

Paul CORNEA, [*Interpretation and Rationality*], *Interpretare și raționalitate*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2010, 600 p.

Continuing an intellectual project ushered in by *Introducere în teoria lecturii* [*Introduction to the Theory of Reading*], designed and written down in the climate of political freedom established after 1990, *Interpretation and Rationality* bears comparison in our culture only with *Biografia ideii de literatură* [*The Biography of the Idea of Literature*] by the late Adrian Marino – itself part of a larger project, together with *Introducere în critica literară* [*Introduction to Literary Criticism*] and *Critica ideilor literare* [*The Criticism of Literary Ideas*], penned by the same author.

Beneficiary of a tremendous Western bibliography (often consulted “at first hand”), the book provided the groundwork for a university course held at the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest. Less thick than Marino’s pivotal works, Paul Cornea’s book offers nevertheless an almost holistic interdisciplinary approach in the field of humanities. The excessive focus on literature is overcome by means of “training and vocation”. We are dealing here neither with a theory of criticism, nor with a theory of literature, but rather with a theory, even a meta-theory and a critical “morphology” of interpretation in general. Inviting the reader – with the necessary precautions – to use it as a handbook, resorting both to a historical and a typological scrutiny, the theory of interpretation opens onto epistemology, the history of ideas (religious and scientific ideas included) philosophy (ethics and politics *y compris*), sociology, anthropology, linguistics and pragmatics, psychology, cognitive sciences, information and communication theory, various forms of literary criticism and so on, always testing their limits, their possibilities and reliability, within a systematic and coherent approach, always mindful to the inexhaustible diversity of reality.

Ultimately, Prof. Paul Cornea’s scholarly synthesis reads as an engaged meditation, a quest and a credo born out of the lifetime experience of an intellectual endowed with the ability to learn from the illusions and disillusion of the times he lived through (the chapter on ideology is sometimes almost autobiographical), “in a well-informed dialogue” with the latest and most significant international developments in the field of hermeneutics. Last but not least, this is an attempt to confront the most serious and topical interrogations facing the world today.

The issue of beliefs and ideologies, the possibility of translation and dialogue among different or even antagonistic systems/cultures, the tension between relativism and universalism, “the endless battle” between the rational and the irrational, the possibility of mutual understanding, together with a whole set of concepts and cultures, however diverse they may be, testify to this. The difficulty of such a scholarly endeavour is all the more burdensome, given the current information advancement: this is because the quasi-chaotic proliferation of theories and opinions seems to have rendered obsolete not only the humanist ideal of “the universal man”, but also the possibility of reaching a consensus. Against the illusions of rationalism – which served as an umbrella for so many irrational impulses generating fanaticism and totalitarian utopias –, the author pleads for the “weak”,

modest and reasonable version of rationality: "The key to this issue resides in the intellectual and also moral obligation not to take rationality for rationalization. The latter is actually a caricature of the former. It involves three things: 1. to claim that there is no alternative to reason, ignoring, in other words, the fact that human nature is dominated by instincts and passions, interests and anxieties, that our mind is often hypnotized by the irrational and terrorized by ideologies; 2. to turn rationality into a kind of mechanics and value coherence above innovation, repetitive uniformity above the concrete and the particular; 3. to replace criticism by convenience or cost-effectiveness calculations, which sooner or later lead to disaster." Therefore, a plea for relativity, not for the illusions of relativism. Not at all incidentally, the end of the book brings Montaigne to the foreground....

As far as literary criticism and interpretation in general are concerned, moral responsibility seems to be "the only possible stake". "The only thing we can do is put our true feelings above the desire to shock, and the desire to serve the work above any wish to flaunt our personal merits. Interpretation requires accuracy and generosity. It is not born out of indifference or routine, but rather out of that vibrating sensibility and also out of a subtle and insightful intelligence which can recognize talent even if it does not meet one's tastes or preferences". Throughout the book, these desiderata are not mere declarations of intent. "Interpretation" and "rationality" are illustrated, in the most concrete way, by the author himself. The intimate model assumed is Popper's fallibility: an open, inquisitive, genuinely liberal identity, the refusal of dogmatism and ideological bias through recourse to experience, embracing alterity, harnessing the ability to "learn" from those who happen to be holding views opposite to yours, without abandoning critical thinking.

The pages where Paul Cornea comments on Leszek Kołakowski's stand with regard to the inextricable dichotomy between Reason and Religion are an illustration of two minds meeting "in the mirror". Throughout his work, the author strives to overcome traditional dichotomies, to reconcile *mythos* with *logos*, reason and rigor with sensitivity and imagination, the geometrical mind with the *esprit de finesse*, the appetite for theory with the infinite attention to the unpredictability of concrete phenomena. Technical but not dry, the work relies on a personal "method" tested in the *Introduction to the Theory of Reading*: pragmatic realism, a "rational" mistrust of radical and dogmatic stances, keen on empirical testing, but also resorting to theories – whose tendency towards abstraction, generalisation and procustianism is counterbalanced by confronting them with the "reality on the ground". The interpretative typologies invoked in the book show that, far from being the prerogative of specialised elites, interpretation is a vital, indispensable and unavoidable act, rooted in our common anthropological background and related to our ability to communicate and adapt to the environment.

At the end of this endeavour, after exploring the main possible options, Paul Cornea distinguishes "five core functions" of interpretation: mediation, explanation, exploration, correction and critical distance. Those who are governed by impatient youthful expectations and expect maximalist solutions and universal "keystones" will probably be disappointed with the "unspectacular" outcome of this spectacular undertaking. We are

dealing with a lesson in lucid modesty, intellectual availability and moral responsibility. Not in the least a “panacea-theory” or a haughty “thesis”, Prof. Paul Cornea’s book conveys a moral and professional stance: “I must confess I can provide no certainties. There are no rules to teach us how we can proceed to harmonise our divergent faculties and find an acceptable behavioural pattern.”

Unlike the hard “-isms” (“absolute” rationalism included), rationality does not provide certainties or easy access to solutions. It keeps us alert, cautious and ready, making us aware and wary of illusions, whether they come from within (impulses of all kinds, ambitions, strong urges, interests, etc.) or from without (overlooking other possibilities, inadequacy to context, the lack of necessary information, etc.). Argumentative clarity, modesty, a distinctive human warmth and, on occasion, a witty sense of humour enliven the reading, turning it into a captivating guide through the historical and also “contemporary” labyrinth of hermeneutical perspectives.

What impresses the reader about this book is not so much scholarship (it can often be sterile) as the author’s ability to find his way in a vast field, which even top researchers find daunting. Particularly enthralling is “the dramatization” of the ideas scrutinized, the ability to extract the gist of the theories under study and to submit it to a thorough examination, tactfully weighing the spheres of applicability, the limitations and errors of each and every opinion. Thus, the hermeneutic circle ceases to be a “vicious circle”: by overcoming it, we prove we can learn from mistakes.

Prof. Paul Cornea’s affinities and sympathies obviously go towards the reasonable and tolerant minds equally endowed with rigour, subtlety and an appetite for the concrete: from Montaigne to Freud, from the unjustly demonised Lanson to Habermas, Popper, Eco, Ricœur. The analysis of Gadamer’s works (with the controversies surrounding concepts such as “precomprehension”, “tradition” or “prejudgment”) and that of Feyerabend’s thought are extremely exciting... The volume also includes quite sharp theoretical polemics (Matei Călinescu’s study on rereading is taxed with being too restrictive, while Mihai Spărioso’s book on play is criticised for condemning with Nietzschean pathos any excess of reason).

The “intrinsic comparison” model outlined by Andrei Cornea in his *Turnirul khazar* [The *Khazar Tournament*] is used as a means of bypassing the law of the excluded middle and identifying a dialogical space of encounter between opposing systems of thinking. The excesses of “Cartesian” or “positivist” rationalism, as well as the irrational attacks against rationality (coming from a revaluation of myths and the imaginary or from a postmodern anarchic relativism) are all examined through a check-and-balance type of strategy which we also find in Umberto Eco’s *The Limits of Interpretation*, whereby reductionist abstractions are always subject to the ruthless test of empirical diversity. For instance, fighting against the homogeneous and organicist concept of Tradition viewed as “a single torrent”, in Gadamer’s words, Cornea draws our attention to the fact that “we live in a world of conflicts, fractures, controversies, pluralism” and that tradition – with all its “classical” (namely “exemplary”) products –, should be seen as “universally human,

reaching far above the distribution of languages and ethnicity”, so as to prevent it from becoming restrictive and stifling.

Conversely, when the relativistic chaos of interpretations, of conflicting views seems to be insurmountable, “common sense” is summoned as a saviour: “and yet, how is it that we can communicate and sometimes even understand each other?” Again, common sense sanctions the partially legitimate plea – precisely because it is radical and unreasonable – made by Susan Sontag for the refusal of the “hermeneutic rape” in favour of an “eroticism of art”. Outstanding is also the fine assessment of the “anarchic epistemologist” Feyerabend: the fact that he ironically revises his opinions from one book to another, that he often launches risky or aberrant ideas just for the sake of destabilising dogmas and “rational” clichés should not deceive us: for this author, superficially labelled as an “anarchist”, “reasonableness” has actually a positive connotation: it is a “feature of appropriate thinking”: to be rational is to have the ability to revise your thoughts whenever necessary. In turn, at a close reading, Derrida (much like Rorty) is far from being a follower of the “anything goes” dictum: his “frivolous” relativism is backed by a very reasonable plea for suitability to one’s object, for philological rigor and contextualised arguments.

Likewise, those who advocate, above all else, the observance of the author’s intention (Hirsch) and those who favour the reader’s freedom to use and abuse a text as he pleases are countered with the same “minimalist” arguments of empirical reasonableness: far from being dead and gone, as the structuralists believed, the Author makes a comeback and rouses the public’s interest through biographies, memoirs, diaries and auto-fiction, while the hedonistic, narcissistic reading inevitably falls into disrepute in the eyes of the readers who cannot be deceived. This moderate universalistic outlook (shared by Adrian Marino as well) stands against conservative metaphysics as well as against multicultural parochialism. However, we are not dealing with an unachievable “axiological neutrality”, but rather with “a way to negotiate our partisanship in the best possible way”; after all, we are all part of the same world and “nobody has the quality to speak from God’s point of view”...

Some will probably regret the fact that the author overlooks contemporary art, performance art and installations, which are deemed either to “escape interpretation” – according to Susan Sontag – or to contain their own interpretation. However, the theory presented in Paul Cornea’s study is generous enough to provide answers to these “questions” as well. After all, the author is well aware that exhaustivity is unattainable and irrelevant.

A top-notch work of Romanian critical theory, *Interpretation and Rationality* crowns an outstanding career.

PAUL CERNAT

Virgil NEMOIANU, *Postmodernism & Cultural Identities. Conflicts and Coexistence*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2010, 392 p.

“This splendid work goes right to the heart of contemporary debates over the ‘postmodern’ condition. It is an original creative work in the philosophy of culture, a capstone statement by a renowned scholar” – Gerald Gillespie, Emeritus Professor of Comparative Literature, Stanford University

Prof. Virgil Nemoianu engenders, at the most fecund moment of his cultural destiny, a work of significant reflection. The intellectual and ultimately spiritual aperture pervading his recent American volume is noteworthy. It implies an in-depth understanding of the 20th cultural dynamics (and implicitly its remote roots) and also finding the answers to the ever more obsessive questions raised by the Euro-Atlantic (and sometimes global) civilization. This foray is welcome, to be more direct, as it formulates a generous solution to the postmodern axiological deadlock, and in particular, to its generalized relativism, faced with the immediate, universal and resistant values of the human being. In this way, the author proves once again his noble belonging to a cultural family whose reflections – we have been nourishing this belief for the last two centuries or so – have ushered in Modernity. Far beyond the thematic content of the book we comment upon, we shall further on ponder over the message Virgil Nemoianu has entrusted the book with. It seems to us to be extremely positive and necessary.

The disinhibited and somehow celebrative assertion of the constructive (and safeguarding) character of the great cultural heritage of humankind is pervasive to Nemoianu's thinking. What is encouraging and enthusing is that, now, the most pertinent arguments are systematized and re-designed in line with this belief and that they are tapped up from this widely resourceful heritage. Hereon, the force, the sustainability and the dynamics of the values of tradition are brought to limelight, against both the nihilistic prophets who predicted its end, and also the anxious adepts who museumified its forms. Reasonable, nuanced and very dense, Nemoianu's message is at the same time firm; it can bear consequences on the level of humanist disciplines and methodologies, of the cultural and intellectual *Oikumene* of communities and social organization. What the four sections of his book convey is the need to construe a framework open up to dialogue, whose guarantee can be culture itself through everything that is more dignified and beautiful in it. Rigorous and synthetic, this message, conveyed by a humanist who followed through the school of modernity, can be epitomized into the following theses: (1) the dialectics underlying history does not have antithetical poles, that is why the concurrent or subordinated paradigms can and must co-habit; (2) culture communicates intensely and is enshrined into indetermination relationships with all the fields of human manifestation it dynamizes; (3) the Euro-Atlantic cultural canon has an inexhaustible and necessary identity function (the more so in the wake of the postmodern indictment it was submitted to); (4) the basic values of culture and civilization enjoy a certain stability,

nevertheless the stylistics and the image system they communicate are subject to ongoing and natural revisions; (5) the aesthetics heteronomy can be taken as a model for the consistent and tolerant dialogue of different communities (either dominant or peripheral, or doctrinary, ideological, disciplinary, linguistic or geopolitical); (6) culture, art and religion are the fountainhead of dignity, hope and relief for any human being, in spite of what the aggressive delegitimizing demonstrations may argue; (7) faith and reason are not designed to be mutually contradictory, while Modernity provides not only the fierce criticism of the former, but also the premises of the harmonious encounter of the both; (8) Christian humanism supplies the solid and flexible values for a public space and a healthy political ethics (as shown, for instance, by the liberal conservatism or the social thinking embraced by the Catholic Church).

The author structures *Postmodernism and Cultural Identities* into two sections “in mirror,” whose importance has not been sufficiently emphasized. “General Cultural Values” and “General Literary Values” are telling, of course, by their rich and challenging suggestions on the philosophy of culture, aesthetics, the theory of literature or, at least, literary criticism. To go into detail here would be tiresome, inevitably partial and, eventually, redundant, since they can and must be carefully watched *in situ*. To review them would also prove to be groundless, as it may overlook a more subtle and important dimension of the work, outlined by the principles and solutions the humanist reflection extends onto the spiritual and intellectual deadlocks, given this paradigmatic crossroads we have reached. Therefore, let us say that the gesture the author makes is highly significant – not to speak of the wishful follow-ups inside humanist sciences – to appeal to axiological explanations and inquiries. In the last two decades, *value* is the last concept the structural vocabulary of Virgil Nemoianu’s thinking and work has sanctioned, joining in the line of: *model, micro-harmony, dialectics, the secondary, decentralization and canon*. Voicing a sufficiently clear option for the attempt to comprehend *the specific, the particular or the identity* – formerly studied by the same author through *the symptomatological criticism* – value opens up a horizon wherein the gestures, events and hallmarks from our history gain momentum, somehow appeasing the differences and bridging up alterity. In fact, *value* does not mean for Virgil Nemoianu an axiological concept in the traditional sense of the term; it delineates, now, *a certitude* or *a belief*, assumed and practiced, hence conveying identity and specificity. To this end, cultural systems, marginal traditions or intellectual projects truly enter into a dialogue, since they understand each other in the light of *the values* they carry and defend. Therefore, it is no longer necessary, I think, to underline how appropriate this identity axiology is within the overall effort the humanities make to settle the Western post-modern dilemmas and appease post-historical anxieties. Standing quite apart, although not necessarily competing with or superior to traditional axiology (which defined value as a higher *ontological quality*), this descriptive or symptomatological axiology deepens cultural semantics, practiced for quite a while by Nemoianu, since it examines not only the signs (or *symptoms*), but implicitly the intimate values of symbolic systems or of the great historical ensembles (religions, cultures, societies, mentalities or stylistic fields), in order to grasp their individuality, to

place them into their original field and to formulate, therefore, the proper premises of the accomplished dialogue.

Therefore, it is not hard to understand why Virgil Nemoianu defines the canon itself more as a rich and dynamic source of values and beliefs, and less as a restrictive and prescriptive index of titles and authors, set up by the one-sided diktat of specialists. In Chapter IX – “Literary Canons and Social value Opinions” (a worthy synthesis of the author’s earlier theoretical gains and intuitions on canon nature and function) – he underlines that, eventually, “canons are shaped by deeper and less easily formalized categories: sensibilities, communitarian orientations, broad axiological decisions, tacit preferences, modes of behavior and being” (p. 175). Open to multiple identities, more precisely to those which structurally and expressively reach a certified level of value and relevance, the canon itself turns into the broader, extra-literary concept of cultural identity and memory: here are stored the basic “recollections” of our remote and recent past. In my opinion, what Professor Nemoianu accomplishes with this volume is his reiterated statement – in a context upholding this gain – on the major significance of culture in human society and on its quality of being an inexhaustible indentitary heritage. Or, in order to build up a future likely to have its “islands” of wisdom, morality, beauty and tranquility, it will be unable to further on deny, deconstruct or overlook this heritage. The last section of the book – “A Philosophical Garden” proves this gnoseological and ontological function the canon performs in the long run: within the great *symposium* of culture, humankind learns how to know itself. To accept itself, to assume and shape up values and also the basics, to carry on a dialogue. I do not think to be too much in the wrong by saying that this definition of the canon reads as the happy epilogue to the great *canonic battle*, now terminated, once pluralism and tradition have not been proven to be incompatible (and that both may have an identitary vector).

As Giuseppe Mazzota has already noticed (in “Modern Language Notes”, 126.5/Dec. 2011), Nemoianu is cerebrally involved into a lucid and balanced dialogue with Postmodernism. Let us add up that the motifs behind this cordial polemics belong to the author’s Central-European cultural heredity, to the original cultural specificities, to the Christian humanistic lesson and also to the moderate Enlightenment gains. Flexible and context-driven, Virgil Nemoianu deals with postmodern anti-canonical (i.e. secularizing) versions with that certainty grounded in the firmness, broad scope, influence and *aura* of the tradition on whose behalf he polemizes; his clash with the pluralism challenge is lived through with poise and self-confidence. This is because pluralism means for Nemoianu the foreseeable effect of dialectics running the life of human communities. Coming to America from a marginal European culture which developed – by the force of circumstances – at the crossroads of other three or four dominant cultures, Virgil Nemoianu naturally adjusts himself to heterogeneous ideological and cultural environments he tackles with the liberal, open, unself-conscious spirit of Modernity; from this standpoint, he is able to become conscious and assertive, on one hand, of the fact that “the postmodernist existential mode is not absolute”, and, on the other, that post-modernism “is able to function and survive precisely thanks to the counteracting forces

that arise [...] inside and alongside it.” (p. 23). To my mind, it would not be hazardous to see Nemoianu’s endeavor to temper the dispute between the *old* and the *new* (in its contemporary version) as a proof of his valid outlook on the (micro) dialectics of our civilization. In this way, the pluralist experience of European Modernity can prove, besides the crises already stirred up, its usefulness and necessity in rebuilding the future, furthermore, making the past less obsessive and the present less anguishing. Culture – and mainly literature – is, therefore, the sign under which the historical conciliation of paradigms and communities can be reached, given its space replete with values.

Virgil Nemoianu’s recent volume is, ultimately, the outcome of a lucid cultural introspection, which turns the humanist discipline onto itself and which searches its roots in order to continue to serve the environment it comes from. As a matter of fact, it reads as a synthesis collecting various gains, ideas and intuitions, integrated not into a theoretical system but into a lucid, sincere and scholarly reflection. Its goal is to explain the phenomena defining the last century and to understand which and where the possible solutions are to disciplinary, social, moral and finally axiological deadlocks generated by the crisis of Modernity. The specialist in comparative literature, European Romanticism or literary theory stops somehow midway (like the Marathon runner, in a way) to ponder over the meaning and perspectives of art and culture in *the new world* we are building up. Following in the trail of similar humanist efforts, this book gears up, practically, a consistent mode of the humanist science to think of itself, while thinking also of the history it lives in. Emphatically underlined, matters such as knowledge, imagination and even life that are worthy to carry on prove to be the unspectacular but safe solution to overcome the impasse: they are spiritual dignity, human reason and divine grace. They teach us, writes Nemoianu, that the changing nature of history and its flaws are acceptable and that there is always a sphere of elements common to any competing or apparently incompatible paradigms; that, consequently, historical discontinuities are not necessarily absolute and insurmountable, and accidents and irrationalities should be seen with a sort of relaxation and calm. The model to reach the universal agreement from the harmonized subjective experiences is, predictably, the aesthetic heteronomy, likely to become the very foundation of reinvented culture. In this way, we are able to cure “the pathologies of reason and faith” (according to Cardinal Ratzinger, see Chapter VII), a reason why aesthetics can be considered – as Nemoianu stated earlier in his book titled *A Theory of the Secondary* (1989) – a guiding discipline of epistemology, and we realize today, of cultural community itself. That, behind all these options and *values*, lies a staunch metaphysical idea is obvious: but this is another topic about the enduring intimate beliefs of Platonic Europe and Nicean-Constantinopolitan Europe; although it repressed these beliefs, the last century seems only to have extended their existence.

LUIGI BAMBULEA

Thomas PAVEL, [*The Thinking Novel*], *Gândirea romanului*, trans. Mihaela Mancaș, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2008, 464 p.

There are countless attempts to charter the fictional worlds depicted in the novel throughout its historical evolution, and Thomas Pavel's *Thinking Novel* specifies right from the onset how it will stand apart from the others. While Auerbach analyses in *Mimesis* the technical progress of realism, and Franco Moretti brings into discussion the ages of the novel (in *The Way of the World*, he posits a correlation between the ascent of the *Bildungsroman* and the authors' growing preference for youthful protagonists), Thomas Pavel looks at three aspects that define fictional worlds: the type of community within them, the rules that govern them and the status of the couple. Within each period, the distinctions he makes are thematic and unravel how the characters are built, bringing his criteria closer to the Formalist/Structuralist approaches, with the difference that Pavel sees these criteria to be neither normative nor forming an abstract matrix meant to govern or predetermine literary texts; instead, they are deduced from the texts, enabling us to grasp a common set of features which puts order in the disconcerting variety of novelistic universes.

Pavel's project is the outcome of relentless research spanning his entire career, as evinced by the papers he published in various prestigious magazines, such as "Fiction and Imitation", in *Poetics Today*, 2000, in which he discusses the relationship between *mimesis* and imagination, stating that *mimesis* undermines virtue, while imagination undermines the capacity to grasp reality. The criticism of Formalism and Structuralism, revealing the analytical bent of an author, who rejected them only after he had previously embraced them, are present in *The Spell of Language*, in *Fictional Worlds*, as well as in papers like "Formalism in Narrative Studies" (in *Poetics Today*, 1988, where he compares narrative semiotics to the domain of Gnosticism) or "Narrative Tectonics" (*Poetics Today*, 1990), where he writes that in order to decipher the sense of history's movement, we need more than a succession of events or mere fractures. Neither chronology, nor seismology is sufficient to understand historical temporality. As the French historians have argued for a long time now, underneath the shifting surface of visible events there is a crust of relative stability, an area where excessively slow movements buttress and make possible the frenzy of daily metamorphoses.¹ The "narrative tectonics" displayed in this article is actually put into practice in *The Thinking Novel*, where Thomas Pavel searches for the elements of stability common to the development of all types of novels, however diverse. While *Fictional Worlds* ventured to investigate the way in which imaginary universes have been discussed in time, starting with the philosophers of language, and examined the way they relate to reality, *The Thinking Novel* is structured more like an attempt to map out the internal development of fiction. In the *Introduction*, the author already names the four kinds of history he will take distance from: the natural history of the novel (Henri Coulet), the history of narrative techniques (Bakhtin), the social history of the novel (Ian Watt) and speculative history (Lukács), whose achievements he highlights, making it clear, however, that he sets himself other goals.

Thomas Pavel outlines a history of the imaginary that structures the novel in relation to the three lines mentioned above – society, the individual's moral standards and the relation to Eros. The way he shuns the scientific aura of rigorous definitions is, among others, a proof that the Romanian-American theorist distances himself from Structuralist thought, with an eye to the flexibility of the genre: "The novel has almost always displayed an amazing ability to adapt itself to different circumstances and to the demands of the public, and, in turn, it always managed to make readers dream, cry, laugh and think" (p. 16). On the one hand, this very flexibility testifies to the difficulty of providing a final definition of the novel; on the other hand, it gives more space for the critical and speculative mind to investigate the identity and functions of the novel. A premise of the book is the question: "Can anyone write the history of an object that has no definition?" (p. 40). Noting that "the novel is led by a sort of customary law, pragmatic and imperceptible", Thomas Pavel suggests abandoning the futile quest for a definition in favour of identifying the elements of continuity that link a moment in the history of the novel with other preceding moments, thus forming a coherent image which invalidates the thesis of "the infinite mobility" of this literary category.

The title of the book, especially in its English version, *The Thinking Novel*, suggests that it is about the internal evolution of the genre, in a Structuralist vein. The novel is a kind of narration that ponders over the aforementioned relations, over the individual's presence in the world, and, at the same time, as the author reckons, it is the protagonist of a prolific history. *The Thinking Novel* is also legitimised as "a novel about a novel", or as its biography, to the extent in which the reflection on its chronological stages is also a narrative discourse, as Hayden White would say. In his "Epilogue" (a narrative term chosen by Pavel to end his book), the author concludes: "The story I told is not just the history of one of the many movements of the universal soul (although to some extent I would like to be); it also brings on stage real-life actors – in this case, authors of novels –, actors whose projects, success, misunderstandings and mutual influences form the content of the action" (p. 419). In fact, the discourse about the authors is subsidiary, the main discourse focuses on the novel and its inner world, on the characters and on the way they act. The author is merely a discreet presence. Phrases like "the self-confidence of the novel" (p. 17) are the hallmarks of a critical discourse positing a relative autonomy of the genre.

The categories structuring Pavel's work define the ages of the novel and are called "The Transcendence of the Norm", "The Charm of Interiority", "The Naturalisation of the Ideal" and "The Art of Detachment", equally pervaded by the attempt to identify how the "survival of the past within the framework of the present" manifests itself in the analysis of fictional worlds. The emphasis is on the way the hero joins the world he belongs to, as well as on the way the meaning of the word "hero" changes from one period to another.

From the Hellenistic novel which portrayed couples protected by transcendent forces and offered "rudiments of interiority" (p. 62), to the chivalric romance, with its heroes who dream of ridding the world of its imperfections by enforcing high moral standards, moving on to the pastoral novel, which highlights the distance between the ideal of fulfilled

love and the tribulations of the characters, history goes through the first age of the novel, defined by “the transcendence of the norm”. Chariclea and Theagenes, Amadís, Astrée all live in a universe where the rules prescribed by ideals are indisputable, whether they integrate the heroes into community or isolate them. From here, the “Capital” of the novelistic study on imperfection moves to the picaresque novel, which transforms “comic themes into objects of serious moral reflection”, starting with *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes*. Thomas Pavel argues that Rabelais and burlesque literature cannot be the forerunners of the 19th-century realistic novel, as Bakhtin said, because the Hellenistic novel, the pastorals and the picaresque novels bore great influence on the following centuries.

Pavel argues that the elegiac story and the novella also played an important part in the development of the novel, through their propensity for examining the imperfections and their strive for verisimilitude, like in *The Exemplary Novels* of Cervantes. Thus, the characters’ inner life acquires a more and more significant role in the narrative.

The “ideographic method” employed by in idealistic novels, along with the “exteriority of the ideal” lose momentum by the 18th century, when the “Charm of Interiority” starts to gain momentum instead, and the three key relations ingrained in the novel begin to be governed by the particular traits of modern idealism, shifting into the principles “of dualism, the social contract and the beautiful soul” (p. 143). Richardson’s *Pamela* and Rousseau’s heroine in *New Heloise* are the models that define the interiorised ideal. *Tom Jones* follows the same pattern of imperfection and Thomas Pavel believes Fielding to inherit Cervantes’ anti-idealism and ability to create heroes who see no breach between themselves and the world they live in. These novels support the statement that “human roots are not planted in the sky of idealistic novels, but in the soil of man’s mortal condition” (p. 164). Moreover, unlike the idealistic novel in which “the heroes’ perfection, meant to inspire the readers’ admiration and modesty, calls for a certain discretion on the part of the author” (p. 171), with Fielding and his comic perspective on the characters’ imperfections, the author gains a certain assertiveness which enables him to intervene at any time and even play down the importance of the anecdote through various linguistic strategies, like in Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* or in Diderot’s *Jacques the Fatalist and his Master*. The Gothic novel, the novel of manners and the sentimental novel complete the novelistic landscape, mixing idealism with the propensity for imperfection, until the advent of Romanticism, which through its praise (and critique) of passionate love, explores affection in great detail.

At the time of “the naturalization of the ideal”, the hero’s relationship with the world was governed by other three basic components: “roots, the community and impossible love” (p. 223), taking on various forms at Kleist, Walter Scott, Manzoni, Stendhal, Dickens. Thomas Pavel goes on to identify the recurrences and the variations of the ideal-absence polarity in the “The Art of Detachment” age as well, when the triad of dominant elements takes the shape of “the abolition of any links, the problematic community and Narcissus’ apotheosis”. The tripartite structure that dominates the structure of the novels is always filtered through the plot and the protagonists’ relationship with the world, brilliantly

accounting for the conflicts and the continuities present in each and every age, up to a few brief remarks on the Postmodernist novel.

The Thinking Novel also offers a polemic response to previous interpretations, as Thomas Pavel insists on the fact that an analysis based on the concept of literary current cannot provide good insight into the novel; for instance: "The term 'Romanticism' refers to a tangible end product, and not an invisible principle that would have presided over the creation of the works even before their inception" (p. 428). Similarly, Bakhtin is frequently invoked in the chapter on Dostoevsky, where Thomas Pavel claims that the characters' extensive speeches, at times unstructured and incoherent, are not a mark of their freedom, but of imperfection. Of course, the previous critical discourses tackled the characters' freedom with respect to the author and his "tyranny" over the creation of round, flawless personalities, and not freedom within the fictional world. After all, freedom and imperfection are complementary, and not opposite traits.

Leaving aside the section dedicated to the authors who make their presence felt in the text, Thomas Pavel always observes a certain autonomy of the critical discourse on the character, seen more as the subject of his own statements than as the object of the author's intention. Pavel argues that certain features or topoi are recurrent in the novel without bearing the mark of any programmatic or explicit intention on the part of the author – which again places him in the line of Structuralist heritage. Although he attaches great importance to the innovation represented by the auctorial intervention in the novelistic discourse, Thomas Pavel does not insist on the role this discourse plays in shaping the fictional world. The fictional world remains governed by the way the character relates to the world, and this is not affected by the direct intervention of the author in the discourse.

Thomas Pavel draws attention to an important distinction – namely, that between a masterpiece and the work which is instrumental to the transition into another stage of the novel. In this respect, the book accurately identifies the inflection points on the chart of the novel: "Viewed from this perspective, the landmarks of the history of the European novel are: around 1550, the translation of Heliodorus's *Aethiopica* into modern languages – a translation providing prose writers with an undisputed model of novelistic idealism; the publication of Richardson's *Pamela* in 1741 – the first work which managed to capture the charm of interiority; *Waverley*, by Walter Scott, in 1814, a novel that opened the age of rootedness, and finally, Huysmans' novel *Against the Grain*, in 1884, the onset of the aestheticizing reaction that would soon lead to Modernism. Albeit noteworthy, these are outstanding achievements, and none of them is a masterpiece comparable to *Don Quixote*, *Tom Jones*, *Middlemarch* or *In Search of Lost Time*. [...] The historical importance of a work does not necessarily coincide with its level of artistic achievement" (p. 426-7).

The clear-cut polarities governing each chapter of the study (interiority-exteriority, rootedness-uprootedness, couple-narcissism, ideal-imperfection), as well as the consistent pursuit of the lines of research set from the onset make *The Thinking Novel* a book that successfully provide a rigorous history of the genre, without requiring the assumption that there can only be one definition of the novel. Therefore, the model of the internal evolution

of the genre confirms its functionality, without falling into the traps of Structuralist fundamentalism and at the same time without invoking a set of extra-literary criteria that would govern the laws of the novel.

NOTE

- ¹ Thomas Pavel, "Narrative Tectonics", in *Poetics Today*, vol. II, nr. 2, Narratology Revisited I, (Summer 1990), p. 354.

ROXANA EICHEL

Mircea MARTIN (coordinator), [*Forays into the Past and Present of Romanian Literary Theory*], *Explorări în trecutul și în prezentul teoriei literare românești*, ART Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, 272 p.

Literary theory is, as we all know, a discipline of only recent vintage. In the last decades, the ways of approaching the literary text and its context have developed to such an extent, that its underlying forms and groundwork have been undergoing permanent and in-depth changes, moving closer and closer to other areas, such as cultural studies or philosophy (the latter, in turn, reshaping itself and enlarging its borders).

All the more commendable is, therefore, the initiative of clarifying “How literary theory has been carried in Romania”, a task undertaken at the conference organized by the Literary Theory Department within the University of Bucharest in 2004. The conference papers were gathered in the anthology entitled *Forays into the Past and Present of Romanian Literary Theory*. Often working “in (hostile) circumstances”, most Romanian theorists have obtained outstanding results that only their professionalism and their confidence in the destiny of this discipline – apparently parasitic and inconsistent – can explain.

The first achievements date back from the interwar years, at a time when authors like Mihail Dragomirescu, E. Lovinescu, Lucian Blaga, Camil Petrescu, Liviu Rusu, G. Călinescu and D. Caracostea laid down the “modern foundations” of this discipline. Even if their discourse – with a few exceptions, such as Mihail Dragomirescu, less known today – is fragmented and moves towards theory from other areas, most often from literary criticism (a perpetual mirage for Romanian literati), the ideas hold true to the present day. Few people remember today that Mihail Dragomirescu’s book *Știința literaturii* [*The Science of Literature*] was put out in Paris in four volumes (1928-1938) and that, as Al. Tudorică writes, “the keystone of the whole theoretical edifice” is the question of aesthetic judgment: “What for Kant was the universal character of aesthetic judgment becomes for the Romanian scholar, by means of a rather dubious translation, the *objective* character”. The primacy of aesthetic autonomy, once upheld by Junimea, is one of “Dragomirescu’s inherited values”, which bears a striking resemblance to the concept of “aesthetic relativism” (to quote Florin Mihăilescu), or to the synchronism of E. Lovinescu. We could also mention D. Caracostea, about whom Ioana Bot writes: “of a disturbing topicality is his refusal (constantly reiterated, ad nauseam), to rule out ‘the human factor’, the creative non-formalising subjectivity, refusing analysis, but inevitably leaving its mark on it. Briefly put, Caracostea is topical mainly through what poststructuralism rediscovers, now, in plural, conflicting, converging theories, ‘prior to dogma’ and ‘prior to the Second World War’.”

A special section is devoted to Tudor Vianu (commented by Gheorghe Crăciun, Romanița Constantinescu and Mircea Martin), unfortunately more quoted (or not even that) than read, as Mircea Martin points out. For Mircea Martin, the great critic and aesthetician still is, “to a greater extent than other interwar authors”, “one of the last guardians of the magic cipher of totality, the last truly universal man”.

The section “From Ideological Terror to Aesthetic Freedom. From Socialist Realism to Neomodernism” opens with an essay signed by Carmen Mușat, whose conclusion is

that the party ideologists of the fifties and sixties played the role of “literary theorists”, and only later, due to a relative liberalisation, was it possible “to re-establish the authority of critical thinking, arising from the ashes of interwar modernity”. N. Rață-Dumitru and Oana Fotache do not hesitate to draw attention to the toll Silvian Iosifescu and Savin Bratu paid to socialist realism, without forgetting to highlight their merits in the process. Life is more complex than it seems, and that holds true for theory as well.

A female author who is also undeservedly overlooked in the field of Romanian letters is Vera Călin, to whom Anca Băicoianu dedicates an essay; the literary field can be enriched “with a tragic thrill and at the same time, with a shade of melancholic lyricism”, because, according to Vera Călin, the destiny of literature would be “on the one hand, to instil humility into human consciousness in its clash with the unfathomable ways of Providence and, on the other hand, to externalise the cluster of human emotions stirred up by our aspiration toward the absolute and the incapacity to reach it”. What follows are essays on Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga, Ion Ianoși, Paul Cornea – one of the most topical and systematic Romanian theorists –, then a chapter on Adrian Marino, an example of “European integration”, rightfully seen as a “comparatist and a universalist” – here Mircea Martin discusses the inevitable separation from the totalising aspect of “literature”, with reference to “European literature”, “Far Eastern literature”, etc.

The chapter “From Structuralism to Poststructuralism” includes essays on present-day personalities in the field of criticism and theory; some of them have made a huge contribution to the local landscape, others have followed a Euro-Atlantic career in humanities: Solomon Marcus, Ion Vlad, Dan Grigorescu (Alexandra Vrânceanu writes about this theorist of postmodernism), Eugen Simion (credited with “the return to the author, the biography and the diary” by Andrei Terian), the “internationalists” Matei Călinescu, Virgil Nemoianu, Thomas Pavel, Mihai I. Spărișu, and the critics shaping the Romanian postwar canon – Nicolae Manolescu, Mircea Martin – or the new theorists of postmodernism and modern poetry, like Gheorghe Crăciun.

We are, in the literary field, the heirs of these personalities; we simply cannot place ourselves outside the theoretical lines drawn or merely sketched by them in the Romanian humanist culture over the last century, with its turning points, its tragic breakdowns inherent to totalitarianism, and its tremendous inertia, still felt today in our cultural discourse, and in literary criticism in particular. But, at the same time, we are indebted to these authors for having opened new vistas for theoretical research.

DORICA BOLTAȘU NICOLAE

Gheorghe CRĂCIUN, [*L'iceberg de la poésie moderne*], *Aisbergul poeziei moderne*, Editions Paralela 45, Pitești, 2002, 552 p.

Le livre de Gheorghe Crăciun propose une approche de la poésie européenne et américaine des deux derniers siècles selon une perspective visant à mettre en lumière les valeurs transitives du langage poétique. Bien que largement fondée sur des observations linguistiques et stylistiques, sa démarche va bien au-delà, en identifiant également des traits propres à l'ontologie de l'acte créateur ainsi qu'à la psychologie et à la sociologie de la réception. Nous avons donc affaire à une recherche d'une complexité remarquable qui débouche sur la construction d'une typologie de la poésie moderne.

Les trois premiers chapitres d'analyse théorique (illustrés ça et là par des analyses de textes poétiques) se constituent en une sorte d'introduction à une « brève histoire de la poésie transitive », allant du romantisme jusqu'au personnelisme, sans oublier – comment le faire d'ailleurs – la contribution des poètes autochtones des années '80. Ses observations préliminaires, censées préparer le terrain à l'énonciation de sa propre thèse concernant la transitivité à travers la mise en évidence des lacunes ou des abus de ses prédécesseurs, prennent d'abord comme cible le préjugé essentialiste, pour s'en prendre ensuite à l'utopie d'un langage poétique « motivé, métaphysique, autoréflexif, visionnaire, intransitif et opaque ». Ce que l'auteur conteste, c'est l'identification moderniste de la poésie avec le langage connotatif et figuré; ce à quoi il s'attaque est, en fait, la manière de concevoir la poésie en tant que déviation, en tant qu'écart par rapport à la norme, la norme elle-même étant comprise comme transitivité: par conséquent, la transitivité était d'emblée éliminée de la poésie comme étrangère à sa nature, à son « essence ». Ainsi la polémique menée par l'auteur ne vise-t-elle pas uniquement la définition de la poésie telle qu'elle apparaît chez les principaux exégètes du modernisme poétique (Marcel Raymond, Hugo Friedrich, Carlos Bousoño), mais aussi leur manière de se représenter son histoire: parmi ses inspirateurs on devrait donc compter non seulement Rousseau ou Novalis, mais aussi Wordsworth et sa préface mémorable de 1800 aux *Ballades lyriques* ainsi que sa poétique précoce de la contingence et de la démystification, du « refus de se leurrer à travers les mots ».

Nous tenons pour remarquables les délimitations préliminaires de Gheorghe Crăciun en vertu de son courage de repenser des catégories poétiques définies et redéfinies par d'autres depuis longtemps ou de sa ténacité de remettre en question « ce qui semble avoir été établi et admis une bonne fois pour toutes ». Le traitement appliqué – avec beaucoup de déférence d'ailleurs – à Tudor Vianu lui-même apparaît, en l'occurrence, comme symptomatique: ce dernier est surpris en flagrant délit de « généralisation hâtive » et, plus grave encore, il s'avère responsable d'avoir promu une conception du style étrangement désuète – le style conçu comme réflexivité surajoutée, donc le style comme ornement. L'auteur s'appuie, ici comme dans les autres chapitres du livre, sur une bibliographie riche, essentielle, bien choisie et commentée judicieusement à travers des notes édifiantes. Soulignons, par exemple, l'évocation d'un ouvrage comme *Les formes de la littérature moderne* de Jovan Hristić, resté plutôt dans l'ombre au moment de sa parution chez nous.

Le chapitre IV de l'ouvrage jouit, à son tour, d'une existence indépendante: *Brève histoire de la poésie transitive* pourrait être publié séparément et remporter les suffrages du public grâce à la nouveauté de l'entreprise et des auteurs, plus ou moins connus chez nous, invoqués par l'exégète dans une hypostase tout à fait nouvelle. Un exemple serait le poème whitmanien, envisagé dans sa dimension anti-poesque: « une structure extensive, réticulaire, quasi-romanesque – au sens de la poétique de Proust, Joyce et Virginia Woolf, prosateurs chez lesquels l'ensemble épique devient une somme de fragments de type épiphanique, à la fois lyriques, narratifs et descriptifs ».

L'imagisme, l'acméisme, l'objectivisme américain, des poètes tels que Pessoa, Cavafy, William Carlos Williams, Francis Ponge, Montale sont invoqués dans des présentations micro-monographiques comme autant d'exemples d'un langage poétique transparent, direct, dépourvu de métaphores. Il est significatif, de ce point de vue, que Bacovia et Montale soient coupés de leur contexte proprement moderniste – symboliste ou expressionniste dans le premier cas, hermétique dans le deuxième – afin d'être sélectionnés pour leurs derniers volumes, relevant plutôt du prosaïsme.

L'avant-dernier chapitre du travail de Gheorghe Crăciun, ayant une ouverture à la fois théorique et historique, se propose de repenser l'espace de la poésie en fonction de cinq dimensions fondamentales, à savoir le moi poétique, le lecteur, le langage, la réalité et la structure proprement dite du texte poétique. On y retrouve des points de vue convaincants de l'auteur concernant les métamorphoses du moi poétique moderne, avec ses variantes spécifiques de manifestation, des observations sur la condition complètement différente du lecteur des poèmes de Whitman par rapport au lecteur des poèmes de Mallarmé et des distinctions entre « versus », « discursus » et « textus » en tant que formes différentes d'administration du langage poétique. Retenons également comme remarquables les observations de l'auteur au sujet de la « poésie sans ontologie », où le langage n'exprime plus une attitude existentielle, ainsi que les observations concernant la relation qui existe entre la poésie transitive et le plurilinguisme, développées à travers la grille de la vision de Bakhtine sur le discours polyphonique du roman.

Le dernier chapitre du livre explore les possibilités de création d'une nouvelle typologie poétique à même de dépasser le réductionnisme des modèles antérieurs. Gheorghe Crăciun arrive à considérer que l'on pourrait identifier, au sein de la poésie moderne des deux siècles derniers, trois directions essentielles de la création ainsi que trois types de poésie différents: linguistique (ludique et expérimentale), réflexive et transitive. En ce qui concerne le premier type de poésie, ce n'est qu'à ce point de l'analyse qu'il est examiné dans toutes ses implications historiques et théoriques. On passe en revue, tour à tour, les formes poétiques iconoclastes représentées par Lautréamont, Tristan Tzara, Hugo Ball, Isidore Isou ou les textes des poètes néo-avangardistes des groupes « I Novissimi » ou « Tel Quel ». L'idée essentielle de l'auteur est que, à chaque fois, nous nous retrouvons devant une poésie qui soit privilégie les jeux du langage, soit conteste, sape et détruit la grammaire. Il s'agit d'une poésie où l'individualité humaine cesse de se manifester, pour mettre en question les fondements et les limites de ses formes d'expression. En échange, la poésie réflexive et la poésie transitive ont une profonde vocation ontologique, en

exprimant toutefois des visions du monde opposées. La poésie réflexive recherche la transcendance, la pureté, les valeurs métaphysiques, le symbole, la métaphore, l'essence, l'atemporel; c'est une poésie de l'enfermement et de l'éloignement par rapport au réel et au lecteur. La poésie transitive appartient, au contraire, à la contingence et aux valeurs immédiates de la vie. Elle met l'accent sur la biographie, le discours familier, l'expression directe et les valeurs dénotatives du langage. Ce dernier type de poésie est caractéristique du monde profane, dépourvu de l'illusion de la transcendance, porté à rechercher l'essentiel et la profondeur dans la vie immédiate. En fin de compte, la description de ce type de poésie – qui est aujourd'hui l'un des aspects dominants du postmodernisme – représente une synthèse des observations de l'auteur énoncées tout au long de l'ouvrage.

En fin de parcours, Gheorghe Crăciun ajoute deux textes qui complètent le livre à merveille. Le premier est une étude détaillée portant sur les procédés transitifs utilisés par Bacovia dans ses volumes *Stances bourgeoises* et *Stances et versets*. Le deuxième est un essai dédié à la relation qui existe entre le modernisme et le postmodernisme, où le modernisme est conçu comme l'expression d'un langage motivé, alors que le postmodernisme, comme une tentative de promouvoir l'arbitraire du langage et des actes existentiels.

Je voudrais lancer maintenant un débat au sujet de cette relation qui existe entre la poésie transitive et le postmodernisme, en me permettant de proposer une autre hypothèse à partir des observations mêmes de l'auteur. Je commencerai par mettre en évidence une situation quelque peu paradoxale. De quoi s'agit-il au juste? L'idée de la littérature, de la poésie comme écart par rapport à la norme est une idée plus ancienne, que le modernisme radicalise au moment où il reprend à son compte la dissociation mallarméenne entre « le mot essentiel du Poète » et « les mots de la tribu », en lui conférant un caractère ontologique. Une telle projection sur un autre plan de l'existence débouche également sur le postulat d'une unité indestructible entre le contenu et l'expression, celui d'une immanence du sens de la poésie. Le sens immanent est le sens littéral qui peut toujours exploser en une multitude de sens potentiels.

Le paradoxe réside ainsi, selon moi, dans le fait que, au moment où – et je parle d'une circonstance logique et pas nécessairement chronologique – cette littéralité atteint ses formes extrêmes dans le surréalisme, on voit surgir un autre type de poésie qui cultive non plus l'opacité, mais la transparence. Nous devons, bien évidemment, prendre en considération une période plus longue, étant donné que certains poètes transitifs sont antérieurs aux manifestes surréalistes – mais non pas antérieurs à Rimbaud, si l'on excepte Wordsworth. A mon avis, le paradoxe découle de l'apparition de ces deux types de poésie opposés dans le même cadre historique du modernisme. Pourquoi la poésie transitive relèverait-elle non seulement du postmodernisme, mais aussi du modernisme? Parce que, selon moi, son apparition même, ainsi que sa légitimation, n'auraient pas été possibles en dehors du cadre de la poésie moderniste spécifique – qui est métaphorique, synthétique, intransitive. D'ailleurs, Gheorghe Crăciun parle lui-même d'un phénomène de dilatation du principe figuratif entraînant « le risque de la saturation du sens à travers sa propre opulence ». La poésie transitive apparaît comme le résultat de cette saturation,

mais aussi sur fond d'opposition latente. On ne l'aurait jamais inventée, acceptée, goûtée, appréciée en l'absence non seulement du souvenir de la poésie réflexive, mais surtout de sa présence implicite. Cette référence implicite est intimement liée à la réception de la poésie transitive, semblable à une espèce de béquille invisible sur laquelle le poète transitif s'appuie souvent, sans même s'en apercevoir.

Cette dernière remarque n'est nullement péjorative, étant donné que je ne tiens pas pour inférieure la poésie transitive par rapport à la poésie intransitive. Je ne fais que constater, ou plutôt déceler, un processus mental déjà ancré dans une structure artistique. La poésie transparente, directe ne saurait exister – je le répète – en l'absence de la toile de fond de la poésie déviante, typiquement moderniste, tout comme cette dernière s'est affirmée à son tour par rapport à l'éloquence romantique. Sans son pendant invisible, mais présent, la poésie transitive serait sans portée, dissoute dans « le discours sans corps » du quotidien. C'est de la même façon que l'on pourrait, je pense, en venir à bout de la question irrésolue par Gheorghe Crăciun, celle de la littéralité de la poésie énonciative, qui pourrait faire l'objet d'un autre débat.

Le travail de Gheorghe Crăciun a, entre autres, le mérite essentiel de susciter les réactions les plus diverses grâce à son sérieux et à son originalité. Considéré dans son ensemble, y compris les derniers chapitres – importants du point de vue théorique – le livre amorce une réflexion dont la portée dépasse les enjeux formulés dans le titre de l'ouvrage, en ouvrant la voie vers une appréciation des conditions actuelles du champ littéraire proprement dit, des stratégies qu'on devrait adopter ou abandonner à l'intérieur de celui-ci. Ce serait également une occasion de voir s'y affronter des paradigmes culturels, des générations ainsi que des opinions et des formules personnelles.

Nous sommes donc en présence d'un ouvrage à même de définir et de restaurer, sur le plan national ainsi qu'international, un certain type de poésie et qui relance, après tant de tentatives illustres, le procès de la poésie moderne.

MIRCEA MARTIN

Ovidiu VERDEȘ, [*Contemporary Literary Theory. Topics, Authors, Approaches*], *Teorie literară contemporană. Teme, autori, abordări*. University of Bucharest Press, 2008, 282 p.

Contemporary literary theory is a demanding field. The savvy unveiling of models, schemes, structures goes hand in hand with the joyful discovery of analogies, equivalences or paradoxical locations on the map of major cultural assets.

The studies gathered together in Ovidiu Verdeș's book, *Teorie literară contemporană. Teme, autori, abordări*, were either published as prefaces or afterwords of author books or included in collective volumes and communications delivered at international conferences. The metamorphoses of theory are instrumental in understanding the phenomenon as such, as literary theory is forced "to renounce its scientific pretensions, to differently hatch up its object and, without sacrificing its rigor, to open up to the broader scope of culture, assuming thereof the interpretative status of a humanistic discipline" (p. 8).

Interpretation is an "over-determined" concept, meant to paralyze theory rather than support it. The studies have as their common denominator the anguish felt before the protean interpretation, deriving actually from an irreducible plurality of theories and languages that are increasingly sophisticated, tedious or downright unintelligible to anyone who is outside the game.

The book is divided into three parts covering, besides the facets of interpretation – "Towards an ethics of interpretation" (Paul Cornea), "The play as a hermeneutical tool" (Mihai I. Spăriosu), "A narrative model of personal identity" (Paul Ricœur) –, studies on the heritage of structuralism – "Structuralism as a scientific mirage" (Thomas Pavel), "Barthes, from structure to reading", "Lacan or the psychoanalysis as an ineffable science" – and also papers on border genres, such as "The unseen face of the modernist canon" (Gheorghe Crăciun), "The autobiographical pact is postponed" (Philippe Lejeune), "The disfigured autobiography" (Paul de Man). The book's theoretical dimension is seconded by its didactic approach, paradigmatically focusing on the historical ascendancy of this discipline. In an era of disciplinary monologues, literary theory attempts to restore a dialogue with philosophy, psychoanalysis, political science, etc.

The first study deals with the issue of interpretation, a Pandora's box, in an attempt to rationalize huge chunks of information, starting from solid and recent bibliography. Targeted are the meanings of interpretation, the delineated relations with understanding and knowledge, by identifying and classifying genres, forms, strategies and criteria for validity.

The dialectics of the rational and the irrational brings closer Paul Cornea's *Interpretation and irrationality* to the American professor Mihai I. Spăriosu's study titled *Dionysus' Resurrection*. The hallmark of this approach is Nietzsche, the philosopher who revolutionized the image of Hellenic culture, showing that, under the guise of its classical serenity, there is a clash between Apollonian and Dionysian antagonistic forces. Spăriosu turns the dialectical theme of the game into a "tool of hermeneutical diagnosis applied on the scale of modern culture" (p. 9).

Paul Ricœur, whose essays on hermeneutics foreshadowed a distinct approach to the literature-philosophy relation, later on tackled in *Métaphore vive* (1975) or in *Temps et récit* (1983-1985), felt the need to dialectically integrate the famous opposition between explanation and comprehension formulated at the beginning of the 20th century by Dilthey. The study on Ricœur deals with his theory about “narrative identity”, articulated in *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990), according to which our personal identity is construed through a process of interpretation, mediated by signs and texts. Identity defines itself through the other: «l’Autre n’est pas seulement la contrepartie du Même, mais appartient à la constitution intime de son sens.» Furthermore, the concept of narrative identity carries inside a narrative identity model, showing how the reader interacts with the fictional characters.

The linguistic mirage, an essay by the American professor Thomas Pavel, theorist and a comparatist, member of that “brilliant generation of researchers who promoted structuralism in Romania in the ’60s and ’70s” (p. 119), is a scathing but well-grounded attack against structuralism. The volume passed almost unnoticed in academic milieus and specialized journals, although it was translated into Romanian more than ten years ago. In broad lines, we can say that where the structuralists saw opportunities to open up interdisciplinary vistas toward linguistics, Thomas Pavel identified incompatible levels, warning that modern disciplines derived their specificity not only from their object but also from formality itself, from the viewpoints taken. The focus on the complex relationship between convention and representation – “the structural properties and the mimetic success” – opens up a space of freedom and indeterminacy, the simple causality being excluded. There are three varieties of structuralism which illustrate a unique typology, reconciling heterogeneous styles and visions: a moderate structuralism (on the literary level, represented by Tzvetan Todorov, Jean Rousset, Paul Zumthor, Jean-Pierre Richard, Claude Bremond, Gérard Genette), a scientific structuralism (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes in the ’60s and ’70s, A.J. Greimas), a speculative structuralism (the philosophical-ideological branch of the movement, represented by Althusser, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Barthes from his last period, along with other theorists grouped around *Tel Quel* and *Change* magazines).

An atypical structuralist, Roland Barthes went through a series of sudden and unexpected “conversions” from a sui generis Marxism to structuralism and poststructuralism, to end up with an agnostic “pleasure of the text”. By confronting Thomas Pavel’s interpretations (from his paper “How to become a poststructuralist: the case of Roland Barthes,” published in 1996 in *Euresis* magazine) and Matei Călinescu’s (*Rereading*), the author wants to show that, against the background of the separation from “scientist” structuralism, the topic of reading was a solution of compromise, through which “after the fascination of semiotic codes,” Barthes could tacitly turn back to subject and subjectivity – including his own subjectivity as a literary critic and potential writer – therefore without openly contradicting his previous statements.

As a rule, seen as a poststructuralist, Lacan differs from the representatives of this trend owing to his ambition to construe a system, to design a project making a science out of

psychoanalysis and also to his genuine orientation toward Freudianism, labeled as 'phallogocentrism'. The exegetes insisted that, in spite of "the return to Freud principle, decisive for Lăncăuș was the encounter with Lévi-Strauss's thinking in order to develop a theory of the unconscious" (p. 182).

The last part of Ovidiu Verdeș's book contains three papers of applied theory on border genres, from *The iceberg of modern poetry* by Gheorghe Crăciun (dealing with the concept of "transitive poetry") to the studies on autobiography by Philippe Lejeune and Paul de Man. The autobiography as a "reflexive modernity" implies a resizing of personal identity and the status of the subject. The author starts from the hypothesis that the marginal status of autobiography comes from the fact that it is mainly construed in contradictory terms, as a subjective representation of life, to finally reach the idea that a new approach is at hand, through which autobiography proves the personal identity concept to be synonymous with self-interpretation.

Lastly, although the author insists that the studies should be read as working hypotheses, their heteroclitic character actually lends stability to the concepts employed, as they make a radiograph of the concerns and lines of analysis embraced by the Bucharest professor. The theoretical space is mapped out with savvy and finesse, and the network of topics, authors and theoretical approaches strikes a right balance between antitheses.

IRINA GEORGESCU

Corin BRAGA, *Du paradis perdu à l'antiutopie aux XVI^e-XVIII^e siècles*, Éditions Classiques Garnier, Paris, 2010, 416 p.; *Les Antiutopies classiques*, Éditions Classiques Garnier, Paris, 2012, 350 p.

L'intérêt pour l'utopie et la contre-utopie – ou l'utopie noir, comme certains l'ont nommée – dans la culture roumaine récente est lié, certainement, à des antécédents anciens, mais surtout à l'expérience de la vie sous la dictature pendant la IX^e décennie du siècle dernier. L'embarras de constater que la réalité directement vécue est conforme à un modèle déjà préfiguré par le célèbre auteur – formellement interdit en Roumanie – George Orwell, dans la fable *La ferme des animaux* et aussi dans le roman *1984*, a stimulé la curiosité côté antiutopique. Cependant, ce sont seulement les recherches plus systématiques après la chute du régime personnel de Ceausescu qui ont détaillées cette direction d'attaque dans la recherche de la culture moderne et contemporaine, en particulier à l'aide des plumes des historiens et critiques littéraires spécialisés dans la connaissance de la littérature science-fiction, Cornel Robu et Mircea Opriță, parmi d'autres.

Corin Braga a rejoint la tendance d'explorer l'univers antiutopique, dès qu'il a poussé ses recherches comparatistes vers des dimensions européennes, par l'élaboration d'une thèse de doctorat dans l'espace hexagonale et par l'inauguration de sa collaboration avec des éditeurs français (Harmattan, Garnier). Après les deux parties composant une recherche approfondie sur la localisation du paradis terrestre dans différents domaines culturels, son nouveau livre se penche sur le passage du paradis perdu vers l'antiutopie aux XVI^e – XVIII^e siècles: *Du Paradis perdu à l'antiutopie aux XVI^e-XVIII^e siècles*. Le phénomène, d'une ampleur auparavant sous-dimensionnée et sous-estimée, se révèle comme une révolution majeure dans l'imaginaire de la modernité, ce qui indique un chantier sur lequel la voix de l'exégète roumain a beaucoup à dire. A travers cette nouvelle monographie, l'auteur approche d'une manière radicalement différente de ses prédécesseurs – de Romul Munteanu à Adrian Marino et Pompiliu Teodor – le matériel auquel il s'applique. En découpant la problématique du paradis perdu, le comparatiste de Cluj n'est ni un miltonien indigène, comme certains puissent le penser, ni un pieux plein de ferveur, cherchant n'importe où le Paradis selon les attitudes de la foi armée d'un renforcement docte, comme le titre semble le suggérer. Braga est intéressé, comme toujours, de l'imagerie européenne et de ses thèmes, découpant, cette fois, dans la sphère des représentations intellectuelles du thème paradisiaque ses expressions révélatrices du monde européen classique (comme Pierre Chaunu l'appelait) et de l'Illuminisme.

Quand même il faut préciser que, dans le livre mentionné, la censure qui traditionnellement sépare les deux phases historico-culturelle ne fait l'objet explicite ni d'une approche exprès ni d'une délimitation particulière. Tant que le projet formulé est de suivre, pas à pas, à travers la casuistique littéraire, le processus de la dégradation progressive de la projection culturelle du Paradis, par l'utopie, jusqu'au seuil négationniste de l'antiutopie, ce qui émerge est une sorte de Bildungsroman savant du déclassé d'une projection collective durable. Le processus va de pair avec le triomphe de la rationalité,

avec le «désenchantement du monde», avec la perte des illusions et la croissance de la lucidité pragmatique ... On perd quelque chose et on gagne quelque chose.

La question est de savoir si, en vue de tout ça, l'antiutopie remplace au sein de la modernité le pôle archétypal du Paradis, si celui-ci est définitivement déclaré impossible et peut-être même indésirable. Pour répondre à cette question il faut déterminer si la société conçue par les communistes, où chacun aurait des biens selon ses besoins, et non selon les possibilités – limitées – de la société pour répondre à ses besoins, est une utopie, une antiutopie ou, simplement, un équivalent du Paradis terrestre. C'est seulement en apparence que cette question se présente comme une catégorisation pure. Et seulement à un regard superficiel qu'elle n'a pas à voir avec l'approche de Corin Braga, qui s'arrête sur le XVIII^e siècle, alors que le communisme s'est virulemment affirmé au XX^e siècle. L'histoire des idées et des représentations ne suit pas les paramètres de la chronologie ponctuelle, événementielle, mais s'étend sur la durée longue du passage du temps, comme Fernand Braudel l'observe. Et le fait que les historiens «canonique» ne se hâtent pas de briser le carcan de l'instrumentaire et des problématisations traditionnelles, plutôt positivistes, effrayées de nouveau, ce n'est pas une raison pour abandonner les tentatives répétées, de mettre le passé dans la page.

Corin Braga produit la preuve que l'histoire des textes peut fournir des témoignages de première main dans la compréhension des transformations survenues dans la pensée des sociétés et des époques entières. En les interrogeant, il saisit l'une des sections que la pensée européenne, à l'instar de la modernité, se reconstruit. «A l'instar de la modernité»? Mais si la modernité signifie, en fait, justement cette descente sur la terre et les yeux attentivement ouverts, sans les projections exaltées ou exaltantes, sans un soutien suffisant? Selon une telle lecture, rendue possible par le nouveau volume de Corin Braga, la modernité n'est plus un délai historique ou un faisceau de traits stylistiques tirés de l'évolution de la société et la culture, mais un mode de la mise en place de l'homme dans le monde à travers son projection.

En vertu de cette possibilité de comprendre la proposition de l'auteur, on s'empare d'une clé de lecture pour les rapports au temps historique, à la condition humaine et bien sûr à la conception du rêve de la rédemption et de la perfection humaine. Car, selon la nouvelle grille, c'est bien naturel que certaines personnes se maintiennent dedans le vieux paradigme, les projections mythiques et paradisiaques, tandis que d'autres adhèrent, instinctivement et par réflexe, à la seconde, que nous avons appelé moderne.

En fait, l'histoire racontée par Corin Braga se présente – selon ses propres mots – ainsi: «L'attaque chrétienne contre l'utopie visait principalement l'hérésie adamique et pélagienne, selon laquelle l'homme est capable, en utilisant son intelligence et ses capacités, d'offrir une alternative à l'acquisition de Jésus-Christ et de l'Église. L'idée que la Cité de l'homme peut suppléer le jardin et le royaume divins était, aux yeux des penseurs chrétiens du XVI^e et XVII^e siècles, une impiété et un blasphème. Dans ce contexte, on a pu voir la mentalité orthodoxe, pieuse, fidéiste ou tout simplement pessimiste, en forçant de nombreux utopistes de fermer ou de détruire leur paradis sur terre. [...] Le message que l'idéologie chrétienne impose sur la pensée utopique est clair: la construction d'une utopie ou le désir d'accéder

à une utopie attire la damnation! La censure et l'autocensure religieuse entrave les fictions utopiques selon le scénario de la chute biblique» (p. 363, 372).

Et bien l'année 2012 apporte un nouveau titre, *Les Antiutopies classiques*, montrant la vitalité d'une préoccupation et l'élargissement systématique dans le domaine. «Dans un volume précédent ... nous avons voulu montrer à quel point la critique théologique et la censure religieuse ont engendré au XVII^e siècle, l'émergence d'une série d'antiutopies qui montraient comment le prétention de l'homme d'établir la cité idéal et le paradis sur terre sans la médiation du Christ et de l'Eglise a donné naissance à des sociétés infernales et a conduit à la damnation», explique Corin Braga, justement pour préciser que «Dans ce deuxième volume du diptyque, nous poursuivons les recherches sur les antiutopies, en essayant de prouver que, dans la descendance de la critique religieuse, deux autres écoles de pensée, le rationalisme et l'empirisme, ont donné, au XVII^e siècle et au XVIII^e siècles des coups décisifs à l'optimisme utopique et ont déterminé l'apparition des contre-utopies classiques » (p. 7). Ainsi résumé, le projet ambitieux s'avère très important pour une compréhension plus complexe, à partir d'un angle différent de celui traditionnel, de l'histoire des courants de pensée européenne, et aussi de la philosophie en tant que telle. Selon l'histoire – pour le moment – en six volumes de Michel Onfray, d'autres approches, comme celle de Corin Braga, remet dans des contextes différents l'image sur la trajectoire suivie par la connaissance, les ressorts qui l'ont nourri dans différentes époques historiques et les avatars qu'elle a connu (parfois même en dehors du discours sur les généralités, en prenant le chemin apparent de la narration, par exemple chez Campanella ou Francis Bacon).

Les deux parties du volume sont mises, la première, sous le signe de la critique rationaliste et, la seconde, sous celui de la critique empirique de la pensée utopique. Ainsi, après avoir examiné la corrosivité avec laquelle des philosophes comme Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza et Leibniz – parmi les plus connus – ont rencontré la faculté imaginative et surtout l'esprit utopique, on prend note de la réponse des utopistes. Désabusés, ils ont commencé à produire des utopies noires. Cette observation est importante car elle montre comment, une fois désavoué, l'apollinien s'est versé dans le dionysiaque et l'imaginaire « noir » a pris la place du celui azuré. Cette dynamique annonçait, en effet, le soupçon avec lequel certains des maîtres de la modernité, tels que Marx ou Freud, ont démantelé l'esprit optimiste constructif de l'époque de la révolution industrielle et la «belle époque», en rejetant le monde dans la culture de la crise universelle (par l'intermède de Spengler et d'autres). Ce qui nous amène à nous demander combien de diagnostics donnés à l'évolution de la société, de la civilisation et de la culture sont le résultat des observations sur le terrain, basées sur des données empiriques recueillies par l'observation directe, et combien restent l'effet des modes intellectuels, des changements de paradigme et de méthodologie dans le jugement des phénomènes de la vie humaine.

C'est bien le thème dont l'auteur parle dans la seconde partie de l'ouvrage, en analysant comment l'empirisme et le matérialisme ont été les doctrines imposant un nouveau code de lecture du monde. De toute évidence, les thèses de Corin Braga bénéficient pleinement

des résultats obtenus par Kuhn et Feyerabend, qui ont soumis les « tics » de la connaissance et les méthodes de l'arsenal scientifique à une observation attentive, en révélant ainsi ce qui est vrai et ce qui est son représentation à travers des cérémonies savantes spécifiques. Les deux volumes de Corin Braga rafraîchissent le marché roumain des idées et participent, au nom des roumains et en pleins droits, au débat actuel au sein du monde scientifique occidental.

OVIDIU PECICAN

Paul CERNAT, [*Retro-modernism in the Romanian Interwar Novel*], *Modernismul retro în romanul românesc interbelic*, ART Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009, 324 p.

The volumes authored by Paul Cernat to this day seem to outline two main lines of research: on the one hand, a penchant for the literature of the first decades of the 20th century (*The Romanian Avant-Garde and the Complex of Periphery*, initially a Ph.D. thesis, and *Contemporanul: The History of an Avant-Garde Magazine*), and on the other, an interest in charting various aspects of everyday life in a totalitarian regime (*Searching for the Lost Communism; A Lost World: Four Personal Accounts Followed by a Dialogue With H.-R. Patapievici; Investigations into Romanian Communism* – all of them written in collaboration with Ion Manolescu, Angelo Mitchievici and Ioan Stanomir). *Retro-modernism in the Romanian Interwar Novel* has its rightful place among the former, complementing Paul Cernat's research on the historical avant-garde with an analysis of the inner tensions at the heart of the Romanian interwar novel and an account of what we might call the hidden face of Romanian modernism, for which the researcher coins the phrase "retro-modernism".

While the connection between this book on retro-modernism and the studies tackling the literary avant-garde is fairly salient, the way in which *Retro-modernism in the Romanian Interwar Novel* relates to Paul Cernat's writings on the communist period is less apparent, thus bringing to the fore the elements which ensure the continuity of Paul Cernat's intellectual project: it appears to me that both the interwar period and post-war communism are seen as moments of rupture and crisis, as great shifts of cultural paradigm, engendering a paradoxical attitude towards the past. If we are to place the two phenomena one alongside the other and look at them from a bird's-eye view, the search for another chronotope entailed by the legitimization efforts of the avant-garde (the appeal to forerunners as a means of internal legitimization marks a temporal shift towards the past, whereas external legitimization implies a spatial shift towards the seat of aesthetic authority, towards the cultural centre of the day) bears a striking resemblance to the mirage of space-time relocations fuelled by the restrictions imposed in a totalitarian regime (escapism as a means of retaliating against the communist policy of national isolation is ultimately an aspiration towards spatial relocation; similarly, the difficulty of coming to terms with an incongruous present and the nostalgic drive towards bringing the past – i.e. the *fin-de-siècle* period – back to life can be interpreted as reactions against the massive demolition policy of the communist regime). Paul Cernat seems to be drawn to cultural phenomena marked by a restless drive towards some other place or time. It appears to me that in his entire work the Romanian researcher fundamentally presents us with one and the same vision on this type of cultural mutation which attempts to obliterate the past: what interests Paul Cernat is not the violence of the rupture, but its ambiguity, its ambivalence and its inner contradictions. Paul Cernat looks at the way in which the past is both repudiated and reclaimed, focusing on the paradoxical connivance between innovative literary movements and the very past they reject. As a result, ruptures are never truly ruptures, but folds which make the old and the new overlap and enable the coexistence of opposites.

From this point of view, focusing on the unseen, past-ridden face of modernism, *Retro-modernism in the Romanian Interwar Novel* is yet another instantiation of this particular vision upon rupture, revealing the same penchant for grey areas, for the “white noise” which undermines the deceitful coherence of phenomena and upsets long-established taxonomies.

The stake of the book appears to be threefold. First of all, the concept of retro-modernism put forward by Paul Cernat demands of us to rethink and go beyond Eugen Lovinescu’s theory of modernism, otherwise still pervasive in Romanian literary studies (7). Next, revisiting our conceptual framework challenges the way in which we have been accustomed to read and label the writers of that age, as Paul Cernat’s study defamiliarises a few interwar “classics”. Finally, the present study suggests a way of reshaping the interwar literary canon by pleading for a re-evaluation of literary works so far labelled as second-self (such as Ionel Teodoreanu’s novel *La Medeleni*) (20).

As fashioned by Paul Cernat, the concept of retro-modernism attempts to override the Manichaeian distinction between modernism and traditionalism underpinning Eugen Lovinescu’s seminal work *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature*. Paul Cernat manages to circumvent this confrontational outlook on literary movements, centred on the *agon* between the moderns and the traditionalists, by undermining the coherent and harmonious self-portrayal of modernism framed in Lovinescu’s discourse. Thus, retro-modernism shifts the focus from the clash between modernism and traditionalism towards the tensions and dissensions within modernism itself. Following in the footsteps of Matei Călinescu and Sorin Alexandrescu, Paul Cernat contends that modernism, far from being a monolith, is actually defined by plurality. What’s more, for Paul Cernat, even the various species of modernism are likely to harbour inner contradictions: such is the case of retro-modernism, which entertains an ambiguous relationship with both Lovinescu’s modernism (because, albeit past-ridden, it resorts to modernist techniques as well) and the literary past (because, albeit nostalgic, it exhibits “a critical attitude towards the conventions of an epoch which had only recently faded away”) (12). Therefore, the essence of retro-modernism is precisely this collusion between the assertive force of modernism and a certain “vintage” feeling.

Paul Cernat does not offer a relational definition of retro-modernism (as an attitude opposed to Lovinescu’s modernism, as a negation of Lovinescu’s modernism), but a substantial one, which partially explains why the author preferred the particle “retro-” to the prefix used by Compagnon in his influential book *We Anti-moderns*: “anti-” is deemed too radical to name a phenomenon in which critical nostalgia prevails over the polemical zest or the rhetoric of imprecation. Above all, retro-modernism is modernism endowed with memory. For Paul Cernat, retro-modernism is not so much a critique of modernism as an attempt to recover the past. The following, very dense, definition testifies to it:

A fusion between nostalgic solidarity with, and critical distance towards the conventions of an epoch which had only recently faded away (but which is radically separated from the present through a terrible historical rift and a radical change in

mentalities); the aesthete embracing of “obsolete” and “anachronistic” aspects, even with respect to literary forms; the recreation of an atmosphere which transfigures – through lyricism, imagination and myth – the mimesis of social realist bent; the primacy of illusion over reality – are all distinctive features of this heterogeneous typology. (12)

One of the most important landmarks for Paul Cernat’s theory of retro-modernism is, nevertheless, Antoine Compagnon, whose taste for paradox and interest in “retrospective modernism” Paul Cernat shares. From this point of view, Paul Cernat’s study is a necessary step towards integrating the analysis of our local modernism in the international debates over modernism and modernity. Unlike Antoine Compagnon’s anti-modernity, Paul Cernat’s retro-modernism has a more limited scope, restricting itself to literature, even if one can assign to it extra-literary causes, such as the hiatus created by the First World War (10). Unfortunately, nowhere in Paul Cernat’s book can be found a definition of retro-modernism as methodical and detailed as the definition Compagnon provides for the anti-modern in his introductory chapter. In spite of the fact that Paul Cernat did not set out to write a volume of literary theory (“the stake of these essays pertains, above all else, to literary criticism”) (20), given the theoretical weight of the concept he coins, a few concluding remarks or a final chapter dedicated to redefining retro-modernism would have been welcome.

Paul Cernat’s corpus offers an interesting selection of writers and highlights surprising juxtapositions – a “poporanist” author penning novels of psychological analysis (G. Ibrăileanu), a decadent writer (Mateiu Caragiale), a novelist in the vein of Balzac (G. Călinescu), a creator of local myths (Mihail Sadoveanu), a writer of teenage novels (Ionel Teodoreanu) and an author who advocates the literature of authenticity all the while dallying with fantastic fiction (M. Eliade). The diversity of these authors points out the fact that retro-modernism, apart from being one of the many faces of modernism, is itself many-sided. Divided into two parts (“Retro novels” and “Between Two Worlds”), the study accounts for the peculiarities and complexities of each of these writers’ literary career. Paul Cernat does not forget that, however retro-modernist they may be at heart, the authors he discusses are not retro-modernists in all their writings. Moreover, retro-modernism itself being a multifarious phenomenon, it will take different forms in the texts which are part of the corpus. The texts themselves will be hybrid writings, more often than not displaying both retro-modernist and hard-core modernist features. Taking all these aspects into consideration, the close reading exercise practised by Paul Cernat in this volume appears to be the best way of giving an accurate account for the complexity of the phenomenon.

Although not conspicuous, there is a certain axiological component in this charting of retro-modernism. In order to invest retro-modernism with theoretical dignity, one inevitably needs to revisit the canon of interwar literature, and this cannot be done without passing value judgements. Thus, retro-modernist texts are not evaluated by means of some exterior criteria, such as those of Lovinescu’s modernism, but by relating them to their own frame of reference. And yet, however necessary such an endeavour may be, revising

the “mainstream” modernist canon tends, at some point, to gain precedence over the main thesis of the book (e.g. in the chapter dedicated to Ionel Teodoreanu, the analysis of retro-modernist features informing Teodoreanu’s novels is quickly overshadowed by the attempt to rehabilitate the Moldavian author).

Nevertheless, without rehabilitating a few names, Paul Cernat would not have been able to refute the modernist belief in literary progress and advance an alternate understanding of literary history, at odds with the one underpinning Lovinescu’s writings. Literary history is no longer a matter of linear progress, of intrinsic (and necessary) evolution of literary phenomena, paralleling social evolution. Instead, for Paul Cernat, the focus seems to be placed on the destabilising events which fracture identities in the course of literary history. This vision upon literary history argues in favour of adding an axiological dimension to retro-modernism: novelty may be the fetish of modernism but a literary work exhibiting this attribute does not necessarily hold a higher aesthetic value than a text which revolves around the past, capitalizing on tradition.

It is precisely this way of understanding literary history which brings Paul Cernat’s volume in the proximity of trauma studies, which have gained quite a momentum in the United States today, ever since the 1990s. Seen through the looking glass of trauma studies, retro-modernism comes across as an attempt to come to terms with a traumatic experience, not by revisiting it, as Caruth says, but by trying to reconcile what preceded it with what came afterwards. Paul Cernat’s concept of retro-modernism offers valuable insights for trauma studies: the traumatic event (i.e. the First World War, in the case of both modernist and retro-modernist writers) causes a breach in the identity of the victim; the victim does not only try to understand and come to terms with the traumatic experience, as Caruth and Vita Fortunati argue, but also to regain a unitary, coherent identity. In order to achieve this, the retro-modernist retreats in the past, whereas the modernist takes asylum in the new, post-traumatic identity. Viewed through the lens of trauma studies, modernism and its counterpoise, retro-modernism, become wider concepts and extend their borders beyond the realm of literature, acquiring an existential stake, apart from the strictly literary one.

From the vantage point of trauma studies, retro-modernism is not only an aesthetic formula, but also a response to the historical trauma of the First World War and to the identity issues it ensued. Paul Cernat’s motto (quoting Mihai Ralea) testifies to this handsomely: “First and foremost, we are a mixed generation. Pre- and post-war. [...] we might say we bridge the two worlds, otherwise separated by their memories and aspirations.”

Paul Cernat’s study engages both the past and the future. The analysis of retro-modernism, evincing the author’s penchant for “underground” phenomena, challenges deep-seated national preconceptions about modernism, while opening new vistas for research and tuning the debate over Romanian modernism to the wider European context of ever-growing complexity and finesse.

RUXANDRA CÂMPEANU

Horea POENAR, [*The Sign of the Four*], *Semnul celor patru*, Paralela 45 Publishing House, Pitești, 2008, 376 p.

What a great surprise (for me, at least) to read Horea Poenar's *The Sign of the Four*! Not being familiar with the author's debut work – *A Morning Walk on the Servandoni Street* – cited quite often, as a matter of fact – and so far having read only some of his articles in *Echinox* magazine, I could not have foreseen such a far-reaching endeavour. All the more so as this surprise comes not only in an individual but also in a generational line, as it is almost implausible to see it published in a cultural age that – unless my representation is somehow reductive – is more eager to see the demolition and the belittling of such syntheses, the deconstruction of such all-encompassing approaches.

Similar negatory approaches are manifest in this volume too; notwithstanding this, salient and commanding is its constructive appetite, its constructive vocation. At times, it is amazing, even fascinating to see how Horea Poenar confronts singlehandedly (it is indeed a confrontation and not a contemplation), from his own vantage-point, the panorama of the great aesthetic systems and how he stands up (singlehandedly again) against the avalanches of contemporary intellectual disseminations, taming the ghosts of abstraction through artistic concretizations, blurring the conceptual outlines through an inter-subjective, inter-textual and contextual aura.

In my opinion, praiseworthy is also that kind of *theoretical innocence* (not to be mistaken for lack of information or expertise) which made it possible for him to imagine and perform the inaugural gesture. Horea Poenar enjoys that thrill and stamina to formulate, to name, to split up things in his own way.

The book opens with an anti-intellectualist *profession de foi*. Aesthetic experience is almost equated to a miracle and, therefore, it is not by accident that the author invokes charm, voluptuousness, seduction. He pleads for irregularity and surprise, for unpremeditated promptness, for talent: a talent which is in a very complex sense (since it regards the author and his receiver alike) an embodiment of destiny.

The first movement of the book – which has a marked musical structure – ends with a piece of prose – but what am I saying? –, a poem in prose. Such moments will be interspersed throughout his work, fulfilling a function I would call – however paradoxical it may sound in other contexts – heuristic. Here, these interferences are quite natural since – both in principle and in practice – literature and art inspire theory in the most direct and concrete way; all the more so as they are the very facets of theory.

I shall not dwell on these chapters or excerpts akin to applied aesthetics, since the historical, stylistic and theoretical diversity conveyed by the literary texts or artistic images under study would lead to infinitesimal, endless dissociations. However, this interference between theory and art, this mutual incorporation, this inter-incorporation of the literary text with the theoretical text will be an ongoing challenge for all whose field of expertise is aesthetics and theory in general.

As a theoretician, Horea Poenar is careful not to place too much value on systematicity or readability. He does not see theory to be a security-provider and he tends to look at

identity as a textual device rather than a clear-cut, well-shaped representation. Texts are, in their turn, “fluid”, while creation and interpretation alike are “out of control”. What he pursues is the *process* of thinking, of signification, of interpretation and by no means their outcome. The phrase Horea Poenar thrusts upon traditional aesthetics reads as follows: “The way a theory is organized can no longer follow the modernist criteria of visibility and logic”. His theory sits at leisure – although not security-proof – in post-modernity, namely in a cultural age and an episteme within which the certitude of signs is but an illusion we all will become more and more aware of. In postmodernism, he continues, “language is transgressed by the relevant discourse understood as a way to organize visibility and also the meanings that surpass any decisions inferred by certain linguistic significances.” Hence, discourse visibility is a trans-linguistic dimension.

I admit that here I have felt the need to see a more intense concept-driven, dissociative and accurate approach. What would this visibility mean? Does it overlap over that readability which is, in turn, understood as a trans-linguistic dimension? From other different contexts, we can infer (I don’t say *deduce* as this term carries a special meaning in this context) that it does not. But, after many other pages, I seem to feel an unsatisfied hunger for clarity and rigor. Postmodern discourse is not necessarily clear-cut and rigor-bound, as it would run the risk of being, in consequence, reductive, deforming or shallow. It defies apparent stabilities. Its meanings do not reside in words but in the “labor of writing”. They cannot be “isolated”, underlines our author. His goal is to “shape another form of significances” in which the interpreter’s horizon “is also caught up and regularized.”

Horea Poenar’s inspirational authors are, besides the last Heidegger and the last Merleau-Ponty, Garelli, Richir, Maldiney, as well as Gadamer, Vattimo and Ricœur, all of them representing the so-called “second phenomenological aesthetics”. Leaving aside the fundamental identities (subjectivity, world/work, alterity), the three discursive horizons and also the non-discursive horizon (the hymen) and the three types of discourse, which are in general well-defined, I wonder how all these are integrated not so much into his own argumentation, but mainly into his personal construction. I believe we need, together with the author – and also the author together with us – to raise the issue of the relation between *institution* and *destitution*, more precisely the issue of *the link*, *the connection* or in other terms, *the point of origin* which cannot be (under the threat of suspension) *a point of insertion* as well. Wherefrom does our discussion begin? And wherefrom does our contribution start? Here, Tudor Vianu’s old, inexhaustible and unparalleled procedure to go back into the past of the topic under study would not have been quite futile.

Let us now look into the very status of aesthetics as a subject matter. Aesthetic discourse is “a discourse of the imaginary”, asserts Horea Poenar. Aesthetics is a discourse of the imaginary, but of a past imaginary, cast in forms, I was tempted to add, when here is what the author himself writes: “the imaginary is a form of producing forms, but not of closed forms prone to speculation ...” We cannot avoid now a discussion about the status of forms. In the given context, the (traditional) *forms* are deemed to be *closed forms*, while the

imaginary forms alone would be *open*. Although the latter may be called dynamic, fluctuating, etc., a reference to Umberto Eco and a redefinition of forms after revisiting the Italian author seems to me to have been welcome.

“In general”, writes Horea Poenar, “philosophical tradition strives to abridge identities to their clear-cut visibilities, to their readable outlines, sized up to a certain perspective, fearing that a different approach would undermine the entire understanding and delineation process underlying its discourse”. We should not hold the view that traditional aesthetics would perceive visibilities to be clear-cut and sharp-edged, that ambivalences, ambiguities and even opacities would be absent. This seemingly well-delineated and enlightened landscape should always be cultivated, revisited, processed; otherwise it runs the risk of lapsing or relapsing into platitude or unintelligibility. Somewhere else, the author writes: “Aesthetics, like criticism, is not *subsequent* to the artistic phenomenon, whereas the latter would come first.” Towards the end of his book, he is even more straightforward: “Aesthetics is no longer a subject matter voicing [...] phenomena that would precede it.” I wonder whether – while hypothetically agreeing with Horea Poenar’s suggested reversal – it would not be more accurate, however, to say that aesthetics is subsequent to aesthetic phenomena, in the same way in which an aesthetic experience is subsequent to another aesthetic experience and a work of art is subsequent to another work of art.

Nevertheless, this draft aesthetics I would call *imaginal* is stimulating, fecund, not to speak of this kind of existential recuperation of a subject matter seen as too abstract and system-bound. “Aesthetics does not work with categories, but with the levels of being.”

Although the author’s demarche is not exempt of meanders – at times he even seems to be looking for them on purpose –, although he says he is wary of what he calls “conceptual glory”, the broad lines of an outlook are discernible to the minds still concerned (of course, illusorily) with the stability of certain truths. Most likely, the key phrase, instrumental (another illusion!) to his discourse may refer to the complex relation between *theory* and *writing*, to theory in the making and not that theory cut-and-dried beforehand, which “is not the mirror of theory but part of it.”

Horea Poenar’s book leads us, actually, to a paradoxical encounter. Undoubtedly, the differences between the first and the second phenomenological schools matter. Certainly, the second phenomenology no longer aspires to be a “*strenge Wissenschaft*”, but it does strive to be a rigorous philosophy. Well, this philosophy and this phenomenology meet and clash with each other and are more than once lured by our author’s postmodern spirit and in certain cases by the inspiring texts and images. This encounter is, we have to say, explosive. But, at the same time, we have to admit – and Horea Poenar would in no way contradict us – that the outburst itself is nothing else but a stronger, quite unusual expression.

The novelty of Horea Poenar’s approach lies in this very encounter and not necessarily in the often outstretched radicalism of some of his definitions.

MIRCEA MARTIN

Ion MANOLESCU, [*Comic Strips and the Postmodern Canon*], *Benzile desenate și canonul postmodern*, Cartea Românească Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011, 264 p.

The minimal revisions done to the papers republished in this volume by Ion Manolescu make no alterations to the otherwise minute survey of the problematic selected. Faced with the *fait accompli*, the reader who turns the first page of the book feels like standing in the middle of an oral examination, where the answer to the question is halfway provided by the question itself. The initial interrogations become genuine rhetorical questions, to the point of being obvious by nature, provided that the author astutely persuades his client and draws on to his side the “popular” public and not just the “academic” audience he has in mind. And if he fails, at least he feels rewarded, as long as he somehow managed to change the reader’s canonical option. From the onset, therefore, the preface stands out, deftly named “interface”, in tune with the idea of electronic device in general.

Located on the outskirts of the literary creation itself, and by no means part of *the mainstream* – a syntagm Florin Manolescu introduced into the Romanian theoretical space –, *the comic strip*, often remains a marginalized item within the global concept of literature, unable to stand upright against the criterion of “pure aestheticism”, anachronistically applied by its advocates. Its lineage unveils not only the cultural past of the comic strip, but also its civilizing, even didactic vocation, since it frequently appears in the school textbooks of the Western countries, such as France or Germany. A mode of expression that entwines image and text, the comic strip is legitimized in the reader’s consciousness through names like Mickey Mouse (Walt Disney), Superman, Batman, Terry, noting that the last three will fall into the pattern of dramatic and not comic strips. The comic strip stereotypes, whose favorite topic is the struggle between good and evil, as Ion Manolescu underlines, include, among others, *the emblematic and physiognomic clothing* (p. 35), associated by the public with the supernatural powers of the heroes about to restore a new order. Moreover, the author also feels the need to minutely describe the anti-heroes of the comic strip series, no less important, whom he deems to be the signs of physiognomic decomposition and personality disorder. The direction followed is that of a negative *alter ego*. A similar interpretation is found in a broader paper, taking an extremely unusual approach and titled “Disjointed Bodies”: the author once again demonstrates, with sufficiently valid arguments, that Liviu Rebreanu can become, at least from a certain viewpoint, not only “postmodern” through techno-cultural ideological hybridizations (body-mind-machinery), but also unmistakably topical, at a simple rereading of such short stories like *Itzic Shtrul*, *the Deserter* and *The Catastrophe*.

Besides his interest in para-literature, Ion Manolescu claims the deletion of aesthetic barriers and cultural frontiers. The critic practically presses the “cancel” button of an imaginary keyboard and wipes out any unjustified pretense, turned meanwhile into a preconceived idea, particularly the dichotomy *culture* and “*sub-culture*” or *literature* and “*sub-literature*” – artificial concepts or rather, in this case, artificially designed to illustrate the idea of the conservatives’ narrowness. Contrary-wise, Ion Manolescu advocates the

principle of a mutual influence and interpenetration between the two levels. The chapter rightfully delineates the man-machine relationship or the true meaning of cyberpunk fiction – a territory less explored by Romanian criticism.

A recurrent name in Ion Manolescu's writings is Mircea Cărtărescu, with his literary activity of phantasmatisation; the discussion is preceded by a brief definition of the aforementioned concept, placed in relation with *New Age* – a trend, or rather a way of living and understanding reality. Furthermore, even when he advocates a flexible canon, based on the socio-aesthetic tolerance of values, the author does not hesitate to put side by side the writer Mircea Cărtărescu and Sandu Florea, a famous cartoonist who emigrated to the States and whom Ion Manolescu includes in his historical survey of comic strips around the world. Keeping accurate numerical evidence, Ion Manolescu probes into and compares their status, noticing that they fully deserve an equal standing in the pages of the same history or on the shelves of the same library.

The core of the book, containing the synthesis that gives the title, gathers together pieces of information quite familiar to the generation of the '90s; from postmodern cartoons like the well-known *Cow & Chicken* or *Johnny Bravo* to the comparison with the devils from Ion Creangă's stories, it only takes one step. The proposed solution is a ludic pact with the anti-ethics of postmodern art (p. 50). The idea is nuanced on yet another occasion, when Ion Creangă's stories become mere samples of discrimination. Again, the critic resorts to the ever more debated concept of *political correctness*, in a similar way as he does in his paper on the dictionary of politically acceptable terms. In the postmodern chronicle, "baba" is, in Ion Manolescu's view, a term with offensive and oppressive connotations, and the examples given in general can also function as a model for the scenarios of the aforesaid *Cow & Chicken* series. Nonetheless, one of the core articles deals with Corto Maltese, to be associated with the famous French weekly *Pig Gadget*, which delighted generations after generations all over the world. Hugo Pratt, an Italian script writer of comic strips and a contributor to the aforementioned magazine, is known to readers and critics alike as one of the "big names" of this genre. Pratt's sailor's name, Corto Maltese, rings "good luck", with millions of copies sold worldwide, and yet still not a match for the unrivaled *Astérix*, whose number of sold copies exceeds by far all expectations: 250 million albums!

"The new canon" foreshadowed by Ion Manolescu leaves room for discussions, given the polemics fueled by the three categories of interlocutors who have dominated the cultural landscape in the last fifty years – the radicals, the moderates and the conservatives – and whose debates show that reshaping the canon is a matter far from being settled. In this line, Ion Manolescu opines that one of the blemishes of Romanian literature is that of insisting to revise the entire canon, sidetracked by notorious errors over time: to this end, the example given is the Lovinescu-Brăescu-I. L. Caragiale case. The latter is an involuntary "co-author" of the album, for the mere reason that, together with his characters, he lays the ground work for the comic strip. Viorel Pîrligras rediscovers Caragiale through the comic strips, deliberately taking a certain liberty toward Caragiale's

universe. The concept of “intertextuality” is now understood, first and foremost, at its “graphic” level.

Lastly, Ion Manolescu’s articles show his interest in the way literature is perceived by the young generation of readers, in relation with the canon mechanism – an issue which gives quite a headache to theorists as well, namely the issue of the so-called “nasty” books, increasingly harder to be digested by the public. The evaluation of the replies, taken after the American academic model, would allow, once again, for what is known as “the periodic canonic control” (pp. 94-95). Again, through questions like: “How do you motivate the displeasure of reading?” we can genuinely put to the test the *topicality* of a book, an issue Ion Manolescu often scrutinizes. As he states himself, the matter bears all the consequences of a true “examination” of literature and beyond. By way of rapping up in an optimistic tone, the closing article of the volume stands out among the finest ones, in the way it addresses the role of the *Pif Gadget* magazine, a syntagm tantamount not only to Corto Maltese’s success, for instance, but also to the comic strips history (it is true that the papers observe a chronological criterion, and this one came out in 2004 – quite recently, compared to the first ones included in the volume, dating back to the early ’90s). Despite its discontinuous publication, *Pif Gadget*, to all appearances, is by no means a closed chapter in the history of comic strips.

ARABELLA STAN

Oana FOTACHE, [*Le divan de la critique. Discours de la méthode dans la critique roumaine d'après-guerre*], *Divanul criticii. Discurs asupra metodei în critica românească postbelică*, Editions de l'Université de Bucarest, 2009, 309 p.

Le livre de Oana Fotache, *Le divan de la critique. Discours de la méthode dans la critique roumaine d'après-guerre*, visant à mener « une recherche sur la critique roumaine [d'après-guerre] censée suivre son autodéfinition, la compréhension du statut de la discipline ainsi que de ceux qui la pratiquent » (p. 9), est une tentative d'analyser certaines tendances méthodologiques de la critique littéraire roumaine d'après-guerre. Consciente d'emblée des difficultés de cette démarche, découlant du conflit opposant la critique et la théorie au sein de l'espace littéraire roumain, mais aussi du fait que les positions méthodologiques des études littéraires roumaines restent le plus souvent implicites, Oana Fotache se voit obligée à assumer elle-même une méthode de sélection et de valorisation du matériel soumis à l'analyse. Ainsi le découpage réalisé est-il à la fois typologique et historique, culturel et fonctionnel, en dépit de tous les risques qui découlent de tous ces positionnements relationnels pourtant incontournables si l'on veut reconstruire, à travers des chapitres d'analyse des « discours de la méthode » de la critique littéraire d'après-guerre, le tableau méthodologique impliqué dans les démarches « critiques » étudiées.

Les deux premiers chapitres du volume (à part l'inévitable « avant-propos ») suivent une démarche explicative. Le deuxième chapitre, « Introduction à la théorie critique », évite la tonalité formalisatrice et la rhétorique abstractisante, le plus souvent inévitables pour une telle démarche, pour évoquer aussi bien les noms les plus importants de l'espace de la critique occidentale s'étant prononcés au sujet de la critique littéraire et de ses méthodes (R. Wellek, M. Krieger, W. Iser, J. Starobinski, A. Thibaudet, G. Genette, A. Marino etc.) que les grands thèmes générés par ce débat (la délimitation de l'objet de la critique, la condition du critique et de la critique, les fonctions de la critique, l'élaboration et l'application des méthodes critiques). Le passage en revue – succinct d'ailleurs – des discussions portant sur la difficulté de l'adéquation de la théorie à la complexité de son objet (l'œuvre) et de la méthode à la fluidité du champ littéraire amène l'auteur à assumer une méthode qui soit elle-même flexible ou, pour reprendre le terme de G. Vattimo, « faible » : « le concept de *méthode* configure, dans un ensemble relativement homogène, des attitudes semblables par rapport à l'objet littéraire, des façons similaires de concevoir le statut de la critique, des conceptions convergentes quant au degré de rigueur et de liberté nécessaires ou possibles pour un acte de critique » (p. 34). C'est, d'ailleurs, cette définition « faible » des extensions et des fonctions de la « méthode » à l'intérieur des études littéraires qui va finalement permettre à l'auteur de se concentrer par la suite sur le dialogue entre les diverses théorisations concurrentes du phénomène littéraire tout au long du XX^e siècle et, en même temps, d'opérer les découpages méthodologiques et attitudeaux de la « critique » littéraire roumaine de l'après-guerre.

Le troisième chapitre s'attache à construire un « Panorama de la critique littéraire européenne et (nord)-américaine au XX^e siècle ». Ici la démarche de l'auteur est facilitée par son expérience d'éditeur d'une anthologie théorique extrêmement intéressante qui

passé en revue les divers tournants du discours théorique du XX^e siècle (*La théorie de la littérature. Orientations dans la théorie et la critique littéraire contemporaine*, Editions de l'Université de Bucarest, 2005, anthologie conçue en collaboration avec Anca Băicoianu). Le mérite de Oana Fotache est d'avoir tenté une systématisation typologique des méthodes des études littéraires en posant un ensemble de critères de classification flexibles, ceux qui, au fond, se rapportent aux éléments visibles de l'équation littéraire (*auteur–texte–lecteur*). À partir des dissociations théoriques d'Umberto Eco ou de M. H. Abrams (via H. F. Plett), l'auteur propose comme directions d'analyse trois types de « critique » : *la critique orientée vers l'auteur* (allant de l'histoire littéraire traditionnelle jusqu'à la critique génétique et aux diverses formes de psychanalyse), *la critique orientée vers le texte* (la stylistique, le formalisme, le structuralisme, la nouvelle critique américaine, le textualisme) et *la critique orientée vers le récepteur et le contexte social* (l'impressionnisme, la critique sociologique, le féminisme etc.). Cet ensemble de critères de classification est conçu comme un corpus d'éléments combinatoires à même de caractériser une partie de l'armature théorique des divers modes d'étudier la littérature, que cette section décrit à travers une présentation qui ne pouvait être que synthétique. L'objectif est celui de construire une sorte de « tableau périodique » du « discours critique » occidental qui puisse donner la mesure des diverses influences, filiations ou congruences avec la critique littéraire roumaine.

La construction et l'apparente adhésion à ce « tableau périodique » ne représentent toutefois pas pour l'auteur une formule analytique coercitive. La deuxième partie du travail, consacré aux analyses des méthodes de la critique littéraire roumaine (chapitre 4 – « Y a-t-il une théorie roumaine de la critique ? »), qui est au fond la préoccupation majeure préfigurée dans le titre, a comme prémisse une observation essentielle, à savoir que la narration ordonnatrice de la théorie de la critique roumaine est celle du conflit entre un *paradigme impressionniste* et un *paradigme scientifique*, le premier étant promu par E. Lovinescu (ou plutôt par T. Maiorescu), le deuxième par C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea (p. 124). Cette hypothèse de travail témoigne d'un intérêt envers le spécifique et la tradition de la critique littéraire autochtone et envers son histoire conflictuelle. Attentive à cette polarisation de l'espace des études littéraires roumaines, l'auteur est en même temps soucieuse des nuances méthodologiques relevant de l'adhésion au schéma typologique général des études littéraires occidentales du XX^e siècle. Les dissociations proposées par Oana Fotache, plus d'une fois simplifiantes (mais c'est bien le risque des dissociations !), représentent les variables prises comme point de départ pour une représentation cartographique de l'espace de la critique littéraire roumaine de l'après-guerre. Les découpages effectués identifient des directions et des filiations à même de fonctionner en tant qu'indications d'orientation à travers l'espace – pourtant complexe – des études littéraires roumaines.

La direction (ou le paradigme) *scientifique* est analysée à travers une double filiation : *sociologique* (C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea, S. Iosifescu, Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, P. Cornea, S. Bratu, Z. Ornea ou M. Ungheanu) et *esthétique* (M. Dragomirescu, T. Vianu, le structuralisme roumain, la critique linguistique/stylistique, la sémiotique littéraire et/ou

le textualisme roumain). La direction *impressionniste* est décrite, à son tour, selon une double filiation. Il y a, tout d'abord, une filiation *subjective* (entendue comme un impressionnisme du contexte) qui représente une direction importante de la critique littéraire roumaine: E. Lovinescu, G. Călinescu, ce que l'auteur appelle « le néo-impressionnisme de l'après-guerre » (I. Negoïtescu, N. Balotă, Gh. Grigurcu), V. Cristea, N. Manolescu (ou, selon une formule plastique, l'« institution » Manolescu), la critique personnaliste des années 80 (Mircea Mihăieș, Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu). Il y a ensuite une filiation *objective* de ce paradigme (caractérisé comme impressionnisme du texte et/ou critique d'identification: Lucian Raicu, Mircea Martin, Eugen Simion, « des consciences critiques des années 80 » (V. Podoabă, Al. Cistelean, Radu G. Țeposu).

Cette analyse dichotomique des manifestations des études littéraires roumaines est placée sous le signe des nuances. Oana Fotache est ainsi bien loin de radicaliser ce schéma abstrait au moment où elle s'attache à surprendre les particularités « des individualités critiques » qu'elle décrit dans la dernière partie du volume. Ce qu'elle se propose, c'est de suivre le devenir de chacune de ces consciences critiques analysées, en préférant surtout de découper soigneusement les aspects autoréflexifs du discours critique. Cette attitude prévenante conduit souvent à des enchevêtrements classificatoires qui risquent parfois de contrarier le besoin du lecteur d'avoir à sa portée des étiquettes claires qu'il puisse utiliser de façon pragmatique. Mais, si cela arrive, c'est plutôt à cause de la relativité des critères qui peuvent être appliqués à un phénomène bien complexe et, finalement, difficile à cerner grâce à des concepts transversaux. L'auteur est, d'ailleurs, la première à s'aviser de ces difficultés, qu'elle ne se fait pas faute d'exprimer à la fin de son ouvrage (chapitre 5 – « En guise de conclusion: la critique roumaine dans le contexte européen »), au cadre d'un résumé à la fois critique et projectif de sa propre démarche. Critique parce que l'auteur semble sciemment énoncer les omissions générées par les découpages effectués à travers le volume, et projectif parce qu'il semble annoncer surtout ce qui reste à faire à travers une analyse encore plus détaillée des options méthodologiques de la critique (des études littéraires) roumaine. Ce qui est certain, c'est que Oana Fotache réussit à esquisser un panorama bien intéressant et bien utile de la critique littéraire roumaine à travers ses connexions paradoxales avec l'espace des études littéraires occidentales ainsi qu'avec leur tradition autochtone.

DUMITRU TUCAN

Rodica ILIE, [*The Literary Manifesto. Poetics of the Avant-Garde in the Romanian Cultural Space*], *Manifestul literar. Poetici ale avangardei în spațiul cultural românesc*, "Transilvania" University Press, Braşov, 2008, 350 p.

In an editorial landscape where theoretical studies are not quite present or do not enjoy too often a display in the Hall of Fame, Rodica Ilie's book catches the eye, first and foremost, by the topic approached: the avant-garde manifesto, a species in its own right, quasi-literary, radical, denying and ludic. An effective weapon against institutionalized power and also against conformities of any kind, the avant-garde manifesto relies on an aesthetic that is fluid, disruptive, quite often fake, but each and every time carrying an impact.

The author's approach is noteworthy. Written with accuracy, with academic authority, but also with a fresh insight, the work reads as a synthesis on "the professions of faith" and "the proclamations" made by the avant-garde writers of the Romanian space. The quite broader cultural context in which the author places the object of her study requires an impressive documentation effort. The broad material does not mean piling up isolated data; the author rejects the irrelevant classifications or excessive filiations, always setting up pertinent analogies and pursuing only the most eloquent theories and assumptions.

In an elaborate, still non-alluvionnary manner, Rodica Ilie attempts to outline the operational concept in order to release its defining features, approaching the manifesto both as speech and performance: "the manifesto requires both a verbal structure and a halo of meanings and actions that define it as a gesture, as a cultural and existential happening. Therefore, it can be examined from multiple angles, rounding up the approach in terms of poetics and rhetoric with the theory of speech acts and pragmatics, with the theory of action, games, cultural history and mentality."

The author goes on to examine how Baudelaire and Rimbaud are instrumental in building up that consciousness of modernity that made possible – as Matei Calinescu also states – the avant-garde. From the prehistory and proto-history of the literary manifesto, the researcher proceeds to discuss certain current from La Belle Époque which established a series of elements traceable in the manifestos of the Italian Futurism. Moreover, the author perceives the Marinetti manifesto also as a theoretical tool to approximate certain affinity-bound shapes: it is about counter-manifestos or anti-manifestos, ironic meta-literary writings and rewritings, inter-textual and self-reflective "second degree forms", to be found at Apollinaire, at the Primitivists, in Creationism, in the Brazilian Antropophagism and the representatives of Dadaism.

The author pays special attention to the analysis of futuristic poetry, following its echoes in the pessoane programmatic texts and in those signed by Oswald de Andrade. An accurate X-ray of Dadaism and Surrealism, highlighting the most important products of theoretical and artistic thinking specific to Romanian avant-garde, fills in the dynamic picture of the age and the literary / cultural / social background on which the manifesto as a literal / ideological / literary genre is grafted.

The issues are not incidentally touched upon; on the contrary they are scrutinized from a complex perspective, where the diachronic approach does not rule out regional peculiarities. In a scholarly style, devoid of ostentation, showing a dissociative passion, the author comments on the fascinating game of various hypostases the literary manifesto takes – for example, in the Portuguese and South American area, “Thanks to the avant-garde dynamism and the textual protean tendency that define these movements, outstanding within what is known as *literary manifesto* are two major discursive models: one incisive, highly polemic and critical, matching the most reactionary anti-war, anti-Marineti and anti-traditionalist currents (in the sense of competing cultural paradigm imposed by the immediate tradition of modernity, in its directive and normative dimension), an emphatically well-irrigated model, brilliantly illustrated by the two Portuguese *Ultimatums*, published in the unique number of the “Portugal Futurista” magazine, in 1917 (one by Almada Negreiros – *Futuristic ultimatum to Portuguese generations of the 20th c.*, and the other by Pessoa Alvaro de Campos) or the *Manifesto Antropofago*, signed by Oswald de Andrade (1928) and another, a more moderate discursive model of a creationist, ultraist or sensationalist type.”

The manifesto is seen in its historical, political, social context and placed in relation to the data of an entire nonconformist, vindictive tradition, rejecting the dogmas. The subtitles of the chapters bring to the limelight her drive toward a systemic understanding of the avant-garde manifesto. Rodica Ilie describes how the machinery of Dadaist and Surrealist manifestos works, providing us with a number of terminological distinctions and information on the rhetoric and graphic expression of these time-bomb texts and on the external imperatives feeding them: *The polymorphism of the Dadaist manifesto; The thematic anarchic gesture; The Dadaist subject between play and alienation; The Dada show. Scandal, buffoonery, ‘the universal circus’; An aesthetics of contradiction; The art of the collage; The Dadaist auto-referentiality; The Surrealist Manifesto – poetics and ideology; The automatic writing and the anonymous identity; “Changer la vie” or “transformer le monde”?; The theoretical delirium – “the theoretical terrorism” etc.*

The harmonic construction of the book leaves room to some medallions of representative figures for the avant-garde spirit (Apollinaire, Fernando Pessoa). These sketches, and also the well-applied comments breath out the same desire to identify the energy instilling the production of manifestos, their common reference plane: “The statements recorded by *the Activist Manifesto to the Youth* (the *Contimporanul* magazine, May 1924) fall, in the first instance, into the logic of social and economic pragmatism. In this respect, Ion Vinea is an active progressive spirit who will reiterate the analogous gesture of the romantic model, a visionary, assuming the pathos of renewals, of the total revolution. Henceforth the violent reactions toward tradition, the poisoned arrows against the old order: “Let us destroy by the force of the propagated disgust the ghosts trembling before the light. Let us kill our dead!” These invectives carry the symptoms of the Dadaist crisis (*the disgust*), the refusal of any models, of the shadows of the past, reactions Vinea also imbues with the vigor of the futuristic rejection (*antipassatismo*), and also with its constructivist visions...”

The level of the exegesis is undoubtedly uplifted by the author's theoretical intelligence, and also by the stylistic beauty of her discourse or the rigor-bound arguments relying on anthropology, mythology, psychoanalysis and the philosophy of the imaginary. Thus, the proliferation of the manifestos could have an agonal basis, the researcher finding out in these texts the traces of the *agon* as a cultural function: "Viewed from the perspective of culture, the manifesto provides the role of indicator, of barometer and timer of the agon play, between tradition and novelty, between conservative poetic schools and reforming, experimental groups. "But the manifesto is considered also a *pharmakon* that, "maintains dialectically, in a unique formula, the spirit of decomposition and the seduction of salvation" being placed in the wake of those archaic *gestae*, "which saw with an always renewed hope the act of re-founding the world, of surpassing chaos". This openness toward inter-disciplinarity – along with the nuanced observations and the soundness of the argumentative scaffolding – recommends this book and proves that the author meets the qualities of a critic and a theoretician alike.

EVELINA OPREA

Raluca DUNĂ, [*I, the Author: Auctorial Representations in Literature and Painting. From Antiquity to the Renaissance*], *Eu, Autorul. Reprezentări auctoriale în literatură și pictură. Din Antichitate până în Renaștere*, Tracus Arte Publishing House, Bucharest, 2010, 401 p.

Over the last decades, literary, cultural and artistic studies have shed light on the ever deeper crisis of representation, heavily fuelled by poststructuralist theories. Loosely speaking, we might say that the almost unanimously shared opinion today is that subjectivism inevitably and seriously undermines any representational undertaking. In this context, a justified question would be: what are the chances for any subject to be represented?

The author of this book offers a partial but relevant answer, as she approaches the issue of *auctorial* representation in literature and painting from Antiquity to the Renaissance. The topic is approached from an explicitly multidisciplinary perspective: literary history vs. art history, the theory of literature vs. the theory of painting, the history of ideas vs. comparative literature, iconology vs. literary hermeneutics are successively or even simultaneously called forth to shed light on intricate, even arcane issues. Likewise, neither the philosophical commentaries, nor the issue of the real referent in autobiography and self-portrait are eluded. To be successful, this far-reaching endeavour needs a sophisticated intellectual apparatus, apart from the mastery of an all-encompassing and rigorously annotated bibliography. It also requires a solid cultural and artistic, not only literary, background, a good acquaintance with the succession of artistic tastes and epochs, thorough knowledge of literary and artistic masterpieces, as well as the ability to make meaningful distinctions.

These qualities (and many others) are displayed right from the beginning, in the book's very first introductory pages, wherein the author delineates the object of research, defines the terms, details the working method and presents the major theoretical sources (Foucault, Philippe Lejeune, Michel Beaujour, Louis Marin, Georges Gusdorf, and also Simmel, Panofsky, but mainly Georg Misch). This is where the main goal, connecting all the threads of her research, is formulated: "the manner in which the two types of representation, visual and textual, relate to one another within the cultural system to which they belong" and, of course, the way they evolve from one historical age to another. The author is drawn, even fascinated by similitudes and convergences, eventually convincing us of their existence as well.

Somewhat surprisingly, and ultimately running against the prevailing trend in most of the bibliography consulted, she asserts her aim to be – at least in the subtext – a history of auctorial self-consciousness, understood, in the line of Dilthey and his disciple, Georg Misch, as a history of human self-consciousness in general.

The book is structured into several extensive sequences. The *Introduction* is followed by a short history of auctorial representations from classical Antiquity until the Hellenistic period. A distinct and well-substantiated chapter is dedicated to Saint Augustine and his *Confessions*, mainly Book X which, according to Georges Gusdorf, reads as a synthesis between "the a-temporal essence" and the "historical manifestation" of the individual existence. Other two diachronic sequences follow: The Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Mainly faithful to Georg Misch's synthesis on "a history of autobiography," Raluca Perța (née Dună) recasts the topic's history not only as a chronological inventory of precedence, but also as a series of historical and typological considerations. Cleverly selecting the information at hand, the author makes best use of them for her own argumentation. She adroitly manages a rich, diverse bibliography, picking up whatever proves to be more interesting, more debatable or fertile to her theme. She is neither drawn to spectacular and ungrounded confrontations, nor overwhelmed by the authority of illustrious predecessors she quotes sparingly. The volume abounds in bibliographical references which do not overshadow the author's voice. The interplay of quotations naturally integrates in Raluca Dună's own commentary as intertextuality turns into intratextuality.

Leaving aside the chronology, there are many ideas turned into working hypotheses which secure the scaffolding of this historical presentation. Here are two of them: "The positioning of the author's portrait at the beginning of the text plays a major role in the iconographic tradition of Antiquity, later handed down to Christian iconography." And "the self-portrait has at its origin the author's portrait." Undoubtedly, the auctorial presence takes various forms from St. Augustine's *Confessions* to Giorgio Vasari's *Lives*... but noteworthy, in my opinion, is Raluca Dună's undertaking to place this presence and its shapes in relation with the authors' attitude towards life and the Other: "St. Augustine's *Confessions* establish," she writes, "an imagistic relation wherein both terms (I, You) are present. The Self feels closer through the Other, it does not reach out, it does not assert itself in the outer world: it projects itself onto the Other, hence retreating within itself."

Likewise, she forecasts an inspiring role – a posterity, in other words –, to this position: "Whence, perhaps, that fascinating intensity, that overwhelming power of Dürer's self-portraits, mainly the self-portrait dated 1500, or that of van Eyck's self-portraits or late Rembrandt's self-portraits. The revealing look – which helps us recognize in a group painting, among the other portraits, an undeclared self-portrait – is the look which, although stares out, obstinately fixing the Other, also turns inward, by an implosive miracle, dragging us into the space of the work of art and therefore bringing together the You and the I." There are many similar excerpts that prove the author's power of comprehension, her historical and theoretical breath.

There are other interesting, impelling remarks, about the relation between the individual and the universal in the Ancient Times and the Renaissance or about the subtle relation between self-portrait and allegory, which are left, unfortunately, in a fragmentary, underdeveloped form.

The ample sequence dedicated to the Renaissance predictably deals with painting, and the author makes most of it so as to display a range of somewhat surprising evocative and artistically telling qualities. The painting is recreated under our own eyes, with all its social and psychological consequences. The author focuses mainly on the psychology of creation. Setting herself the goal of seeing "not only *how* but also *why* writers and painters represent themselves in their works", Raluca Dună corroborates insight into the technical aspects of paintings with an analysis of biographical and historical correspondences; she has an eye for aesthetic and moral purport, and also for philosophical and personal consequences. And here she makes best use of an extremely rich, dense bibliography – quite difficult

to systematize, as a matter of fact –, managing to give consistency to interpretations replete with subtleties, contradictory evidence and spectacular, often improbable intuitions. And on top of all this, she manages to squeeze in her own options.

The chapters on Montaigne and Rembrandt are pivotal to the economy of her work. Here the text analysis unfolds at ease, not just *en passant*; likewise, the survey of the paintings in the following chapter. The commentary develops between the promising words in the *Introduction* – “Rejecting here the order of an artificial memory and also the transcendence of the Augustinian memory, Montaigne restricts himself to the futile present of his own self. A place, however, for the memory, but for a personal, oblivious memory, which continuously rewrites, by auto-selection, the discourse about the self” – and the concluding remarks where Raluca Dună relates the “happy consciousness” Starobinski spoke about to the moment when “vanity (in fact, the consciousness of vanity) is accepted and established in the self-portrait.”

But, before this paradoxical equation, the author finds another paradox, namely the transposition of the self-portrait from the painting into the written page – an inaugural gesture attributed, yet again, to Montaigne. To put it in her own words, “Montaigne ‘steals’ something of the spirit and rhetoric of certain pictorial gestures to devise a new way of representing the author in literature.”

Thus we come to the end of the book, dedicated to Rembrandt’s self-portraiture, inspired by an unquestionable meta-pictorial appetite. This chapter also abounds in subtle considerations, derived, in fact, from the previous exegesis, but steered with theoretical intelligence towards the author’s own conclusions. While she comments, for instance, upon the *Self-portrait with Saskia*, at the Gemäldegalerie in Dresden, and adopts the hypothesis of a peculiar Rembrandtian mimesis, recently upheld by most researchers, Raluca Dună pays attention to details and concludes: “Nonetheless, the setting is not ‘real’, and similarly the objects making up the props are not ‘real’ in a mimetic rendition. Rembrandt is on the point of falling, leaning backwards, the hand around Saskia’s waist has an unnatural position, while Saskia seems to be stiff, with the neck turned, as if caught in a screw vice. Their positions are impossible and yet, at a first glance, absolutely verisimilar, like the objects on the table, which, at a closer look, are somehow suspended above the table. Nonetheless, the optical illusion works, even if Rembrandt rejects realistic mimesis.”

The last phrase raises, however, a question: is not the optical illusion, by excellence, a realistic illusion? The issue might trigger an entire discussion, but Raluca Dună moves on to another hypothesis, namely that the Prodigal Son – the allegory behind the self-portrait – could be “the painting’s creator and onlooker alike”. But, again, she refrains from explaining why. Even by default of arguments, the hypothesis is alluring.

As a rule, the author opts, however, for what may be called a balance between antitheses, a solution that seems to me entirely acceptable: “The self-portrait is realistic, ‘true to nature’, owing to the spontaneity of the pose and the individuality of the portraits, but it is also counterfeited, anti-mimetic, since the details are merely sketched and the two characters are depicted in unnatural positions.”

So, the author concludes her book in an elegant and artistic manner, keeping us engrossed in meditations on Rembrandt. This last chapter is both analytical and synthetic,

since the insightful description of paintings captures in a nutshell the gist of the entire study. The chapter is subtitled *Conclusions*, but it is less conclusive than suggestive, i.e.: its dissociations and connections cast an aura of complexity and mystery on the entire matter under study. As if tempted by a self-reflective gesture, the author would like to repeat and cover here everything that had been conveyed until then.

A specific and, more often than not, blissful relation is established throughout the book between analysis and synthesis, between temporality and spatiality, between succession and simultaneity, between the readable and the visible. Could it be the author's *forma mentis*, a *pattern* or the outcome of a prolonged submission to the object, to an instinctive (perhaps conscious?) imitation of the book's twofold object – representations of the self through words and through images? The manner in which this twofold object is approached implies a correspondence between succession and analysis – in literature, and between simultaneity and synthesis – in painting. Raluca Dună indulges however in favouring the *play* – present in both sister-arts – between a natural and inherent narrativity and a gained, artificial one, as well as between an immediate, direct simultaneity and an indirect, postponed and evanescent simultaneity.

Finally, I would like to make so bold as to offer a suggestion of precaution with regard to what I would call an excess of subtlety. "I is always another after Montaigne," writes the author, quoting Rimbaud's well-known formula in order to characterize the mobility of the self which the French humanist wanted to capture in his writing, marked by "an anti-rhetoric of auctorial representation". Nonetheless, the comparison can be deceitful. Rimbaud's utterance has a different meaning and should be placed on another level: it defines something that is related neither to the truth/the verisimilitude of art, nor to the becoming of the self; instead, it relates to a radical transformation. Here, alterity is taken to mean neither the difference between days, nor the difference between ages, least of all between humors, but instead the difference between the self prior to the work and the self after the work. Even if he is aware of the sometimes "phantasmagorical" character of the self-image, Montaigne still holds on to the framework of a realistic representational convention, or better said, he nuances and deepens it. The same goes for Rembrandt. With Rimbaud and Manet, for instance, things are different. André Malraux said about Manet's famous portrait of Clemenceau: "So that modern art could be ushered in, it was necessary that Manet should want himself to be everything and Clemenceau, nothing." Obviously, Rembrandt is not in the least in the same situation, whatever anti-mimetic aspects may be found in his work.

Contemporary exegesis, be it literary or artistic, shows an irrepressible tendency towards topicality, whose purpose is, of course, to renew perspectives. Everything that these interpreters say – and Raluca Dună follows closely in their footsteps – about Montaigne and Rembrandt is interesting, inciting, enchanting and it may also be accurate, provided that the groundwork is always outlined. Otherwise, if these artists are anti-mimetic, then how could Picasso or Salvador Dali be termed?

MIRCEA MARTIN

Rareș MOLDOVAN, *Symptomatologies: A Study of the Problem of Legitimation in Late Modernity*, Limes Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2011, 304 p.

Initially a Ph.D. thesis delivered in 2004, the project informing *Symptomatologies* underwent a significant change in scope by the time the book was published. The original intention, that of outlining “an architecture of importance”, subsequently dismissed by the author as overambitious, was replaced by a seemingly more modest enterprise – an inquiry into the issue of legitimation in modernity and late modernity. In Rareș Moldovan’s view, legitimation, as “part of the process of value constitution” (7), is what makes importance manifest, because it retraces the process by which the quality of “important” is ascribed to an object. Legitimation is the answer to the question regarding importance, thus revealing the grounding of value judgements.

Although the author appears to reduce the investigation of importance to just one of its facets – legitimation is only part of the “mechanics of importance” (7) –, the study remains, nevertheless, quite ample in its breadth. The first chapter announces the twofold purpose of the study: on the one hand, to examine the manner in which contemporary literary theory accounts for the process of value constitution; on the other hand, to investigate the way in which the issue of value formation offers, in its turn, valuable insights into the current status of literary theory (value constitution both exposes the limits of literary theory and highlights its possibilities, thus touching upon the topical issue of the future of literary theory) (19). “[T]he mode in which theory relates itself to the assumptions that combine contingency, historicity, the ‘cultural’ and the ‘social’ with respect to the constitution of value will be a constant point of investigation” (36), announces Rareș Moldovan. However, the scope of the book goes well beyond literary theory. *Symptomatologies* is not so much about the way in which this particular discipline deals with the process of value constitution. Instead, the overarching theme of the book is value constitution, and its relation to literary theory becomes marginal, as the study shifts towards a more general theory of culture in the transition from modernity to late modernity. The author’s philosophical bent, albeit useful, offering a framework and a set of instruments (the hypothesis of the book is drawn from Nietzsche; Kant, Hegel and Heidegger are quoted extensively; the author frequently turns to phenomenology – literary theory is ingeniously defined in terms of its intentionality –and hermeneutics also occupies an important place in the economy of the book), ends up sabotaging the overall project. It overshadows the case of literary theory and fails to provide a sufficiently elaborate depiction of the way in which literature relates to the question of value constitution. It is due to this comprehensiveness itself that the book ultimately presents itself as quite heterogeneous and thus, difficult to classify as (meta)literary theory.

The starting point is Nietzsche’s contention that the value of life cannot be estimated by a living man, because value judgements are symptoms of the very world they are supposed to evaluate; since value judgements have no ultimate grounding, their validity is merely circumstantial (11). In modernity, value statements – and value itself – are legitimated as symptoms of the cultural environment which produced them. Therefore,

as Rareș Moldovan is quick to point out, a discourse on legitimation in modernity can be but a symptomatology (12). At this point, the title discloses itself as self-referential, since the book is not only an analysis of symptoms; *Symptomatology* is itself a symptom of the cultural milieu which occasioned it, thus becoming yet another illustration of the Nietzschean paradox.

What seems to define the process of legitimation in modernity is the grounding of legitimising operations in culture and history, which prompts the author to state that in modernity, legitimation takes the form of a “cultural-historical logic” (42). In Rareș Moldovan’s view, legitimation is the continuous interplay (and tension) between immanence and exteriority, between autonomy and situatedness, between the historical process of value constitution, on the one hand, and ahistorical validity, on the other. What distinguishes late modernity from modernity is a particular attitude towards historicity (a concept which is closely related with contingency): while modernity attempts to override historicity by adopting a teleological view on history (46), late modernity opts for embracing contingency instead, and takes the cultural-historical logic one step forward by distinguishing among multiple cultural spheres of value (113).

The key concept underpinning Rareș Moldovan’s view on the passage from modernity to late modernity is neutralisation: if modernity is characterised by the emergence of a cultural-historical logic, late modernity is defined by a neutralisation of the cultural-historical logic pertaining to modernity. Neutralisation is achieved by rethinking the distinction between interiority and exteriority underlying the historical-cultural logic of legitimation in modernity. At this point, Rareș Moldovan’s study is greatly indebted to Niklas Luhmann’s theory of social systems. Transposed in Luhmann’s theoretical framework, the Nietzschean paradox translates into the tension between system and environment. For modernity, the subject-object distinction is a claim theory (the system) makes about its environment. The object of theory lies outside theory, a statement predicated of the environment. In late modernity, on the other hand, the subject-object distinction is re-embedded within the system; it is no longer presented as a fact, but as a cultural construct, a contingent tool with which theory operates. The subject-object distinction is no longer an empirical one, but a theoretical one. The distinction between interiority and exteriority no longer defines the actual relationship between the system and its environment; instead, it is transferred within the system itself – a process which Luhmann dubs “re-entry”. This means that while in modernity theory postulates a distinction between itself and its environment, in late modernity it copies this distinction within itself. In Rareș Moldovan’s words: “The main merit of such an approach is that it offers the possibility of re-writing ‘aesthetics’ in modernity [...] from a strange perspective in which the distinctions between history (dependence) and logic (autonomy) [...] are read as being just that: distinctions that have been employed in second order observations” (276). Thus, late modern theory becomes self-reflexive, taking into account its own historicity. Theory changes its referent: it no longer tells us anything about the world as such; the only type of knowledge it can give us is about itself. We cannot gain access to what lies beyond social constructs.

At first glance, this might seem to indicate the tendency of the system towards dissolution (if theory admits that the evaluating subject is part of the object it evaluates, this threatens the existence of the very border which separates the system from its environment, and without which the system would simply dissolve). However, it actually contributes to the perpetuation of the system by ensuring its closure – a prerequisite for “autopoiesis”, an essential feature for the “survival” of a system, in Luhmann’s view.

In the field of literary theory, this process of re-entry leads to what the author calls the “exhaustion” of literary theory (19). The relation between literary theory and its object enters a state of crisis: theory moves away from literature, as literature is integrated within various cultural contexts, losing its status of privileged object of study.

Nevertheless, Luhmann’s theory is, first and foremost, a sociological one. While it might be true that Luhmann strove for a comprehensive framework able to cover any aspect of social life, his theory did not deal expressly with literature. As a result, its applicability to the field of literary theory might be somewhat problematic and might require a more ample discussion than the one provided by Rareș Moldovan. Luhmann’s quest for an all-encompassing societal theory seems to have influenced the Romanian author as well – if all systems are alike, interest in the specificity of a particular system is minimal, and this might explain why the peculiarities of literary theory are not sufficiently delineated within cultural theory in Rareș Moldovan’s study. In *Symptomatologies*, “cultural theory” is more frequent a phrase than “literary theory”, although it is doubtful whether what holds true for cultural theory also holds true for literary theory.

Rareș Moldovan’s study remains, however, a very insightful exploration of legitimization as part of value constitution in modernity and late modernity. The author’s associative intelligence enables him to create a dialogue between various philosophical systems and cultural theories, offering surprising and stimulating juxtapositions (Nietzsche, Kant, John Barth, Theodor Adorno, Fredric Jameson, Stanley Fish, Steven Connor – just to name a few of the thinkers he often engages in dialogue). On a side note, not the least of his merits is that of introducing Lehmann to the Romanian readership, all the more so as his works are yet to be translated into Romanian.

The application of the theory of autopoietic systems to literary theory appears to present a number of advantages, some of which are listed and discussed in the final chapter. Resorting to the gradual closure and “complexification” of systems in order to account for the passage from modernity to late modernity could bring a significant contribution to theories of postmodernity.

Autopoiesis also invites us to reconsider the condition of cultural studies. Rareș Moldovan stresses the fact that autopoiesis rids theory of some of its enduring illusions, such as the illusion of external reference: cultural studies only mimic external reference, and their claim to have the ability of changing the world can only be false. No external reference is no external relevance. Although this might cure theory and cultural studies of the “*pathos* of political and social action” (280), one might wonder whether such an illusion shouldn’t be preserved instead of abandoned, since it is this very illusion which actually fuels cultural studies, by giving them meaning and gearing them towards action.

Moreover, is external reference truly an illusion, and what are the consequences of such nihilism? Couldn't re-entries be deemed a means of mediating external reference instead of cancelling it? Even if the world-image incorporated in theory is not an adequate representation of the world as such, it could, nevertheless, be viewed as a means by which the system approximates the world instead of radically separating itself from it. Rareș Moldovan's study raises challenging questions and manages to prove the usefulness of a theory which can find numerous applications in literary theory, offering engaging perspectives on topical issues in cultural studies and the theories of postmodernity.

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