained ground, and young writers felt themselves to be the peers of Gide and Proust, of Papini and Huxley. If we add to the above the extremely fertile dialectic of tradition and aesthetic radicalism, of autochthonism and openness to the international, then we have a brightly coloured, vivid picture, in which canonical hierarchies were contested even as they were being elaborated.

But we cannot overlook the presence of provocative concepts in the same period, which demonstrate its intellectual vitality and long range. Representations of the corporeal began to abound, from the expressionist sketch and lyrical sensuality to increasingly impetuous descriptions of sexuality. It was a sign of the struggle between the perpetuation of an abstract and communal definition of culture and the emergence of a new definition, more attentive to the concrete, the individual and the idiosyncratic. At the same time, the novel aims to become not a mirror, but a normative map of the Romanian world, and so behind authors' opting to represent one social setting or another there are at work social tensions and sometimes telling ideological choices. The traditional village of Mihai Sadoveanu (1880-1961) is replaced with the throbbing city of Camil Petrescu (1894-1957) and Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu (1876-1955); but at the same time, the provincial town became a sanctuary for childhood and dreaming, in the work of Ionel Teodoreanu (1897-1954) and Garabet Ibrăileanu (1871-1936), and in the texts of Max Blecher (1909-1938) it is transformed into the space of an allegorical confrontation between revelation and damnation. Ultimately, the novel is also a space where memory, with its power to convoke the absent (in Teodoreanu), meets technical experiment, with its forward-looking power to create the future (in avant-gardists such as Urmuz).

One solid novelist, with a complex and wide-ranging body of work, always cited by contemporary critics as a certificate of guarantee for the literature of the time, was Liviu Rebreanu (1885-1944). Although also preoccupied with the subtlety of the inner processes of a patriotic deserter about to be executed (*The Forest of the Hanged*, 1922) or an aristocratic murderer (*Ciuleandra*, 1927), his most important writings are his two peasant novels. *Ion* (1920) is about a Romanian village in Transylvania at the beginning of the twentieth century, about the landless man's fanatical love of the soil, about violence and moral blindness born of poverty, which claims victims on every side. *The Uprising* (1932), which is set during the revolt that erupted in Romania in the spring of 1907, Europe's last major peasant uprising, situates the social problem within a horizon of extreme realism, refraining from judging the revolt with the authority of a demiurge of textual worlds; on the contrary, the theme of the novel will be the impossibility of apportioning guilt in a conflict where an anachronistic social structure, abusive authorities, and an impassive God seem equally responsible in the face of the exasperation of the dispossessed.

Mihail Sadoveanu, another important novelist, who worked with broad canvases and had a prodigious career, symmetrically completes the picture of the canonical writers. Sadoveanu is a storyteller who,

especially in his writings of the 1930's, is carried away by the temptation to evoke the wisely archaic, a type of life immersed in mythology, which has made his interpreters compare him with the Hermann Hesse of *Siddharta*. In a number of books, the author depicts his native Moldavia as a province that has not yet lost the battle with secular and despiritualised modernity. Most of his works of this period – whether set in Byzantine antiquity, where sainthood confronts moral corruption (*The Golden Bough*, 1933), or in the late mediaeval period, where politically dangerous lovers are slain through treachery (*The Zodiac of Cancer or the Reign of Duca-Vodă*, 1929), or in a contemporary village in the mountains, where telegraph poles have begun to penetrate (*The Hatchet*, 1930) – nonetheless foresee the imminent defeat of an enchanted social order, in which ritual guides both people's lives and the wider, silent world.

Other writers are fascinated by the mechanisms whereby the emblems of modernity are adapted to the Central/East-European culture of Romania. Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, the great novelist of the period, is fascinated not by the distortion of the West-European model of civilisation, but precisely by the paradoxical durability of a social life built on pretension and mendacity, on imposture and hypocrisy. Declaring herself to be fascinated with the vitality of high-society Bucharest, in her saga of the Halippa family she doggedly and ironically chronicles the interwoven connections between a number of families allied above all by the compromising secrets they know about each other. In the best novel of the cycle, *Concert of Music by Bach* (1926), the general harmony of high society is sealed by a murder and disguised, to the general indifference, by its classical music-loving snobbery.

Another devotee of Bucharest, Mateiu Caragiale (1885-1936), author of a short novel that created major enthusiasm, *The Rakes of the Old Court* (1929), is a wholly atypical writer. It was such asymmetries in inter-war literature that were to guarantee its lastingness in the decades to come. In his short novel, written with an aesthete's fervour over the course of decades, Caragiale constructs a myth of a Balkan Gomorrah, a cursed and hermetic city, in which vice not only borders on, but is directly related to spiritual refinement: refined intellectuals allow themselves to be taken to a brothel by a vulgar and villainous companion, and the Academy is the name of a tavern. Degradation cohabits with apotheosis, and the fall can be understood as ascesis in this book – a study of mores and a spiritual guide – which can also be interpreted with the tools of esoteric hermeneutics.

Employing forms that were to bring them public success, other novelists of the period spoke of the friable world of modernity, beneath whose veils lies hidden a precious past, ended all too soon. In his novel *At Medeleni* (1925-27), Ionel Teodoreanu gives an account of a childhood lived at the beginning of the century, in a period in which French is learned from Symbolist poetry, and native culture from the taste of watermelons. The novel, with its sometimes-excessive lyricism, turns from a maudlin evocation of the past into an apotheosis of the fiction that restores the essence of memory, thereby capturing not the photograph of a period, but perhaps the escapist/bovaric nostalgic and undecided spirit of modernity and inter-war Romanian high society, which looks back to the past in order to rediscover itself. In contrast, in the novels of his youth, which are barely readable today, scholar Mircea Eliade (1907-1988) gazes wide-eyed only towards the future that young intellectuals, fanaticised by ideas, are planning with a sense of urgency. Of his early debate-type novels, *Maitreyi* (1933) remains an agreeable read, mining the cosmopolitan lode in a story of cross-cultural love, between a European and an Indian, each with their own representations about the world of the other. But it was the fantastic novellas he published after the war that were to redefine him, showing him to be obsessed with the fault lines between the world of the here and now and the multiple worlds that are always "beyond" (*On Strada Mîntuleasa*, 1963).

Camil Petrescu is a novelist who adapts the Proustian viewpoint to the spectacle of Romanian modernity. The social milieu of his novels points to an exhilarating contemporaneity: aviators, motorists, crooked industrialists, interior designers, actresses, but their moral world is undermined by doubts and concealed traumas. Nevertheless, the modernity of his novels is one of technique and viewpoint rather than décor. Beneath the pellicle of high society, the characters of *The Last Night of Love, the First Night of War* (1930) and *The Procrustean Bed* (1933) experience dramas of knowledge brought about by the revelation of love, jealousy or unworthy, degrading love. The reflexive attitude to lived experience, the act of remembering and writing an analysis of one's own experiences in love or war, defines both the characters and their author, a complex writer, a playwright, poet and author of a philosophical system. The Proustian is also well represented in the literature of the period, and Garabet Ibrăileanu's charming novel *Adela* (1933) is particularly worthy of note here.

But in the early 1930's there was a reaction on the part of younger writers to the analytic refinement of Proust's Romanian followers. These young writers were existentialist in style, proponents of a literature that recounted experiences of knowledge in a deliberately careless way. Such writers were doomed to marginality in the canonical picture of the period, and their books were to remain in the literary memory primarily as expressive (and not seldom obscene) gestures directed towards a detested tradition. One of the period's marginals was Constantin Fântâneru (1907-1975), the author of a single, short novel: *Interior* (1933). Fântâneru applied the severest anti-aesthetic programme of his generation, writing a rebellious book,

which seems to betray a poor grasp of spelling. This is suggestive of "lived experience" in the novel, whose style reproduces the type of experience lived by the character, a semi-vagrant wandering listlessly around an unrecognisable city, fervently experiencing otherwise banal events, such as encountering a tree or a child. The character's and the author's marginality point to an ethical maximalism, reflected in the intransigence towards the expressivity of talent and even towards grammatical correctness, which is regarded as tantamount to a betrayal.

Also marginal is another interesting author, H. Bonciu (1893-1950), whose two novels of the 1930's (*Luggage*, 1935, and *Madame Pipersberg's Pension*, 1936) were prosecuted for being pornographic. Naturally, the pornography existed only in the minds of the public prosecutors, who had a political agenda; the representations of sex acts are just as studied as a cubist nude. The books are bold above all aesthetically, full of narratological provocations, such as the impossible story told by a dead man, and show signs of kinship with the German and Austrian expressionists, whose circles Bonciu had frequented before the war. Presented as misshapen, his characters themselves live in a distorted reality, and their contortions also represent a protest.

A unique place is occupied by the patron saint of the Romanian avant-garde, prose writer Urmuz (1883-1923), who, in just nine short prose pieces (*Bizarre Pages*, 1930), demonstrated a remarkable proclivity for games with the inertias of language. His absurd texts, written around 1908-09, in which a man falls in love with a funnel and another character with an aromatic wooden beak finds some poems in a field, eats them and then vomits them back up, set a bold standard for avant-garde aberration, leaving an important trace in their continuer and French translator, playwright Eugène Ionesco.

Max Blecher is the most dazzling product of the period, a marginal who became "canonical" only decades later, an unusual writer who bewildered authoritative critics and whom posterity hastened to claim as a precursor. Blecher is also a special case, a highly precocious author, who wrote his masterpiece at the age of twenty-six and died before the age of twenty-nine, having suffered all his adult life from tuberculosis of the bones, confined to a horizontal position. From his suffering he drew the materials for a cosmopolitan novel set in a French sanatorium, *Cicatrised Hearts* (1937), in which the habit of using one's body in various convenient ways (walking, eating, praying, sexuality) is deconstructed and with it the humanist aspiration to transcend corporeality through the spirit. But his real masterpiece is the novel *Occurrences in the Immediate Unreality* (1936); in it not one word is said about illness and the ill, but nonetheless reality fragments before the reader's very eyes. The everyday existence of a young man from a provincial town, whose streets and bourgeois interiors are of exasperating mediocrity, is recounted as an endless adventure in which Good and Evil confront each other within an arena filled with buttons, letters, gramophone records, wax dolls and marketplace cabbages. It is a metaphysical novel realised in the most improbable setting possible.

There is a fertile dynamic in inter-war literature, which brings together both canonical patriarchs and rebellious marginals within a family portrait with a number of surprising but significant proximities. Unfortunately, the coming of totalitarianism and the cultural diktat were to cause this splendid diversity to vanish for decades thereafter.

Doris Mironescu



The Inter-War and Post-Revolution Memoir. Nostalgia and Reclamation

Nineteenth-century Romanian prose rests under the sign of *memory*. Literary historians have unanimously established this, without masking a certain amount of surprise. For, if we lend credence to the common view, it would have been natural for the beginnings of a literature (or rather the beginnings of a professionalised literature) sooner to favour the genres of *fantasy*, with all that these entail in terms of style and subject matter. But what happened was exactly the opposite and it is unnecessary to lay out the exceptions in detail: rather than the predictable emergence of the novel (a genre indulgent towards liberties of every kind), there was an unexpected efflorescence of writings in the background of which may be observed an unaltered form of recourse to memory. Put simply, Romanian authors drew either on their own memories or on what the collective imagination had filtered and, as a result, already established, whether in the historical or family or even personal document. It is sufficient to leaf through the writings of the 1848 Generation in order to establish the statistical truth of this observation. The majority of such writings barely rise above the ground, so subservient are they to the real. The few masterpieces of the novella form are either adaptations of mediaeval records or skilfully orchestrated accounts of striking biographical episodes. Things remained unchanged two decades later, when the so-called "major classics" assumed symbolic power. There were at least three peaks in this phase: *Memories of Childhood* by Ion Creangă (1837-1889), *Letters to Vasile Alecsandri* by Ion Ghica (1816-1897), and the posthumous *Diary* of critic Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917). And this is without taking into account an entire cohort of writers who, without achieving excellence, nonetheless wrote books that are memorable and enjoyable even today, having decided in their old age to become quite simply sincere: C. D. Aricescu, G. Sion, V. A. Urechia, and later writers such as Iacob Negruzzi and G. Panu are perfect examples of this category.

What I am trying to say in this extremely cursory review is that the genre, protean as it is, had a noble tradition even prior to the brilliance it attained between the two world wars. It existed and, if need be, can explain the almost atavistic interest that the memoir has always aroused among the (average) cultivated reading public in Romania, including in those periods in which, for reasons of categorial purity, it was kept at the margins of literature. Even today there are authoritative voices that cast the memoir's status into doubt, regarding it as inferior to poetry, fiction and drama, albeit less vehemently than in the past. And one of the causes of this "accommodation" is, I believe, the very pressure of the aforementioned tradition, which has allowed hybridisation from which there is no turning back. It became quite difficult to ignore (in the twentieth century) a genre whose capacity to produce (in the nineteenth century) works of the first rank one had already recognised.

Of course, another explanation takes into account the evidence: the major literatures that have not had any scruples in accepting the exemplary character of such "niche" writings and which have developed (in the natural order of the movement of ideas) an entire theoretical apparatus in their margins. It is impossible to gain a deeper knowledge of Tolstoy while ignoring his diary or to reduce Kafka solely to his novels. Pavese is just as moving in *Il mestiere di vivere* as he is in *Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi*. Moving away from the area of the diary, we may also think of the extraordinary letters that Flaubert wrote to Louise Colet, which today are more delightful even than the impeccable *Madame Bovary*. There are countless examples and none of them presupposes any concession of taste. In the light of these examples, summarily to deny the importance of the memoir in the wider sense (or, to use the term of a critic who has painstakingly researched this field, the "genres of the biographical") is quite simply bankrupt.

It is possible to discuss at length the arguments that have been cast into this battle for legitimacy. Some of

them are blatantly ineffective, given that they are contradicted by the reality, and others are cogent in a degree that goes beyond mere polemic. I shall choose just one, which is very convincing in my view, in order to set a number of criteria for the selection that is to follow. It was not formulated by a theorist of literature, but by an essayist by vocation. Moreover, it is sufficiently recent (published in Dutch magazine *Nexus* in 2014) not to have become shop-soiled by repetition already. The problems touched upon by Horia-Roman Patapievici in the essay to which I refer are extensive, and so I shall try to summarise them without losing sight of the centre of gravity of the matter. Setting out from Plato and Plotinus, who speak, in adjacent terms, about "what is of greatest worth" in man (and since it is "of greatest worth" it can never be expressed consistently and even less so transcribed), Patapievici puts forward a concept that is reparative to a certain extent: "uninterrupted conversation." Faced with the depths of the soul to which it attempts to give shape, every art is condemned to pellicular status. No poem by Paul Celan, let us say, will ever completely and correctly convey the inner matrix of the *true* Paul Celan. Just as no novel by Dostoevsky will ever convey the *true* Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, with every fibre of his consciousness (which in any event is inaccessible to literary critics, but anticipated by theologians and, to an even larger extent, mystics). And so, the concept to which I refer, and which, like any other concept, has its share of the imponderable and abstract, is, in the essayist's eyes, the only one capable of partly and secularly resolving this aporia. At the intuitive level, we can picture it in exactly the way that the terms it contains allow us to understand: as a convivial moment, ever renewed and ever ready to be renewed without syncope, which, of course, does not preclude either idle chatter or dull, uninspired moments, but which is constantly lent backbone by the passion of contact with one's own spirit. We feel the same type of connection, from without, observes Horia-Roman Patapievici, on encountering a great (in the essentialist sense) diary or epistolary corpus.

As I said, of all the arguments, this seems to be to be extremely fertile when it comes to a cartographic exercise of the type I am attempting here, because it allows us to widen the perimeter beyond the limits of the literary, in a moral sense, but defines it rigorously (and thereby differently than negotiable, small talk-type approximations of morals). Unlike the nineteenth-century memoir, to whose poetics they do not in any case adhere, the diaries, memoirs and letters of the twentieth century more often than not have an incurably existential component (and sometimes an existentialist one, as we shall see), which is hard to capture in any simplistic historical equation.

People between the Wars and their confessions

Despite the above, the selection of the most interesting examples of the memoir comes up against a number of practical difficulties, due not so much to methodological details (since the Romanian inter-bellum is not a homogenous period, which has even led some critics to propose that its boundaries be redefined), as much as to wider history itself, which, as we know, is quite indifferent to the stylistic boundaries of literary history. Şerban Cioculescu (1902-1988), a critic whose name was at the forefront of up-to-date commentary between the Wars, did not publish his *Memoirs* until 1981, during the communist period, probably toning down plenty of negative comments, which, under normal circumstances, he would have left intact. This is just one example. Another, even more striking example, is the belated publication, after the Revolution, of the *Agendas* of another critic very authoritative at the time: Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943). Running to six volumes, the *Agendas* are the most complete live account of the main hotbed of Romanian modernism, the *Sburătorul* cenacle, in which all the most notable authors of that period participated at one time or another (along with numerous second-rate writers, of course). This is the reason why in my selection I shall refrain from working with overly restrictive chronological criteria. For, nothing is more dangerous than a confusing chronology of political events. Therefore, in this section I shall refer to writers whose work is substantially connected to the literature of the period between the two world wars, even if the biographies of some of them extended beyond that interval.

The book that sets the standard for this period remains Mihail Sebastian's (1907-1945) *Journal*, a veritable ethnic and ethical cross section of the darkest years of the inter-bellum. A Jew, but close to far-right intellectual Nae Ionescu (1890-1940), Sebastian was, after a given point, exposed to crossfire from both sides. His major problem was to break away from his mentor spiritually and to cope with adverse reactions (sometimes barely perceptible) on the part of those he regarded as friends and who suddenly became cautious around him. Not published until 1996, the journal is the transcript of a crisis, which the author nonetheless records with decorum. The book has been much debated and scenarios that run counter to the facts have even been invented around a question that is, alas, pointless: what would Mihail Sebastian have done politically if an accident had not taken his life at the age of just thirty-eight? With or without such hypotheses, the *Journal (1935-1944)* remains one of the most harrowing accounts of a period that has long been idealised by literary historians.

A number of the "characters" in Mihail Sebastian's journal are themselves major voices of the Romanian memoir genre. The best known is Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), who was not only a practitioner of the genre, but also an apologist for the sincerity of the diarist, following in the footsteps of Gide. In his youth a leader of the new literary generation, which emerged in the late 1920's, Eliade dedicated himself to the study of the history of religions, the field in which he was to forge an international career. His new position forced him to revise and even obscure his own past (his Iron Guard

sympathies) in the two volumes of *Memoirs* that were published in Romanian in 1991. Of greater interest and more problematical (in the existential sense) is his *Portuguese Journal*, which was recently unearthed (2006): here, Eliade is disgusted at the world, at Romanian culture, and at himself. He does not even conceal the idea (one surprising in a scholar of his stature) that the diary is his real literary work. Nonetheless, he has literary plans and begins to write a novel, *The New Life*, which he conceives in major terms, as a project comparable with Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Siblings Arşavir Acterian (1907-1997) and Jeni Acterian (1916-1958) were part of the same generation. The first was the author of *Diary of a Lazy Man*, which, given his long life, abounds in information and portraits. As he got older, Arşavir Acterian, who had once been a contemplative preoccupied with introspection, becomes a man of the world, or in any case a man who pays close attention to the world around him. Jeni Acterian, who is more dynamic, at least in relation to the inner life, wrote *The Diary of a Girl Hard to Please*, in which history is ostracised in favour of subjects of the acutest seriousness: continuing cultural education (the young woman devours literature, philosophy and cinema omnivorously) and, after a given point, her unhappy, anguished love for philosopher Alexandru Dragomir.

A complement to his work as a playwright, Eugène Ionesco's (1909-1994) *Fragments of a Journal* bring to light a huge discrepancy and lend a uneven texture to a life that from the outside seemed smooth. The literary reviewer of the inter-bellum, in constant conflict with the prejudices of his contemporaries, gives way to an explosive personality, on the verge of dipsomania, prepared to subject himself to any medication in order to overcome his visceral fear of death. It is an image that lends additional weight to Ionesco's writing, which otherwise is susceptible to paradoxes and the spirit of the *flâneur*.

Constantin Fântâneru (1907-1975) represents a limit situation. A prose writer and essayist of a certain amount of notoriety in his youth, he was rediscovered as an innovator of the memoir genre by critics after the Revolution. His novel *Interior* (1932) brings to the stage a mind endowed with a spirit of rapacious observation, ready to record everything, filtering exactly as much expressiveness (never in excess) as allowable. His journal, covering the period from 1969 to 1973, is along the same lines: a man setting down his own instances of strangeness without excessive analysis. Having withdrawn to the countryside and accepted the lot of a schoolteacher in obscure out-of-the-way places (Glodu, Budişteni), Fântâneru has no other ambition than to transform the blank page of his memoirs into a black-and-white screen capable of "capturing" a life in all its perfect, conscious banality.

As for the "textbook" authors of the period, they proved less concerned with the relationship between the text and inner truths (whether frenetic or, contrariwise, paralysing). Generally sceptical towards the diary genre, they channelled their confessional energies either into the documentary memoir or into memorable epistolary exchanges. Camil Petrescu (1894-1957) was a relative exception, one of the most brilliant minds of the inter-war period, a novelist of great subtlety, an always disconcerting essayist (his analyses of the style of Marcel Proust alternate with scholarly interrogation of the detective novel), a remarkable (albeit over-cerebral) playwright, and not least, a team player, the leader of one of the most balanced and serious cultural publications of the age: *Revista Fundațiilor Regale* (The Royal Foundations Review). In the few diary pages he wrote, Camil Petrescu shows himself to be a personality in a constant state of urgency: continually frustrated that his genius is not put to better political use, always ready to dedicate himself to new, not necessarily literary projects (he invented a self-propelling parachute), always dissatisfied with the impoverished understanding of his contemporaries. His highly original *Daily Notes* offer extraordinary surprises even today, but very little comfort.

At the opposite pole to this attitude can be found the *Journal* of Maria Banuş (1914-1999): covering eight hundred pages and a huge period (1927 to 1999), it allows the reader to wander through a biography that looks like a huge desert. Moral qualms cause not one muscle to twitch on the face of this poet, who, after an auspicious beginning (a still beautiful volume of poems, *The Land of Girls*, published in 1937), ended up dedicating blatantly insincere verses to the regime in the worst years of the communist period. She regrets nothing and does not even seem capable of regret. Her only devouring passion is her obsession with writer Zaharia Stancu, with whom she had a post-adolescent affair and whom she never forgot, even after his death in 1974.

Unexpectedly fresh are the memoirs of two writers who, in spirit, belong to the Old Regime (i.e. the period before the First World War): George Topîrceanu (1886-1937) and Constantin Beldie (1887-1953). The first writes a front-line diary, which, despite the horrors it describes (with a suspiciously clinical timbre, for a poet regarded as ludic par excellence), always finds an outlet for serenity. The second, a prolific journalist and mainstay of various newspapers in the first half of the century, paints a gallery of portraits (some in garish colours, but all of them remarkable), placed in rather an unusual context for prudish Romanian society. *Kaleidoscope of Half a Century* is not lacking in strong language and reflects in the margins of the sexual taboos of the day.

Of the numerous letter writers, two are especially worthy of note. The first, Ion Barbu (1895-1961), was the most typical of the Romanian modernist poets. A leading mathematician (who made major contributions to the field), in his writing he developed a difficult style, on the boundary between Balkan mannerism and Mallarméan hermeticism (a comparison that has often been made). His posthumously published correspondence is a sample of the internalisation of this format: with the air of officiating at an ancient ceremony, Barbu imparts to his friends the most unnatural sexual exploits and extreme narcotic

escapades (all of this while he was studying for his PhD in Germany). Similarly, Mateiu Caragiale (1885-1936), the author of a body of work parsimonious in size (his major achievement amounts to one novel of consummate decadent aestheticism) is the author of a correspondence characterised by flawless cynicism, in which his aristocratic loquacity allows gestures of supreme defiance against everything at odds with his idiosyncratic taste. The less well-known biography of Mateiu Caragiale thereby adds a tenebrous perfume to the areas of shadow.

Between reclamation and legitimation

What I observed above in connection with the memoirs of Şerban Cioculescu reverberated after 1989: after five decades of propaganda (and guerrilla war against it), Romanian literature repositioned itself in relation to the rigours of sincerity; in other words, it rediscovered naturalness. The first years after the Revolution rested beneath the sign of what we might call a restitution of public truths. This was why, of all the genres, the memoir genre also had the most to gain. Thitherto regarded as noble, poetry and fiction suddenly suffered a reduction in symbolic capital. All of a sudden, they became discourses too noble to dissect matters of life and death, such as the history of the previous five decades. Not only the wider public, but also specialists were in agreement, granting the memoir genre privileges that had thitherto been denied to it. The most influential reviewer of the time, Dan C. Mihăilescu, devoted a whole series to the surprises offered by memoir writers. A critic from an older generation (Eugen Simion) channelled his energies into a theoretically ambitious project about the private journal. They probably contributed to a shift in perspective and the need to confer upon the literature of the recent past a moral framework capable of ensuring its vitality. This was also the period when there was much talk of so-called "desk-drawer literature," in other words, great books that the best Romanian authors had written in secret, without any hope of ever publishing them, due to ideological censorship. However, such books proved to be fewer than our illusions had led us to believe.

One revelation was *Journal of Happiness* (published in 1991), a prison memoir by Nicolae Steinhardt (1912-1989). It was the first great book literarily to reclaim the years of political detention in the communist prisons and the one that changed the code before it could be established. Rather than resentment (natural in such limit cases), Steinhardt adopts Christian mercy and forgiveness. From this standpoint, the title of the memoir is not at all paradoxical. Unjust as it was, the experience served the author, just as reclusion serves the hermit. A Jewish intellectual from the same generation as Eliade, Ionesco and Sebastian, brilliant and controversial in his youth (among other things, he was the author of intelligent parodies of his contemporaries' books), Steinhardt became, after years of imprisonment, a fervent Orthodox Christian, who placed love at the centre of the whole world and who in his memoirs listed books according to their spiritual relevance. Many pages of the *Journal of Happiness*, which is not a journal in the proper sense, can be read as genuine moral essays. Writers of every stripe, from the canonical to the popular and ranging from philosophers to musicians, are convoked in the memoir in order to create a pact with the idea of salvation. In parenthesis, we may say that the exact opposite of this attitude can be found in the work of Adrian Marino (1921-2005), also a victim of the totalitarian regime, but who in *The Life of a Lonely Man* (2010) refuses to forgive and forget. Not only the torturers, but also acquaintances and even friends are here subjected to a barrage of accusations of greater or lesser plausibility, but which in any event are ill suited to the supposed reconciliation brought by old age.

Ion D. Sîrbu (1919-1989) represents a similar case, particularly in his posthumous writings, such as *Journal of a Journalist without a Journal* (1991-3), the correspondence contained in *Crossing the Curtain* (1994) and the novel *Adieu, Europe!* (1992-3). A left-wing sympathiser in his youth, Sîrbu suffered the privations of an absurd regime: he was dismissed from his university teaching post and made to work as an unqualified labourer. He was betrayed by those close to him and lived a lonely life in a provincial town in southern Romania, where he continued to write his highly personal books, envenomed with savage invective, but guided by a firm moral compass. Although sometimes they give the impression of an *écorché*, both the *Journal* and the letters (to friends abroad) are the work of a thoroughbred intellectual, aware that the biographical accident is more than an accident and that ultimately it can condemn him to failure.

The third name without which this panorama would be inconceivable is that of Petre Pandrea (1904-1968), who, in his *Memoirs of a Wallachian Mandarin* (2000), perfects the portraitist's art: he is one of the most interesting (and cutting) portraitists in the whole of Romanian literature. It is hard to say how much of the behind-the-scenes information he provides from the period 1928-68 we can credit today. But anyway, the accounts are amusing and if their documentary value is relative, their storytelling and expressiveness are beyond any doubt. An innocent victim, like so many others, but blatantly innocent (he was arrested under accusations of being both a left-winger and a right-winger), Pandrea does not seem to take any pleasure in revenge. The invective, found everywhere in the pages of his memoirs (to *Memoirs of a Wallachian Mandarin* he added other books from the same creative laboratory, including *The Ivory Tower*), is not necessarily a consequence deducible from suffering, as it is in the case of Sîrbu. It is the product of his talent as an intemperate moralist: he is always ready with an abrasive turn of phrase and never has enough tact to pass over it in silence. "You cannot put the brain in chains," he writes somewhere, by way of categorial definition.

Monica Lovinescu (1923-2008), the daughter of the great inter-war Romanian critic, belongs to the same category and rests beneath the sign of ethical

intransigence. Her *Journal*, which covers the last decade of communism and the first decade of freedom, raises a paradox: although written entirely in Paris, it is the keenest account of Romanian cultural life that we have. Day after day, Monica Lovinescu spent hours on the telephone, informing herself (and informing her interlocutors) about Romanian books and writers then in vogue. In a way, it is not her verdicts that count (the author herself subjected them to harsh examination) as much as the fantastic energy that Monica Lovinescu brought to bear in defending the dignity of a literature from which she was separated by thousands of kilometres. On the same level of the reclamation of still living memory and clarification of spiritual confusions, we may place such devastating confessions as *Our Everyday Prison* (1991-97) by Ion Ioanid (1929-2003), *Torture Made Intelligible to All* (2001) by Florin Constantin Pavlovici (1936-), and *Offerings* (2002) by Cornelia Pillat (1921-2005).

Also interesting are confessions that do not follow historical necessity, but a completely personal set of exigencies, in other words, those writers who, in not setting out to reclaim what *must* be reclaimed socially, prefer to focus on their own lives or at least fragments of those lives. The result is literary in the proper sense, rather than literary-historical or bibliographical or documentary or political. This is why I talked above about the legitimacy of the genre. When two major publishers (Humanitas and Polirom) each dedicate a series to the memoir, the journal and the "egograph", we are faced with a fact rather than an opinion and have to treat it as such. Here it becomes difficult to pick out individual books and a mere list would fill pages. But we should not overlook books such as those by Matei Călinescu (1934-2009): *Portrait of M*, a harrowing dissection of the mind of a father who has lost his son; Gabriela Melinescu (1942-), who in her series *Swedish Journal* makes oneiric glosses in the margins of her distance from the language in which she wrote her first books, but without breaking away from the world in which she conceived them; Ion Vianu (1934-), whose outstanding work is the half-essayistic *Amor Intellectualis*, a book about coming to maturity the likes of which few have been written in Romanian literature; and, more recently, Gabriela Adameşteanu (1942-), who in *The Romantic Years* parts from the militant past of the first decade of post-communism, of which she was a fervent part, in order gracefully to return to literature. Also harrowing is the diary of poet Constanța Buzea (1941-2012), *The Crest of the Glacier* (2010), of which one volume has been published: unexpectedly direct (and dark) compared with her rather radiant poetry, the diary records a marriage in crisis, unravelling thread by thread, not without outbursts of violence. To this list may be added those longer or shorter memoirs that lend nuance to an already highly diverse genre.

In conclusion, two projects (the second still in progress) have made a decisive mark on the last twenty-five years. The first, subtitled "essay on education" is *Flight Within Arrow's Range* by Horia-Roman Patapievici (1957-), which in effect cannot be compared with anything else in Romanian literature (reference may be made to Mircea Eliade, but with great caution). Coming to prominence only after 1990, after spending his youth in prolonged study and self-imposed silence, Patapievici articulated in this book what might be called his intellectual map, one disconcertingly vast (from quantum mechanics to philosophy, poetry and music, nothing seems unfamiliar to him) and febrile in style, making him from the outset unmistakable in a cultural space usually cautious when it comes to such validations. The second is the *Journal* of Mircea Cărtărescu (1956-), of which three volumes have appeared to date, a faithful transcription not of a life (his material is not everyday events) as much of the continual tension of writing. A singular case, Mircea Cărtărescu here manages a triple performance, one poetic in its essence: he records an obsession (literature), about which there is nothing disgraceful, but which is electrifying and bracing; he places his autobiography in parenthesis, but without creating a feeling of aridity; and finally, he writes something *different* than literature, while nonetheless writing literature of the highest calibre.

Cosmin Ciotloş



The Mururoa Atoll
Prose in the Communist Period (1948-1989)

Analysis of the psychological reality of the literature written under communism (1948-1989) obliges us to support the thesis of its autonomy. Removed from the sphere of the natural, it is the product of a closed space, where particular laws of evolution operate.

Nothing that happens in the process of a literature developing under totalitarian rule has a natural explanation. Directly or indirectly, everything is a defensive, desperate or inventive reply, a reaction, riposte or realignment, a stratagem for survival.

Writers' natural will to assert themselves and to create was counteracted and moderated by the prohibitive action of the publishing (and even post-publishing) control system and was hijacked via all kinds of underhand tricks and diversionary tactics.

Under the pressure of these adverse fields of force nothing but a sick landscape could emerge, albeit one that is interesting from the viewpoint of a potential totalitarian "aesthetic", which, if its bases as a discipline are ever laid, will deal with the contorted nature of the creative works of those times and the unusual evolution of the artistic phenomenon.

What accentuated the unnatural character of the literature written between 1948 and 1989 was also the fact that writers had a tiny range of options and they constantly found themselves in the situation of having to position themselves relative to the demands of the communist authorities (as part of the creative equation). There were a small number of potential reactions to Party decisions in matters of cultural policy. Such decisions counted enormously in writers' literary destinies. Either they fell into line and marched down the road indicated by officialdom, contributing propagandistically to the consolidation of the ruling power, or, taking advantage of propitious moments, they sought corridors of freedom that would allow them to write literature with as few concessions as possible. In order to enjoy even the smattering of artistic freedom permitted at certain moments, they avoided sensitive topics and tried to deceive the vigilance of the censors (or to take advantage of their calculated indulgence), resorting to Aesopian language or choosing, in order to keep their hand in, artistic areas less subject to ideology (poetry, escapist prose, prose about the past, the essay). Therefore, there were thematic areas that were frequented seldom if at all and others that were insistently sought after for their literary advantages and their effect on the public. As may be deduced, the literature published under communism was – in a very broad sense – one of free corridors and niches that quickly had to be filled with something, of defensive stratagems and protective formulas. Thus, we find a form of determinism when it came to writers' reactions and a damaging and too blatant intent to elude and avoid (by likewise predictable channels). These constitute a model of potential reactions, of responses to the authorities' initiatives and dressage manoeuvres – and this prepares the ground for repetitiveness and deduction.

We shall pass over the first years of the People's Republic, the years of "terrorist" communism, when the Party controlled all artistic production and allowed no other kind of literature than that placed in the service of propaganda.

What is genuinely important is that the re-conquest of literature as literature was achieved firstly through the accelerated recapitulation of post-1848 Revolution literary experiences, as if the law of ontogeny that repeats phylogeny had suddenly been activated. After 1953, with the onset of the process of de-ideologisation (interrupted after 1957 and resumed after 1962), there commenced what we might call the stage of the re-schooling of writers, which gave rise to a literature that was "recycled," recapitulative, and preponderantly one of extension. Plots of land long abandoned were reclaimed and, for a time, cultivated. Through Marin Preda, Petru Dumitriu, Titus Popovici and others, the tradition of critical realism was successfully rediscovered (and nor have its resources been used up, even to this day). Typologies diversified, class conflicts no longer hogged the whole stage, positive

characters were permitted to have weaknesses (heroes "with flaws") and even to become more complex. Ideologically derived Party theses were implicit rather than explicit (but never absent). In the spirit of the (previous) realism of the nineteenth century, narrative jettisoned stereotypes, conflicts were no longer resolved in a fairy tale-like way, settings were brought up to date, and there was an increase in the number of social settings tackled. Breaking away from socialist realism was difficult, however, and traces of the rupture were still present. Rereading them, one gets the impression that the achievements of those novels, which aroused enthusiasm on the part of the critics, were sooner a consequence of a satisfying diminution of the set of socialist-realist characteristics.

The "freeze over the thaw" that brought the brutal repression of the Hungarian Revolution and a return to the climate and terrorist methods of the early years of Romania's Bolshevisation postponed the re-conquest for a few years. Writers conformed, waiting for better times. Those who came to the fore in the mid-1950s published few books and of negligible value. Marin Preda published the novella *Audacity* in 1959 and the first version of the novel *The Wastrels* in 1962. Eugen Barbu published collections of novellas and two "party-line" novels: *Northern Highway* (1959) and *The Making of the World* (1964), which immediately became part of the official canon. The brilliance of his novel *The Pit* (1957) was already a memory. It was only thanks to the literary prestige he had gained over time and his political authority that Zaharia Stancu managed to avoid the new direction imposed by the authorities, publishing two stories (*Grass*, 1957, and *Constandina*, 1962) and two decent novels (*Playing with Death*, 1962, and *The Mad Forest*, 1963), which gave room to a subjective view of life. By its very nature, biographical prose dominated by authorial subjectivity lay outside the precepts of socialist-realist literature, which was, as we know, dedicated to the collective ideals of the working class.

The sense of a possible return to hell seemed to increase writers' determination to break once and for all with the socialist-realist past, as soon as the opportunity arose (the same fear of a return to the world of ideological straitjackets was to produce the same kind of determination after the July Theses of 1971, which announced the reinstatement of socialist realism). The opportunity arose with the declaration of April 1964, which was also interpreted as a break with all that the Soviet occupiers had brought with them. Out of a horror towards simplistic determinism, the constant clarifying interventions of ideology, typological predictability and the narrative stereotypes that the socialist-realist method had imposed for fifteen years, prose writers hastened to shake off everything that might be a reminder of it. The march back to the past was resumed, with vigour – the inter-war literary past, a paradoxically progressive aim, given the circumstances. The impression that one gets from the prose published after 1964 is that of a river which, abandoning its predictable course, splits into a number of streams, flowing into riverbeds long dry. Narrative substance becomes denser, and above all the number of types of narrative multiplies. It was what a Party critic like Paul Georgescu called "necessary polyvalence" (a slogan that even became a Party thesis!). Prose reappears in which the picturesque, accidental and marginal are prevalent, in other words, the exceptional rather than the typical (Nicolae Velea, Fănuş Neagu, Eugen Barbu). Tentatively and in the footsteps of Mateiu Caragiale, a prose that harnesses mystery and cultivates enigma announces its presence (A. E. Baconsky, *Madmen's Equinox*), and realism veers off into the fabulous and fantastic (Ştefan Bănulescu). The psychological (and introspection in general), having been banished from socialist-realist literature, returns to its former place, in a few texts by Nicolae Breban, Augustin Buzura and Alexandru Ivasiuc.

The first tentative attempts at synchronisation with the West also occur (texts by Mircea Ciobanu, Dumitru Ţepeneag, Sorin Titel, Dumitru (Puşi) Dinulescu). Each more surprising than the next in the landscape of a literature that continued to include belated examples of socialist realism, these fictions, containing unusual narrative forms, unheard of in the previous decade, were received with lavish praise by those who had for years and years experienced a sense of vacuity and frustration.

Thus, in the years of the "minor liberalisation" (1964-71), the number of literary subjects increased, and the human substance of fiction was to a degree enriched. In its attempt to rediscover and modernise, fiction took as its model inter-war Romanian literature and, to a certain extent, post-war French prose. The ideal of writers in the mid-1960s was to reach the same heights as the inter-war period and to re-establish links that had been broken, but with a few exceptions, in regard to expression and form, they were still at the level of the pre-moderns.

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Nothing could exceed the enthusiasm that greeted, as a further sign of renewal, books that displayed not only a certain indifference to communist ideology, but placed in doubt the very justness of some of its theses.

This was the fiction that exposed certain "errors" and "shortfalls" of incipient socialism (Marin Preda, *The Morometes*, 2 vols., Ion Lăncrănjan, *The Cordovans*, Al. Ivasiuc, *The Birds*).

Accepted and even encouraged by the new Party leadership, who had an interest in transforming the errors of the system and ideology into personal mistakes, the fiction of the "obsessive decade" also filled a void, a niche.

But this time it was a species of prose without a past, something new in the history of Romanian literature, and whose emergence only the political developments specific to totalitarian regimes could foster.

Its success caused a breach in the regime's defences. Through it slipped a number of major writers, who broadened the problematic and thereby inaugurated *the onerous process of reconquering the truth in the widest sense* (political, historical, social, moral). It was in this way

that "unorthodox" philosophical, religious and moral reflections were able to slip through in literary guise: the nation's history, with details formerly impossible to divulge, could now be examined and was examined with an enthusiasm that was often deleterious.

Many of these generally well-intentioned writers published a prose that was *necessary* at the social and political level in that period of history. It refreshed our memories, it drew our attention to the excesses and villainies of every kind that had been perpetrated or tolerated by the Party and it took upon itself the function of keeping watch and sounding the alarm. But however beneficial it may have been in the context of the times, this was not a function of literature.

To the honour of our writers (and their hard core in particular), who proved capable of putting up psychological resistance to new political pressures, the July Theses (1971), along with all the ample means of propaganda then brought to bear, did not have any effect. Initiated and rigorously supervised by Nicolae Ceauşescu, the ideological re-indoctrination of cultural life did not have any major consequences, except in the media.

After an interval of disarray, *the same fear of a return to the situation of the 1948-53 early communist period*, in other words the memory of the nightmare, created solidarity among writers and they regrouped to form a *consolidated generation with a shared idea, ready to defend the aesthetic ideal*.

The solidarity of writers from different generations (in the sense of both age groups and writers of similar styles) and the coming together of a broad front to defend art's status augured well for the destiny of Romanian literature and were proof that its aesthetic ideal could not be budged.

And so, researchers of this period will be delighted to observe that despite the new commandments and pressure from all kinds of retrograde forces, poetry and prose continued to distance themselves from the socialist-realist past.

The process of modernisation and Europeanisation begun in the previous decade was pushed far ahead.

Therefore, as it turned out, a regime that did not employ direct administrative measures and draconian solutions (like in the 1950s) was rather stimulating for writers. The more or less explicit thought that you were undertaking something against the grain of what was demanded by an increasingly unpopular regime, the very idea that you knew you were taking part in a resistance movement, even if it was only through culture, had become mobilising.

It was in this period, which signalled an ideological regress, that the number of artistic options increased and the first novels to surpass those of the inter-bellum in their technical subtlety appeared (the emergence of the first writers in the mould of Faulkner, Borges, Marquez, Joyce). Imaginative fiction gained its rightful place, albeit a place it had rarely occupied in a literature such as ours, where *memory* rather than creative fantasy rules. Even meta-literature claimed its rights, in a continually increasing number of self-reflexive fictions.

It may be said that the period between 1971 and 1989 (the longest and most fertile of the literary phases under Romanian communism) proved to be favourable to stylistic refinement, pure artistry, and escapism.

Thematically speaking, there were no longer as many interdictions (apart from the ban on references to morbid sexuality, belief in God, the rotten foundations of socialism, and the ineptitudes of the Ceauşescu regime).

Moreover, Romanian prose now paradoxically achieved the greatest degree of complexity in its entire history, a complexity that may be understood in every sense.

Nicolae Breban demonstrated his predilection for "cases" and unpredictable behaviour (*Annunciation*, 1977, *Don Juan*, 1981), brilliantly illustrating the introspective and analytical genre of prose, a genre still underrepresented in Romania. And only an obtuse mind could ignore the progress in the knowledge of human beings that these novels revealed in comparison with inter-war novels of the same nature.

As a delayed reaction to the levelling tendencies of socialist realism and to the exclusion of outstanding individuals from its sphere of interest, the emphasis shifted from the typical to the exceptional and unpredictable (a component of human complexity).

Prose that evoked extraordinary lives re-entered the stage.

These were either the lives of heroes from "lesser history," the civil history of recent times, which was often merciless towards individuals that were out of the ordinary, as in the novels of Constantin Ţoiu (*Gallery of Wild Vines*, *The Chaperone*, *Falling into the World*), or the lives of the heroes who had forged the "greater history," as in the novels *Pyre and Flame* and *1784 Changing Times* by Eugen Uricaru and *Prince Ghika* by Dana Dumitriu.

Writers' interest in "cases," in "unpredictable human natures," in exceptions and the exceptional, as well as in the obsession with the salvation of national history and its values known and unknown, also seem to have been late responses, the expression of a reaction to the levelling cynicism of communist ideology and its scorn for national history, the creative individual and the elite.

Arising from an idealisation of the past, the obsession with salvation now seemed to mobilise writers to compose by employing the methods of modern narrative, drawing on salvaged fragments of memory, on sociographies full of symbolic meanings and mythic suggestion. Sorin Titel (*The Faraway Land*; *The Bird and the Shadow*; *The Rapid Moment*; *Woman, Behold Thy Son*) recomposes the mythic world of the Banat without discarding the acuity of realist observation and narrative innovation. Mircea Ciobanu (*Histories I-V*) paints an impressive social fresco setting out from a family chronicle and endowing the reconstructive narrative with a huge network of significations, analogies and symbols.

In other words, in the creative space there was a return (also by way of a reaction) to the appetite for the epic, and the quantity of epic gave rise to sweeping, fresco-like representations: social, historical, family

frescoes, now painted with a more confident brush and more numerous, well-assimilated techniques: simultaneity, musical structures, alternations of tempo, and so on.

Characters began to move from one book to another and writers seemed interested in creating worlds of their own, recognisable universes or realms, governed by a specific way of life (D. R. Popescu, M. Ciobanu), realms that were sometimes coloured by the oneiric, sometimes by the absurd, and not infrequently by the magical and mythological (drawn from the national store of folk beliefs).

New structures and combinations appeared: fiction fused with the essay, realism with the self-reflexive.

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In that period – one not distant in time from that in which escapist literature had been condemned – there was a burgeoning of realist fictions into which the fantastic intruded, somewhat similar to south-American magic realism and superior to comparable fictions of the inter-bellum. It might be said that thereby the extreme point of the emancipation from socialist-realist dogmatism, and likewise canonical realism, was reached. Books such as those written by Ştefan Bănulescu, Ştefan Agopian, George Bălăiţă and Mircea Cărtărescu were to seal the complete victory of fantasy and the creative imagination.

Read today in their spirit and letter, novels of the kind written back then seem to us to be a plea for the power and destiny of artistic fiction, whose mere competing presence seemed destined to strike a discordant note with political power and its ideological fictions.

On the other hand, the eagerness to fill other niches, other voids, showed no signs of abating, so much so that in the previous decade, a number of traditional areas of Romanian prose were barely covered, and even then only superficially. The tendency towards rapid synchronisation and experimentation with the new has always been stronger in Romania than that of going deeper into the themes and methods of great traditional realist fiction. The change in the literary landscape, through the advancement of new literary formulas (capable of bringing swift success) gives a certain satisfaction to the writer's pride, one that is impossible to ignore. Marin Sorescu (*The Vision of the Burrow*) and Paul Georgescu (*Baroque Summer*, *Troubled Solstice*, *Siesta*, *The Pluperfect*), as well as other lesser writers, ventured to write fantastical and ludic literature.

The prose of the "Tîrgovişte School" (written years earlier but not published until that period) was also perhaps ludic in intent, but in the sustained performances of M. H. Simionescu, Radu Petrescu, Costache Olăreanu, and Tudor Ţopa it became, not infrequently, self-referential and parodic.

Although different in their artistic temperaments, the writers of the Tîrgovişte School together opened up new perspectives for the understanding of literature, different than the still official perspective that literature reflected reality. They anticipated the vision of the eighties-generation prose writers and poets, who lent strong impetus to the modernisation of post-war literature, uncovering the mechanism specific to writing and altering the perception of the literary act as the production of meaning.

Of course, in the Tîrgovişte school it is possible to identify a group poetics, as is proven by an inventory of shared *topoi*, themes and rhetorical devices and in particular by the sovereign presence of the *workshop diary*. This was also the natural means whereby their referential prose was transformed – in ways that differed from one writer to the next – into self-referential reflection.

The literary and parodic prose of the Tîrgovişte school, together with the stylistic exercises of Romulus Vulpescu, Modest Morariu and Paul Georgescu and texts characterised by deliberately displayed self-referentiality (those of critic and author Gheorghe Iova) or appended self-referentiality (works by Gheorghe Crăciun) also represent one of the extreme limits reached by the emancipation from the official realism.

The leap from mimesis to poesis was one of the visible signs of the move beyond the aesthetic horizon of the inter-bellum. Such texts presaged the twilight of modernism.

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In the meantime, no few prose writers continued the onerous process of revealing the (political, historical, social, moral) truth, that is, the struggle against the Orwellian Ministry of Truth.

Under the new conditions, the authorities were prepared to tolerate, as they had in the previous decade, the exposure of the errors made in the "obsessive decade" and their consequences, accepting the (implicit) antithesis between the present (the Ceauşescu regime) and the past (the Dej regime) as a means of paying homage to the new leader.

As it was hard to gauge how far the urge to expose the past (something that gave the reading public great satisfaction) could go, the censors were ever vigilant, even when the authors in question enjoyed the Party's trust (Ion Lăncrăjan, *The Clay Effigy*, *The Suffering of the Descendants*, *The Son of the Drought*, Dinu Săraru, *Some Peasants*, Petre Sălcudeanu, *The Library of Alexandria*).

Not only the aforementioned, but also gifted novelists (Al. Ivasiuc, *The Birds*, Constantin Ţoiu, *Gallery with Wild Vines*, Petre Popescu, *The Bacchic End*, Marin Preda, *The Most Beloved of Mortals*) resorted to stratagems, small concessions, and defensive mechanisms in order to publish their "denunciations."

Exposure of the noxiousness of the Ceauşescu-era present required an even greater number of stratagems. By recourse to allusion, allegory, parable and analogy it was possible to reveal the mechanisms of absolute power, for example in a number of short stories by Alexandru Monciu-Sudinski, in *The Black Church* by A. E. Baconsky (not published until 1990, but broadcast at length on Radio Free Europe), and in *The Lobster* by Alexandru Ivasiuc.

In his novels Augustin Buzura likewise took on the politically as well as aesthetically risky mission of bearing

witness to a demoralising climate, to the mood of Romanian intellectuals who had lost their bearings in the last, morbid two decades of the Ceauşescu regime.

Such books corrected the radiant social picture that the political leadership and writers servile to Party ideology had been trying for years and years to impose.

They can be interpreted either as a niche literature or as a literature of reaction (one that took on a demystifying psycho-sociological function), or as both.

Just as literature as a whole was gradually rediscovering its literariness, which had been ignored or banished in the early years of communism, the *literature of disclosure* was trying gradually to re-conquer the falsified or ignored truth.

Both species of prose indicate a predictable direction of evolution and a deducible destiny. The second strove also to achieve the finality of the first and did not succeed, just as it did not succeed in entirely fulfilling its aim, since under communism no novelist could have told the whole truth. It is also the reason why the public quickly lost interest in such prose after the Revolution.

But the first category, prose that aspired to literariness, also sometimes attempted to take on, if only in passing and for the sake of public success, the mission of reassessing, under the pretext of fiction, the figures and events of a national history distorted by Party historiography. Writers were able to take advantage of the capacious nature of the novel, a genre protean and useful to all, able to absorb, like a spring, information of every kind, historical, ethical, psychological and philosophical reflections impossible to find elsewhere, as they were omitted in the press, official treatises and textbooks.

Under the cover of fiction, writers such as Marin Preda (*Delirium*), D. R. Popescu (*The Lame Rabbit*), Gabriela Adameşteanu (*Wasted Morning*), and Bedros Horasangian (*The Waiting Room*) prepared the ground for a gradual revision of the official viewpoints.

A strange phenomenon of convergence arose within the ghetto of the Ceauşescu era.

The scribes servile to Party policy aspired to aesthetic achievements; writers with subversive political intentions did not feel they were absolved from the rigours of art; aestheticising spirits in love with pure art did not refrain from slipping in little allusions and did not protest if their works were read in a political key, since almost everything was read that way.

In addition, there were also phenomena of usurpation: *servile prose* borrowed procedures and techniques established by subversive prose and employed the diversionary trick of "revealing" part of the truth and realistically describing, with accuracy and talent, aspects of secondary importance.

After finishing a book, it was not easy for a reader to situate it on one or the other side of the political barricade or to be persuaded to remain in the pure space of fiction, content with the pleasures of art.

In any event, as a consequence of readers being accustomed to expect a literature of political disclosures and revelation of the truth, a large part of Romanian prose ran the risk of being read in an allusive/subversive key.

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The attempts of certain young authors of short prose (many of them from the eighties generation, including Ioan Groşan, Adriana Bittel, Nicolae Iliescu, Cristian Teodorescu, Bedros Horasangian, and, in particular, Mircea Nedelciu) to record "minor reality" in all its concreteness, to write, in other words, a prose of authenticity (half a century after the young writers of different times had given priority to diary-like recording), provided the satisfaction of "justice being done" and took the place of political reaction.

In fact, such short prose primarily expressed a need for the real, for life, for experience, for authenticity, and heralded the resurgence of post-war realism.

The naked transcription of the insignificant everyday coincided with a similar tendency, detectable in the poetry of the late-1970s (Constantin Abăluţă, Petre Stoica, Victor Felea, Marin Sorescu, Ioana Ieronim) and early-1980s (the eighties generation).

Those texts (whether prose or poetry) reclaimed for posterity the grey, depressing image of socialism and had an involuntarily subversive effect.

On the other hand, they also represented an early, natural reaction to the "artistic life," which is to say, the excess of literariness resulting from the impulse towards the aesthetic of a literature too long under ideological control.

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We might say that the landscape of the literature written under communism, precisely because of its unnaturalness, because of the dramatic story contained in every fissure and every landform, had the potential to become more exciting than that which emerges in normal times. It somewhat resembles the strange landscape of the Mururoa Atoll or Chernobyl after the disaster.

If we view with the closest attention (and with the intense concentration of a spaceman landing on an alien planet) not the burnt surfaces, but what has grown from the nourishing ash of the disaster, we will observe, to our astonishment, trees that have taken on fantastical shapes, precocious germinations, accelerated reproduction, errors in growth, enclaves, areas of refuge with wonderful islands of vegetation, and above all the extraordinary respiration of plants ready to sprout, like in a fairy tale, and to cover, with their biological murmur, the traces of devastation.

Few phases of Romanian literature offer more expressivity or are more easily able to replace the aesthetic component.

Eugen Negrici



Contemporary Romanian Drama (1948-2015)

In the more than forty years in which Romania was a communist state (1948-1989), drama was probably the literary genre most affected by censorship. At the same time, authors who adopted the communist ideology in their plays and presented historical or contemporary events in concordance with the demands of the ruling Communist Party enjoyed the greatest benefits. From this situation flowed a number of consequences whose effects are visible even today, twenty-five years after the fall of the communist regime, and which have stamped certain characteristics on dramatic literature.

In the first place, a large part of the plays published and performed in Romania between 1948 and the 1989 Revolution are devoid of any literary value, being mere propaganda tools, produced either by direct command or as a result of the intuition with which certain authors studied the Communist Party line and sought to anticipate what was known as a "social commission."

Such plays might refer to the historical past, in which the heroic deeds of rulers (the voievodes of old, but never the kings of Romania from the period 1866-1947) were presented. To these were added heroes and patriots from the "common people", who in their historical period talked using the slogans of the immediate present. Other plays glorified present-day events, in which peasants, workers and, more rarely, intellectuals implemented the policies of the one-party state. Plays were written about steel production in Romania (*The Fortress of Flame* by the now-forgotten Mihail Davidoglu), about the achievement of coke production for the first time in Romania (*Open Windows* by the able Paul Everac, a playwright not at all lacking in talent, which he unreservedly placed in the service of communist ideology, bringing him enormous material advantages). There were plays about oil production, the building of the Bucharest Metro, the construction of a canal linking the Danube to the Black Sea, and so on. There were also plays which, by contrast, castigated or mocked situations regarded as opprobrious by the authorities: discontented citizens who left the country (*A Moth to the Gas Lamp* by the same Paul Everac), the proliferation of religious sects (in Romanian plays religion was presented solely as a "negative phenomenon"), vacillation on the part of (some) intellectuals when it came to participating in socialist construction, although in the end they would lend their wholehearted support, and so on.

Even such plays, some of which were inspired by the history of the Communist Party (a falsified history, obviously, and written to order), were vigilantly inspected by the censors, and if the ideological nuances shifted, as happened after the death of Gheorghiu-Dej, when Nicolae Ceauşescu became leader, certain plays vanished from the theatre play bills and from radio and television, to be immediately replaced with others written according to the new requirements.

Such sloganeering plays cannot be read today other than for purposes of historical research, and there is no question of them ever being performed again. This despite some of them having certain dramatic qualities and having been written by authors who, in a free society, would have been capable of penning worthwhile plays. Such is the case of Alexandru Mirodan's comic drama *The Journalists*, which presents the "ideological struggle" of the communist press, developing a wholly mendacious thesis: namely that the Party press could have an influence on the decisions of the Communist Party. The author subsequently emigrated to Israel, abandoning all connections with the theses he had formerly served.

Another consequence of ideologised drama was that after 1989 theatre people no longer wanted to put on Romanian dramas, repudiating the authors in whose plays they had acted on command, but also other, innocent playwrights. Some of these authors had not had plays published or performed during the communist dictatorship precisely because they refused to compromise or quite simply because they were too young in the period and only began to write after 1989. This tendency persists to this day.

A third consequence of the above was that from inertia a part of Romania's playwrights, as well as theatre people (actors, directors), rejected metaphorical and parabolic plays. Under communism, the only means of saying anything relatively valid was to disguise it in a vague form, to place the action and characters in a nebulous past or in a utopian or dystopian world. The most important playwrights of the period from 1964 to 1989 wrote plays whose spatial and temporal settings were vague. 1964 was the year when there was a relative "thaw", and for a few years the censors became more indulgent. After that, things got progressively harsher, becoming unbearable in the final seven or eight years of communism. We can point to the metaphorical plays of Marin Sorescu, Iosif Naghiu, D. R. Popescu, Ion D. Sârbu (a political prisoner, although he had been a communist before the Party came to power), Horia Lovinescu, Dumitru Solomon and many others. Such plays also wagered on complicity between audience, actors and authors, and present-day events and the immediate reality were presented on stage as happenings from a fictive, hypothetical world of the distant, even pre-biblical past.

As a result, after the abolition of censorship, some playwrights theorised a raw realism, often accompanied by shocking language, the play as a "slice of life," thereby returning, rather bizarrely and in any event unconsciously, to one of the demands of the erstwhile Party, which firmly demanded literary writing "drawn from everyday life."

Despite a long time in the wilderness and lengthy captivity, Romanian drama of the period 1948-1989 nonetheless produced a few valuable plays that have continued to be performed even after the Revolution. In the period of censorship, some of these plays took advantage of certain events allowed to be presented on stage, particularly during the "thaw" of 1964-1971. For example, Marin Sorescu's *Riverbed* takes as its backdrop the floods that hit Romania in 1970 and made use of them to claim the right to be performed. Others of Sorescu's plays refer to history, namely Vlad the Impaler, who was later identified, without any basis in fact, with the fictional character Dracula. Vlad the Impaler was a figure approved of by the leadership, and Nicolae Ceauşescu even liked to identify himself with him, ignoring the Dracula myth, naturally.

Similarly, we may also cite works by D. R. Popescu, Horia Lovinescu, and Dumitru Solomon, about ancient philosophers, with whom the communists had no ideological axe to grind. Other plays were mercilessly struck by the censors, as were their authors. Iosif Naghiu's play *Hooded Eyes* took as its main character a policeman (called a militiaman in those days), who wears a hood to keep off the rain, but which also prevents him from seeing the criminals who have broken into the house of a writer and are terrorising him. The writer asks for the policeman's assistance in vain. The play gave rise to a review in the form of a one-page indictment in the Communist Party's official newspaper, *Scînteia* (The Spark) and was subsequently banned. The author was ostracised for many years, unable to make a living because his plays were no longer performed and he was not allowed to take any other job.

By the 1980's the censorship was suffocating, the only plays performed were "social commissions," and younger, "untried" playwrights were not even allowed to publish their work, let alone have their plays performed. And so it was that the most important Romanian playwright to emerge in those years, Matei Vişniec, emigrated and forged a career in France, with his work not being performed in Romanian until after 1989. Other young playwrights were forced to postpone their debut until after 1989. This shielded them from the brutality of the censors and they were able to write, with their plays appearing belatedly, but without obstruction. Such was the case of Vlad Zografi, Răzvan Petrescu, Petre Barbu, Radu Macrinici, Saviana Stănescu, Alina Nelega and others.

The 1989 Revolution led to the abrupt abolition of the communist regime and the rule of the one-party state over the whole of Romanian society. In this context, political debates, mostly televised live, and social upheavals monopolised the public attention. There was a decline in interest in literature in general and theatre in particular. Playwrights turned to journalism or other literary genres, which did not require the intermediation of a company of actors. State and municipal theatres came to be underfinanced, and so they have remained. Poorly financed, ephemeral theatre companies proliferated, coming together to produce a limited number of performances, usually sensational works translated from other languages.

In the first decade after 1989, playwriting became a wholly unprofitable occupation, and the chances of contemporary Romanian plays reaching the stage were paradoxically far lower than in the communist period, although political censorship was defunct. Competitions for new plays were held, individual authors published their work and there were also anthologies of plays, but the work included therein rarely reached the stage, although some of it deserved a better fate. Theatre producers continued to view contemporary Romanian drama with mistrust, regardless of whether it was by the "old" playwrights who had continued to write after 1989 (D. R. Popescu, Marin Sorescu, Dinu Grigorescu, Tudor Popescu, Paul Everac, Dumitru Solomon, Iosif Naghiu, Mircea Radu Iacoban, Radu F. Alexandru), by "mature" dramatists, who had remained in the shadows before 1989 and emerged in the new period of freedom (Lucia Verona, Mircea M. Ionescu, Paul Ioachim, Emil Mladin, Puşi Dinulescu, Adrian Lustig), or the "new" playwrights who made their debut immediately after 1989 (Vlad Zografi, Alina Mungiu, Alina Nelega, Petre Barbu, Radu Macrinici, Ştefan Caraman, Denis Dinulescu).

In the first two decades after the Revolution, authors established in other genres flirted with the theatre: Ioan Groşan, Hanibal Stănciulescu, Octavian Soviany, Paul Vinicius, Daniel Bănulescu, Răzvan Petrescu, Petre Barbu, Liviu Ioan Stoiciu, Marian Ilea. Other authors began as playwrights but subsequently took refuge in prose or the essay, where success was more easily achieved, because they did not require the mobilisation of a theatre company: Dan Lungu, Florina Ilis, Bogdan Mihai Dascălu, Dan Mihu, and even Alina Mungiu, who had been seen as the great hope for playwriting after her controversial *The Evangelists*.

Matei Vişniec was and continues to be the exception, an author much performed in Romania after garnering international success. Having emigrated from Romania in 1983 and recommended by productions of his plays abroad, Vişniec returned in force, aided by his talent, literary fecundity, and also his ability to write plays relatively simple to stage, plays that are both eloquent and ambiguous. The literary historians are in agreement that Matei Vişniec (1956-) is the most remarkable Romanian playwright of the last three decades. His drama has shifted from symbolic, dystopian plays with generic characters (the Gravedigger, the Hangman, the Commandant, etc.) to scenarios drawn from the reality of recent history. Now, the author seems to be more inclined towards prose, having published a number of novels in succession.

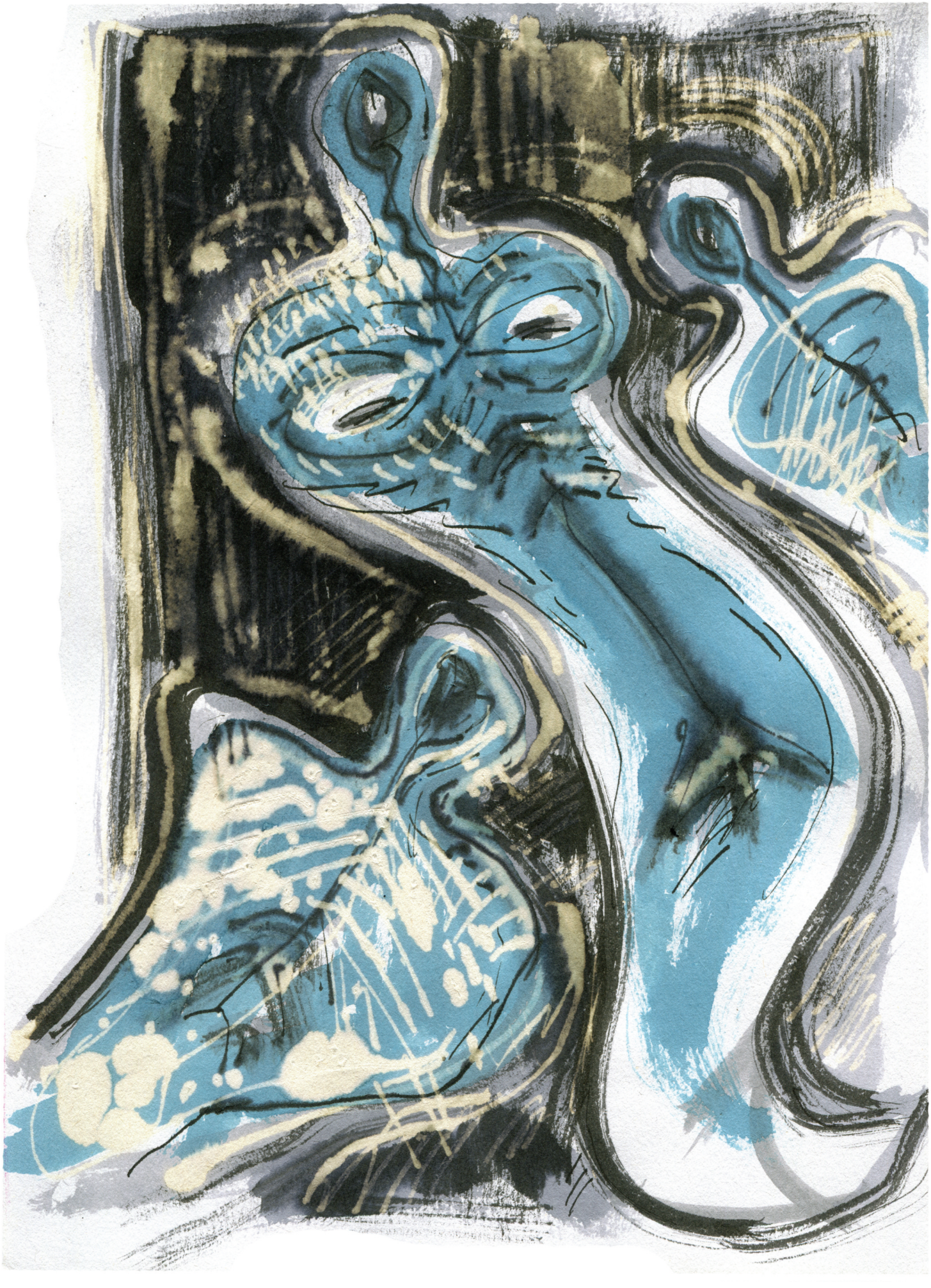
Other authors who emigrated before or even after the 1989 Revolution have returned to the Romanian stage, but none with the same success as Vişniec. They include Petru Dumitriu, George Astaloş, Virgil Tănase, and, much younger than the foregoing, Saviana Stănescu.

More recently, twenty to twenty-five years after the Revolution, Romanian drama has been staged more frequently at home and, albeit seldom, has been translated and staged in other cultural spaces. In recent years, there has been an increasing trend on the part of directors to create "scripts" that are often not even couched as a dramatic text, which are therefore intended only for a single performance. Such compositions can only be classed as literature if their authors nonetheless decide to put them down in a form that can be read and restaged in a performance other than the author's ad hoc production.

In parallel with this trend, Romanian drama in the proper sense continues to follow its destiny, one that, whatever one might say, is rather thankless. It is relatively rare for contemporary directors to stage a contemporary Romanian text; they prefer translations, the classics and their own textual improvisations, sometimes based on works from other genres, many of them blatantly unsuitable for dramatisation. Thus, well-known Romanian novels hard to imagine on stage have provided the pretext for ambitious shows whose results have been mediocre aesthetically.

Although in recent seasons Romanian theatres have been affected by a penury that has affected the number and the quality of productions, there have nonetheless been a number of premieres by contemporary playwrights. These have given rise to quite decent productions and include plays by writers of longstanding experience, who have remained faithful to the genre (Mircea M. Ionescu, Dinu Grigorescu, Lucia Verona, Olga Delia Mateescu), authors who are now part of the generation in the middle (Radu Macrinici, Ştefan Caraman, Ioan Bogdan Martin, Alina Nelega, Ştefan Peca, Marian Ilea), and aspiring young playwrights who fulfil hopes that the genre will survive (Carmen Dominte, Edith Negulici, Sânziana Popescu, Mimi Brănescu and others).

Horia Gârbea



Romanian Aesthetic Oneirism. The Adventures of a Group of Dreamers

In order to tell the story of aesthetic oneirism, we first have to go back in time. The history of twentieth-century Romanian literature cannot be understood outside its political and social context or against the backdrop of the major events that affected the whole of Europe in that period. After 1944, when the Romanian Army turned arms and joined the Allied side in the Second World War, and above all after Yalta, the influence of Soviet politics and culture in Romania gradually increased up to the point where a "new" type of literature was imposed, a literature created for the communist New Man: socialist realism, which, from 1947 onward, was to become the only artistic choice officially available to Romanian artists.

The two decades that followed were, with minor exceptions, a cultural desert, which was felt all the more acutely given that the arts had flourished as never before in inter-war Romania. For the important writers whom the period caught at the height of their powers, the period from 1947 to 1963, whereafter a relative thaw began, were years of writing for the desk drawer, if they were lucky enough not to be in prison. Such was the case of one of the writers who founded the oneiric group and who to this day has remained perhaps the most representative of the Romanian oneirists: Leonid Dimov. His meeting with Dumitru Tsepeneag and the young writers who took part in the *Luceafărul* (Hesperus) magazine cenacle in Bucharest enabled a small group of intellectuals to come together, who publicly raised the issue of creative freedom. They formed a small but vocal group, which discommoded the political establishment of the time and soon became bold enough to formulate its own poetics and to legitimise itself as a literary movement. This alone was sufficient to draw the attention of the authorities in a country controlled by the secret police, a country where, after the waves of arrests and internal deportations of the 1950s, people were accustomed to minding what they said and to whom they spoke, to keeping their opinions to themselves and not causing any trouble.

What is certain is that from 1947 to 1968, when Dumitru Tsepeneag published his article "In Search of a Definition," no other literary group had declared its existence in Romania. By placing the dream at the centre of their literary programme (in blatant opposition to the whole of Romanian literature at the time, which claimed to draw its lifeblood from reality), the oneirists formed from the outset a body separate from other writers, allowing them to play the game of literature according to different rules. The aestheticising programme of the oneirists, as we shall see, proclaimed a privileged space, that of the Artist, legislating, in other words, the autonomy of the aesthetic.

Therefore, the oneiric group began to take shape in 1968, in the wake of the first theoretical articles published by Dumitru Tsepeneag and Leonid Dimov. In his article "In Search of a Definition," Tspeneag made it clear: "For oneiric literature, as I conceive it, the dream is neither a source nor an object of study; the dream is a criterion. The difference is fundamental: I do not recount a dream (mine or anybody else's), but rather I try to construct a reality analogous to the dream. (...) Oneiric literature is a literature of infinite space and time, it is an attempt to create a parallel world, not homologous, but analogous to the ordinary world. It is a perfectly rational literature in its modality and means, even if it chooses as its criterion an irrational phenomenon."

As the oneirists began to write their works, yet another criterion was to prove decisive in oneiric literature, namely the pictorial, not in the static but rather in the visionary sense: "Both Brumaru and Turcea, not to mention Dimov, as well as others, whose literary production is regarded as prose, write paintings," observed Tsepeneag. Literary criticism in Romania often noted that Hieronymus Bosch, Monsu Desiderio, Giorgio de Chirico, Marc Chagall, and Joan Miró could easily be detected in Dimov's oneiric "paintings."

The aestheticism of the oneiric programme, or the appearance of aestheticism, did not fool the censors, however, and the oneirists were tolerated only as long as their discourse was not explicitly political, and as long as they could get away with it. The Securitate archives stand witness to the fact that both Dimov and Tsepeneag were kept under very close surveillance by the secret police as early as 1967,

for two reasons: their friendship with dissident Paul Goma and their critical opinions regarding the Communist Party and its leader, Nicolae Ceauşescu, the President of Romania up until 1989.

In August 1968, Dimov and Tsepeneag instigated a general meeting of the Writers' Union to express solidarity with the Czechoslovak people and to advocate artistic freedom. It was the two writers' first public act of rebelliousness, after which the Securitate summoned them, in order that they might "get some sense into their heads." Nevertheless, in the period from 1968 to 1971 the Romanian oneirists published a number of major works. Even if, unlike other writers, they were not pampered by the regime, at this time the oneirists were recognised as genuine writers and they were even praised by a number of critics less sensitive to the preferences of the Party.

The oneirists in the 1960s and 70s

Viewed in perspective, the early works of the oneiric writers were definitely influenced by the prose of Franz Kafka. The leader of the oneiric group, Dumitru Tsepeneag, openly declared himself a descendant of the Prague writer.

The novels *To the Point of Disappearance* (1968) by Vintilă Ivănceanu, *The Long Journey of the Prisoner* (1971) by Sorin Titel, and *Arpièges/Vain Art of the Fugue* (1973, in the French translation by Alain Paruit; first published in Romanian in 1991) by Tsepeneag are parables of imprisonment and the (vain) attempt to escape from the rule of a tyrannical, absurd and faceless power, which suppresses freedom and negates the value of the human being.

In *To the Point of Disappearance*, the main character, Ion Dragalina, lives through a hell that the parabolic language of the novel cannot disguise: the daily life of political prisoners in a communist gaol. The plot of the novel preserves the givens of existentialist literature: imprisoned for an unknown crime, tortured physically and mentally, the protagonist is the absolute victim, with no escape. To the Romanian reader, the methods of torture are recognisable, because they appear as such in the prison memoirs of political prisoners of that period, such as Paul Goma, Corneliu Coposu and Nicolae Steinhardt.

Also undoubtedly Kafkaesque are the poetic prose pieces in Dumitru Tsepeneag's first published works, *Exercises* (1966), *Cold* (1967) and *Waiting* (1972), and the novels he published after his departure to France: *Arpièges/Vain Art of the Fugue*, *Le mot sablier/The Sandglass Word* (written in Romanian and French, with the two languages intermeshing and flowing into one another according to the principle of a sandglass, whence the title), *Les noces nécessaires/The Necessary Nuptials*. Tsepeneag's prose, particularly in his early periods, excels in conveying a mood; the illogical and the absurd, the unmotivated, agglomeration, tense and constant waiting, and hints of the oneiric/nightmarish create an all-pervading universal mood of disquiet, since in Tsepeneag's prose a character's destiny follows a course independent of his will or actions.

Sorin Titel also began his career under the auspices of Kafka. The title of his novel *The Long Journey of the Prisoner* (1971) perfectly sums up the epic narrative, articulating in advance its two themes: the endlessness of the journey and imprisonment. The journey of the prisoner and his two warders suggests Sisyphean torture, and finally all three become victims of the same fate, which unites the guilty and innocent alike.

In the same key were books by Iulian Neacşu (*Island. Texts – Signs – Apocrypha*, 1968) and Florin Gabrea (*Hanimore*), although in the second author, more than in the work of Ivănceanu, Titel and even Neacşu, it was possible to feel more strongly the influence of the Surrealist model: many pages could have been written by a disciple of Boris Vian, with a forerunner in Kafka.

In this period, the oneirist poets were marginal. At a time when Romanian poets were rediscovering lofty lyricism, re-forging the link with inter-war modernism across the abyss that had been socialist realism, the oneirists stepped into the arena ready to do polemic battle. Leonid Dimov, Virgil Mazilescu, Daniel Turcea and Emil Brumaru were not adepts of Mallarmé-style lyricism, but rather wrote "prose pieces," epic poems with characters that would later become emblematic in Romanian literature: a werewolf and a tennis player by the name of Clotilda, in the work of Dimov; "Guillaume the poet and the building superintendent" in Mazilescu; Julian the Hospitaller in Brumaru. While the leading poets of the time were rehabilitating the metaphysical, the oneirists chose the opposite direction, claiming, for example: "Poetry begins where philosophy no longer has any business, because the latter's arms are too coarse" (Leonid Dimov).

The vindication of the oneirists

Today, almost half a century after the birth of oneirism in 1968, it might be said that the oneirists have been vindicated. Leonid Dimov, who unfortunately did not live to see the fall of communism, is regarded as one of the most important, if not the most important, Romanian poets of the post-war period. The most famous contemporary Romanian poet, the award-winning Mircea Cărtărescu, cites him as one of his masters. Emil Brumaru, who had great difficulty publishing his first collection of poems in 1970, is today a literary star in Romania. A poet of the intimate, from "summer kitchens" in which even the cupboards fall in love to the "infernal comedy" of an Eros that is both domestic and perverse, Brumaru is read and reread by everyone from lyceum pupils to his fellow septuagenarians. Dumitru Tsepeneag, who has lived in France since the 1970s, regularly publishes books in French and Romanian, which are well received in the Romanian cultural world. In recent years he has received major awards for his life's work, the most recent being the prestigious *Observator Cultural* magazine Prize. Also reread and re-evaluated are poets Daniel Turcea and Virgil Mazilescu.

Luminiţa Corneanu

The Tîrgovişte School: the literature of literature

In the beginning was the game. Playing at literature. In the 1940's, a few lyceum students from Tîrgovişte gradually transformed their reading workshop into a creative workshop: they published their own magazines and books in manuscript. Painstakingly handwritten, illustrated with drawings in ink or watercolours, embellished with vignettes, skilfully bound, these became works of art in the true sense of the word. They were handmade books comparable with those made by the monks of the Middle Ages, although the literary texts manufactured by those adolescents were intended to be avant-gardist and subversive. The founders of the group, Radu Petrescu (1927-1982), Mircea Horia Simionescu (1928-2001) and Costache Olăreanu (1929-2000), took an oath of honour: not to publish their manuscripts before the age of forty. The three musketeers were to continue to write and share their literary experiences during their time at university (adopting Tudor Ţopa along the way). This miniature human ecosystem became a *Zone* à la Tarkovsky, a space of friendship and creative freedom, a refuge for the spirit in a time of dehumanisation: the Romanian communist regime.

The prose writers of the "Tîrgovişte School" emerged onto the literary scene – after underground writing activities lasting more than twenty years – during the intellectual and artistic climate of apparent normality brought by the interval of "liberalisation" between 1964 and 1971: Mircea Horia Simionescu made his debut in 1969 with *The Well-tempered Ingenioso. Onomastic Dictionary*, Radu Petrescu in 1970, with the novel *Matei Iliescu*, and Costache Olăreanu a year later, with *View from a Balcony*. Although their books were published in an interval in which the oppressive-coercive political system relaxed somewhat, the Tîrgovişte writers turned their backs on history, showing themselves to be preoccupied above all with the forms and mechanisms of literature. In his *Romanian Literature Under Communism: Prose* (2003), critic and literary historian Eugen Negrici appropriately includes them in a chapter titled: "Self-referential and parodic literary prose. The literature of stylistic exercises. The literature of literature. From mimesis to poiesis." Being relatively innocuous thanks to its apolitical nature, its focus on the problem of *literariness*, and its innovative urges, the literature of the Tîrgovişte School may therefore be classed (in parallel with the other tendency to salvage and rediscover inter-war modernism) within the process whereby Romanian prose, having fallen seriously ill, almost to the point of annihilation, during the ferocious Stalinist years, finds its way back to good health and regeneration.

Experimenting literarily for its own sake, the Tîrgovişte writers not only moved away from traditional realism, but also modernist psychologism, revived in 1960's Romania as neo-modernism and enriched with various forms that had not been assimilated earlier (Joyce, Faulkner, Woolf) because of the all-razing juggernaut of socialist realism, as well as with the more recent influences of the French *nouveau roman*. If we accept the existence of a "Romanian postmodernism without a postmodernity" (Mircea Martin), a solely aesthetic and theoretical postmodernism, lacking in the (Marxist) political dimension that characterises the ideology of Western and, in particular, American postmodernism, then Mircea Horia Simionescu, Radu Petrescu and Costache Olăreanu are among the writers that signal the end of modernism in Romania and inaugurate – artificially and non-programmatically – a new literary paradigm. In his *Romanian Postmodernism* (1999) Mircea Cărtărescu believes that they followed "the mannerist, ultra-aestheticised line of European late-modernism until they broke free of the bounds of veracity and the gravity of experiment, anchoring themselves in the immanent space of pure fictionality."

In fact the Tîrgovişte writers, and Mircea Horia Simionescu in particular, initially influenced by the

mannerism of Călinescu, illustrate and legitimise, involuntarily and non-mimetically – unlike the programmatic postmodernists of the Eighties Generation, who, for the most part, acclimatised Western experiments – the "original" variant of Romanian "greenhouse" postmodernism, a hyper-mannerist and apolitical postmodernism. The prose writers of the Tîrgovişte School push to the very limit the formal and stylistic innovations of modernism, casting anchor, after lengthy experimentation and exploration in the underground, on a different shore of literature, unknown in Romanian at that time. They initiated, albeit with a far smaller audience, what Eugen Negrici reproaches the eighties-ists for: "the interruption of Romanian literature's path to recovery."

Nevertheless, if we look at the full half of the glass, we can be glad that the emergence of the Tîrgovişte "phenomenon" hastened the re-synchronisation of our literature with Western literatures. In the 1960's, we had "perhaps the most evolved literature in the East," as Monica Lovinescu observes, since in this zone of the communist gulag, "from terror there was a move to literature, but not literature about the terror. The results of aesthetic escape are remarkable. (. . .) Whereas in other countries, the pen sped over the page too quickly because it had too much to reveal, to confess, because all the sloughs of lies and hypocrisy, the moral mire, had to be drained, in Romania writers worked painstakingly with the word, they tried to make the leap to contemporaneity not through subject matter, but through form." The bitter tone here regarding the "sacrifice of the truths of being" for the sake of the evolution of literary forms and the "salvation of culture" is consonant with that of Eugen Negrici. But she insists on the morality of culture above all, because otherwise, as that proponent of *The Ethic of Non-forgetting* says, "literature will always be responsible for its deeds in its own words" (*Short Waves. Indirect Diary*, 1990).

The vast literary experiment engaged in by the postmodernism-oriented Tîrgovişte prose writers, one that was immoderate compared with other previous destabilising experiments that had brought about new paradigms, seems all the more surprising in that it occurred against the backdrop of an incompleteness in Romanian literature rather than an over-saturation. Far from having exhausted its resources, modernism was trying, in the period of the "thaw", that oasis of (pseudo-)liberalisation, to make up the ground it had lost after the advent of the communist dictatorship. In those circumstances, the choice of/propensity for experiment on the part of Mircea Horia Simionescu, Radu Petrescu and Costache Olăreanu was sooner subjective in cause, relating to their intellectual, spiritual and temperamental makeup. The oversized interest in the technical problems of literature may, however, have been not only an aesthetic "dispute", but also an ethical choice – an "east-ethics", as Monica Lovinescu defines art with an aesthetic face unravaged by ideological smallpox, i.e. an art that has made no moral compromise: "in its watershed moments, our literature has been forced to feed itself, in order to survive, with unusual courage, both aesthetically and ethically, which resides in something very simple: not to allow the word to lie. The starting point is ethical, the result aesthetic: when words are stained with the lie, they deteriorate, are corrupted, suffocate. And evil, as Maiorescu said, is contagious: even if you reserve your lies for the newspaper, the ink with which you have written them little by little invades the pages of the 'work' you intended to keep apart from any contamination" (*East-ethics. Short Waves IV*, 1994).

The "untimeliness" of the Tîrgovişte writers was not an act of rebellion or voluntary opposition, but rather a defensive reaction, a means of defence involving "desertion" through writing. Mircea Horia Simionescu himself says that ignoring the historical present was also based on the weakness of fear: "I would call it defence. That is, ignorance of the times in which we lived. Some people say: 'You opposed.' What were we supposed to oppose? We were devilishly scared. Not for any other reason than we were scared we would be searched and they would take our writings away, writings that were an extension of our games. (. . .) We were not fighters. We were indifferent. I was the one who was the most regimented, since I worked at *The Spark*, but I did something completely different than what was demanded. During working hours I was a well-behaved sort, who could have been accused of a lack of combativeness" (*Ziua*, no. 3404/2005). But such an attitude remains the "heroism of weakness," to use Thomas Mann's expression, since the Tîrgovişte School made no ethical compromises in their aesthetic creations. Since they had to live and write in a "period bereft of culture, in order to endure, they shut themselves up with their writing in the cells of literary erudition, of the aesthetic, as an all-consuming vocation, reading for years at a time (in the period when they were neither known nor published) each other's gospels of survival" (*Contemporary Posterity. Short Waves III*, 1994). Rather than on open opposition, they wagered on thematic and formal non-alignment, on patient resistance and consistency in the "trenches" of their own literature. The non-publication of their manuscripts at the time – quite apart from the adolescent "oath" that is part of the group's "mythology" – is in any case symptomatic of the way in which they positioned themselves relative to the "terror of history."

Although when they were published, they enjoyed positive, sometimes laudatory, reviews, the unusual, today even disconcerting, books of the Tîrgovişte prose writers were not part of the mainstream before 1989, when political novels about the "obsessive decade" and the so-called "Aesopian", parabolic novels of "truths half-spoken" were at the forefront. Wider recognition, which began tentatively in the 1980's, increased

considerably in the post-communist period and was due primarily to the reclamation of Mircea Horia Simionescu and the other Tîrgovişte writers as forerunners of Romanian postmodernism by its main proponents: Micrea Cărtărescu, Ion Bogdan Lefter, Gheorghe Crăciun. Moreover, the need to revise and reorder the canon after a period of dictatorship characterised by political immixture in literature favoured the rediscovery and re-evaluation of the marginals of the 1960's and 70's (including poets Mircea Ivănescu and Leonid Dimov), and this became manifest in the increasing number of new editions and critical commentaries.

The prose of the Tîrgovişte writers is characterised by the ludic and ironic; intertextuality, be it subtle, as in Radu Petrescu's *Matei Iliescu*, or blatant, as in the work of Mircea Horia Simionescu, which includes false, invented references à la Borges; parody and pastiche; stylistic polymorphism; authorial narcissism; the autobiographical and self-fictionalising; metatextuality; the weakening of fictional ontologies; the "totalisation" of discourse, through the diary form in Radu Petrescu's *Meteorology of Reading*; and inventory-like texts in the writing of Mircea Horia Simionescu: *Onomastic Dictionary* and *General Bibliography*. Along the path of parodic meta-literature, indebted to matchless textual *bricolage*, Mircea Horia Simionescu went to the very limits, as far as ecstatic artificiality and conventionalisation of the anti-conventional. The denunciation of the literary work as an artefact and the "disenchantment" of literature do not preclude its fetishisation, and nor does the compensatory temptation of referentiality, and autobiographical reference in particular. In the *Well-tempered Ingenioso* tetralogy, the critical deconstruction of tradition is combined with the invention of a literary no man's land, where the procedures of anteriority are recombined, given new functions, hybridised according to a rigorous and ludic recipe. *Onomastic Dictionary* is a text whose structure is musical and open, constructed according to the principle of the theme with variations, a "novel" of names and a carnival of literary forms. *General Bibliography*, a literary utopia, a model of the world as Library, represents a paradigm of textuality in a parodic key, wherein dystopian "germs" flourish, in the sense of political subversion. *Breviary (Historia Calamitatum)* is a parable and a parody of utopian (political) discourse. *Toxicology or Beyond Good and This Side of Evil* is a deconstruction of the autobiographical genre. At the same time, the writer radicalises the technical obsessions of literary modernity and prefaces (in a way even outclasses) the formal and stylistic gains of the Eighties Generation postmodernists. In the sphere of prose, it was not until Gheorghe Crăciun's *Pupa russa* and Mircea Cărtărescu's *Blinding*, both published in the post-communist period, that the breadth, aesthetic achievement and paradigmatic value of Mircea Horia Simionescu's Alexandrine masterpiece *The Well-tempered Ingenioso* were marched. Placed in the *meta-fictional* "family" of post-modernism by critic Carmen Muşat ("preponderantly *ludic*, *self-ironic* and *parodic*, characterised by epic discontinuity, blatant exposure of narrative strategies and procedures and systematic breaking of the constitutive rules of the work, a parody of literary conventions and direct challenge to the reader") alongside authors such as John Barth, Italo Calvino, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut, and Donald Barthelme, Mircea Horia Simionescu is a writer who cannot be ignored, but who has been done injustice through the absence of translations.

In the post-war period of Romanian culture, the prose writers of the Tîrgovişte School achieved a radical revision of the way in which literature is conceived and written.

Gabriela Gheorghişor



The Romanian Crime Novel: From the Well-tempered Paradoxes of the "Totalitarian" Detective Genre to the Mystery and Thriller of the New Millennium

We should say from the very start: the present text is rather like taking a photograph of a landscape from the air, in which only the dominant landforms and their most obvious particularities will be captured. The aim of establishing landmarks within a potential poetics of the genre absolves us to a large extent, but it does not stop us from signalling an alarming situation: although it represents a widely read segment of para-literature and includes works worthy of careful interpretation, the Romanian crime novel still does not have even a selective dictionary of authors, and even less so a study of its narrative structures, its stylistic particularities or the distinctive phases in its evolution. Here is one example: trying to undertake an analysis of the works of one of the champions of para-literature – Haralamb Zincă, author of more than fifty novels – we had at our disposal just four references from the press of the 1980's, which were merely announced the publication of the volumes in question, nothing more, and so the existence of those references was not even worth mentioning. The situation is identical even in the case of Rodica Ojog-Braşoveanu, another famous name and a writer regarded as "Romania's Agatha Christie."

Paradoxically and also by way of compensation, a televised survey, using a significant sample of one hundred and twenty-two people of different ages, levels of education and interests, came up with four Romanian crime novelists for the period 1960-2000, out of the ten names of authors required, as follows, in order of frequency: Rodica Ojog-Braşoveanu, George Arion, Haralamb Zincă, Petre Sălcudeanu.

These are clear signals of the fact that a researcher who focuses exclusively on the Romanian crime novel will, after investigation that is not at all easy, discover extremely interesting aspects of the ways in which Romanian authors have adapted to the imperatives of the format, frequently bringing innovations to it. It is precisely these original and innovative contributions that pointed us towards a novel by George Arion, which has enjoyed great success, has been translated into two other languages, and has been made into a film, but before we analyse it briefly, we think it necessary to make a few observations of a more general nature.

First of all, we will find it useful to bring back into discussion a fact of literary history: the adventure of the Romanian detective novel begins only a short while after the publication of Poe's short stories and Émile Gaboriau's *feuilletons*. Although it can only be regarded as a detective novel given a great deal of leeway, *The Murder on Strada Soarelui, or The Killers of Maria Popovici*, published by Panait Macri in 1885, represents the Romanian debut of the genre.

Despite this, it is possible to speak of the native detective novel, in its classic, integral format, only much later in Romania. Immediately after the First World War, there were a number of popular serials, specialising in varieties of the sensational: *Extraordinary Journeys*, *Far West*, *Adventure*, *Enigmas*, *Detective* and *Eccentric Club* saturated the market with translations from Pittigrilli (*Attack on Decency*, *The Chastity Belt*) and belatedly discovered Jules Verne and his scientific fantasies. The publications included translations of Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Sax Rohmer and Maurice Leblanc, but by far the champion was Edgar Wallace, whose work was translated almost in its entirety in inter-war Romania, making the author as well-known as Alexandre Dumas père had been half a century earlier.

In effect the Romanian detective novel did not exist until *The Spangled Kimono* (1932) by Victor Eftimiu, in which we find a number of the genre features that Cezar Petrescu tried to develop in *The Mechanical Ballet* (1932), but without managing to lend them any depth. It was not until Liviu Rebreanu's novel *Both of Them* (1940) that is possible to speak of a genuine detective plot, and a year later, *The Defence Has the Floor*, by Petre Bellu, a bestseller (forty thousand copies sold in a popular fifteen-lei series), attempted to insert a detective plot into a violent, melodramatic setting, with scenes of tawdry pathos, reflecting the life of prostitutes in a brothel. Although after

The Murder on Strada Soarelui Macri continued to publish, with Ilie Ighel following his example, in a series of "crime novels" with titles such as *The Death of the Bandit Simion Kiciuski*, *Dragoş, the Stealer of Women*, and *The Lightning Bandit*, such books were primarily popular novels in the sensational mould.

In the April 1928 issue of *American Magazine*, Van Dine published the Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories, the first table of laws laid down for the genre, applauded by some, vehemently contested by others; in any event, it was the first determined attempt to bring order to a format threatened with adulteration, both in Europe and across the Atlantic.

If we sum up achievements of the genre around the middle of the year 1928, we may easily observe that the big names of the classic detective novel had already proven themselves. Edgar Allan Poe had long since been laid claim to as the father of the genre and his short stories were published all over Europe. From 1887 (the year of his first novel) to 1927, when he published *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes*, Conan Doyle had created a fashion that crossed the Atlantic. Maurice Leblanc had patented a literary prototype, thanks to Arsène Lupin, the gentleman burglar. Victorin Jasset had adapted the adventures of Nick Carter, the "great American detective," for the big screen. Gaston Leroux had written the French version of the locked room mystery (invented by Poe), marking the debut of the redoubtable Rouletabille the journalist detective. G. K. Chesterton, who made his debut in 1910, had published the majority of his short stories and a number of novels, introducing Father Brown, a highly original investigator. John Buchan had published his novels and, in 1920, thanks to *The Mysterious Styles Affair*, Hercule Poirot had entered the stage. Also in 1920, *Black Mask* magazine began to be published in America. Three years later, Dorothy Sayers published *Whose Body?* in London, introducing Lord Peter Wimsey. The already famous Edward Phillips Oppenheim had achieved a resounding success with his novel *The Mystery Road*, and Edgar Wallace had already become a familiar name, ever since his debut *The Green Archer* (1923), going on to write another four detective novels by 1927. In Indianapolis, Earl Derr Biggers had made a name for himself with detective Charlie Chan in *The House Without a Key* (1925), while in Paris, Albert Pigasse had created the famous *Le Masque* series, which he inaugurated with Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. And, as a final significant detail, in March 1928, a month before the publication of Van Dine's rules, cousins, Manny and Danny, who wrote as Ellery Queen, won a prize of 7,500 dollars, after submitting the manuscript of *The Mystery of the Silk Hat* (published in 1929) to a competition for detective novels.

In short, the classic format for the genre had been established and there were authors who followed it faithfully. Many of these authors had become champions of the classic genre, and enjoyed enviable fame. Although he was in his forties and had written only two novels (strictly abiding by the formula), Van Dine aspired to the same glory and had every chance of achieving it, given the success his first books enjoyed.

In other words, the twenty rules laid down by the critic and author of the detective novel seem at first sight to be a firm attempt to maintain the prerogatives of a narrative format that had won millions of admirers and adepts. But on close inspection, Van Dine's laws also appear to be a prompt reaction to the distortions of a format, because change was in the air.

As early as 1925, Dashiell Hammett, affiliated to the *Black Mask* group, spoke of the hard-boiled novel, which he himself was to pioneer. The format had also been dealt two blows to its stability, one by Austin Freeman, who innovated, eliminating the elements of the surprise puzzle and suspense, the other by Roy Vickers, a disciple of Freeman, who carried forward the "method of inversion," throughout his *Department of Dead Ends* series, altering even the established reading model.

Apart from all this, the detective novel had become, at least within its strictly logical mould, a *genus britannicum*, a kind of game with set rules. The plot had to be constructed in such a way that the reader would constantly be unable to guess what was going to happen. The consequences of not allowing the reader to fulfil the role set aside for him, that of the decoder, were not long in manifesting themselves: plot complications would be manipulated as the writer went along and the number of characters would multiply.

Detective novels would soon be prefaced with *dramatis personae*, presenting long lists of characters. It was then necessary to come up with unusual murders committed in circumstances that were exceptional but plausible; and this is how conventions were established, which tended to become rules.

As a theorist, Austin Freeman (*L'Art du roman policier*, 1924) recognised only a single rule, which, by force of its singularity, became a kind of interior law of the genre: the law of logic, derived from the principle of identity, governing deduction in the novel.

But the pressure of such a unique law makes itself felt as soon as we cease to allow that murder and its motives in the detective novel are *faits divers*, pertaining to the order of the natural and normality.

Paradoxically, this *hors du commun* is complicit in its own regulation and seems the most promising matter for the prescription of a table of laws within the so spiny question of writing a detective novel.

Logic will naturally remain the sinew of the story, although the intelligence will henceforth be applied not to a simple and predictable problem, but will have to achieve a major feat, in other words, it will have to go beyond itself, the same as in a game of bridge or, why not, a prosodic structure, with convention intervening only to increase the text's level of reflexivity to the maximum.

But what is convention if not limited permissiveness, during the very exercise itself? First of all, the author of the detective novel will forbid himself from frequenting the real in its totality, with all that the real implies: possible

encounters, the results of chance, in other words, things that are too easy. From the very start, he will define an effective portion, a share of the concrete, the only one acceptable to the detective novel's level of tolerance.

It is obvious that this cutaway section will envisage as limited a territory as possible and the better the field for manoeuvre is defined, the more ingenious the construct promises to be. In more exact terms, the impossible crime will be credited as the ideal crime. This also justifies the paradoxical notion of the perfect crime, a myth that the detective novel will place in circulation precisely in order to contradict it.

In the detective novel, the murderer himself functions as a logical automaton, who produces a murder adapted to the real and thence decipherable through deduction, except that in itself the murder never ceases to be a convention.

Subordinate to its own rigorous laws of construction, the detective novel seems to have learned from the way any other game works that the role of convention is to intervene precisely in order to slip in that lack of strictness that makes the game exciting.

Probably under the dictation of such an intuition, albeit combined with the conviction that after a period of triumph the detective novel in its classic form was on the verge of a methodological impasse, Van Dine put forward a series of rules of construction, intended for any detective novel that cared about its status.

After almost half a century, a definite sign that Van Dine's rules could be contested, but not ignored, structuralist theorist Tzvetan Todorov, referring to them, finds plenty of redundancies in them and narrows them down to eight main recommendations, as follows:

1. The detective novel must have a detective and a guilty party and at least one victim (a corpse).

2. The guilty party should not be a professional killer; nor should he be the detective; it is necessary that he should murder for personal reasons.

3. Love has no place in a detective novel.

4. The guilty party should be granted a certain amount of importance:

a) in life: he should not be the butler or maid;

b) in the book: he should be one of the main characters.

5. Everything should have a rational explanation; the fantastic is not allowed.

6. Likewise, there is no room for psychological descriptions or analyses.

7. Every detective novel should, in regard to the information about the story recounted, conform to the following analogy: "author:reader = murderer:detective".

8. Banal situations and solutions are to be avoided (Van Dine lists ten such situations, which Todorov does not find it necessary to reiterate).

Reducing Van Dine's twenty rules to just eight and commenting on them as we have shown, Todorov in fact comes up with a simple and convincing solution: namely, apparently insignificant features find themselves codified in one or another of the species of the detective novel and a certain type of evolution in the genre brings together particularities situated at different levels of generality.

If we look more closely at this true classic detective novel it becomes plain that Van Dine has lost sight of the genre's "nature as a logical game", as well as the fact that science does not recognise privileged areas of the real and, as a result, a number of the norms expressed aesthetic concerns not very compatible with the concern for total objectivity, which ought to be the novelist's sole aim.

In the case of the detective novels by Romanian writer George Arion, everything seems to point to an interpretation that presupposes the existence of an organising meaning: the narrative schema, the author's and the reader's jurisdictions, the success enjoyed by *Attack in the Library* (1983) and its cinema adaptation. Despite all this, there is a constant slippage into play, which is combined either with fine irony or with recourse to a blameworthy intertextuality, which the greater part of the "unofficial" literature of Romania in the 1980's invoked in a whisper, between the lines.

Infiltrating even the vascular network of the detective novel, this "Aesopian side," which is at the same time part of the legitimate literature of the time, doubles the meanings and adjoins the plot, heroes and their actions to a para-textual structure, a kind of avant-scène of transparent allusion, also to be found in other detective novels from Eastern Europe in the last twenty years.

In other words, elements and figures prescribed within a formula of the genre: the detective and his assistant, the suspect, accomplices, etc. jettison the mythical charge that was proper to them in order to become subversive, and in order gradually to interweave, up until the end of the novel, a kind of dual offensive.

Apparently situated in conformity with the rigors of a given formula, George Arion innovates in the typological schema of the detective, inscribing within it the unwilling detective (in fact a suspect who ends up being a detective) and at the same time parodying it. Just one example: Andrei Mladin's Watson is a tomcat, who, in a second-degree parody, is called Maecenas!

Thus, *Attack in the Library* conscientiously moulds itself onto the mainly English-language schemata of the "classics" of the genre that are worth copying. It has all the "ingredients": the murder, the investigator (in this case, an amateur detective who is a journalist by profession), the murderer, the victim. After a night of which he remembers nothing, journalist Andrei Mladin discovers a corpse in his own library. He cannot understand how the lifeless body has ended up among his books, toppling them onto the floor or who were the people involved in the struggle, in which some of his precious records were destroyed, or how one of his dumbbells (used mostly to impress female visitors) came to be used as the murder weapon. After a nerve-wracking descent in his building's lift, he disposes of the body, depositing it in the cellar for want of anywhere better, lest it be discovered by inquisitive neighbours. It is an abrupt opening, in which the main

characters are introduced: the victim who has unleashed the story and the man who is falsely accused, rejects his role (unlike other characters in the books) and decides to settle the affair himself, becoming an amateur detective. The first move he makes in this new capacity is conveyed via a narrative artifice: a return to the recent past, in which, although he is not sure he will discover the murderer, he at least reviews the circumstances in which he came to meet Valentin, the victim of a motiveless killing, dumped in his flat.

It is not the murderer's tricks that lend suspense and savour to the book, but the concealment and return of the corpse to the same flat, to a library which, the same as in *The Name of the Rose*, becomes a dangerous place, plus Mladin's desperate attempts to prove his innocence before "officials" Buduru and Pahonţu enter the scene. It should be remembered that in George Arion's novel, the relationship between Mladin and the officials (representatives of the communist-period militia) is not one of delightful, sportsman-like rivalry, as it is in other European masterpieces of the classic form, but a terrifying hangman/victim kind of relationship.

Apart from that, the casting of the roles is insignificant, not because it answers the clichés (there is a murderer, two murders and two victims – suspects and accomplices, the beginning of a love affair and an amorous intrigue situated somewhere in the past, in a story that orbits the solution of the case), but because the actors are not actors (they are not even extras), but merely functions whereby the suspense is heightened, on the one hand, and functions of a secondary-level discourse, on the other, which is continuously insinuated into the discourse proper. There is, for example, in the idiolect of the actors, as well as in the idiolect of the narrator, an ironic and parodic grandeur, in other words an ironising of that discourse, irony towards the irony, which complicates the registers and turns the protagonist into a redundant orator, wrapped up in the mantle of all the book's meta-languages.

George Arion's novel does not have characters, rather it is a novel with one character, but above all, it is a novel of ironical splits. The overabundant orality of journalist Mladin, the same as the overabundance of his mishaps, in the manner of the popular novel, in fact conceal expectations and the explosive tension of a hunt that extends to every level: the novel is in a hurry to track down its primary meaning, while constantly under threat from the tributary streams that disturb it. Mladin is hunted by the murderer, but also by Buduru and Pahonţu, by Sulcer, who is courting the woman the hero is in love with, by nosy neighbours, by the caste scorn of the doctor's family, while all the others ultimately become the prey of a supreme, indifferent and always infallible pursuer.

In the three decades between 1983 and 2015, the year when the French translation of *Attack in the Library* was published by Genèse Édition (Paris and Brussels), George Arion published another fifteen detective novels, including the complete Andrei Mladin, with the title *Unwilling Detective* (2008), brilliantly veering off into the dark thriller and the mystery novel, constructing them according to all the rules of the art. The author is not just an illustrious survivor of two formats and, implicitly, two distinct speeds and viewpoints in the detective novel, but an acknowledged leader in the genre. The president of the Romanian Crime Writers Club, in 2014 he founded the Crime Scene Press, which has published and supported leading names in the genre, such as Stelian Ţurlea, Oana Mujea and Caius Dobrescu.

The fact that outside Romania's boundaries it is for the time being still the classic formula of the genre that has a broad echo and the fact that the native detective novel still does not have a dictionary of authors do not represent a de-synchronisation relative to the fashionable scenarios of the European pole, but merely a deficit in the reception of this para-literature, which is perfectly entitled to benefit from authoritative exegeses, film adaptations and prestigious publishing series in Bucharest the same as anywhere else. In other words, after a quarter of a century under the paradoxes of the "totalitarian" detective style, the Romanian crime novel confidently awaits publishers, translators and scriptwriters.

Daniela Zeca-Buzura

Contemporary Romanian Children's Literature

In Romania in the communist period there was a small industry producing children's books written and illustrated by Romanian authors. At its core was Editura Ion Creangă, the only publishing house for children, which replaced the Editura Tineretului of the 1950s, distancing itself to a certain extent from the Soviet model, although many of the foreign books on the market were translations from Russian. The publication in Romanian of books such as J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (in Romanian: *O poveste cu un hobbit*, translated by Catinca Ralea) was a rarity; nothing much was known about fantasy literature or what children's books were like in the West. For example, it would be interesting to know how Harry Potter could have got past the censors, if at all, and whether such a series could have been written or become a phenomenon in the 1980s. Many of the texts for children were propagandistic, inspired by Romanian history and folklore. The great rulers of the Romanian people became legendary figures, children read about historic battles and the great deeds of the past, which, of course, also found their equivalent in the present: the achievements of Ceaușescu's "Golden Age." There were also books with contemporary subjects, for example, books about pioneers setting off on various expeditions (*The Cherry Blossom Club* by Constantin Chiriță, republished with quite some success even after 1990) or parables about school life (*The Long Break* by Mircea Sântimbreanu). But there were also authors of value, such as Vladimir Colin, an excellent author of fantastic literature, whose name has remained familiar even today, and Alexandru Mitru, whose retelling of the legends of Olympus enchanted generation after generation. Likewise, under the heading of poetry for children, Romania was quite well off: we should mention the poems of Ana Blandiana, the penname of Otilia Coman, and, of course, *The Book of Apolodor*, the wonderful adventures in verse of a penguin, conceived by poet Gellu Naum, which even today has remained a must-read of childhood.

And so, one of the "tasks" laid down by the Party was to "produce" literature for children and many writers of the period obeyed the order. Others wrote for children purely from pleasure, and with talent. After 1990, things radically changed. Publishers' interest in contemporary Romanian literature for children declined dramatically. For a long time they believed that it was more profitable to publish imported books, international bestsellers that came with promotion and ideally a toy as part of the same "package", ignoring Romanian authors and illustrators, as many as were left. It is true that to produce a children's book is not at all cheap in comparison with the publication of a book for adults, a literary work, for example, where special paper is not required and the only major investment image-wise is the cover, and at the time publishers were interested in immediate, short-term profits. The market for children's books in Romania was therefore invaded by translations, some of them good, but also numerous commercial series and pulp publications. The advantage was that the public could enjoy worthwhile contemporary books, and only a short while after their publication in their countries of origin. Apart from the republication of fundamental childhood books, such as *The Little Prince* (now in a new translation by Ioana Pârvulescu, published by Editura Arthur), or classic fantasies such as *The Lord of the Rings*, we also had in bookshops the Harry Potter series even as it was becoming a phenomenon in Britain, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, Cornelia Funke's *Inkheart*, Terry Pratchett's books, and series by great authors such as Roald Dahl.

On the other hand, Romanian parents are conservative, and publishers have not yet succeeded in creating an audience for their books. Unless they hear of a book that has become a "phenomenon" (and, ideally, one that has been turned into a film), they prefer to buy the classic fairy tales of Petre Ispirescu. A survey, which asked the question: "Can you name a contemporary Romanian children's author?", came up with names from the 1980s, such as Silvia Kerim.

Another problem is a lack of interest on the part of established literary authors when it comes to children's books. Many of them regard the genre as minor and apparently "unserious", compared with "major" literature. They are not tempted to write for children and nor do they have in view even a few attempts that might help to revive the genre in Romania. The publication of *The Encyclopaedia of Dragons* (Humanitas, 2010), by Mircea Cărtărescu, illustrated by Tudor Bănuș, was a fortuitous, isolated occurrence. The book is aimed at both children and adults, recycles a number of classic characters from Romanian fairy tales (dragons are usually the principal negative characters opposing the hero), and creates for them, with poetry and humour, a new, modern world for their setting. In appearance a series of entries on the characters, each with his own story, *The Encyclopaedia of Dragons* is a good example of what the contents of a contemporary Romanian children's book ought to be like. We need modern stories about dragons and handsome princes, not just dragons and unicorns, stories that are set in Bucharest or the Danube Delta, not just in New York or Hogwarts. Even if they are bestsellers, the imported books on the market do not correspond with the realities of children in Romania.

In recent years, Editura Arthur has been engaged in a coherent project involving contemporary Romanian children's literature. The project aims to discover and re-launch "Romanian stories." For the last three years, the Arthur Trophy competition has sought authors and manuscripts of value, awarding them prizes. The winner of the first annual competition, Florin Bican, is a well-known poet and translator, who has chosen to write for children (too). *The Recyclopaedia of Tales with Rhyme and Without Reason* (published in 2013, with illustrations by Matei Branea, a well-known cartoonist) is a collection of verse parodies of famous texts, a remarkable feat of poetic virtuosity.

Setting out from the conviction that "the moral, in its old form, is threadbare, no longer has an effect," Florin Bican creates a witty world in which "commercial" heroes are either absent or become caricatures. His second book, *And thus I told you the tale (The adventures of the enchanted horses, by their own account)*, is a novel, which brings together a number of classic Romanian fairy tales (such as the tale of White-Arab, the Emperor Aleodor, the Prince with the Golden Hair, and Unageing Youth and Deathless Life). Florin Bican rewrites them in a modern and amusing manner, from the viewpoint of the enchanted horses and, sometimes, from that of the maidens "in distress," the second-tier characters more often than not unjustly ignored by storytellers.

Editura Arthur has also published a book by writer and sociologist Laura Grünberg, *Let's Grow Little* (with a daring design and also cartoon strips by Alexandru Ciubotariu, a plastic artist also known as the Square Cat). The book, which children can read alongside their parents, is an original, fantastic sociological study that divides adults into a number of categories, from "floaters" to "fluffies" and "bigs", and gives advice on how to combat the epidemic of "bigitis" (growing up too much). It is of course the "littles", children, who will find the cure.

Poet Ioana Nicolaie has invented Arik, a likeable and courageous hedgehog, whose adventures she has told in verse, in two colourful and imaginative books for children aged six to twelve: *The Adventures of Arik* and *Arik and the Mercenaries*. Horia Corcheș has written a novel, *The History of Răzvan*, which is educational in purpose, aiming to be an amusing and more digestible alternative to history lessons at school. His character, Răzvan, travels back in time and gets to know the people and customs of various periods in Romanian history.

Another initiative of Editura Arthur is a series of anthologies (supervised by Liviu Papadima and Florentina Sâmihăian, university professors and authors of Romanian language and literature textbooks) of texts for children by famous authors. It is in fact a challenge sent out to writers who have hitherto avoided "little" literature, being concerned only with "big" literature. Each book has a theme: *What is it with reading?* is a plea for reading; *What can you do with two words?* is about how stories come into being, proceeding from Gianni Rodari's *binomio fantástico*; *Who is afraid of technology?* concerns the impact of technology on everyday life; and *Look who is talking?*, currently in press, is about shifts in narrative perspective. Apart from the diversity and value of the stories in themselves, the books also have a didactic and/or motivational purpose. This is why they have also been published in versions written and illustrated by "juniors", children selected as part of a national competition.

Humanitas, Curtea Veche, Corint Junior and Nemira have also engaged in educational projects and books written and illustrated by Romanian authors. For example, in 2014 Curtea Veche published probably the biggest-selling children's book of recent years, *Miss Day-After-Tomorrow and the Time Game* by Adina Rosetti, illustrated by Cristiana Radu. The book is aimed at children between three and eight and sets out to answer in a ludic and creative way their questions about time. Mr Today, old Mrs Yesterday, Miss Day-After-Tomorrow, Never the witch and Ever the pixie all meet in an amusing story, in which text and illustrations communicate in an inspired way.

Another publishing house worthy of note is Editura Cartea Copiilor. It is the only publishing house to produce books solely for children, whereas the others are publishing groups that have lists or projects for children. It is a courageous initiative, given that the children's book market is still developing, audiences do not have sufficient points of reference, and production costs are high. Cartea Copiilor does not make compromises; it publishes few books, but with exceptional designs. One of the publishing house's authors is Victoria Pătrașcu, an editor for the press, radio and television, who is responsible for the concepts and promotion of educational projects aimed mostly at young children. *Stejarul pitic, cel mai bun tătic!* (Dwarf Oak, the Best Daddy!), illustrated by Livia Cojoni, contains five intelligent and amusing stories about

love, friendship and other fundamental values of life. *Wordless Ella*, wonderfully illustrated by Cristiana Radu, is the story of a little girl who refuses to talk, "a lesson about the way in which words can give birth to worlds, but can also wound," as the author says.

Most of the Romanian illustrators who work on children's books and have gained renown (names such as Cristiana Radu, Livia Cojoni, Irina Dobrescu) are members of the Illustrators' Club, an association headed by Stela Lie, a professor in the National University of Arts, Bucharest. The members of the club have held numerous joint exhibitions and took part in the Bologna Book Fair. For illustrators it is a way of drawing attention to their works. One of the Club's projects was a book published in 2009, *Bookătăria de texte și imagini 1* (Bookitchen of Texts and Images 1), with texts for children by established authors and illustrated in various original ways by young artists.

Adina Popescu





The Prose of the Eighties Generation

Fresh, surprising, tuned in to new developments in the West, attentive to the infra-reality beneath ideology, self-reflexive, and measuredly subversive – this describes the young writers that were to be known as the Eighties Generation at the beginning of the 1980's. Emerging from student literary circles (*Junimea* (Youth), headed by Ovid Crohmălniceanu, *The Monday Cenacle*, headed by Nicolae Manolescu, both in Bucharest) or from student magazines (*Echinox* in Cluj, *Dialog* in Jassy, *Orizont* in Timişoara), the eighties-ists found it hard to break through in the suffocating climate of Ceauşescu's "cultural revolution": they made their debut crammed together in group anthologies suggestive of a literary "parachute landing." In a country increasingly isolated from the outside world, they nevertheless caught the years when universities opened up to the West and they avidly consumed the cultural "booty" disseminated by young lecturers with Western contacts: literary theory, semiotics, structuralism, psycho-criticism, Kristeva, Genette, Derrida, Lacan, McLuhan. In a Romania controlled by the secret police, they tried not to succumb to censorship, rejecting both faux-courageous realism with "permission from above" and the aestheticism of the *roman à clef* or Aesopian fable.

The eighties-ists demanded (and provoked) a shift of cultural paradigm. This was to be the transition from the belated modernism of the previous generation to a postmodernism adopted via the French theorists of *Tel Quel*. To this generation was due the popularisation of French textualism in Romania (Adriana Babeţi, Mircea Nedelciu) and the first Romanian critical studies of postmodernism (Christian Moraru, Mihai Spăriosu, Mircea Cărtărescu).

The Eighties Generation entered the stage with a well-articulated theoretical programme, which rested on two mainstays. The first was the *new authenticism*, which looked back to inter-war authenticism (Camil Petrescu, Anton Holban); this involved authorial honesty, direct experience, the cult of raw documentary material; the reality aimed at was the banal, derisory everyday, and the viewpoint had to be stripped of the dramatic and aesthetic. The second was *textualism* or *textual engineering*, whereby the author (in the name of the same writerly honesty) openly took on the rôle of textual producer and opened up his laboratory to the reader's eyes; textual experiences were produced with the complicity of the reader; the author's dilemmas were shared with the public; the tricks of the textual illusionist were artifices revealed to the reader; textual engineering was therefore close to the Russian formalists' "baring the device," the meta-fiction of the postmodernists, the *fictioncritifiction* of Raymond Federman; its character as a work in progress makes it close to Susan Strehle's actualism.

If between the two mainstreams there yawns a void – authenticity and meta-fiction seem incompatible to usual logic – their reconciliation was nonetheless possible in the logic of the *liminal*, of the ritual threshold theorised by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, in which opposites are paradoxically reconciled. Themselves a pivotal generation, articulating the transition from a totalitarian to a democratic Romania, the eighties-ists were obsessed with thresholds, frontiers, no man's lands, vague topographies and places of transformative transitions. Their protagonists oscillate between two contrary states; they are voluntary *déclassés*, marginals of a special kind, "liminals" who refuse to make the choices imposed by a castrating society.

Stylistically, eighties-ist prose also seeks the solution of remaining ambiguous. The eighties-ists intensively practise the hybridisation of genres (docufiction, the anti-detective novel à la Spanos, the cynical fairy tale for adults, metaphysical science fiction), while at the same time taking a first step towards assimilating popular culture in a cultured/ironical way. Free indirect discourse, which they use

frequently, allows them to be simultaneously *outside* the narrative (as uninvolved narrators) and *inside* it (as characters whose discourse contaminates the author's). Another particularity is the original use of *second-person narrative* in a way that does not allow the pronoun *you* to be identified either with the (narrative) character-addressee or with the narrator-in-the-mirror.

Somewhat similarly to the Western postmodernists, the Eighties Generation evolved from fragmentary, "technical" (and ultimately anti-mimetic) experimental prose to a rediscovery of the seductive narrative; from the "schismatic" to the humanist; from provocation to seduction. This evolution took place during the one and a half decades from 1979 (when Mircea Nedelciu's first collection of short stories was published) to 1996, when the unity of the eighties-ist nucleus began to dissolve, and individual writers evolved in divergent directions. Paradoxically, this dissolution took place concurrently with an intensive effort to promote the eighties-ist aesthetic, through republication (particularly by Călin Vlasie's *Paralela 45* publishing house) and critical (re-)evaluations (Radu Gh. Ţeposu, Ion Bogdan Lefter, Mircea Cărtărescu, Monica Spiridon, Adrian Oţoiu). Many of these evaluations tended to enlarge the original group (which was in any case informal), either by discovering precursors or by adjoining to it provincial and marginal writers or quite simply "lone wolves."

Among the precursors, Ştefan Agopian (1947-) writes seductive (pseudo-)historical and neo-picaresque novels (*Velvet Taki*, *Sara*), characterised by allegorical and literary fantasy, displaying fantastical erudition and refinement, and imbued with a poetic or parabolic flavour. Anticipating the meta-fictional consciousness of the eighties-ists, the protagonist of *Tobit* has a revelation of his own fictionality, which legitimises him and simultaneously compromises him. Among the features that make Agopian similar to the eighties-ists are the legitimisation of characters by their belonging to a Book, ludic cruelty, and the undermining of the historical novel through anachronism.

Also rediscovered from a previous generation, Bedros Horasangian (1945-) moved from the short story to the novel in 1987, retaining his gift for psychological observation and his passion for the spectacle of the everyday, to which he added discreetly postmodern elements. For example, in his long novel *The Waiting Room* (1987), the feeling of a genuine period document lent by the protagonist's diary is eroded by the appearance of characters borrowed from a short story by Camil Petrescu, an author saluted as a true ideologue of authenticism.

The undeclared leader of the Eighties Generation, Mircea Nedelciu (1950-1999) was also, along with Gheorghe Iova, the theorist of textual engineering. His *Adventures in an Inner Courtyard* (1979), *The Controlled Echo Effect* (1981) and *Amendment to the Property-owning Instinct* (1983) are more than collections of micro-stories that capture banal reality in an unmediated, unfictionalised way; using a meta-textual approach, they include theoretical essays about the author's method. The thesis of the novel *Fictional Treatment* (1986) is that through "textualising activities it is possible to make a constructive impact on the world," not only on the aesthetic, but on the political – a subversive idea in 1986; here, in the format of an epistolary novel, three narrators – each with a credibility problem (graphomaniac, pathological liar, hothead) – describe in hyper-realist detail the existence of a secret phalanstery, not marked on any map, and which exists outside time; in parallel, Pytotron, an agronomic laboratory, also exists according to a "dual calendar," and the science-fiction novel becomes metaphysical. We also find albeit low-tech science fiction, in which technological paraphernalia are absent, in the story "And Yesterday Will Be Another Day" (1989), where the hero's journey to the future is a bitter disappointment, made up for only by the opportunity to take excursions to the Delta of the Past. The search for origins and parents, as well as an investigation of the way in which history is made, forgotten and falsified (another taboo subject for the communists), is the subject of the novel *Lowland Raspberry* (1984), a remarkable example of what Holquist called "the new metaphysical detective story."

But when the detectives themselves become authors of books – in search of a subject, characters and an ultimate meaning – we have the novel *The Woman in Red*, by Mircea Nedelciu, Adriana Babeţi and Mircea Mihăieş (1990), the most spectacular and successful text to come out of the Eighties Generation. Beyond its self-referential level, it is an exciting story that unfolds on two continents, between the Banat and Chicago, whose protagonist is peasant Ana Cumpănaş, who later becomes Anna Sage, the femme fatale who betrayed gangster Dillinger. The Prohibition period is revived through authentic documentary inserts, and the search for the truth follows the protocols of a coroner's autopsy.

A colleague and friend of Nedelciu's, Gheorghe Crăciun (1950-2007) was to continue the task of promoting the Eighties Generation as a publisher, theorist and university teacher. In his novel *Composition with Uneven Parallels* (1988) Crăciun rewrites *Daphnis and Chloe*, in a manner that rejects the usual formulas of postmodern recycling – ironic parody and de-structuring pastiche – in favour of a nostalgic paraphrase of the love novel, which is intended to be more authentic than the original. Crăciun's authenticism is indissolubly linked to corporeality, and the author vouches for his text "with his living body." The novel *The Bodiless Beauty*, a subtle investigation into the nature of reality, suggests reality has an esoteric fabric of different planes, when Vlad, the reader of Octavian's diary, seems himself to be "read" (and perhaps even written) by a writer outside this world: George; as if in an ingenious detective novel, the realisation of this enigma is entirely in the hands of the reader, who is discreetly supplied with additional information.

Ioan Groşan (1954-) is an ironist of Chekovian tenderness. In the short stories in *The Film Caravan* (1985) and *Night Train* (1989), the natural and the literary stand in for each other, with the literary becoming part of nature itself (as in the splendid story "The Island"). The irony becomes sarcasm and the tenderness bitterness in his two parodic mini-novels, originally serialised in newspapers. The first, *Planet of the Mediocrities: Space Odyssey, 2084*, parodies the science fiction of interplanetary journeys, taking as its protagonists grotesque figures from the "multilaterally developed socialist society" and producing what Groşan calls "proto-chronic *littérature d'anticipation*", in other words, science fiction that looks forward to the year 2084, only to find the dysfunctional and absurd present of the year 1984. The second, *A Hundred Years at the Gates of the Orient* (1992), parodies the historical novel, which Groşan undermines with anachronisms, scandalous authorial inventions, and repeated asides to the reader.

Another humourist, not formally associated with eighties-ism, is Adrian Lustig (1953-). A polyvalent author (who later became a millionaire and successful playwright), in his *Drama of the Bearded Woman* Lustig parodies both the commonplaces of the popular sensationalist novel and the excesses of the textualist method.

The poet star of the 1980's, Mircea Cărtărescu (1956-) made an about-turn in 1989, becoming a prose writer and publishing a collection of stories called *The Dream*, later republished as *Nostalgia*. In these prose pieces the fantastic is constructed against the backdrop of a reality inventoried using a hyperrealist magnifying glass; the setting is easily recognisable as the Bucharest of the 1970's. Two of the stories involve a metaleptic leap, an impossible transgression of the boundary between the author's empirical world and the fictional world of the characters; in "REM" the characters discover their author, and in "The Roulette Player" (which has something of the ambience of Palahniuk's later *Fight Club*) the hero realises that he is just a figure in a fictional world. Cărtărescu's conversion to prose was to be permanent, and his *Blinding* trilogy, written after eighties-ism unravelled (1996-2007) propelled him into the ranks of Romania's most read and translated contemporary authors.

George Cuşnarencu (1951-) writes contemporary fairy tales with characters from the communist proletariat – in the parodic key of a Barthelme or Coover – in the "Fairy Tales of Today" section of his *Treatise of Permanent Defence* (1983), as does Florin Şlapac in *Matthew and Eve*. In the sensationalist scenario of Sorin Preda's (1951-) novel *Partially Coloured*, the disappearance of a child leads to psychoanalysis of violence towards children in classic fairy tales and urban myths.

The typology of the (voluntary or involuntary) *déclassés*, collateral victims of totalitarianism, finds a special place in the prose of the Eighties Generation, for example in *The Mysteries of the Heart* (1981) by Cristian Teodorescu (1954-), Cuşnarencu's *Tango of Memory* (1988), and *The Crystal Ball* by Răzvan Petrescu. Other liminal figures are commuters, oscillating between two worlds, such as in *Return Journey* (1988) by Nicolae Iliescu (1956-) and *The Little Girl* by Adina Kenereş (1957-).

No presentation of the prose of the Eighties Generation would be complete without mentioning the "lone wolves" who, although thematically and stylistically akin to the eighties-ists, are not always included in the canonical lists. The following is a list of each of them, along with their single most significant title from the period: the refined and tender Alexandru Vlad (1950-2014), with *Summer Cold* (1985); the nostalgic Daniel Vighi (1956-), with *Notes on Years Past* (1989), and his monograph on the deportations to the Bărăgan steppe, *Whitsuntide '51*, co-authored with Viorel Marineasa (1944-), author of the novel *In the Tunnel* (1990); the ironic Petru Cimpoieşu, who was not to fulfil his true potential until 2007, with *Simeon the Liftite*; the interiorised Adriana Bittel (1946-), with her bitter-sweet exploration of the world of kitsch in *Julia in July* (1986) and *Phototheque* (1989); Stelian Tănase (1952-), with his mosaic-like and loquacious prose, such as *Light Fittings* (1990); Radu Ţuculescu (1949-), with the Gothic-accented stories collected in his *The Microwave Oven* (1995); the meteoric Ovidiu Hurduzeu (1987-), with his telegraphic novel à la Vonnegut *In Rome Everything is Okay* (1993); and the even more meteoric Dan Grădinaru (1951-), with his sadistic/intertextual fiesta, *Four Stories* (1984).

Adrian Oţoiu



Eighties-ist Poetry: Written Life and Lived Writing

Eighties-ism/postmodernism: a topic increasingly difficult to write about. The roads having long been travelled and the paint having peeled off the signposts in question, we are perhaps left with the idea that "postmodern" principally means the spirit (arising subsequent to the radicalisms of the historical avant-gardes, both in contesting the cultural past and in asserting the new) of ironically relativising every literary format and the slightly hypocritical amorous embracing of the statues in the parks of the imaginary, of reducing the fever to synchronise with the latest vociferations of the literary moment, against a backdrop of general scepticism in regard to the possibility of further radical renewals of expression. The invasion of the computer in the last few decades has not left very much room for bloody battles against "the old" or for the victory of "the new", which up until not long ago had been arduous and uncertain: modernity's victors come in by the window of the Internet, already defeated, having capitulated to hyper-modernity.

In its day, what we now know to have been the "eighties generation" burst onto the scene spectacularly enough to signal sooner a (major) neo- or post-avant-gardist programmatic component. The seminal questionnaire in the last issue of *Echinox* to be published in 1979 attests to the presence of such accents. Firstly in the answers given by Mircea Cărtărescu, who spoke at the time as a true great-grandson of the historical avant-garde, about the "poetic vacuum" prior to the new generation coming onto the scene – a belated echo of radical ruptures with other pasts and with a type of literature that had been hastily assimilated by a "lofty", purist, aestheticising, mannerist, literary modernism, which was now attacked by the 1960's generation. The shift from the literary to the existential, in other words the search for a new authenticity in writing, the overt taste for the current and the concreteness of everyday life (see the slogan: "taking poetry down into the street"), and even Mircea Cărtărescu's later claim about the "typewriter" as a tool on which literature is produced directly, in the mechanical rhythm which is also that of the age (nowadays, the computer and the Internet would be invoked, obviously) were a direct, almost literal echo of the exigencies of the "Integralists" of around the year 1925. The poem had to record, in a Whitmanesque alluvial flow, as much of "reality" and its diversity as possible, that reality being characterised in fact by dynamic modernity, albeit coloured with new tints, given that decades had passed since urban, mechanised civilisation had first been embraced, during the phase of the industrial revolution...

Magda Cârneci (then writing under the pseudonym Magdalena Ghica) invokes a similar engagement in the real, a "reality down to the bone," an engagement in life in all its dimensions, claiming for the poetic discourse an abundance of facts and languages equivalent to the new pulse of the age. Her first book of poems was to be titled *Hypermateria*...

What can be remembered as being a particular accent was, both then and afterwards, the privileging of "the real" and the democratic language of the everyday – the quotidian was continuously acclaimed – the privileging of colloquial expression and, in any event, the multiplication of registers of expression.

Such a position was, of course, to be judged as bringing freshness compared with the "neo-modernists," but also compared with somewhat older attitudes concerning a similar contestation of ivory tower poetry, the urge to reject a poetry "dying of too much poetry" and to capture "the sweat and blood of recent history," as a manifesto written by Geo Bogza in 1933 expresses it with pathos; then, it may also be compared with the "war generation," for whom "the machine for sewing words in the mind" had to give way to the bloody dramas of the moment.

If the "great narratives," the great "stories" about the world, were once more questioned, the doubt in fact changed not so much its object (since for every innovative/dissenting movement, the "narrative" to be repudiated was a segment of Tradition or even cultural tradition as a whole) as much as the context that defined it.

In so-called "postmodernity", what was being contested were in fact absolutes, the extreme absolutes of negatively innovative programmes, all the fevers for the new and "progress," allowing admixtures of co-existing styles and sensibilities, except that tacitly they were "controlled" by a critical awareness, interrogated and warned that they could not be accepted within the new textual frames and montages without such an examination: but nonetheless, they crossed frontiers...

In a world of texts, communication was naturally to come about among texts, and so-called "intertextuality" suggested it and abundantly served it, all the more so given literature's highly "modernist" self-awareness; its self-reflexivity appeared all the more aggravated in this new age of writing. Leaving our appetite for the "real" aside, we ultimately live, as is well known, in a world of letters and words and in our reality there is much show, with masks, stage sets, and actors, we constantly write and rewrite, the artefact, the simulacrum and the convention play an equal part in the life of the world today. Writing's "ontological" investment was therefore seriously rivalled by the awareness that in writing we were dealing with a world of paper, that we were producing worlds of paper, combining and recombining texts, until we reached the not very encouraging feeling that all we were doing was to re-write... Textualism was therefore all but outlined in this world of sensibility organically associated with the remembered awareness of the literary convention, which for better or worse was now accepted as inevitable.

When in the above-mentioned questionnaire Mircea Cărtărescu "let slip" a sentence such as the following: "Let him who is incapable of astonishing be currycombed," quoting baroque mannerist Gianbattista Marino, he showed that he was merely inattentive. His poetic vision had already been cautioned against the weight of the artefact, the "ingenious", in a world devoted to the text and its possibilities as an *ars combinatoria*, consequently it was clear that the invoked grip on the real and the existentially concrete also included, willy-nilly, the experience of the Library, the literary, which in their turn were now accepted as part of "living's" givens, and were therefore somehow required to be "authenticated"... The author's fingerprints on a famous book of avant-gardist poems had to re-certify the authenticity of the document as written life and lived writing...

This is how, if it was possible to proclaim itself "postmodern", this literature that was inaugurated in the 1980's was also postmodern in the sense that, in coming after it, it could not help but conserve something – rather a lot – of the spirit of modernity, with its dual openness towards text and "life." In any event, in Romania, postmodernism – insofar as it was able – did not pursue a new "industrial activist phase," already exhausted and attenuated by the feverish rush for progress, but rather, it would seem to me, it attempted to articulate and synchronise, with one "ear" to the historical avant-garde and the other on the American "Beats", who were much read in Bucharest at the time, within the Monday Cenacle... Likewise, as the Romanian avant-garde did not have much to contest within a local tradition that was still not very burdensome, it lived mentally in Paris and elsewhere, trying to synchronise itself over real, geographical and literary frontiers.

Eighties-ist "postmodernism" arose, if we are attentive and unaffected by distorting militant impulses and the generational barricade, as a phenomenon with multiple tributaries, indebted to the European and modernist traditions that it continued beneath or above sixties "neo-modernism", which itself was not entirely immune to contamination, which was in any event acknowledged later on, at least through references to the "Tîrgovişte school" in prose or to poets such as Mircea Ivănescu and Leonid Dimov (in other words, nota bene, to writers highly sensitive to the text and the movement of literature's forms, syntaxes, and conventions as a world of words or paper). But why not also to the Marin Sorescu of *Disenchantotheque*, for example?

The ideal of authentic "experience" and the (self-)critical awareness of the constructor/deconstructor of texts here ineluctably coexist, sharing their responsibilities and merits. And if things seem to stand thus, a proposal such as that of Alexandru Muşina, regarding a "new anthropocentrism", is to be received with somewhat more goodwill and openness than other overly exclusivist positions. For, apart from the common-sense observation that in Romania it was not possible to speak, along the lines of a correct chronology, of a post-industrial post-modernism, there remains the more consistent truth of an exigency for reconnecting with the condition of today's "concrete man" in a de- and re-sacralised world, with its shared secular objects, perhaps derisory epiphanies of what is left of the metaphysical and transcendent in the sensibility and consciousness of modern man. Ultimately, this was more or less what it was about and it was the question that was put in the context of the communist dictatorship, with the constraints of censorship temporarily and ephemerally relaxed and requiring as great a distance as possible from the inconvenient concreteness of immediate life. And the eighties-ists could not but submit to mediations, be they more restricted than the symbolic-aestheticising ones of many of the writers of the preceding generation for whom the quota of effectively critical realism remained very difficult to express and was always drastically controlled by the censors. Hence the proportion of irony, of intertextual play, of making the planes of reference to the real deliberately prosaic, of attempts to appropriate, to the point of identity, through expressionist intensifications of "sensation," the text of life, by means of suggesting the corporeality of the signifier, to be found in prose and verse. Let us think of Mircea Nedeleciu, Gheorghe Crăciun, Mircea Cărtărescu, Al. Muşina, Mariana Marin, Ion Mureşan,

Romulus Bucur, Traian T. Coşovei, Florin Iaru, Aurel Pantea, and so many others...

In the final instance we may easily draw a kind of generally valid conclusion, and namely that the pretension to radical renewal (despite the programmatic complacency towards the mosaic of all the languages of the past being displayed) must nonetheless be relativised: even the eighties generation, like no other literary period, cannot be divorced from the ensemble of a certain dynamic of the literary phenomenon, with natural relations and confrontations between sensibilities and ways of writing that follow on from one another, return via certain components, melted down into the substance of the new forms of expression. The social-literary context counts enormously in the evaluation of these manifestations, no matter how recent they might be, and what changes is the "decors" of society and the cultural ambience, the emphases on certain elements of the equation between the written and the real, between the 'I' and the world, between text and writing. What should be borne in view is sooner the typological shape of such movements – and eighties-ism is a significant one – for within the same biological generation we know that it is possible that different formats and diversified types of discourse can coexist and cohabit, inevitably, in fact. The "absolute" of value is approximated from relativities and relativisations of this type and it aims at a classification in time of what has been called the "eternally human." Baudelaire said this very well when he reflected on the modern and the transitory, adding the other component of the "eternal," i.e. the wider and permanent Tradition.

Therefore, the eighties generation has the same percentage of "postmodernity" as current literary movements everywhere else, but the label "postmodern" is not plastered over the whole surface area of this literary moment. The error that has been made, and continues to be made, in connection with the subject under discussion is, I think, that of generalising this attribute, one that is often not very clearly defined (and perhaps impossible to define in the strictest manner). And above all, it has been abused as a label of value. To reject in its name valid literary experiments, merely from reasons of generational pride, is excessive and denotes, in some militants of the "generation", the lack of a historical-literary horizon or at the least conscious ignorance of all its points of reference. Up to a point, the label of postmodernism, applied to the eighties generation, has been positive, inasmuch as it guaranteed a kind of encouraging solidarity in support of a creative project, particularly in the sense of wagering on the authentic, on the need to re-appropriate the real in all its dimensions, in a period of new limitations on freedom of expression, but it also damaged the "generation" to the extent that it brought under too large an umbrella a number of strong individualities. To be "eighties-ist" or "postmodern" could be tantamount with being a necessarily valuable writer, while other authentic writers from other generations were consigned to the dustbin of literary history. One irony of the same history, in our immediate vicinity, is that the "two thousand-ists" are in their turn separated quite polemically from the "textualists" of the 1980's and later, and therefore are regarded as not sufficiently "transitive" in their relationship to the immediate reality...

Exacerbation of the will to authenticity therefore leads to other forms of exclusivism... Too much militant energy has been spent on creating such categories, which, as has been said so many times, are valid only as "necessary conventions" in the structuration of an approximately clear view of literary history, of positioning in time. Beyond them, as has again been said so many times, remain individuals and their works, which also speak through being related to a historical series, but who can – if they can – transcend it, remaining not exactly isolated, but within a small, necessary, perhaps fragile frame of fertile solitude.

Ion Pop



Fantasy and Science Fiction

To go back to the origins of Romanian science fiction we have to make a leap back in time of 115 years, but which (how wonderful it sounds!) encompasses more than two millennia. In 1899, Victor Anestin's novel *In the Year 4000 or A Voyage to Venus* was published. The next milestone was the same author's novel *A Celestial Tragedy*, published in 1914. Also in 1914, Henri Stahl's "astronomical novel" *A Romanian on the Moon* appeared. Of course, the books of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells also made a contribution, the same as later, when other famous writers unwittingly contributed to the next generations of Romanian fantasy and science fiction authors. And let us not forget Russian science fiction writers, whose influence in the 1950's and even 60's set Romanian S.F. on the good path of what was to be a version of the political correctness of the time.

Of the writers of the 1960's and 70's, Camil Baciu, with *The Garden of the Gods* (1968), Sergiu Fărcăşan, with *A Bull Seeks You* (1970), Victor Kernbach, with *The Sublime Skiff* (1961), George Anania, with *Feasibility Test* (1981), Romulus Bărbulescu, with *Catharsis* (1983), Anania and Bărbulescu as joint authors, with *Doando* (1965), *The Farm of the Stone People* (1969) and *The Parallel Enigma* (1973), Adrian Rogoz, with *The Secant Price of the Abyss* (1974), Ion Hobana, with the collections of short stories *People and the Stars* (1963) and *A Kind of Space* (1988), and Vladimir Colin, with *Babel* (1978), are of interest even today, and their books have been republished over the intervening years.

The next generation brought to the stage authors such as Gheorghe Săsărman, whose volume of short stories *Squaring the Circle* (1975) was recently translated by Ursula K. Le Guin; and Mircea Opriţă, still active, whose novels include *Argonautica* (1970), also the author of the volumes of short stories *The Nights of Memory* (1973, awarded the Prize of the Union of Writers in 1974) and *The Truth about Chimaeras* (1976), as well as the most important critical work on native S.F., *Romanian Futuristic Literature* (1994).

The 1980's saw an explosion of Romanian science fiction. These were the years when dozens of cenacles sprung up all over the country, the years when the National Conferences (RomCon, the first of which was held in 1972) became something normal, although the 1983 convention was broken off by the authorities. These were the years when young writers gained access to books by British and American authors, either through libraries or through translations that were passed from hand to hand in the cenacles. What crystallised was a kind of writing in which plot was sometimes to the detriment of the characters, but which put forward bold ideas. Most authors wrote short prose, which was read at cenacles or published in fanzines.

The writers that came to prominence in that period and who are still active include Rodica Bretin (*Holographic Effect*, 1985; *The Iron Maiden*, 2002, awarded the U.K. Fantasia Art Association Prize for best foreign novel in 2015), Silvia Genescu (*Rock Me, Adolf, Adolf, Adolf*, 2008, awarded the Vladimir Colin Prize in 2011), Leonard Oprea (*Forbidden Domains*, 1984 and *New Forbidden Domains*, 2015), Cristian Mihail Teodorescu (*Sensoriad*, 2014), Dănuţ Ungureanu (*Waiting in Ghermana*, 1993), and Marian Truţă (*The Time of Giving Up,* 2008). Mihail Grămescu (*Phreaeria*, 1991, and *The Leapers into Empty Space*, 1994) and Alexandru Ungureanu (*The Great Threshold*, 1984) have passed away, while Cristian Tudor Popescu (*Planetarium*, 1987) has given up S.F. for journalism.

In the 1990's it was possible at last to speak of a fantasy and science fiction market in Romania. And if we add to this *Jurnalul SF* (SF Journal) and *Colecţia de Povestiri Ştiinţifico-Fantastice Anticipaţia* (The Anticipation Collection of Scientific-Fantastic Stories), then we have the premises for the emergence of a generation of writers who caught up with cyber-punk after just a ten-year delay and then moved closer and closer to the movements and sub-genres existing on the global fantasy and science fiction market, and I am talking here about deliberate rather than accidental synchronisation, rather than the

fruit of "subject picking" on the part of critics eager to claim Romanian precedence. After 2005, a new generation of writers emerged, who joined with those who made their debut in the 1990's to create what we now call Romanian fantasy and science fiction.

In the following, I shall briefly present some of the books that have been published in recent years and which might be of interest to foreign literary agents and publishers.

Lucian Dragoş Bogdan (1975-), *The Wizard on the Inner Cloud,* Editura Tritonic, 2014. A successful space opera, in which the author abandons the usual anthropocentrism of S.F. authors, managing to create an impressive and no less coherent panoply of extra-terrestrial beings in a race to find a solution to prevent extinction. The novel is set in the same universe as *The Frontier*, Editura Diasfera, 2006. Recommended to fans of Iain M. Banks' *Culture* series and Nancy Kress's *Probability Moon*, as well as to fans of *Star Trek*.

Roxana Brînceanu (1969-), *Sharia*, Editura Tritonic, 2006, Millennium Books, 2014; winner of the 2008 Vladimir Colin Prize. A bio-punk dystopia with elements of urban fantasy, which weaves together a detective story and a love story. Sharia is a world in which citizenship is granted based on an I.Q. test, which humans, chimpanzees, gorillas, dogs and dolphins can pass, while those who fail stand every chance of ending up slaves. Recommended to fans of China Miéville and Paolo Bacigalupi.

Oliviu Crâznic (1978-), *And Finally There Remained the Nightmare*, Editura Vremea, 2010; awarded the 2011 Galileo Prize. A novel with a gloomy atmosphere, a castle, mysteries, murders, investigations, vampires, written in a modern style, but aiming to bring back the classic gothic novel. The critics have compared Crâznic's novel with the writing of Edgar Allan Poe, Horace Walpole and Stephen King.

Sebastian A. Corn (1960-), *We Will Return to Muribecca,* Editura Nemira, 2014; awarded the 2014 Ion Hobana Prize. An adventure novel about the search for an ancient and mysterious city in the jungles of Brazil, with complex characters, intersecting plots in which capitalism and communism clash, and questions (and answers) about human nature. It goes beyond the S.F. niche, providing just as great satisfaction to readers not accustomed to the genre. One of the best novels to be published in Romania in 2014.

Dan Doboş (1970-), the *Abbacy Trilogy*: *The Abbacy*, Nemira, 2002; *The Curse of the Abbacy*, Nemira, 2003; *The Infinite Abbacy*, Media-Tech, 2005 (awarded the 2005 Vladimir Colin Prize); *The Abbacy*, omnibus edition, Millennium Books, 2011. After conflicts, not the least of which are religious, a part of mankind moves to other planets, populating the Milky Way. The Abbacy is the power-centre of a new religious order, based on the principles of St Augustine the New, which comes into conflict with the Empire. And the clones employed as labour on the agricultural planets also rebel. A complex plot, exciting action, very well realised characters – these are the ingredients of one of the best Romanian works of S.F. For fans of Frank Herbert and Asimov's *Foundation*. Also, *DemNet*, Media-Tech, 2011, awarded the Galileo and Ion Hobana prizes in 2012: a novel about democracy in the Internet age, about manipulation, citizens' freedoms, and politics, for fans of Michael Crichton, John Brunner, George Orwell, Ray Bradbury, Aldous Huxley.

Ona Frantz (1973-), *Laceration*, Editura Dacia, 1999; awarded the 2000 Vladimir Colin Prize. A space saga, baroque narrative, containing elements of fantasy and S.F. (space opera), with a legendary level of past and present, reminiscent of Frank Herbert's *Dune*, to which it has been compared, but also with a dimension of war, caste conflict and rival dynasties battling for power, which places it in the same league as George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the two aspects joining together within a galactic dimension, and with an apocalyptic denouement.

Ciprian Mitoceanu (1976-), *The Dawson Amendment*, Millennium Books, 2012. The Dawson Amendment divides people by social categories depending on their genetic endowment. An adventure novel in a dystopian society, a political meditation followed by a trilogy, *Genetic Predestination*, about a serial killer, of which the first instalment has been published: *In the Father's Blood*, Millennium Books, 2012. For fans of George Orwell and the *roman noir*.

Florin Pîtea (1971-), *Gangland*, Diasfera, 2006; Tracus Arte, 2013; awarded the 2008 Vladimir Colin Prize. A post-cyberpunk novel with the atmosphere of a mediaeval fantasy setting, *Gangland* is a story that draws on all the classic elements of cyberpunk, a story full of action and reversals, in which some of the most complex female characters in Romanian S.F. can be found. For fans of William Gibson, Cory Doctorow and Richard K. Morgan.

Liviu Radu (1948-), the *Taravik Trilogy*: *The Army of Moths*, Nemira, 2012, awarded the 2014 Vladimir Colin Prize; *At a Gallop through the Pyramid*, Nemira, 2013; *Confrontation with the Immortals*, Nemira, 2014. Fantasy adventure novels that fans of Terry Pratchett will enjoy. Also, the *Waldemar* tetralogy: *Waldemar*, Tritonic, 2007; *The Fingerless Block*, Tritonic, 2008; *Afternoon with Beer and Fairies*, Tritonic, 2009; *Nocturnal Alarums*, Millennium Books, 2012; *The World of Waldemar*, omnibus, Tritonic, 2010, awarded the 2011 Ion Hobana Prize. Adventures reminiscent of Romanian mythology, in a series of novels that moves from fantasy to urban fantasy. Liviu Radu is also the author of alternative histories: *The Modifiers*, Millennium Books, 2010, in which a group of people alter history; *Questionnaire for Ladies Who have been the Secretaries of Very Decent Men*, Eagle, 2011, featuring famous figures from Nazi Germany, but in a communist version: a meditation on totalitarianism.

Dănuţ Ungureanu (1958-), *Waiting in Ghermana*, Nemira, 1993. A combination of cyberpunk and noir, against the backdrop of a post-industrial, postmodern society, the novel traces the main character's journey from ordinary man to saviour of the world. For fans of classic cyberpunk and *Sin City*.

Dănuţ Ungureanu and Marian Truţă (1960-), *Vegetal*, Nemira, 2014; awarded the 2014 Ion Hobana Prize. Apocalyptic S.F. (or magical realism, according to some), in which the main character, a fourteen-year-old boy, seeks salvation in a world invaded by vegetation, in which fields of maize, sunflowers and wheat, pumpkins and tomatoes have become aggressive towards animals and people. Recommended to fans of John Wyndham (*The Day of the Triffids*), Brian W. Aldiss (*Hothouse*), and Stephen King.

Other novels worthy of note: Aurel Cărăşel, *O God Beyond the Belly of the Universe,* Nemira, 2011 (alternative history, for fans of Philip K. Dick), Ştefana Cristina Czeller, *Ozz*, Tracus Arte, 2013 (dark fantasy/supernatural noir, for fans of Laurel K. Hamilton and Jim Butcher), Ana Maria Negrilă, *The Empire of Ice*, Amalteea, 2006 (detective novel, dystopia, paranormal); Liviu Surugiu, *Atavistic*, Tritonic, 2014 (for fans of Dan Brown); Adrian Buzdugan, *The Iron Citadel*, Tracus Arte, 2012 (dystopia), A. R. Deleanu, *The Tamer of Waters*, CDPL, 2012 (fantasy).

Anthologies are a category that enjoys great success and can offer an overview of the possibilities of Romanian fantasy and sci-fi. The most important anthologies of recent years are: *Steampunk. A Second Revolution*, Millennium Books, 2011, ed. Adrian Crăciun, awarded the 2012 Galileo Prize; *Beyond the Night. Twelve Facets of the Gothic*, Millennium Books, 2012, ed. Oliviu Crâznic; *Zombies: The Book of the Living Dead*, Millennium Books, 2013, ed. Mircea Pricăjan; *Xenos. Contact between Civilisations*, Nemira, 2014, ed. Antuza Genescu; *Journeys in Time*, Nemira, 2013, ed. Antuza Genescu; *Alternative Histories*, Tracus Arte, 2014, ed. Ştefan Ghidoveanu; *The Windows of Time*, Tracus Arte, 2013, ed. Ştefan Ghidoveanu. Two special cases are *Motocentaurs on the Roof of the World* (Karmat Press, 1995), a manifesto anthology of the 1990's, combining cyberpunk and alternative history, and the Kult group's series of anthologies: *The Chronicles of Blood* (ProLogos, 2001), *The Time of Demons* (Omnibooks, 2002), and *Radharc* (Millennium Press, 2006, ed. Costi Gurgu), all of which involve vampires and dark fantasy.

As I hope will be obvious, the fantasy and sci-fi written and published in Romania are characterised by great inventiveness when it comes to sci-fi ideas, a broad ranges of styles, modernity, and synchronism with what is being published elsewhere in the world, from post-cyberpunk to the new weird, and from the paranormal to steampunk. As Spanish critic Mariano Martín Rodríguez says, it is one of the best genre literatures being written in Europe today.

Michael Haulică



New Romanian Literature from Bessarabia (Poetry and Prose)

In the last quarter of a century, enough Romanian books have been published in Bessarabia to confirm a living, dynamic process with a clear tendency to connect with generally Romanian and European aesthetic experiences. Apart from such movements to synchronise with contemporary artistic phenomena, there are also books that are singular, interesting and intrinsically valuable. One such outstanding book is *Royal Green* (Arc, 2014), by Andrei Ţurcanu. Here, absolute despair meets insatiability for life and the Absolute of "royal green", in incendiary lyrics of love. The poetry overwhelms you with its living pulse and the freshness of its words, but also with the ardour that erupts from the concentrated timbre of the confession. Love exults, is experienced intensely and deeply. *Royal Green* is the diaphanous and regenerative image of the bird-woman, who enchants her lover with her overflowing youth, like in a recurrent *Song of Songs*. The book also has an impressive biography, which includes a tragic existential motivation, verging on suicide, not to mention that the texts were lost and then rediscovered after almost a decade. The most spectacular part, however, was the book's publication by the Arc publishing house in 2014, under the name Emanuel Alexandru, after critic and editor Eugen Lungu had carried on a long and winding correspondence with a supposed relative of a supposed music teacher, who had died in obscurity and was claimed to be the author of the poems. The critic immediately detected the "hand of an experienced poet" in the manuscript submitted to the publishing house, and despite the suspicions as to the true author of the poems, he published *Royal Green* with a fulsome preface. It was not until after publication that the collection's real author declared himself.

If Andrei Ţurcanu is the author of the most harrowing love poetry from Bessarabia in recent years, Dumitru Crudu has written possibly the most disturbing poem about death: *Scarfs in the Sky* (Cartier, 2012) is a sensitive confession unleashed by the imminent presence of death. At the bedside of his dying mother-in-law, the poet has a revelation of life slowly flowing into death. The experience viscerally disturbs him, sharpening his senses to the limits, bringing about dramatic fractures in his awareness. The poetic discourse runs the gamut of minimalist and also expressionist registers, in spontaneous, natural explosions that are engaging in their authenticity.

One phenomenon specific to Bessarabian literature since 1990 is the heightened attention it pays to subjects that concern Soviet everyday life, an angst-ridden, decaying habitat. Savatie Baştovoi's *Rabbits Don't Die* (Polirom, 2007, second revised edition), possibly the best novel to come out of Bessarabia since the 1990s, is a subtle examination of school in the Soviet period, captured through the subjective eyes of a child. Rigorously constructed, impeccably articulated, the novel contains multiple narrative levels and layers of meaning. Aberrant education, by means of slogans and clichés, ideological manipulation and other Soviet cancers transpire from an atmosphere and experiences that are transposed with a great deal of authenticity, but also using bold artistic means. In a discourse of great sensibility and refinement, the naturalism of repellent everyday scenes is interwoven with the mythical, symbolic and parabolic, with surrealist absurdity, even.

Soviet childhood is also authentically represented in the novel *Living Tissue. 10 x 10* (Cartier, second edition, 2014) by Emilian Galaicu-Păun. The novel is constructed in a labyrinthine manner, with multiple narrative levels, and can be read as a socio-political novel about (post-)Soviet realities in Bessarabia, in particular about how they are reflected in the destiny of a Moldavian family, and, in parallel, as a writerly novel, a declaration of love for the "Bodiless Beauty." Both the poetry and the prose of Galaicu-Păun are labyrinthine hypertexts in which almost every sentence/line alludes to the writers and books in the author's inner library. The art of (re-)combining languages, genres and literary models turn his texts into multicultural and polyphonic palimpsests. As a writer he explores the infinite possibilities of language's cultural and intertextual

influence, and the revelations of his discourse always depend on the literariness of an incisive aesthetic game.

Written in the tradition of ludic intertextuality, Nicolae Leahu's *Erotokritikon. Prince Charming, Son of the Pixel* (Cartier, 2011) is an impressive collection of prose poems moulded from various cultural references, paraphrased ironically, put through the blender of a critical consciousness preoccupied with the seethe of continual playful combinations. What is at stake in his writing is the pleasure of combinations between traditional literary characters and mythemes, on the one hand, and characters and images from contemporary literature, on the other, as well as the aesthetic revelations that can be prompted by the most unlikely intertextual connections.

In the poetry of Grigore Chiper, a member of the Eighties Generation, the spectacle of intelligence is shifted to a subsidiary level. What define his *Absinthos. Clouds of Ink* (Arc, 2015) are a poetics of nuance, suggestiveness, and literary refinement. The world that presents itself to the poet is devoid of any binding centre; it is de-sacralised, fragmented. The inner library, sensibility, and the outlets of the imagination allow him to reconstruct a picture of reality and to invest it with meanings that radiate from/towards the textual world of the Book.

Unlike the unitary poetics of Grigore Chiper, Arcadie Suceveanu's lyric poetry evolves from baroque modernism to the ludic postmodernism of the Eighties Generation and, in *Beings, Shadows, Epiphanies* (Arc, 2011), autobiographically tinged nostalgia, in which memories of his mother, father, and the Cernăuţi of times gone by are freighted with archetypal meanings.

Vasile Gârneţ is a poetic aristocrat, albeit one who is somewhat blasé. In *The Borges Field* (Vinea, 2002), the reality of Bessarabia is, with dazzling intelligence, scrutinised despairingly from within the citadel of the book by a lyrically lucid, sensitive 'I'.

Nicolae Popa represents the Eighties Generation in spirit more than technique. In *Elegies to the House of Writers* (Vinea, 2013), he writes a poetry of slantwise incisions, with bold metaphorical plunges into the inner fissures of the 'I'. What is surprising in his lyric is the fineness of the analogies, the subtle transfer of the poetic image from reality to fiction, from past to present, from illusion and virtuality to certainty. The same as in the psychological novels of Liviu Rebreanu and Vladimir Beşleagă, in Popa's novel *The Aeroplane Smelled of Fish* (Arc, 2008), the emphasis is on the angst of the murderer, on the feeling of guilt, on the obsessive need to understand, on the ebb and flow of introspection. The factual is interwoven with the psychological, the imaginary with the real (the contemporary reality of Moldovan society in transition) in hybrid narratives that blend different styles and viewpoints. The novel is complex in structure, demonstrating virtuosity at the level of discourse and narrative construction in particular.

Although the eighties generation claim her as one of her own, it is difficult to assign poet Irina Nechit to any generational category. In *The Child in the Yellow Car* (Cartier, 2010), the poet's discourse moves from expressionist vortices to areas of neo-impressionist calm. The "tyranny" of meanings and "depths" ironised by the Eighties Generation can be glimpsed on the surface even when the poet wishes to create the impression of complete detachment from what is serious, solemn and direct in its impact.

Alexandru Cosmescu, an erudite young writer with a philosophical background, might at first sight be classed as a confessional, intimist poet. His collection *A gentle space that receives me as if it embraced me* (Cartier, 2013) contains a lyricism of subtle reflections, of moods sublimated into a whispered discursive flow. But behind this can be glimpsed an explosive rite of initiation into the silences of the self. In the recurrent gesture of the touching of hands there quiver, as if in a rippling mirror, the moods, emotions and images of a hypersensitive 'I'.

The poetry of Margareta Curtescu in the collection *In Dante Plaza* (Vinea, 2014) is confessional, intimist, combining the articulation of an inner biography with utterance that is textualising and literary. The poet oscillates between the desire for extraversion and the fear lest her inner tensions smother the authentic respiration of the poetry. The intrusion of the literary therefore comes as a natural consequence.

Moni Stănilă is a writer remarkable for the subtlety of her meditations. Her novel *The Fourth* (Tracus Arte, 2013) deepens the reflexive fibre of her poetry, and convincingly establishes theologically-charged narrative as part of the Bessarabian literary landscape. Briskly paced, the novel constructs, with captivatingly natural phrasing, a journey of *purification* through suffering, of *mystical and religious initiation*, and of *openness* towards the *other* by means of love.

The life of Moldovans after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. is a pregnant subject for novelists Iulian Ciocan and Dumitru Crudu. Both writers focus their attention on the banal everyday, on simple folk, illustrating a programmatic *minimalism*, which faithfully illustrates a reality in disarray. In his novel *The Realm of Sasha Kozak* (Tracus Arte, 2011), Iulian Ciocan brings a melancholy viewpoint to Bessarabia's post-Soviet transition period, suggesting that corrupt politics has mutilated Moldovans' minds and deprived them of existential reference points, leaving them with nothing but the desperate struggle to survive. The same problems of inter-ethnic conflicts and interminable squabbling between communist and anti-communist politicians is dealt with in Dumitru Crudu's novels *Chişinău Folk* (Editura Tracus Arte, 2011) and *An American in Chişinău* (Casa de Pariuri Literare, 2013), with a dose of humour and stylistic verve.

We cannot but comment on how powerfully women's poetry from Bessarabia has come to the fore in recent years.

In the poetry of Silvia Goteanschi, we find the madcap, unpredictable play of fantasy. Within the highly original mise-en-scène of the poet's inner décor there is a stream of undulations, twists and turns, leaps and

enfoldings of vision. The space of her poetry is theatrical (with a book title to match: *The Dramaturgy of Gleaming Ropes* (Vinea, 2014)), and the minimalist backdrops are animated by playful fantasy, which intermittently shifts its outlines, shapes, meanings. As it progresses, the play of pure pleasure, whether magical act or carnivalesque jubilation, evolves into something serious, with dramatic implications, a game of life and death.

The poetry of Liliana Armaşu reveals a lucid and interiorised lyrical 'I'. The poet turns solitude into an autarchic universe, sufficient unto itself, assailed to the point of exacerbation by empirical and literary experiences. Loneliness, the leitmotiv of the poems in *Wednesday Solitude* (Arc, 2013), is a torture for all-consuming lucidity and a gift for reveries, in which may be glimpsed the serious meanings of existence, poetically transposed in a manner that is as natural as it is original.

The poetry of Silvia Caloianu's *Narcotango* (Vinea, 2013) exudes freshness and youth. The lyrical 'I' is spontaneous, tumultuous, its blood "thrumming / like a proud and perilous herd of horses." Femininity erupts in passions, coquetry, temptations, moodiness, angst, contortions, which are expressed discreetly and only occasionally flare into the rhythmic discordances of experiences pushed to the extreme. The atmosphere created by the poet engages the senses, enveloping them in a subtle aroma of coffee "with dancing brandy shadows" and an all-pervasive muted music.

In Radmila Popovici's *Intimatum* (Vinea, 2014) we find a poetry of contrasts, in which euphony alternates with the shout, the diaphanous with harsh, angry images, radiant maternal femininity with that of the tumultuous Amazon in combat.

Doina Postolache constructs spectacular, existentially-tinged allegorical settings, concealing as an appendage to her poetry a thirst for the ideal and fulfilment. In Moth, the Drapery-Bride, the Black Shirt and Word the poet creates characters of great suggestive power. Her collection *Moth Poems* (Prometeu, 2011) is unique in Bessarabian literature thanks to its impressive lyrical tales, with a cast of moth characters, whom the poet subtly directs in unusual images and surprising streams of meaning.

Childhood naïveté, transposed in a minimalist register, is evoked in the memories of growing up in the countryside during the Soviet period that we find in Diana Iepure's *A Hundred Thousand for a Seat Behind the Goal Posts* (Casa de Pariuri Literare, 2011). Spontaneity, the organic and naturalness are the protective myth within which childhood is situated, weathering every adversity.

Duty Free (Cartier, 2015) by Aura Maru is a poem of the emigrant, which traverses not only cities and countries, but also a visceral metamorphosis of identity ("the turning inside-out of the bones"). Maria Pilchin's *Poems for Ivan Gogh* (Paralela 45, 2015) reveals a serene poetics of love against a backdrop of ethnic strife and crises of national identity in the Bessarabian (post-)communist space. In the poems collected in Virgil Butnaru's *Return to Innocence* (Casa de Pariuri Literare, 2014), impressions of books and the refractions of an apolitical everyday produce unusual aesthetic effects. In Anatol Grosu's *Epistle to the Philippians* (Max Blecher, 2012), childhood experiences bring about good-hearted mythologisation and highly ingenious imaginative speculations. Likewise, in *3ml of Konfidor* (Casa de Pariuri Literare, 2013), Ion Buzu writes a poetry of the everyday, but extracts therefrom a poison (pesticide Konfidor), which causes nausea and a desire for self-annihilation.

These and other remarkable books written East of the River Prut reflect directly or by ricochet, a literary consciousness that has its finger on the pulse of the new rhythms of globalisation, alternating between (textual) play with reality, angsts, and ontological fractures.

Nina Corcinschi



"Nineties-ism": Prose and Poetry

In this country there is an old tendency, which periodically manifests itself, towards imitation and reduplication under Romanian conditions of foreign models regarded as being both prestigious and centralised. The effort to synchronise with Western literatures was important to the equation of the modernisation of Romanian poetry and prose. Eugen Lovinescu made it an axis of his critical system and, at the same time, the evolution of our literature. This all but permanent reference to non-native terms ought not to lead to the erroneous conclusion that what is specifically Romanian is superposed upon what is Western, or to be more exact, that the socio-cultural history that shapes the native literature is the same as that which shapes French literature. Imitation only implies identity in a formal and sequential way. "Behind" the term imitative there is a history different to the one that made the imitated term possible.

This is why, after the modernist synchronisation of the inter-war period, the parallel histories of post-war Europe shaped different types of literature: some, the Western, within a democratic period, without state control, without censorship, without the immixture of single ideologies, others, such as the Romanian, within the "socialist camp." The comparison between the Romanian (and, in general, Eastern) literary term and the Western (and, in general, democratic) term forces us to accept the obvious. What happened in Romanian literature in the historical period from 1948 to 1989 cannot be compared with what happened in French literature in the same interval. The sixties generation of Nichita Stănescu and Nicolae Breban and the eighties generation of Mircea Cărtărescu and Cristian Teodorescu arose under specific historical circumstances. For, national specificity is not ethnic and ethnographic, as the traditionalists saw it, but historical: a totalitarian period in which sixties neo-modernism and eighties post-modernism once again represented Romanian literature's attempt to synchronise itself with the normal stages of Western literatures' evolution. We were once again "behind," after the socialist-realist interlude, and we had to recoup what was natural to the literatures and cultures of the free countries.

The nineties generation was the first in which the attempt to synchronise our literature no longer took place within a totalitarian period and against it. This time, thanks to the December 1989 Revolution, the Romanian social and political space was to evolve precisely in the direction of democratisation and assimilation of Western models, enormously easing the task of the lucid writer when it came to doing the same thing in his area of manifestation. The political was no longer a retardant and no longer constituted a factor of oppression. It became a factor of pressure, in the positive sense: the evolution of Romanian society was so spectacular, from December 1989 (the Revolution) to January 2007 (Romania's entry into the European Union), that it may be said, without fear of error, that post-Revolution history became a catalyst for literature of the same period. Because history had changed (this time for the better), literature was created within the given interior of change.

This was why "nineties-ism" was completely different from "eighties-ism": not only because it had different critical mentors (Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu and Nicolae Manolescu in the latter case, Laurenţiu Ulici, Mircea Martin and Dan-Silviu Boerescu in the former), not only because the generational viewpoint was different, but also because the "nineties-ists'" entire field of literary manifestation was structurally different from that of the preceding generation. "Nineties-ism" had its first flush of youth in the final years of the Ceauşescu regime and the publishing debuts of its major authors had the air of being a struggle with an ossified system that was shortly to explode. Cristian Popescu, Daniel Bănulescu, Dan Stanca, Radu Aldulescu, Ioan Es. Pop, and Mihail Gălăţanu are the writers of a pivotal generation, born in the twilight of the Ceauşescu regime and coming to prominence in the first decade of freedom, after four decades of communist totalitarianism. Biographically, they are contiguous with the old period; bibliographically, they are defined by the new.

This "duality" of the nineties generation can best be observed when reading the novels of Radu Aldulescu. He explores the totalitarian years with the freedom to select the facts and with the flexibility of expression brought by the years of freedom. If Marin Preda in *The Most Beloved of Mortals* wrote obliquely about the "era of villains," since censorship prevented him from doing so directly and transitively, Aldulescu enjoys complete freedom of manifestation: freedom of both conscience and his art.

Whether quickly or gradually, it can be seen how artistic particularities and creative obsession again become more important than the examination and exposure of social truths. Dan Stanca moves away from the epic themes and issues of a novel about communism, as well as from those of an exposé about post-communism. "Our" post-communism is not that of Dan Stancu, a prose writer more interested in spiritual problems and the metamorphoses of characters who tear themselves away from the horizon of the 1990's and project themselves into scenarios of religious self-combustion.

The (apparent) paradox is that if we are able, using Preda's *oblique* novel, to reconstruct the Ceauşescu period in which it appeared, using the transitive novels of Aldulescu and Stancu we are sooner able to reconstruct the profile of the writer than the period "depicted." In the democratic period in which we find ourselves, it becomes a meaningless act to say *through* literature what you are allowed to say aloud. Literature reduces its function of compensation and once more becomes literature so-called: an experience of the personal imaginary and of unmistakable writing.

Given this is the situation in the novel, it is only natural that it be different in poetry. The novel is (still) close to the given reality, through its forms and structures and the propensity for the concrete found in canonical realism. Poetry, on the other hand, is almost completely autonomous, and it required a dictatorship in its harshest phase for a poet such as Ileana Mălăncioiu to be able to make, in *Climbing the Mountain*, an anti-totalitarian reply *through* poetry.

Cristian Popescu, Daniel Bănulescu, Mihail Gălăţanu and Ioan Es. Pop are poets extremely different from their "eighties-ist" predecessors, as well as their "millennium-ist" successors, but they are also different from each other. There is no longer a generational hard core, a set of features that characterise the writing of each of the members of the generation. The poeticised tragic of Ioan Es. Pop, the mystic-sexualising jubilation of Daniel Bănulescu and the placental-"patriotic" projections of Mihail Gălăţanu stand at an appreciable distance not only from the surrounding reality, whatever the period, but also from each other within dual and polymorphous "nineties-ism." From this viewpoint, Cristian Popescu will probably remain the most representative artist of the generation, whose poetry overflows into prose and theatre and in which the melange of genres, structures and literary discourses is pushed to its final consequences.

To capture in a composite formula the literary plurality of this generation is not very easy, but nor is it impossible. It is a post-textualist and pre-authenticist generation, pivoting historically, culturally and literarily between the restricted and ossified field of manifestation that was the 1980's and the considerably enlarged and permissive field that was the 1990's. These are writers through whose literature the *extremes* gain the right to artistic expression and end up touching, in a way that is significant for our post-revolutionary freedom, granted, but above all for the unique and repeatable imaginary world of each author.

In other words, the "nineties-ists" are authors in whom we discover not *ourselves*, as we discovered *ourselves* in the "sixties-ists" and "eighties-ists", because reality is no longer constrictive and no longer forces us to identify with an author who says things drawn from *our* censored and indexed truth. They enjoy the benefits and disadvantages of the democratic period: the right to write anything, but also the lack of an audience; unlimited freedom, but also the impossibility of being able to make a living as a writer; the right to travel anywhere, but also the lack of financial resources to do so.

The "nineties-ists" also indirectly show us what communism meant, and what democracy is and how a specificity of a historical rather than an ethnographical order arises in the domain of literature. Their vitality is impressive, and the rate at which they publish new books is likewise an index of their professionalism. The wider public does not owe them very much, because it does not read them as it read the generation of Nichita Stănescu; but knowledgeable readers situate them in the place they deserve and recognise their well-defined role, within a distinct chapter of the history of Romanian literature.

Daniel Cristea-Enache

The Literature of the 2000's

Although authors who became established prior to 1990 remained active in the following period, the most important literary event of the 2000's was the emergence of a new literary generation. The extraordinary popularity of these young authors was tantamount to a rebirth of literature as an institution, after a decade of crisis that can be explained at a number of different levels.

From the socio-political standpoint, literature began to decline in relevance after the fall of the communist regime. Having become useless as a tool of propaganda, literature was forced to redefine its status within society. This was also why a considerable number of writers devoted themselves to journalism rather than literature, in the years immediately after 1990. In addition, the ideology of "the autonomy of the aesthetic," which placed literature on a pedestal, lost its relevance. The acute need for truth, reality and ethical debate, after four decades in which these had been seriously compromised, collided head on with the notion of literature viewed above all as a fictional and textual simulacrum. Suspicion towards literature as a demystifying discourse was obvious in the compensatory proliferation of works in the memoir genre.

From the economic angle, the first decade after the Revolution was confronted with a publishing crisis. Given dwindling state funding, publishers preferred to invest in established authors, particularly foreign writers, who were capable of bringing immediate profits. For this reason, when they were not ignored altogether, native writers were met with reticence and published in minuscule print runs. In this context, few publishing houses were prepared to wager on debut writers. The transition from a state-run to a privatised economy and from state-controlled culture to media diversity was not without its effect on literature, which began to function by rules other than those established by the sole criterion of "aesthetic value" as laid down by a restricted category of experts.

For a decade, the triple blockage – socio-political, economic and creative – gave the impression that literature was going through a crisis comparable with that experienced in the years when communist culture was emerging. For this reason, it has been said of the generation which appeared around the year 2000 that it was a "long-awaited generation," capable not only of altering literary form, as had happened with previous generations, but also of reviving literature as an institution. "Psychologically speaking, immediately after 1989, there was a general impatience for the emergence of a new generation" (Al. Cistelcan).

Poetry

Of all the literary genres of the 2000's, poetry was the quickest to crystallise a new form of sensibility. The majority of the "two-thousand-ist" manifestos are linked to the names of poets. The idea of a new literary generation came into being at sessions of the Eurydice Cenacle in Bucharest, organised by critic Marin Mincu, who announced it in his article "A New Literary Generation?", which was published in February 2003. But the first symptoms of the "2000's Generation" or "two-thousand-ism" can be glimpsed in the *Fracturist Manifesto* of Marius Ianuş and Dumitru Crudu. Published in an initial version in 1998, employing a violent discourse worthy of earlier avant-gardes ("Fracturism won't kill anybody unless it's necessary"), the manifesto announces a break with everything to do with the establishment: if at the political level the "fracturists" declared themselves anarchists, from the literary standpoint there was an obvious polemic against postmodernism and textualism, the key concepts of the Eighties Generation. Instead of refined, bookish literature, which wagered on intertextual play and the natural continuum between biography and culture, the "fracturists" put forward a radically authenticist programme, which excluded any form of cultural mediation. Fracturism was "the movement of those who exist in the same way as they write."

While the radicalism of the Fracturist manifesto was not shared by every member of Marius Ianuş's generation, reticence towards literature as an artefact, in favour of raw

reality and brutal confession, was one of the driving ideas of "two-thousand-ism." For this reason, around the year 2000 poets took as their source of inspiration not literature per se, but mass culture and the "culture of the immediate contingency, of consumables: television, music, clubs, student halls of residence" (Mihai Iovănel). When literary references were nonetheless brought to bear, they came from foreign rather than Romanian literature – a consequence of the avalanche of translations after 1989 – and from marginal rather than canonical writers. In poetry, Geo Bogza replaced the likes of Tudor Arghezi and Ion Barbu, while Virgil Mazilescu, Angela Marinescu and Ion Mureşan were preferred to Nichita Stănescu, Marin Sorescu and Ana Blandiana.

Viewed as a whole, current poetry stages the most radical exploration of the real not only of the last few decades, but perhaps in the whole of Romanian literature. It represents a riposte both to the abstraction of the sixties generation and to the minimalist but politically innocent everyday of the eighties generation. The "children of the third millennium," the first generation of writers to make its debut after the Revolution, take full advantage of language's shedding of taboos, after a long period of censorship and self-censorship. This explains the excessive sexuality, cruelty and colloquialism, which are part of an attempt to transform poetry into a consumer item, adapted to the free circulation of ideas. Răzvan Ţupa opens poetry to media performance, while Adrian Urmanov theorises the utilitarian poem.

Like no previous generation of Romanian poets (with the exception of those of the 1848 Revolution), the two-thousand-ists demonstrate that political vehemence goes hand in hand with poetic vehemence. Of all the genres assiduously practised since the Revolution, whether we are talking about fiction, the diary, criticism or the essay, poetry has been the most sensitive barometer of Romania's post-communist transition. Above the likes of Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Trakl, and the American Beats and new Beats, frequently put forward as this generation's models, Mayakovsky has been elevated as the principal reference, with his dark and vindictive lyricism, albeit one not lacking in pathos and a virulent moral accent. From the thematic angle, all the atrocities of Romania's transition, with its fears and disillusionments, accumulate and burst forth in the poetry of the 2000s. Misery, social marginalisation, the hypocrisy of consumerism, pennilessness, and the prospect of a decent life are not just themes with a civic charge, as they might seem at first sight, but traumas that attack the inner person. This is why the distance between the politically accented poetry of the everyday in the work of Marius Ianuş, Dan Sociu, Ruxandra Nova and Elena Vlădăreanu and the visionary, introspective poetry of Ştefan Manasia, Radu Vancu, Dan Coman, Claudiu Komartin, and Teodor Dună is not unbridgeable. Between the "minimalist/miserablist" pole, oriented towards the traumatising everyday, and the "expressionist" pole, turned in upon the self, a coherent sensibility specific to the contemporary poet is constructed: the sensibility of a hunted animal, harried by social ills, which harries in its turn. The violence of two-thousand-ist imagery – the main accusation brought against the generation by traditionalist critics – arises from a primal instinct for self-defence, from reactive exasperation. Hence the paradoxical juncture of aggression and masochism, between community-minded protest and self-flagellation that bites right down to the bone. The acute crisis of communication, helplessness and aboulia, paroxysmal everyday solitude, guilt and fear, nameless neurosis, and the irrational thirst for revenge are just a few of the obsessions of these poets. It is interesting to observe that, compared with previous generations, there is an almost complete absence of love as a theme (a simple interface of neurosis), which is the topos of literature and every other form of escapism. Contemporary poets are creatures of the present, a generation without any memory or family. In the rare cases where the family does find its way into the pathologically egocentric imagery of today's poetry, it is peopled with alienated figures such as the insane brother (T. S. Khasis) or the tyrannical father (Domnica Drumea).

Prose

Being closer to the public, fiction has also quite faithfully reflected the upheavals the reception of literature has experienced. In the first decade after the Revolution, fiction was usurped by the memoir genre; it is possible even to speak of a genuine crisis of fiction. Strangely, but entirely explicable in rational terms, readers avid to discover slivers of truth in novels published before 1990 now condemned the novel as a genre predisposed to mystification.

Although good novels were not entirely absent in the 1990s – noteworthy are *The Rind of Things or Dancing with the Flayed Woman* by Adrian Oţoiu, *Exuviae* by Simona Popescu, and *The Wake-going Woman's Lover* by Radu Aldulescu – it was not until Polirom launched its *Ego.Prose* series in 2004 that we can speak of a revival of the novel. But it was only half a revival, since apart from inconsistencies in quality, the format chosen by writers such as Adrian Schiop, Ioana Baetica, Ionuţ Chiva, Dan Ţăranu and Dragoş Bucurenci, who were the first to be published, wagered on the techniques of authenticity, thereby adopting the ideology of scepticism towards literature in the sense of "fiction," "construction," "elaboration." Of these writers, only Adrian Schiop has succeeded in confirming his value, in an autobiographical fiction set in the Ferentari ghetto (*The Soldiers*, 2013), and he tends towards being an exponent of the so-called *miserablist* genre. In parallel with the practitioners of "auto-fiction", a series of more artistically mature prose writers came to the fore, also backed by Polirom, in its *Fiction Ltd* and *Ego.Prose* lists, and its publishing subsidiary, Cartea Românească: Dan Lungu, Florina Ilis, Filip Florian, Cezar-Paul Bădescu, Lucian Dan Teodorovici, Sorin Stoica, Radu Pavel Gheo, Bogdan Popescu, Răzvan Rădulescu and Florin Lăzărescu. Polirom, whose

contribution was decisive to the literature of the 2000's, managed to put out two or three series, in the space of just a few years, which brought together most of the youngest and budding literary talents, thereby hastening discussions about a new generation of writers. Thanks to the aforementioned names, the critics agreed that the novel had returned to the "story", "construction," "fiction." Once the need for truth and the memoir/journalistic confession reached saturation point, fiction began to acquire a deeper meaningfulness once more. But the fiction of the 2000's had different aims and a different shape than that which had been popular before 1990. With few exceptions, contemporary prose writers shed the totalising ambitions of the sixties generation (who turned the novel into a surrogate for life), as well as the literary games of the postmodern eighties generation.

From the thematic standpoint, a number of aspects may be observed: both in short prose and in the novel, the fiction of the 2000's wagers on a realistic format, one highly attentive to details, but also sensitive to the paradoxes of a society in transition. The prevalence of film over literature is not definite here, but many of the scenes to be found in the fiction of Dan Lungu, Răzvan Rădulescu, Radu Pavel Gheo, Lucian Dan Teodorovici and Florin Lăzărescu seem coextensive with the imagery of Romania's New Wave of cinema. In the two different media of expression can be found the same lowly characters, the same burlesque humour, the same cynical acceptance of reality, devoid of any urge towards (self)illusion.

But the total wager on the real arises not from a rejection of parabolic or symbolic formulas, but from the fact that fantasy, the burlesque, and the absurd were to be found in everyday life after the Revolution. The novels *Little Fingers* (2005) by Filip Florian and *The Children's Crusade* (2005) by Florina Ilis, which garnered lavish praise from the critics, are evidence that once transposed into fiction the reality of Romania's transition period was capable of incorporating the most fantastical everyday scenarios. The everyday absurd was the major theme of the fiction of the 2000's.

Unlike the poets, who preferred irrational cries of protest aimed at a chaotic reality, contemporary prose writers refer to themselves as "artists of memory" (Sanda Cordoş), preoccupied with the metamorphoses undergone by Romanian society in its transition from a totalitarian to a free system. Novels such as *Good Night, Children!* (2010) by Radu Pavel Gheo, *I'm a Communist Biddy!* (2007) by Dan Lungu, *The Băiuţ Alley Lads* (2006) by Filip and Matei Florian, and *Matei Brunul* (2011) by Lucian Dan Teodorovici attempt to provide fictional solutions to the difficult equations of a Romanian identity suffering from post-traumatic shock. "Nostalgia" for the communist everyday, the mirage of emigration and life in a better world, and the chance to get rid of clichés and taboos after a long period of overriding mystification are all acute problems for the prose of the 2000s, treated in a range of styles, which run the gamut from the humorous to the tragic, with every shade in between.

Stylistic and thematic diversity and the excesses of the contemporary generation of writers are part of a celebration of freedom of expression and the fragmentation of ideologies, such as have never been experienced on such a large scale in Romanian literature.

Alex Goldiş



The Third Europe Group: Between Essay and Autobiographical Fictionalisation

The Third Europe interdisciplinary research group, whose activity materialised in a series of projects and publications that were landmarks for the study of Central-European culture in the Romanian space, came into being more than two decades ago. With a nucleus made up of editors and contributors to *Orizont* magazine in Timişoara, the intellectual community around the magazine included writers, literary and art critics, university teachers, architects, and plastic artists interested in the culture of Central Europe and its relationship with Romanian culture. In the first phase, in the 1970's and 80's, Sorin Titel, Livius Ciocârlie, Cornel Ungureanu, Adriana Babeţi, Marcel Pop Corniş, Ilie and Margareta Gyurcsik, Mircea Mihăieş, Vasile Popovici, Coriolan Babeţi, Daniel Vighi, and Viorel Marineasa set underway individual as well as group projects that were in tune with the Western intellectual dynamic, and also an enduring attachment to the tradition of inter-ethnic communication and cultural contacts and transfers.

These practices and academic and intellectual solidarity were to be fully affirmed in 1997 when the Third Europe programme was set up in Timişoara and in 1999 when the Third Europe Foundation was established. The founders of the Third Europe project were Adriana Babeţi, Cornel Ungureanu, Mircea Mihăieş and young MA and PhD students Marius Lazurca, Dorian Branea, Gabriel Kohn, Daciana Banciu-Branea, Tinu Pârvulescu, and Sorin Tomuţa. In 1998, the research interests of the group active within the Third Europe Foundation opened up to new areas of the humanities, including anthropology and oral history, sociology, politology and history, and specialists Smaranda Vultur, Valeriu Leu and Gabriela Colţescu got involved, thereby broadening the comparative and inter-disciplinary dimension adopted as the principal methodology in the group's overall project. There followed numerous projects, courses, and seminars; books, magazines, dictionaries and anthologies were translated and published; symposia, colloquia and seminars were held, to which were invited speakers from Europe and the United States: writers Herta Müller, Olga Tokarczuk, Andrzej Stasiuk, Paweł Huelle, György Konrád, Attila Bartis, György Dragomán, Lajos Grendel, historians and politologists Tony Judt, Adam Michnik, Vladimir Tismăneanu, Emil Brix, Moritz Csaky, translators Michael Heim, Jenö Farkas, Libuše Valentova, and major theorists and literary critics Matei Călinescu, Virgil Nemoianu, Michał Paweł Markovski.

Long before the official creation of the Third Europe group and foundation, the writers and literary critics who launched the project in the 1970's and 80's had made names for themselves in various genres and registers, but which found a stable point of convergence in the essayistic style. Regarded an integral part of Central-European poetics, the essay is primarily cultivated by Cornel Ungureanu, Livius Ciocârlie, Adriana Babeţi and Mircea Mihăieş as a versatile genre, free of the rigours of purely academic expression, but easily adapted to scholarly tones and subject matter, within whose code these critics and university teachers have conceived a major part of their published work. The predilection for this genre may be regarded as one of the ingredients that have preserved the inner coherence of the group, and at the same time has played a pivotal role in the formation of a definite tradition, also perpetuated by contributors from the younger generation, such as Ciprian Vălcan, Ilinca Ilian and Radu Pavel Gheo.

Having made a name for himself as a remarkable critical voice from his very debut in *Orizont* magazine in 1962, the magazine he was to join as an editor in 1970, Cornel Ungureanu is one of the group's crystallising presences, whose vocation for major projects combines with a wide-ranging and profound vision of literary history, of its vectors and catalysts in the Romanian space. His first book, published in 1975, with the Proustian title *In the Shade of the Flowering Books* (Editura Facla), was the beginning of a career marked by outstanding works such as *Our Immediate Vicinity* (vol. 1, Facla, 1980, vol. 2, Editura de Vest, 1990), *Mircea Eliade and the Literature of Exile*

(Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1995), *West of Eden. An Introduction to the Literature of Exile* (Amarcord, vol. 1, 1995, vol. 2, 2001), *Literary Geography* (Editura Universităţii de Vest, 2002), *The Geography of Romanian Literature Today* (Paralela 45, vol. 1, 2003, vol. 2, 2005), and *The Secret History of Romanian Literature* (Aula, 2007). Cornel Ungureanu publishes essays inasmuch as the essay functions as a vital appendage to the unifying aim of an exploration of the critical landscape and the outlining of a literary history intended to bring nuance to the canon, diversifying its perspective. *To Die in Tibet* (Polirom, 1998), conceived as the diary of a journey to China, is in fact a circular essay, constructed around a stable axis, one almost omnipresent in the author's work: the writer's relationship with the province of the Banat, with the people, memory and places that configure a real and an imaginary territory reflected in biographies and fictions. One of literary critic Cornel Ungureanu's most unusual books, *To Die in Tibet* is an essay-journal about the explorations and initiations of intellectual maturity, which conveys a genuine pleasure in storytelling.

On Kings, Mountebanks and Monkeys (Marineasa, 2003), also written in the form of a journal, can be read as a first-hand account of people and events from a culture experienced over the course of twenty-seven years, from 1976 to 2003. *Building Site 2. An Itinerary in Search of Mircea Eliade* (Cartea Românească, 2012) is along the same lines of personal archaeology: a hybrid text that sets out to bring up to date the critic's preoccupation with the cultural underground of the inter-war period, for less familiar areas of Mircea Eliade's work and activity, in a manner that constantly finds the intersections between books, their authors, history and its syncopes. Without being technical or an essay, the book is one of the boundary texts written by Cornel Ungureanu, which are situated in the interstices of criticism and literary history, a form in which the author has become a classic.

The Mitteleuropa of the Peripheries (Polirom, 2002) can be included in the series of cartographies of Central-European literature that Cornel Ungureanu has pursued in different forms and over different expanses in many of his books, setting the tone and establishing the direction for much of the subsequent research carried out by the Third Europe group. Here, a number of explorations, which bring together writers such as Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, Hermann Broch, Witold Gombrowicz, Emil Cioran and Ioan Slavici, find their realisation, revealing the filigree structure of a unifying framework and the signs of a special sensibility, which is articulated unevenly and often paradoxically in the literatures of Central Europe.

Alongside Cornel Ungureanu, Livius Ciocârlie identifies, in the intellectual setting in which the Third Europe project took shape, the mainline that can ensure full participation in the Central-European imaginary: in his writings critical exploration combines with a subtle autobiographical fictionalisation in which the province, marginality and the insignificant became central terms. In Ciocârlie's books, the myth of the provinces is given body and relief, becoming the invisible armature that unites the autobiographical and incursions into cultural history. A prolific writer, who has made a name for himself in various genres, from academic theorising to the journal and the novel, Livius Ciocârlie is the author of essays that simultaneously embrace subjective spaces and literary interests in an aestheticising style that has become his personal hallmark. From the analyses of Sorin Titel and Radu Petrescu in *Critical Essays* (1983) to the meditative pages of *Old Age and Death in the Third Millennium* (Humanitas, 2005) and dialogues with the authors he constantly revisits (Proust, Gombrowicz) in *Over a Low Flame* (Cartea Românească, 2012), Livius Ciocârlie has consolidated his own inimitable style, whose flexibility is revealed in everything he has written.

Of the books he published in the 1980's, two novels, *A Provincial Burgtheater* (Cartea Românească, 1985) and *The Sunken Bell* (1988) have become emblematic of the subjective mythologisation of the Banat. Whereas in his diary he dwells on idleness, contemplation and passive withdrawal from the world, ironically glorifying them, in his novels he proceeds in the opposite direction, bringing back to life, with spectacular élan vital, an entire forgotten continent: the imperial Banat of the early twentieth century. *Heads and Tails* (Albatros, 1997) signals a return, after a number of volumes of memoirs and journals) to the essay, although the genre can be found throughout his work in fragmentary form. The meditations on autobiography and the construction of self-referentiality in this volume are of interest even today. *Three in a Galley* (Echinox, 1998) extends the play of autobiographical fiction, also to be found in subsequent volumes, such as *& co.* (Polirom, 2003) and *The Book of Trifles* (Paralela 45, 2010), generating a fluid and protean meta-text that defies inclusion in any genre or typology.

In *The Notebooks of Cioran* (Scrisul Românesc, 1999, Humanitas, 2007), concentration on the classic purpose of the essay becomes clear, although even here the subjective imprint of the critic in dialogue with the text and also the philosopher's biography is visible. One of the most original books about Emil Cioran, *The Notebooks* reflects the fragmentary style cultivated by the philosopher, within a well-structured parallelism, which via direct commentary keeps at the centre of attention Ciocârlie the essayist's close relation to Cioran's *Notebooks*, with Cioran being viewed as a writer more than a philosopher. Paul Valéry is approached in the same way in *Proceeding from Valéry* (Humanitas, 2006), with the same dialogic fragmentarism.

Exercises in immaturity (Cartea Românească, 2013) confirms yet again the polymorphic nature of Livius Ciocârlie's writing. The three-part work brings together as many discursive registers. In the first part it is a comparative study of the theme of immaturity and dilettantism in literature. The next part involves a radical change in style, veering towards subjective prose, in which the play of egos, maintaining the tension between the character and his double, is nuanced with satirical tones,

revealing yet another original perimeter within the writer's work. And here, the essay, as the genre besides the journal that Livius Ciocârlie cultivates with predilection, is situated at the intersection of genres, in a space of permeable boundaries.

Mircea Mihăieş clearly falls into a category all of his own, that of the essay in proximity to literary history and criticism, but keeping a variable distance from the norms of the latter. He made his debut with *The Catcher in the Mirror* (Cartea Românească, 1988, second edition, 2005), a volume of essays about the private journals of Stendhal, Tolstoy, Gide, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Mateiu Caragiale, Witold Gombrowicz, Cesare Pavese and Radu Petrescu. *Cruel Books. The Private Journal and Suicide* (Amarcord, 1995, second edition, Polirom, 2005) is an innovative work within the Romanian cultural space, in which Mihăieş continues his fascination with the journal, wagering on the search for the specifics of a relationship that can be framed within the essential equations of modernity: the equation between suicide and the private diary. Writers such as Drieu la Rochelle, Sylvia Plath, Miron Radu Paraschivescu, Arşavir Acterian and Roland Barthes are read under the sign of biographical transparencies, since Mircea Mihăieş is not only interested in the diary's private function, but also in the dynamics of feeling within it. Always split between real and imaginary, the journal is understood as a "text of the mind," a faithful portrait of its author.

Mihăieş's interest in popular culture is manifested in a series of books starting with *The Metaphysics of Detective Marlowe* (Polirom, 2008), a remarkable work in the space of the Romanian essay of recent decades primarily because of the subject it tackles: the detective novel. Definitely resonating with the detective side of the novel *The Woman in Red*, of which Mircea Mihăieş was one of the three authors, the book is an original and engaged incursion into detective literature as an integral part of popular culture, one that functions with distinct formulas and manners, worthy of investigation. The interest in the poetics of Raymond Chandler as an author of pulp literature is developed within a complex critical discourse, carefully calibrated to the particular frequencies of the subject under investigation, so that Mihăieş achieves an analysis impressive in its method and spectacular in its results. Given the virtual absence of any interest in this field in Romanian culture, the book becomes even more important.

What Remains. William Faulkner and the Mysteries of Yoknapatawpha (Polirom, 2012), although situated stylistically within the high range of the academic essay, belongs to literary history and criticism, although it is conceived in a style that does not adopt in their entirety the rigorousness and often arid seriousness of the purely scholarly work. A wide-ranging study of the American writer, the volume confirms the dual scholarly and creative affiliation that Mircea Mihăieş has cultivated in the same spirit as Adriana Babeţi, Cornel Ungureanu, and Livius Ciocârlie.

The Life, Passions and Songs of Leonard Cohen (Polirom, 2005) has enjoyed major public success. Here, Mihăieş juxtaposes the music of Leonard Cohen and his lyrics, true expressions of the poetic art, with the tumultuous biography of the Canadian singer, the result being an original reading of an authentic and penetrating, rebellious and free phenomenon, emblematic of the rock and roll counterculture. The singer's thirty-two poems, translated by Mircea Cărtărescu, greatly expand the lyrical hemisphere of Cohen's art, revealing a unique fusion between the literary and the musical. *The History of Corto Maltese. Pirate, Anarchist and Dreamer* (Polirom, 2014) is a book that enters little charted waters for Romanian culture: the art and literature of the cartoon strip. Corto Maltese, Hugo Pratt's hero, a character famous in the world of children and teenagers from the 1970's, is reinvented in a brisk and suspenseful fictional biography.

Among Mircea Mihăieş's books, *On Grieving. A Year in the Life of Leon W.* (Polirom, 2008) is of particular significance. A wide-ranging examination of grieving and its religious and cultural implications, the book is centred on a dual experience of the process, lived by a friend, American writer and journalist Leon Wieseltier. Apart from the balanced style of the text, the book's most obvious success is its exploration of an essential phenomenon of mankind from the perspective of cultural dialogue. Also under the sign of friendship and fertile connexions rests the essay *The Final Judt* (Polirom, 2011), about the life and books of historian Tony Judt, whose writings, marked by a strongly polemical spirit, have had a major impact on the Third Europe group's study of Central Europe.

The unity of perspective and above all inner harmony of the Timişoara school that is the Third Europe are due to Adriana Babeţi, whose studies, essays, prefaces and publishing projects have ensured the coherence and success of this cultural project. Written in a carefully constructed style, in which rigour and substance are transposed into supple expression, all Adriana Babeţi's texts bear the imprint of an authentic writer, who can adapt her discourse to the nature of the subject with rare flexibility. After a substantial series of studies and translations, combined with extensive journalistic work, her volume of essays *Arachne and the Web* (Editura Universităţii de Vest, 2002) confirms the cultivation of an original way of projecting the consistency of the idea, often between the present and high culture, via the dynamic of vibrant phrasing, into the pleasure of reading. Her essays about Roland Barthes and Gilles Deleuze show yet again her interest in contemporary theory. Her approaches to Kafka, Proust and Sabato certify a consistent focus on the canon of modernity, while other essays on Danilo Kiš, Stefan Zweig and Alfred Döblin bring back to attention Central-European concerns.

Dandyism. A History (Polirom, 2004) tackles a classic archetype of modernity, the dandy. What could have been an aloof examination of authors, texts and cultural periods becomes an engaging and involved account, in which Adriana Babeţi writes a captivating meta-literature, a free and adventurous exploration of an otherwise serious and not at all easy terrain. Although in tune with the aims of comparative literature, the book is also close to the essay,

in which conceptual and theoretical anchoring find their place, thanks to the style. The same register of erudition accompanied by stylistic elegance also dominates in *The Amazons. A Story* (Polirom, 2013), but the sheer range of the project sooner situates the book within the horizon of scholarly research. Without doubt one of the most significant books to have been published in Romanian culture in recent years, Adriana Babeţi's impressive project certifies her unique status, bringing together the qualities of writer, critic, essayist and researcher in carefully cultivated equilibrium.

Along with Mircea Nedelciu and Mircea Mihăieş, Adriana Babeţi was one of the co-authors of *The Woman in Red* (1990), one of the most important texts of Romanian postmodernism. Initiated by the group, bringing together, under the canopy of fiction, the filigree of the provincial and the sweeping outlines of wider history, the novel can also be viewed as a nodal point from which some of the cardinal explorations of the Third Europe project were to radiate.

Gabriela Glăvan



The European Brand of the Braşov School

The Braşov School has its roots in the group made up of young people who studied at Bucharest University in the 1980's, who attended Bucharest literary cenacles at that time, the nucleus of which formed within the Monday Cenacle. Alexandru Muşina, influenced by the atmosphere of the Monday Cenacle, managed to hold a cenacle in Braşov, the 19 Cenacle, together with Gheorghe Crăciun, Ovidiu Moceanu and Vasile Gogea. Simona Popescu, Andrei Bodiu, Caius Dobrescu and Marius Oprea joined the cenacle, where they were introduced to the atmosphere of the Monday Cenacle by Alexandru Muşina and enjoyed real success. Likewise, the Junimea (Youth) cenacle and Noii (The New) cenacle, in which Crăciun had developed as a writer, his friendship with Mircea Nedelciu, Gheorghe Iova, Gheorghe Ene and Ioan Flora, and its intersection with the Monday Cenacle led to the meeting of the two poles, Alexandru Muşina and Gheorghe Crăciun, both of whom had a solid theoretical grounding and were extremely talented.

After the 1989 Revolution, in that atmosphere of stupefaction and unhoped-for liberation from the iron grip of the communist dictatorship, the group, which was bound together by a passion for literature, a desire to change society, and above all friendship, founded the Philology Faculty in Braşov.

Romulus Bucur, Andrei Bodiu, Caius Dobrescu, Ruxandra Ivăncescu, Virgil Podoabă, Al. Cistelecan, and Cornel Moraru joined the team of Alexandru Muşina, Gheorghe Crăciun and Ovidiu Moceanu, who had laid the foundations of Philology in Braşov. From the accounts of that group, which bore the heaviest load in the early years and lent consistency and then renown to Braşov's literature department, that early period, although the hardest, was the most wonderful.

This first circle of men and women of letters propagated an extraordinary phenomenon, unfolding over the course of thirty-three years, from the debuts of Muşina and Crăciun, whereby the circles multiplied, intersected and extended: the circle of friendship, the institution and publications.

The circle of friendship

The human factor is essential in bringing together such outstanding people, and the friendship between the members of the hard core, even if it diminished over time, in some cases, was saved by the projects, mutual respect and memories of the pioneering period that started everything. In this respect, Andrei Bodiu published a moving letter after the death of Gheorghe Crăciun (*România Literară*, no. 5/2007).

The model of friendship forged within the Monday Cenacle was perpetuated, along with the feeling of being part of a thread of history that left traces; this is how Alexandru Muşina, Gheorghe Crăciun, Andrei Bodiu, Caius Dobrescu, Simona Popescu, and Marius Oprea must have felt, as well as all the others who partook of that atmosphere, including students of the Literature Faculty who had the opportunity to be taught by those first four teachers and in that way developed a passion for literature, professionalism, correctness and culture's power to change society. Many of the young writers who developed while studying in the Literature Faculty in Braşov speak feelingly about the way in which that period and their teachers changed them as people and changed the course of their lives. As examples, I have selected excerpts from interviews with former students: Adrian Lăcătuş, an essayist and prose writer, now Dean of the Literature Faculty, and Dumitru Crudu, a poet, novelist and playwright.

Adrian Lăcătuş: "In that period, after I went to university, when I was between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, the people who influenced me the most and probably in a decisive way were Alexandru Muşina and Gheorghe Crăciun, in distinct, different, even complementary ways. That is, if my attitude towards literature was somehow guided by and adopted from Alexandru Muşina, who was synthetic in his approach and always viewed literature in relation to the things around it, all the things around it, and who saw literature as the

most meaningful and relevant way of speaking and thinking about the things in the world, on the other hand Gheorghe Crăciun revealed to me and awakened in me a passion for the analytical spirit, that is, for attempting to distinguish certain fine differences between the things that make up literature, language existence, a desire and an obsession for precision in writing, in talking about literature. [...] And Muşina and Crăciun were, from where I saw things, at the centre of an extraordinary group of university professors, which included Virgil Podoabă, Al. Cistelecan, Cornel Moraru, Ovidiu Moceanu, Caius Dobrescu and Andrei Bodiu. Emulation occurred in those years not only within the faculty but also outside it, it also occurred around the magazines in which they took part, around colloquia and debates."

Dumitru Crudu: "I don't know whether I would have become a writer if I had not ended up in Braşov and if I had not met writers and teachers George Crăciun, Alexandru Muşina, Ovidiu Moceanu, Andrei Bodiu, Caius Dobrescu, Alexandru Cistelecan, Cornel Moraru, Virgil Podoabă and Vasile Gogea. They had a very large influence on me. All my books of poetry were born in Braşov, and were also a result of my communication with those men and extraordinary intellectuals. I was also there in one of the best periods, the beginning of the nineties, when everybody wanted to change something and do something. Communism had been left far behind and those intellectuals were trying to put their shoulder to creating a new world. And so it was an atmosphere of ferment, enthusiasm, dedication. They were wonderful years and very many of the successful projects of today have their roots in those years. My poetry is also a product of that special atmosphere. I can only speak of those times in superlative terms."

Caius Dobrescu, Andrei Bodiu, Simona Popescu and Marius Oprea were bound by friendship to Alexandru Muşina even as early as when they were in lyceum, a friendship that was at the foundation of the "European brand of the Braşov School," as evoked by Caius Dobrescu and Andrei Bodiu.

Caius Dobrescu: "For me the fundamental encounter was with the powerful, larger than life personality that was Alexandru Muşina, whom I met, while still in lyceum, at the 19 Cenacle. For me, Sandu Muşina, who passed from among us prematurely, not only put Braşov on the literary map of Romania, but also made it, at least temporarily, the capital of our intellectual space. I think that this is also how my friends feel/think, the friends who together constructed, beginning in our long-distant adolescence, the European brand of the Braşov School. I think that even today, when it has reached its third or fourth generation (through Adrian Lăcătuş, Rodica Ilie, Cristian Pralea, Geta Moarcăs, Dan Ţăranu, Adriana Bărbat, Bogdan Coşa, Andrei Dosa and other very gifted writers), the school has lost nothing of its large scope."

Andrei Bodiu: "I was in the same class as Simona and Marius in the eleventh and twelfth grade at the Unirea Lyceum in Braşov. We were and still are very good friends, because although we lived in troubled times, we had great inner freedom and we genuinely liked to be together. It was an extraordinary atmosphere. Never in the long experience of the cenacles that followed did I feel so well as I did then. The oldest members, Muşina, Crăciun, Moceanu, Gogea, Angela Nache, looked on us as younger siblings: highly endowed and highly intelligent adolescents, as Muşina used to say. We met on Sundays, every fortnight, first in the basement of the culture club, then in another room, we would listen to poetry and prose, we would debate, we would hear all kinds of new names that encouraged us to read. Even now I think that my formative experience in the 19 Cenacle was vital. [...] The Braşov Group meant Simona Popescu Caius Dobrescu, Marius Oprea and Andrei Bodiu. We were and still are united, although each has now taken his own path, a certain way of perceiving reality, the everyday. I think that I put into practice, even more than they did, the theoretical ideas of the eighties-ists, which fixed at the centre of poetry the concepts of reality and biography. As for me, I continue to be fascinated by reality, everyday reality, and I think that the big themes, the Big Truths, can be discovered in that reality."

Friendship and professionalism were at the basis of the literary cenacles of the 1980's that made history, and they were also forms of resistance, through the esteem in which they held human values (friendship) and culture. In this respect, Gheorghe Crăciun once said in an interview: "And so it was that in Romanian communism, there was resistance through culture, through friendship, through a pronounced feeling of family, through the collective spirit of intellectual groups, which explains how it was still possible to survive."

The human factor is at the basis of the continuing journey begun by the late Alexandru Muşina, by Gheorghe Crăciun and Andrei Bodiu, and their team that carries on the spirit of Braşov literature is, at the institutional level, made up of Ovidiu Moceanu, Caius Dobrescu (despite his moving to Bucharest University), Mihai Ignat, Adrian Lăcătuş, Rodica Ilie, Georgeta Moarcăs, Dan Botezatu, and Dan Ţăranu, brilliant former students of the Literature Faculty.

Friendship, faith in promising young people, and Alexandru Muşina's talent of creating emulation around him influenced literary figures of today who were not students of the faculty, but who, interacting with Alexandru Muşina, were stimulated and pushed forward by him. They include Marius Daniel Popescu, Mihail Vakulovski and Alexandru Vakulovski.

The Institution – The Braşov Literature Faculty

In just twenty-five years, from 1990 to 2015, the Braşov Literature Faculty has become a fully developed institution, providing doctoral and postdoctoral courses, and has had a strong social impact in the Braşov community, at the same time becoming a centre of culture thanks to the events organised here: national and international conferences, book launches, literary events.

The originality of the faculty resides in literary creativity stimulated and shaped through creative writing courses that today constitute the nucleus of the Cultural Innovation M.A. course (Mihai Ignat, playwriting and scriptwriting).

The following are some of the methods applied by Alexandru Muşina in such courses, methods (for poetry) which he shared in a letter to Dumitru Crudu: 1) theory: what writing/creating poetry is; 2) rewriting; 3) exercises: the sonnet, metrical and rhymed folk poems, surrealist poems, etc.; 4) translations.

In an interview Gheorghe Crăciun said: "Further, in the Creative Writing course, it is no longer a secret to anybody what a literary model is, how we can lend a different meaning to a given text, rewrite it, turn it upside down, how we can deconstruct it, above all else. The courses proper are preceded by discussions of a text. Recently, we looked at Urmuz's novel *The Funnel and Stamate*."

The literary figures surrounding the Braşov Literature Faculty, their journalism, their involvement in student life, encouragement of students, promotion of values, and creative writing courses have led to an explosion of creativity, which has materialised in numerous books.

Publications

Beginning with the group debuts prior to 1989 and continuing with individual collections of poetry, prose, essays, literary criticism and theatre, and with the publication of anthologies bringing the Eighties Generation back to public attention, as well as anthologies of young writers, didactic materials and literary magazines, the activity of the Braşov School is impressive.

Poetry

The poetry can be classified along the lines laid down by Alexandru Muşina and theorised in his *The Paradigm of Modern Poetry* (1996) as "poetry of the everyday," of the *new anthropocentrism*, thanks to its "focus on human being, in its concrete, physical-sensorial data, on our existence here and now and a certain 'clearness of vision'." In the poets of the Braşov School we find realist details; it is a poetry that seeks direct contact with reality. Poet Naomi Ionică says of the lesson in poetry she learned from her teachers: "Poet Alexandru Muşina speaks of a plasma of poetry, and the late prose writer Gheorghe Crăciun speaks of 'corporeal writing.' They were my teachers, from them I learned the most about what true poetry means. That is, you should talk about what matters, about what is genuinely important to us, as Alexandru Muşina would say. It was my opportunity to develop in proximity with these extraordinary writers."

In the following I shall take a brief look at the poetry of those who make up the Braşov School, mentioning (here) only the debut volumes of each author.

Alexandru Muşina made his debut in the group anthology *Five* (1982), alongside Romulus Bucur, Bogdan Ghiu, Ion Bogdan Lefter, and Mariana Marin; his individual debut was *Strada Castelului No. 104* (1984). **Romulus Bucur,** group debut: *Five*, individual debut *The Weight of the Ink on the Paper* (1984). **Andrei Bodiu**, group debut: *Pause for Breath* (1991), alongside Caius Dobrescu, Simona Popescu, and Marius Oprea, individual debut: *The 24-hour Race* (1994). **Caius Dobrescu** group debut: *Pause for Breath*, individual debut: *Washing my Socks* (1994). **Mihai Ignat**, group debut: *Family Portrait* (1995), alongside Sorin Gherguţ, Svetlana Cârstean, Răzvan Rădulescu, Cezar Paul-Bădescu, and T. O. Bobe, individual debut: *Klein* (1995). **Dumitru Crudu**, *The False Dmitri* (1994). **Daniel Puia-Dumitrescu,** *Stone Buds* (2005), **Naomi Ionică,** group debut: *The Three Graces (poems)* (2008), alongside Cristina Popa and Georgiana Rusuleţ, individual debut: *The Lonely Will Remain Lonely* (2010). **Andrei Dósa,** *When that which is consummate will come* (2011). **Vlad Drăgoi,** *Methods (*2013)**, Sabina Comşa,** *All the Other Close Ones* (2014). **Robert G. Elekes,** *I Now Shoulder My Teeth and Bid Adieu* (2015).

Prose

The prose of the Braşov School includes novels faithful to eighties-ist textualism (via Gheorghe Crăciun), novels that focus on the everyday and biographical, and miserabilist micro-novels. I shall mention only the writers' debut works.

Gheorghe Crăciun, *Original Documents/Legalised Copies* (1982). **Ovidiu Moceanu**, an eighties-ist, close to modernist realism, made his debut with the novel *A Look at Ioan* (1983). **Caius Dobrescu** published his first novel in 1994: *Madhouse or the Pioneers of Space*. **Andrei Bodiu**, *Heroes Boulevard* (2004). **Ruxandra Ivăncescu,** *Marañon or the True Story of the Discovery of the New World* (2008). **Alexandru Muşina**, *Dracula's Nephew (*2012). **Jolán Benedek**, *Justina's Little Soul* (1996). **Dumitru Crudu**, *Slaughter in Georgia* (2008). **Dan Ţăranu,** *The Fourth Element* (2004). **Ştefania Mihalache,** *East-failure* (2004). **Adriana Bărbat,** *Talk Show* (2004). **Adrian Lăcătuş**, *The Empire of Borţun* (2005). **Mihaela Murariu,** *Cat's Eye* **(**2005). **Cătălina Ene,** *The Echo* (2005). **Ina Crudu,** *The Day of the Eclipse* (2005). **Mihaela Bîja,** *Alin and Alice* (2005). **Anca Andriescu,** *Electric Cigarettes and Other Comicalities* (2005). **Szilágyi Katalin,** *Ancuţa from the Ground Floor* (2005). **Mihail Tomulescu,** *The Adventures of Petrică Bolovan, Peasant Pimp* (2005). **Oana Tănase,** *Filo, meserie!* (joint novel, 2005). **Iulian Ciocan,** *Before Brezhnev Died* (2007). **Ovidiu Simion**, *Virginica* (2008). **Denes Ionas,** *Fleisz* (2010). **Bogdan Coşa,** *Poker* (2011). **Dora Deniforescu,** *Circles of Cold* (2011). **Cristina Pipoş,** *Bitter Chocolate* **(**2012). **Răzvan-Ionuţ Dobrică,** *Local Heroes* (2012). **Cristina Podoreanu**, *Zeze's Moon* (2013).

The essay/literary criticism/literary history

The theoretical sweep of the Braşov School would require a separate and broader discussion. I shall limit myself here to listing the debut volumes of the school's leading members.

Alexandru Muşina, *Where Does Poetry Reside?* (1996). **Gheorghe Crăciun**, *In Search of the Reference*

(1998). **Ovidiu Moceanu**, *The Experience of Reading* (1997). **Virgil Podoabă**, *Between Extremes. Monograph on Aurel Pantea. Followed by the Nova Vita Nova of Aurel Pantea* (2002). **Iulian Ciocan**, *Narrative Metamorphoses* (1996). **Caius Dobrescu**, *Final Modernity* (1998). **Marius Oprea**, *Walk Along Printing Press Lane* (1996). **Ruxandra Ivăncescu**, *A New Look at Contemporary Romanian Prose* (1999). **Andrei Bodiu**, *The Eighties Direction in Romanian Poetry* (2000) and *Mircea Cărtărescu (monograph)* (2000). **Romulus Bucur**, *Eighties-ist Poets (and not only) in the 1990's* (2000). **Nicoleta Cliveţ**, *Ioan Groşan (monograph)* (2001). **Adrian Lăcătuş**, *Urmuz. Monograph, Commentated Anthology, Critical Reception* (2002). **Evelina Cârciu**, *I .L. Caragiale: A Lost Letter, A Stormy Night, Mr Leonida Athwart the Reaction* (2003). **Mihai Ignat**, *Onomastics in the Romanian Novel* (2009). **Cătălin Badea-Gheracostea**, *Critical Alternatives* (2010). **Georgeta Moarcăs**, *Dissonances. Studies of Expressionism in Contemporary Romanian Poetry* (2011). **Cristian Pralea**, *In a Mirror Darkly. American Narratives of Conflict in Politics and Popular Culture* (2012). **Dan Ţăranu**, *The Topos of Marginality in the Romanian Novel* (2015).

This recently published work is, as Adrian Lăcătuş argues, part of a series of studies by Braşov academics that have had a major impact on current literary theory and criticism, such as *The Paradigm of Modern Poetry* (Muşina), *The Iceberg of Modern Poetry* (Crăciun), *The Literary Manifesto. Poetics of the Avant-garde in the Romanic Cultural Space* (Rodica Ilie) and *Mihai Eminescu. The Imaginary of Public Space. The Imaginary of Private Space* (Caius Dobrescu) and, I might add, *The Metamorphoses of the Point. Studies of Contemporary Narrative* (Virgil Podoabă) and *Conservative Modernity. Aspects of Central-European Culture* (Adrian Lăcătuş).

Theatre

Dumitru Crudu (*The Bloody Murder in the Violets Resort,* 2001), **Mihai Ignat** (*Crises*, 2004), and **Elise Wilk** (*It Happened One Thursday*, 2012) are the leading dramatists of the Braşov School, along with their debut plays.

Anthologies

Alexandru Muşina: *Anthology of the Poetry of the Eighties Generation* (1993), *Anthology of Modern Poetry. Modern Poets on Poetry*, co-edited by Romulus Bucur (1997), *The Young 03. Anthology of Young Braşov Prose Writers*, co-edited with Andrei Bodiu and Caius Dobrescu (2003), *The Young 007* (2007).

Gheorghe Crăciun: *Continual Competition. The Eighties Generation in Theoretical Texts* (1994), *The Eighties Generation in Short Prose* (1998).

Andrei Bodiu, Romulus Bucur and Georgeta Moarcăs, *Romanian Poets of the 80s and 90s* (1999).

The Monday Cenacle ideology of publishing anthologies is also continued in *Hazard Light*, edited by Daniel Puia-Dumitrescu (2012), featuring seven poets: Diana Bercu, Antonia Stroe, Şerban Roman, Bianca Nicola, Sabina Comşa, Andrei Dósa and Daniel Puia-Dumitrescu.

Didactic materials

An impressive number of courses and auxiliary teaching materials can be found in the volumes published mainly by Aula and Paralela 45.

Literary magazines

Interval (1990-1992, started by Alexandru Muşina and Gheorghe Crăciun; 1997, started by Andrei Bodiu and Caius Dobrescu), *Corpul T* (since 2011), a project started by Alexandru Muşina, continued by Andrei Bodiu and, after his death, by Adrian Lăcătuş.

After this brief survey, which attempts to organise the vast material hitherto produced by the members of the Braşov School (although I have limited myself only to debut volumes), all that remains is that we continue to follow the unfolding phenomenon, one that seems to be dominated by a spirit of competition. As Gheorghe Crăciun would say, the competition continues!

Adriana Marcu

Jassy and its Writers in 2015

Romanian intellectuals and those from Moldavia in particular have always criticised the imitation of Western models, "forms without a foundation," instead advocating the need for the organic evolution of society and a literature whose purpose is to reflect it as faithfully as possible. Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917), the leader of *Junimea* (Youth), the most influential cultural society of the second half of the nineteenth century, believed that Romanian literature had to remain anchored in folklore and local traditions, and to this end he developed an original theory of the novel, which in his opinion must necessarily be *poporal* (national) and bring to the stage "passive heroes" from the peasantry (the majority social class), in order to illustrate a typically Romanian ethnic psychology. Jassy literary critic G. Ibrăileanu (1871-1936) saw things the same way, and in his studies he accredited the existence of a "national specificity," which he defined and analysed from the viewpoint of cultural regionalism (see *The Critical Spirit in Romanian Culture*, 1909), in a positivist sociological manner. Not even Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943), the ideologue of Romanian liberalism, managed to break away from this movement in conservative thought, and nor did George Călinescu (1899-1965), Romania's canonical critic par excellence, who in his monumental *History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present* (1941) classifies writers according to racial and geographic criteria, identifying a "spirit of the place" with distinct characteristics for each separate region.

It is not until the 1960's generation of critics (Eugen Simion, Nicolae Manolescu, Valeriu Cristea, Lucian Raicu) that we may say that Romanian literature begins to be judged solely according to the criterion of aesthetic value. But if the aesthetic gained its autonomy in that period, it needs also to be understood in context, as an effect of the rebuff of nationalist-conservative ideologies in favour of universalist doctrines (Marxism, structuralism, etc.). And finally, in the postmodern period, local identities are rehabilitated once more, with all their irreducible particularities (see the revival of literary geography and sociology in the contemporary period, as well as the impact of a project such as "The Third Europe," which brings into discussion the legitimacy of localism in the arts).

This explains why, in the context of the liberalisation of Romanian society and multiculturalism, what we have been able to offer the West since 1989 as export goods has proven to be precisely this seemingly minor, picturesque and atmospheric literature deeply rooted in Romanian traditions and realities. As poetry is by its very nature untranslatable, it was to be expected that a new generation of prose writers would speak to the rest of the world about Romanian realities in a language as direct and intelligible as possible, a language without lyricism and, above all, without any pretension to inaugurate new and original narrative forms. Besides the recourse to our specific myths and traditions, the writer also had to speak about the present, deconstructing and at the same time reconfiguring the so-called "Romanian identity" in the manner of objective realism, designed to highlight the historical and social (or documentary, in the wider sense) dimension of literature itself.

In any event, translators have shown themselves to be interested precisely in this transitive/documentary literature, rather than in the enigmatic charades of the poets and lyrical prose writers, or in massively epic or baroquely virtuoso constructs, which, the same here as in all minor literatures, are written in the spirit of the epigone, in imitation of models established worldwide by novelists such as Balzac, Proust, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Thomas Mann, James Joyce and Robert Musil. Today's reader is in a hurry, however, and wants a different kind of book, books that are shorter and more hard-hitting, which will enlighten him or her quickly and at the same time give him or her pleasure.

For these reasons, when I compiled an anthology of contemporary prose from Jassy for the first International Festival of Literature and Translation (FILIT, Jassy, 2013), I realised that aesthetic success was always down to a questioning, polemical and non-conformist stance towards tradition and the so-called "spirit of the place," a spirit conducive to reverie and contemplation, which is to say, a mood favourable to lyrical writing rather than narrative prose

and strictly realist observation. This is probably why Jassy has always produced exceptional poets and brilliant critics, moralists and essayists, rather than equally meritorious prose writers (Moldavian prose, in which the memoir is the predominant mode, generally suffers from an excess of lyricism and sentimentalism). It is a known fact that prose writers from Jassy and Moldavia have generally favoured narrative that is evocative or anecdotal, without managing to tackle the novel with any success (with one exception: Ionel Teodoreanu, a "lyrical" prose writer par excellence, who has been rehabilitated by contemporary literary criticism). And this is because the novel is an infinitely more complex kind of writing, which demands critical intelligence and a capacity to observe in a far greater degree than it does innate talent. But nevertheless, a number of novels written in Jassy have come to be included in some of the most prestigious top tens of recent years and have won numerous awards. I am referring, of course, to works such as *Hens' Heaven*, *I'm a Communist Biddy!*, *How to Forget a Woman*, and *The Little Girl Who Played God* by Dan Lungu, *Matei Brunul* by Lucian Teodorovici, *Juniper Roots* by Ovidiu Nimigean, *Good Night, Children!* by Radu Pavel Gheo, *Our Special Envoy* by Florin Lăzărescu, novels by authors who have garnered national and international success, also having benefitted, it is true, from the support of a strong publisher, Polirom, which for more than a decade has conducted an extensive campaign to promote young writers.

If we judge today's literature from a global perspective, it is obvious that the prose writers from Jassy that might provoke interest on the part of translators from the West are precisely those mentioned above, that is, those who cultivate a realism with an accentuated openness to the ethical and social, in the manner of the "new wave" of film directors (Cristian Mungiu and Corneliu Porumboiu are also Moldavians, the first from Jassy, the second from Vaslui), an option which at the same time proves broad enough to allow the co-existence of palpably different narrative formats. As such, whereas Dan Lungu inventories the actions and behaviours of ordinary people, with a view to configuring specific typologies, and whereas Florin Lăzărescu allows himself to be carried away by the pleasure of storytelling, also having made a name for himself as a successful screenwriter, Lucian Dan Teodorovici remains anchored in the real not from a strict concern for the documentary, and nor from curiosity as to life's unpredictability, but from cognitive interest, with an inclination towards irony and satire based in caricatural and grotesque stylisation and, implicitly, deconstruction of realist/mimetic illusion. Each in his own way, Nimigean and Radu Pavel Gheo succeed in painting an extraordinary fresco of Romanian society in the last fifty years, with a formidable eye for life's concrete details. Given this is how things stand, it is clear that prose from Jassy seems already to have acquired a more complex relief than in the past, including, as we have seen, a number of remarkable novels, uncontaminated by the otherwise unavoidable lyrical microbe.

More closely linked to Jassy and Moldavian traditions are "veterans" such as Grigore Ilisei, Valentin Talpalaru and all the other storytellers in the Sadoveanu mould (let us not forget that Mihail Sadoveanu lived for a time in the city on the Bahlui River), who came to prominence as writers before 1989 and in whose texts we find a particular mood common to the whole of their generation. On the one hand, they capture the oppressive moral atmosphere characteristic of life under communism, and, on the other, they therapeutically compensate it by escaping from the unwelcome reality of the present into the distant past, into story and myth. Not by chance, in their work the mythologisation of the world they experienced takes the place of confession, in a context in which creative freedom was limited and in which a self-searching discourse naturally awakened the censors' suspicions.

But as I said, it was not until the younger generation that prose writers were to have the courage to relate to their own past without prejudices or resentment, analysing it from a purely introspective preoccupation. As such, in the work of Liviu Antonesei, Mariana Codruţ, Cătălin Mihuleac, Ovidiu Nimigean and Radu Pavel Gheo, as well as Adrian G. Romila and Călin Ciobotari, narrative unfolds against the backdrop of a purely decorative Jassy, sooner perceptible as a projection of interiority than as a space in its own right, with its own objective existence. Such evocative narrative thus revives "Moldavianism" (an irreducible element in the psychology of creation) in a number of aesthetically viable guises, such as the Bildungsroman and spiritual autobiography (Liviu Antonesei and Adrian G. Romila), as well as allegory (Mariana Codruţ and above all Călin Ciobotari) and the anecdotal (the now cynical, now sentimental accounts of "pink communism" found in Cătălin Mihuleac's short stories).

Special mention of Nichita Danilov needs to be made, I think: a prolific writer, who first made his name as a poet, but later made the transition to novelist, writing prose that is Russian in its inspirations, which include Gogol, Dostoevsky and Bulgakov, combining fantastic, visionary ingredients with sapiential dialogue in a manner that is highly original. Dorin Spineanu and Florin Irimia write prose that has virulent overtones of social criticism and the squib, in the Wallachian tradition, *à la* Arghezi. The first is inclined to blend discursive registers and preventatively dilute his sarcasm, while the second seems intensely to experience the Romanian sentiment of self-hatred (a sentiment painstakingly analysed by Luca Piţu in his delightful essays).

As for poetry, in the anthology he edited for the first FILIT, Doris Mironescu regards its representatives as Emil Brumaru (also a letter writer and memoirist), Liviu Antonesei, Mariana Codruţ, Lucian Vasiliu, Cassian Maria Spiridon, Nicolae Turtureanu, Daniel Corbu, Şerban Axinte, Constantin Acosmei, Radu Andriescu, Nichita Danilov, Michael Astner, O. Nimigean and Matei Hutopila, writers who (with the exception of Brumaru) claim descent from the works of illustrious predecessors such as Mihai Ursachi, Cezar Ivănescu, Dan Laurenţiu and Ioanid Romanescu.

Besides its legendary poets (Eugen Lovinescu viewed the Eminescu school as the superior aesthetic crystallisation of the Jassy *spiritus loci*), Jassy can also boast a venerable

school of literary critics, presided over in the communist period by literary historian Constantin Ciopraga, who in his most important work, *The Personality of Romanian Literature* (1973), translated shortly thereafter into the world's major languages (a sign that communist officialdom approved the book), attempted to demonstrate the existence of a native literary tradition and specific creativity, along the same lines as Călinescu's argument in his *History of Romanian Literature from Its Origins to the Present*. Both in Jassy's university and in its longstanding journals (such as *Convorbiri Literare* and *Cronica*), the spirit of Romania's inter-war literary criticism was perpetuated, in the form of scholarly works of literary history, as well as impressionistic critical *feuilletons*. As such, in the 1970's and 80's, Jassy produced a remarkable generation of *feuilleton* writers and reviewers, for example, Al. Dobrescu, Ioan Holban, Val Condurache, Al. Dobrescu, Constantin Pricop, Daniel Dimitriu and George Pruteanu, most of them graduates of the Philology Faculty, where they had been taught by the likes of Constantin Ciopraga, Al. Dima, Mihai Drăgan, Elvira Sorohan, Al. Husar and Ioan Constantinescu. An important role in Jassy's cultural life was also played by the Junimea publishing house. Junimea published first-rate books, and not only by local authors, examples of which include Nicolae Breban's novel *Annunciation* (1977), which appeared at a delicate moment, after the novelist had fallen out of favour with the regime.

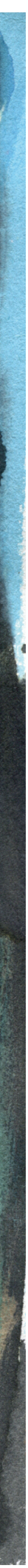
Likewise, it should be said that besides the *feuilleton* and literary review, one distinct feature of Jassy's literary criticism is its predilection for essays and memoirs on moral themes, illustrated by authors such as Al. Călinescu (an essayist with an appetite for theory), Dan Petrescu (a journalist through and through, whose talent manifests itself only in a polemical register), Luca Piţu (unique unto himself), Sorin Antohi (scholarly, erudite), Liviu Antonesei (polyvalent but facile), Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu (a disciple of Bourdieu, author of pioneering works in Romanian sociology), Florin Faifer (a biting but subtle portraitist), Valeriu Gherghel, and Codrin Liviu Cuţitaru, all of whom are university teachers with numerous academic works under their belts, but who have not shunned journalism, since they have not wished to remain captive in the narrow bounds of their own fields of expertise.

More stylistically individualised and of obvious literary value are the texts of Luca Piţu, who, although he was accused by Adrian Marino in *Memoirs of a Solitary Man* of being a mere "verbal madcap," is nonetheless the creator of an unmistakable style, one that is ludic, baroque and monstrously erudite, albeit tinged with all the expressive humours of the squib. Equally individual (but in the opposite direction, that of austerity and the lapidary) is the style of the texts written by Valeriu Gherghel, who in the essay has found the most appropriate vehicle for expression, fully suited to his erudition, highly acute aesthetic sense and tyrannical vocation as a writer. The journalism of Codrin Liviu Cuţitaru (currently Jassy University's foremost academic in the field of English Studies) is also extremely original, which captures, in an essentialising, anecdotal manner and in a semi-fictional register, the not always accessible meanings of history, and his newspaper texts validate themselves literarily as works of the imagination. But apart from the differentiating features, which relate to the talent and personality of each separate author, what is for certain is that a genuine journalistic school (and, no less, a school of the essay in the wider sense) has come into being in *Dialog* and *Opinia Studenţească* magazines, which is exactly where the core of an authentic anti-communist dissidence also formed.

We find the same polemical, subversive, non-conformist spirit after 1989 in the pages of *Timpul* magazine, where many of Jassy's talented young writers made their literary debut, before going on to form the so-called Club 8. The group published a very interesting "manifesto" in *Dilema* magazine in 1999, and a few years later the identity of this literary micro-community from Jassy was further highlighted, thanks to two anthologies: *Club 8 Poetry* (2001) and *oZone Friendly. Jassy. Literary Reconfigurations. An Anthology* (2003) and a collection of confessions: *The Pink Book of Communism* (2004), an explosive work of non-fiction, in which the memoir is merely a starting point. Nor should we overlook the *OuTopos* magazine and cenacle, from beneath whose overcoat emerged a number of the most important novelists and critics of the 2000's generation (Lucian Dan Teodorovici, Florin Lăzărescu, Bogdan Creţu and Doris Mironescu), who went on to write regularly for *Suplimentul de Cultură*, making a decisive contribution to establishing the new literature. Another launch pad for young writers from Jassy, particularly for critics, has been *Convorbiri Literare* magazine, which saw a period of decline under the editorship of Al. Dobrescu after 1989, but has gradually managed to recover since 1995, thanks to the managerial intelligence of Cassian Maria Spiridon, the editor-in-chief of the prestigious publication for more than two decades. Consequently, apart from a few unfortunate events that have overshadowed the "sweet town's" image as a potential European Capital of Culture (the recent scandal surrounding FILIT), I think that the dynamic of current literature in Jassy entitles us to be optimistic.

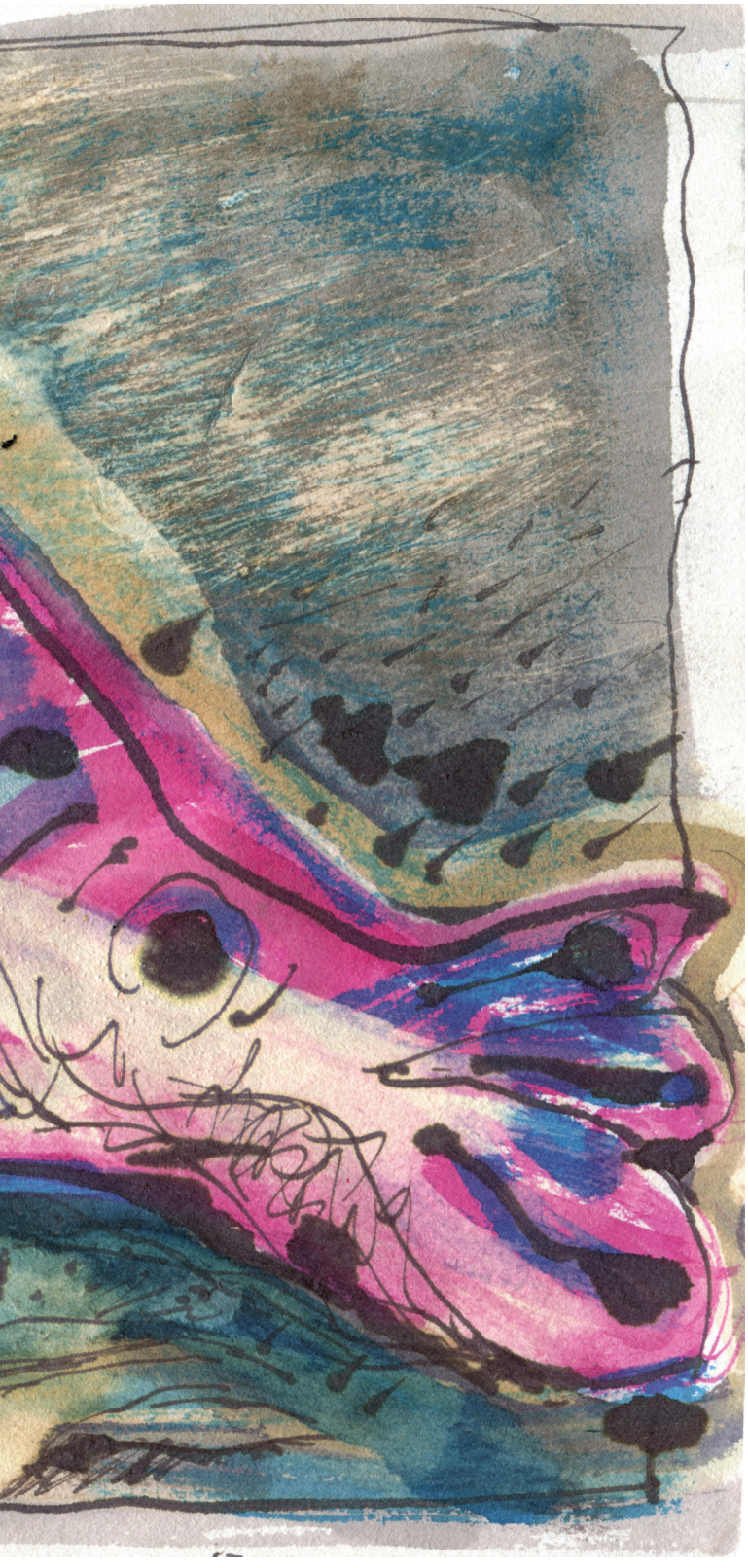
Antonio Patraş





Poems





Andrei Bodiu (1965 – 2014)

The young poets

The young poets gaze from
The photo. They are young and melancholy young and
Ironic when they wear the stag's antlers
Grandfather's trophy instead of a face.

The others take deep drags on cigarettes.
The young poets are stern and tender one resembles
James Dean another looks like Tarkovsky's Stalker.

The girls have beautiful figures. Ordinary ones.
They too take drags on their cigarettes
Nonchalant. Nonconformist.

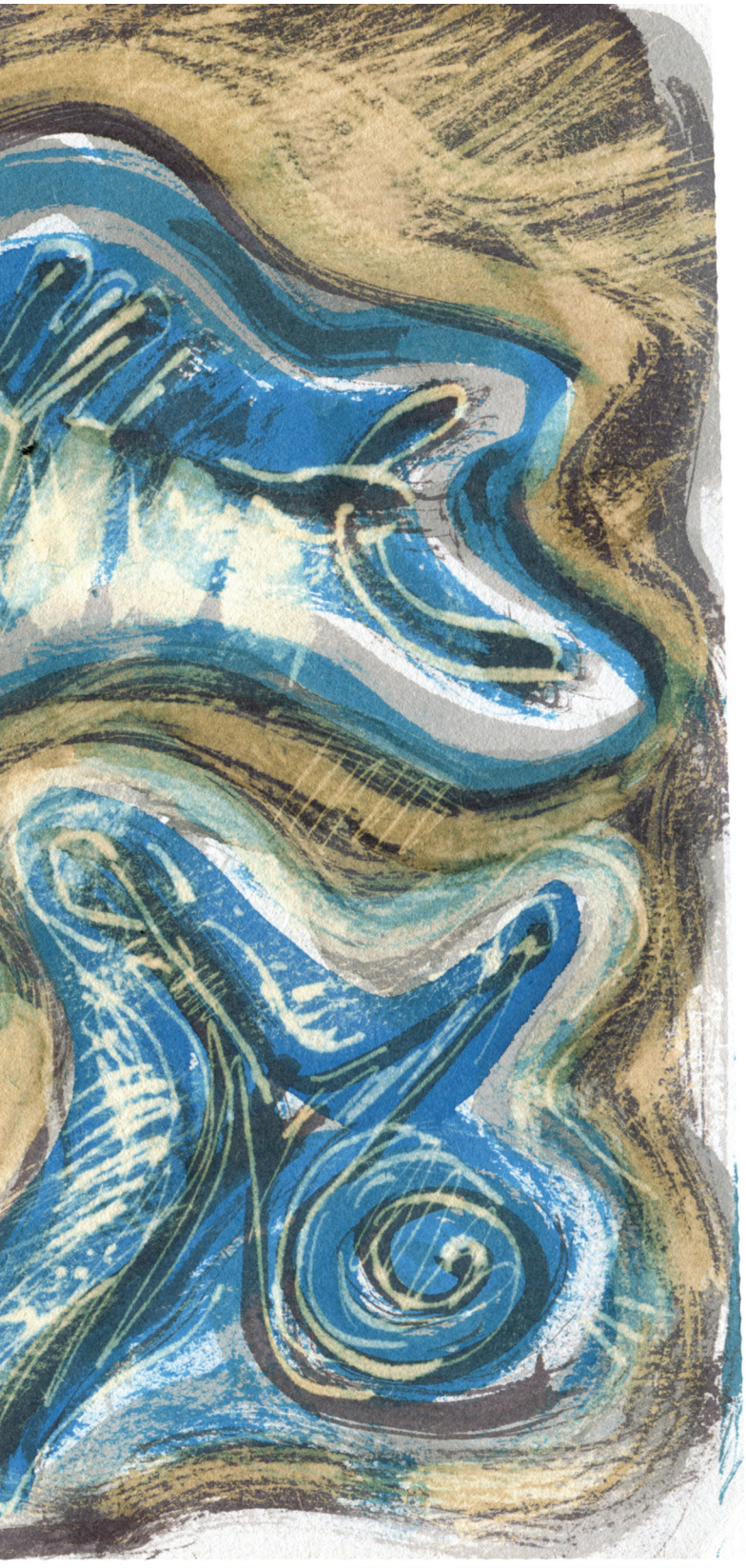
Their delicate excesses cause me to dream.

translated by Alistair Ian Blyth



Romulus Bucur (b. 1956)

courage to



you should have the courage to remember
that last coffee you drank together
the rain which surprised you embracing
after the soppy film her departure
letters never sent from the army
in which you called her goddess and slut
poems in which homesickness
was stuffed in irony's tight shirt
you should have the courage to open wide
the windows of that castle of books
where you hide, and to look
at the wasteland you call your life
to set out from inside the walls of this town
and the next
and the next
exhausted and famished in the umpteenth one
to sit on a bench
between a sleeping drunk
and a child at play.

translated by Simion Dumitrache,
Pat Boran, Heather Brett,
Tony Curtis, Theo Dorgan





Mircea Cărtărescu (b. 1956)

a fine day for banana-fish

it's a fine day for the banana-fish.
I take the no. 90 as far as the university.
Beloved reader, who would belive it's mid-december?
At *doamna ghica* the electric clock
(cum thermometer) shows +15°; and the pekinese
are without their little coloured waistcoats.
even the little branches on the trees seem greener and the
limestone of *ion mincu*
institute of architecture granulates in the sun.
sunrays everywhere. Pinky-orange shop windows
crammed with slips, shirts, sweaters.
At *mirage* they even have deodorant and shaving cream
And in front of the cafe at *dunărea,* unbelieveable,
Two stacks of crates, pepsi – they're selling it right
in the street.
what a day! what a fine day for the banana-fish!
a blue sky and women in piles of fox fur. I take
two bottles
of sparkling pepsi and sit
on a terrace varnished by sunshine
at a white iron table on a white iron chair.
squinting, I face the sun, my sheepskin left at home
and my plastic jacket starts to smell.
two cuties opposite drink pepsi too.
one is beautiful, blue eyes, and the kind of hair I love:
dark, with golden streaks, slightly wavy.
her coat open, her nice little breasts show
through a pretty coloured sweater.
beloved reader, in clear air the colours of the world are
so fluid
I'm afraid to breathe for fear of swallowing some
passer-by or skoda,
for fear the university would hurtle towards me.
The babes clear off, but I find another one to look at
and when all my pepsi's gone
I head for *cişmigiu* into the chaos of the traffic
then from *kogălniceanu* take the trolley-bus back home.

beautiful morning for the banana-fish!

translated by Simion Dumitrache,
Pat Boran, Heather Brett,
Tony Curtis, Theo Dorgan



Magda Cârneci (b. 1955)

At Midlife



In this strange race we can't avoid,
we're sometimes victim of unexpected, dreadful blows.
Just like that, the pocket metronome sputters and stops;
then we see differently, *differently*,
the chair, the glass, the table where we sit in silence, dissolved.
Little by little objects develop a phosphorescent clarity,
a sort of lofty curtain is drawn slightly apart
before an ancient mist, a pulsing dark.
Time stands still, *still*; nothing continues its flow.
We remain in place; we wait
hermetically sealed in an intense, living present.
Something throbs everywhere around us: a noiseless tension, a dread,
as if a mini-apocalypse, no less than terrible
– this life of ours –
could suddenly burst before our eyes
like a cutting water, a redemptive cascade.
A movie gets jammed in an enormous projector
and all at once we awaken in the negative,
in the middle of a sequence; in vast torrent of images that are the world.
The flame of illusion goes out, grows cold.
Everything's silent; a void within; cosmic stasis.
As if in a lightening flash, for a powerful instant, the mind opens
to forgotten mysteries, never before glimpsed.
Something heavy howls inside us, moans, plunges into a sort of abyss.
Something else inside slowly rises toward a vortex of light,
envisioning with wonder its indestructible purity.
In the new clarity of our interior vision
we dimly behold, in a mirage-like phantasm as if from a more refined movie,
mature gods, seated at a table above,
making gentle hand gestures to us,
smiling, waiting us.

translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Alina Cârâc



Svetlana Cârstean (b. 1969)

Gravitation



Gravitation
is
when the aeroplane sets us down
once more
each in front of the other
I know by heart the yew, the pine, the spruce and the fir,
you the conditions of production,
me my father teaches the times table in summer, you
your father socialism,
each on her stool, under the same sun.
we are two rich heiresses
who now look at each other
in the mirror of an extravagant Northern hotel
luxury and betrayal
are not at all unknown to us.
The ingrate daughters of old revolutions!
Gravitation
is
when your shadow looks like Marx
mine like the fir tree
which year after year
at Christmas
filled the house with greenish needles

translated by Alistair Ian Blyth





Ruxandra Cesereanu (b. 1963)

California (on the Someş River)

Drunk on Hotel California we're making a din,
we wake all the neighbours hiding in closets.
Our uproar is epidermal.
We're carnivores, our eyes desolate of knowledge.

It was the day of the dead when we flew by 'plane over the sea,
and on the day filled with candles I always
remember how I almost became a nun.
I had once believed that the nunnery trained you for poetry
and that poetry was a nun in the flesh and blood.
But a great many years have passed since then
and now I stand atop high heels and my earlobes are pierced.
On the day of the dead something clarifies within me
like a door slammed shut by hands gloved to the elbow,
poetry like a nunnery has crashed down off its stilts,
and my ex-nun's habit hangs on a peg.
Does anyone know what happens to a full sack drawn too tight
at the neck?
It does not split down a single side
but bursts all at once from every side wherein it was pent.

"The holidays are here from France by train,
kids, it's time to play, throw our books away,
burn the school down, let the teachers drown,
we'll turn the lights out, put the town to rout."
That's what we used to shout, in the middle of June, like
chaffinches,
up on the roof of the ten-storey block
or in the ground-floor den of blankets, when it rained.

translated by Alistair Ian Blyth





Dan Coman (b. 1975)

love poem

all day it couldn't get any
better as all day
we are stuffed little men,
and mara comes between
clothing us combing us
gently palming our bottoms mara comes and mounted
on
some plastic ducks
floats us out in coffee

all day it couldn't get any
better as all day
we are snow white with the
seven dwarves
mara comes among us and
unscrews our hands unscrews our feet and cleans
off our stomachs
pulling out all the oakum and
wool

all day it couldn't get any better
only at night do we become
full of flesh
only at night when mara finally
sleeps
when we squeeze quickly
under the blanket
and in silence slap against
one another
like two chicken legs.

translated by Martin Woodside
and Ioana Ieronim



Caius Dobrescu (b. 1966)

The dust republic



I sit in front of a plate
with hemp seeds. Meanwhile
the vocabulary grows richer. I mean
people are sleeping. My stomach
has become petrified. You'd need a
battering ram to whack it. I open another beer. The pipes
tingle, the whole plumbing. I go out
to the staircase, listening. You'd say
the scream of a sternum…

I smoke. I'd take off my clothes
the way a woodcutter would do it to a girl,
somewhere in the mountains.
I made the point: I have to
Survive. Who's meant to love me
will do it anyhow.
You cannot
build anything, all
is built in advance: the end
of the clavicle pricking softly
from under the skin, or the sturgeon, decomposing
among power lines, or the idiot
child, almost
carbonized by summer light (almost
turned into its filigree) – playing
among Philomela nests, near the statue
of that nameless soviet soldier, in the
park. Stark naked,
pushed into a barrack, and the light shining
like reflected by razor blades, and a placard WELCOME
DEAR RECRUITS… Oh! And that
Red haired, late in her fourties she doctor, casting a
Bored look at my contracted privacy. Is it
Going to become the privacy of a private?
Say no, please! Say no!

translated by Caius Dobrescu



Ana Dragu (b. 1976)

an education



before there was you I didn't have curtains
and it never entered my head
that anybody would waste their time spying on me from the building opposite
through the window
now I know and I don't see why
I should spoil their fun

before there was you I didn't know that there was a love
good enough to frame
or a love that you had to get rid of quietly, discreetly
like a disabled child
that didn't meet all
the requirements

I didn't have the wretched flesh
or the superstitions

with which I've learned to love you monotheistically

it was dreadfully sad
back when
life wasn't
a pleasure endurance test

all the good poetesses are unhappy
now I know

and I provoke
each instant
every possible touch

just to hear in the distance
how a heart should thump
when dying of pleasure
after 140 years of resisting pleasure

translated by Alistair Ian Blyth



Claudiu Komartin (b. 1983)

take up thy bed and walk



"take up thy bed and walk" said
the rhinoceros during the bridge game
to the short-sighted colour-blind woman
to the old maid slightly crinkled at the edges
and she regarded him in horror and yearning
as the manliest of possible lovers
late in the night the strangulated
orgasm the groan like a long *oiiiink*
and the rhinoceros shaking this so deceptive
reality in which she yet believes
with doggedness the same as in pascal say
with coenobitic rigour.

translated by Alistair Ian Blyth



Mariana Marin (1956 – 2003)

Elegy VIII

In love (of course) and obscured
in the carbide night of souls
death laughs and
sometimes she tells you
"how handsome you are as only in dreams"

and you feel so glad
you kiss her young arms

and then upon my breasts
oh, you no longer know what laughter is

"The dead no longer have mornings"
"The dead no longer have mornings"

she whispers

and you feel so glad
you kiss her arms

and then upon my breasts
in the carbide night
it's the roar of derision in love
and obscured

translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Mia Nazarie



Marin Mălaicu-Hondrari (b. 1971)

The Father



He was tall, he was scrawny, he was smart and a drunkard.
During the months he'd go dry, he'd carry a Bible with him,
get some colour back in his face and have three meals a day.
Until something occurred
and, through the door he'd gone out as a born-again Christian,
he'd walk in as a drunk.
It was not the delights of the afterlife he pursued, but the delights of the heart.
They'd kick him out of his job for a start,
next, they'd kick him out of his church, while Mum
would kick him out of the house.
Next thing he'd be gone months on end,
trying his hand at odd jobs.
He was good to me,
kept me in poverty, fed me on dreams.
Taught me not to answer Mum back,
not to steal, to keep clean, to ride on a bike,
to build an acceptable haystack. And not to forget
the multiplication table. Once a year I go clearing his grave
from the weeds. I would have liked
to get drunk with my father, go watching a ball game with him,
or go whoring with him. Yet I know that he wouldn't have liked it,
for, on top of it all, he was lonely and he'd once loved my mum
and respected his children.

translated by Florin Bican





Ileana Mălăncioiu (b. 1940)

The Bear

In the high mountain grass, my body curled like the
snakes
Crept out to warm themselves in the sun and stiff with
pain
I wait for the bear to arrive, to stoop beside me,
To stay there awhile, sniffing me in silence, again.

Seeing that I am still alive and that I want him to heal
me
To begin the soft trampling from shoulder to feet
So I feel him gliding over my ribs and kneeling without
wanting to
And getting down on the grass when he knows it's
hurting me,

Climbing up again gently along the spine as far as the
neck
Hearing my vertebrae crackling under his wild right paw
And I can't cry out in fear since while he's passing over
me
To heal me, if I screamed he might put out his claws,

Let me rid myself of this female husk of a snake curled
in the sun,
Let the bear find the earth shifting as he makes me
straight,
Gently, under his weight, trembling as he bends,
Let me coil myself again groaning quietly and wait.

Then let the cure come, let me go through the trampled
grass
And feel for once my body hot from his heavy tread
While the bear moves off slowly as if he were still
Stepping not on the earth, but on a woman's shoulders
instead.

translated by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin



Alexandru Muşina (1954 – 2013)

The house on a hill



Never build your house on a hill.
Better that you sleep. From the walls will emerge tall white-robed angels,
With neon halos and plastic flowers. They will undress:
Large, female breasts, a red, inflamed, female sex.
They will approach your bed, with their swelling sex
Shaven to the bone. Which will whisper to you:
"It is time, Lord of Hosts!" "What hosts?" "The undefeated
Hosts of the Faith." Surrounded
By their moist, greedy mouths, you will cry:
"But I want peace and quiet, I want to sleep." And their crooked
Mouths, with their thick red lips, will laugh: "Shoo, shoo!"

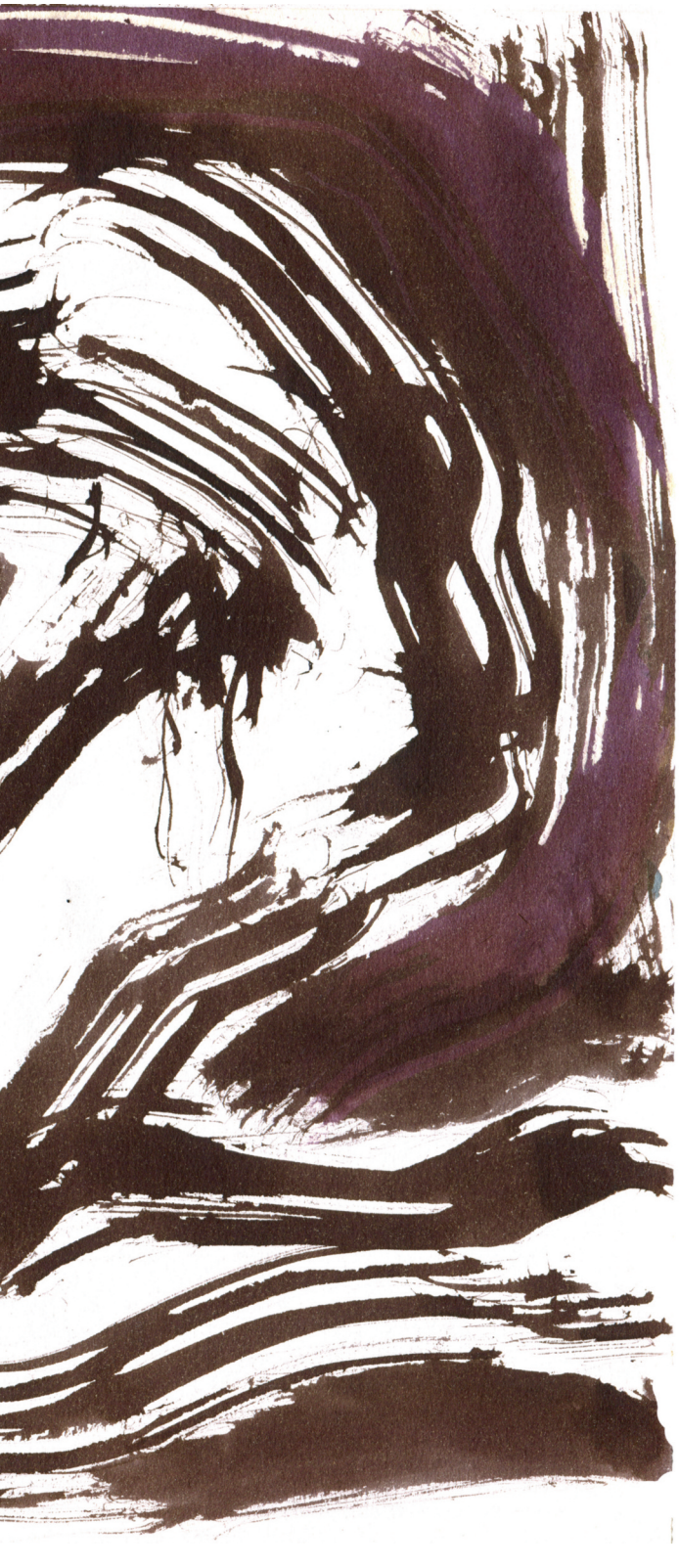
Do not build your house on a hill. Do not fall asleep.
No. Keep your eyes open, fixed on the ceiling. From above
Will rain down a white dust, encasing you in plaster,
Leaving only your eyes and mouth exposed. Then will descend
A woman of gold, with four hands, four legs and a steel-toothed sex.
She will come to a stop a metre above you. And her sex
In a hoarse voice will tell you: "It is time, Lord of Pain!"
"But I want no pain! I want joy, peace, quiet..."
From her ruby eyes will gush
Two grey, mercury tears, which will scald your retina
And her laughter will slide like pain into your ears: "Shoo, shoo!"

Do not build your house on a hill. Do not fall asleep.
Do not look up. Better that you hide
Under the desk and wait there trembling. The black dog
Will come, its muzzle red with blood. It will say: "Arise,
Lord of the Sword and Axe!" "What sword, what axe?"
"The unvanquished
Tools of Spring Reaping." "But I
Am a gentle child of the asphalt and cardboard world." "Get up!
Behind the cardboard there is always flesh and blood, beneath the asphalt
There are animal and human bones, cities and villages in flames."
Then with its rough tongue it will lick your face: "Shoo, shoo!"

Do not build your house on a hill. Do not fall asleep.
Do not look at the ceiling, do not hide under the desk.
Get up, get dressed, go out into the garden. Darkness has fallen,
Into the distance black clouds swathe the sky, and the wind
Is moving madly among the leaves, singing: "Shoo, shoo!"

translated by Alistair Ian Blyth





Ioana Nicolaie (b. 1974)

Crumbs

My mother was the best and by far
the most beautiful woman in the whole wide world…
at five foot three she started out
with hazel eyes and lashes like trout leaping
in the waters of auriferous residues
painted in the mines of Rodna

she was a naïve girl
a girl almost always lonely under her skin filling
her dresses of cheap materials
year by year stretching them more
even more after her fourth child
me
my mother was always there
little by little growing bigger
with her sadness in full bloom looking a few coins
bringing me pills and candy
squandering herself drop by drop
at the sticky intersections of the town
where her parents had married her
when she was sixteen
my mother laughed a lot and told me
about joking around, about the kids next door
about my numerous brothers
about broken sandals, my eventual lovers
disappointments and worries
and she laughed even more
in the midst of the happiness solidified
between quarrels and laundry
taking me to the doctor
buying me my blue school uniform
between happiness and forgetting
and she laughed
to laugh you must clean away the ashes
wipe everything with lye that glistens on dust cloths
and she laughed knowing
that one Sunday she wouldn't just run off
one Sunday she wouldn't forsake Father and us
to stifle her hysteria
to pawn the maddening fear
which forever buffeted her every which way
as in a cyclone
and she laughed
at her cellophane life
at questions rotting with the rags in the attic
at school performances where among other kinds of mothers
she didn't have a birthday
she was a bad cook, continually getting worse
and her auriferous lashes frowned
between one meeting and the next
between one fear and the next…

my mother was a crazy girl
and so she remained, a younger sister
whom I often think of
whom I miss
though her hair thinned
though she grew fat…

translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Irma Giannetti





Ioan Es. Pop (b. 1958)

there's not a lot of death on tuesdays here

there's not a lot of death on tuesdays here,
but not a lot of life either, Phoenicians bear gifts
that few can buy.

it's like that until our earth-dwellers
are told the tale of the lives of their sea-dwellers.
at that moment, our humans start to dream
of buying sea and selling land.

it's no accident that the Phoenicians vanished
to ply the dry land instead.
it's no accident that our humans vanish
to buy the sea from Phoenicians.

nobody seems to care: a gradual somnolence
envelops our world and the next.
nobody remembers anyone as if
each of us had been in his grave forever.

once a month, once a year, someone comes, his shadow
looms over the edge, and we think it's god.
but it's an ominous, silent shadow that can do no better
than heap another night on this night down below.

translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Lidia Vianu



Simona Popescu (b. 1965)

I am an Escher Print

It's noon and I'm feeling irksome
ears plume under choice whispers
it begins...
... I know what begins and I'd like
the phone to ring,
someone to ring the doorbell.

My being splits into two
at the hour of boredom.
Not "being" ... but something outside it
a sententious-white and a sententious-black
like two strange plants with common roots.

You perceive contraries where
and place yourself above
or how should I put it? – parallel.

They are not words
only oppositions
that challenge you
promptly:

Learn, I tell you!
Make a left!
Now is the time. Go!
Don't go telling untruths!
Stay then!
Have patience I tell you,
so that you keep your friends!
Find in humility,
the power to grow!
Don't forget the past!
Never be pert
learn first the worth,
and then devise to know!
Wait,
And make note of all!
Listen and state
what has a price!
Seeming to offer assistance
keep yourself at a distance!
And praise
the power of the living!

What's the point of learning?
Make sure to make a right!
Why wouldn't you stay here?
And what is truth, you say?
From everything steer away!
Whether they've wronged you or vice versa
there's no way to make up!
Don't show yourself distraught
and keep them at a distance!
For always to begin you must forget!
Say what you think,
make sure you're quite clear
unless it'd raise a stink!
Wait for what? And for how long?
And from who?
Listen to the nitwit?
To judge according to their worth?
As you seek to stay away
Avoid what nearer finds its way!
Who and what should you praise
At the edge of the desert's blaze?

as I stand, like this, at intersections
gawking at the black and white signs
I am an Escher print from which I can't escape
I split from myself and find myself again
I walk into my skin I pass myself I look back
the cocoons ruptured
the exuvial structures
what before were resembling shapes.
I prepare my exit from the uniplane.

translated by Carla Baricz



Radu Vancu (b. 1978)

Canto XIV



Someday this day will also be as blinding
as a madhouse
and I am broken by all this living.

I was 17 and I was a porter
at a wholesale on Siretului street
and unloaded ten tons of sugar
all alone in two hours
and I was not half as
broken as I am now, five minutes
after I left Sebastian at the
kindergarten. I was 19 and daddy had
hanged himself nearly a month before and I was
all Kierkegaard and vodka
and I was not a quarter so
broken as now. I was hell
knows how old and I kept deviating
from poetry and I was all
broken and blinding as after
ten tons of sugar.

As after ten days of
Kierkegaard and vodka.

We were three porters on Siretului,
me the youngest and the only one hired
under the table. We carried tons daily
and the wood crates were full of
nails and our bloodied shoulders
were sweet as sugar. As Søren.
As vodka. One of those perverse
worlds which give you the
illusion that poetry really
exists and matters. In which the neck
knows it is hangable and sings
with happiness. In which the mind
is filled with sugar and evil
and knows that someday
this blinding day
will be real and will be
the same madhouse.

You hangable neck, you heart
of vodka and sugar – I know, you carry
tons daily and keep deviating
from poetry. Calm down, however,
I swear on the hanger on which
I put every morning the small clothes of
Sebastian at the kindergarten:
one day, vodka and Kierkegaard
will no longer exist. We will be
old caterpillars. I will no longer suffer.

translated by Radu Vancu



Short bios

Paul Cernat (b. 1972) is a literary critic and lecturer at Bucharest University. With Ion Manolescu, Angelo Mitchievici and Ioan Stanomir he has published *In Search of Lost Communism* (Polirom, 2011), *A Vanished World: Four Personal Histories followed by a Dialogue with H.-R. Patapievici* (Polirom, 2004), and *Explorations in Romanian Communism* (2 vols., 2004 and 2005). With Andrei Ungureanu he is the co-author of the novel *The War of the Butterflies* (2005). He is also the author of the monograph *Contimporanul: The History of an Avant-garde Magazine* (2007), *The Romanian Avant-garde and the Complex of the Periphery* (2007), and *Retro Modernism in the Romanian Inter-war Novel* (2009).

Cosmin Ciotloş (b. 1983) is an assistant lecturer in the Literature Faculty of Bucharest University, where he teaches modern and contemporary literature, including a course on the history of Romanian literary cenacles. In 2013 he was awarded a doctorate for his thesis on poetic strategies in the 1980's. Since 2005 he has written a literary column for the *România Literară* weekly (more than five hundred articles on newly published books). He has contributed to most of the country's cultural magazines, and for five years he presented a book programme on Radio Romania Cultural. He is the author of fifteen introductory studies and prefaces to books ranging from classics such as Rebreanu, Sadoveanu and Topârceanu to young writers such as Ionuţ Chiva and Sorin Stoica.

Nina Corcinschi (b. 1979) is a literary critic, Doctor in Philology, university teacher, and deputy director of the Philology Institute of the Moldovan Academy of Sciences. She is a member of the Union of Moldovan Writers and deputy editor-in-chief of *Metaliteratură* magazine. Her publications include *Poetry and Journalism. The Interference of Languages* (2008), *The Voltaic Arc. The Text as (i)Mediated World* (2012), *Sun and Peacock. Searches for a Paradigm* (2013), *Post-Soviet Literary Journalism in the Republic of Moldova. Interdisciplinary Study*. With A. Grati and O. Gârlea she is the co-author of *The Contemporary Literary Process. The 2000+ Generation* (2014).

Luminiţa Corneanu (b. 1977) graduated from the Literature Faculty of Craiova University in 2000, having specialised in Romanian and French, and in 2010 she was awarded a doctorate in literature. She has published reviews, articles and interviews in Romania's most important cultural reviews. She has worked as an editor for *Mozaic*, *România Literară* and *Luceafărul de Dimineaţă* magazines. In 2014 she published *Leonid Dimov. An Oneiric in the Tower of Babel* (Cartea Românească), which has been nominated for the 2015 *Observator Cultural* Prizes in the Debut category, the Romanian Publishing Industry Gala Prizes, in the Non-fiction category, and the Union of Romanian Writers Prizes, in the Debut category.

Daniel Cristea-Enache (b. 1974) lectures in the Literature Faculty of Bucharest University. Published volumes: *Opening Concert* (2001), *The Romanian Writer's Desk Drawer. Dialogues on Paper* (2005), *Bucharest Far West. Sequences of Romanian Literature* (2005), *A Man from the East* (2006), *Conversations with Octavian Paler* (2012), *New Times. Sequences of Romanian Literature* (2009), *Lyrica Magna. Essay on the Poetry of Nichita Stănescu* (2010), *The Empty Cinema* (2011), *The Sixties Generation: Artistic Discourse and Critical Discourse. Neo-Modernism* (2013), *Today's Literature. Dialogues on the Net* (2013), *The Book as Destiny. Daniel Cristea Enache in Dialogue with Dan C. Mihăilescu* (2013).

Gabriela Gheorghişor (b. 1980) lectures in the Literature Faculty of Craiova University and is deputy editor-in-chief of *Ramuri* magazine. She is the author of the following volumes of literary criticism: *Mircea Horia*

Simionescu. The Disenchantment and Fetishisation of Literature (2011), *Monograms. Configurations of Contemporary Romanian Prose* (2012), *Monograms. Configurations of Contemporary Romanian Poetry* (2014). She is a member of the Union of Romanian Writers.

Horia Gârbea (b. 1962) made his literary debut as a poet in 1982, and since 1989 he has published extensively as a journalist and literary author, receiving numerous awards. He has published poetry, prose, drama, literary criticism, and essays. His plays have been performed on numerous occasions, in Romania, England, France and Serbia. He is a member of the Union of Writers, UNITER, and PEN Club Romania. He has translated into Romanian and adapted for the stage numerous works from the universal stage repertoire. He has published more than thirty original works and translations, and his own texts have been translated into a number of languages. From 2003 to 2013 he was the chairman of the Bucharest section of the Writers Association. He is currently the chairman of the Drama Section of the Bucharest branch of the Union of Romanian Writers.

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