Borbély, Ştefan. *Civilizations of Glass. Utopia, Dystopia, Urbanism*. Cluj-Napoca: Limes. 2013. Print.

A genuinely comparative *tour de force* in the history of the 'transparent societies' projects within European history, *Civilizations of Glass. Utopia, Dystopia, Urbanism* by Ştefan Borbély carries an intellectual density enabled not only by the spectacle of his analyses, but also by the author's narrative charm. His 'adventure' commences 'just before Karl Marx's death in London' and reaches every possible direction:

> 'In this book, I have systematized an older, personal concern regarding the representations of glass within culture, literature and various classical proposals for ideal, corrective urbanism – states the academic from Cluj in a text on the fourth cover. Years on end I have gathered, in small thematic boxes manufactured to resemble exactly those used by Thomas Mann, information and bibliographical references about translucent worlds, transparent societies, white metropolises**,** buildings, cities and monuments made out of glass, hoping that they would eventually congeal into a coherent overview. If they do not represent dystopias – a society which embraces full transparency is also one of generalized control – the glass civilizations suggest either solar, luminous pleasure, or – in an ideatic complementary register – the utopia of complete dematerialization, by putting behind everything that is earthly in us.'

In fact, one can speak about exploring an imaginary civilizing totality, out of which the great projects of urban modernization have sprung into being throughout the last few centuries. Could glass be the definitive 'substance' pertaining to that mentality that seeks to rationalize, optimize mankind and make it transparent, and whose latest 'feats' are the global screen and planetary surveillance? One thing is for certain: the conflict between the 'Apollonian' (transferred onto geometrical, rationalist utopias of urban transparency and the control of all that is unpredictable) and the 'Dionysian' (bearing its correspondence in the images of the chaotic, anarchic, but at the same time lively, city) roams throughout the whole history of European civilization.

Hard upon the reference work of Manfredo Tafuri (1973), the author rhetorically asks to what extent 'are the geometrical, ordered utopias of the "garden city" or those of the Le Corbusier-type "organizations" in accordance with the modern-type industrial *stylistics* (urban, social, existential), or if they represent merely an organizational specter, jutting out of the minds of contemplative cerebrals, with the modern unpredictable city doing nothing more than exacerbating it'. Ironically, absolute transparency, presented as a meliorist ideal in Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon*, becomes a dystopian nightmare of surveillance and repression in Michel Foucault's works and in the representations belonging to the ideologists of the Counterculture from across the Ocean. The same dread was experienced by Dostoyevsky when confronted with the apparition of the Crystal Palace in the works of his contemporary, Chernyshevsky. Dostoyevsky's taste for urban chaos, which opposes the 'standardized, depersonalized dystopia' of the 'swarm city' is, of course, too well known. When speaking about *The Brothers Karamazov*, a few enticing considerations from page 199 must be recorded: 'Too much

have I stressed both literary and journalistically the fact that totalitarianism was 'diabolical'. It suffices to ponder a little in order to understand that it wasn't: the uniform is not the Devil's mantle. Nor are the exact same gestures. Not surprisingly, when sealing a deal, the Devil selects only above average human beings, maybe geniuses. The average person does not come to his attention, nor is he interested in those who are too and cannot surpass their own mediocrity.'

Even if Borbély mentions more than once the work of his disciple, Constantina Raveca, entitled *The Paradigm of Power in the XIXth Century* (Bucharest, 2011), it is very difficult to find a similar work in autochthonous bibliography. Unlike Sorin Antohi's *Utopica*, *The Civilizations of Glass*… does not excel in the erudition of its historical and typological inventory, but rather in the hermeneutical study applied to the utopian narrations, from Plato's *Republic* and Lucian of Samostata's *True Story* to Kepler's 'Somnium', Thomas Morus' 'Utopia' and Campanella's 'City of the Sun/Moon', analyzing other neo-platonic projects as well, such as Francesco Patrisi's 'happy city' Leonardo's 'Codex Atlanticus' or Filarete's 'Sforzinda', moving on, then, from Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism and Malthus's 'population principle' to Ebenezer Howard's concentric 'garden cities' and the neo-classical urbanism of the Oxford Tractarians, without leaving aside the utopian socialism of the 'organizer' Saint-Simon, of the 'transformist' Proudhon or of the 'phalansterist' Fourier, the obsession with order in Marx, the Victorian town in Dickens's novels, the hyper-rationalized geometrics of Le Corbusier's architecture and that of the Russian constructivists. It's also worth mentioning Donna Haraway's theories about the cyborg or 'the new love disorder' celebrated hedonistically by Pascal Bruckner. Moreover, unlike Sorin Antohi's *Civitas Imaginalis*, *Civilisations of Glass* seldom touches upon the Romanian space (minus a few transient references to Teodor Diamant and Urmuz).

Artistic fiction represents a considerable aspect of the history of 'civilizations of glass': alongside the nineteenth century Russian novels of Dostoyevsky, Saltykhov-Schedrin, Odoevsky and Chernyshevsky, we find the fantasies of Jules Verne, Edward Buller-Lytton, H. G. Wells, Jerome K. Jerome, Hermann Hesse, Evgheny Zamiatin, George Orwell and Karel Čapek, or movies like Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* or Pink Floyd's *The Wall*. Almost inevitably, we notice that utopia slowly slides away into dystopia, while lights become shadows. Symptomatically, the author's sense of geometry, seduced by the verbiage of ideas and by conceptual precision, falls into its reverse side, comprising the hermeneutical mannerist's spirit of *finesse*, one fascinated by gnosis, mythology, alchemy or hermetism, and very interested, along Jung's lines, in the psychological and anthropological structures of the imaginary of transparency; the fact is visible even in his older preoccupations regarding the conflict between the bourgeois and the artist as the axis of European modernity. One should therefore observe the way in which the 'academic-like' first person plural alternates, in Borbély's text, with the familiar first person singular: 'Mainly, we shall discuss in this chapter about 'heliotes' and 'selenites': inhabitants of the Sun and of the Moon, respectively. However, we shall reach this on a circuitous path. I have tried to suggest, in *Mircea Eliade's Fantastical*

Prose..., where the famous glass slipper which Cinderella loses on the steps of the Palace comes from, as well as the glass coffin we find in *The Sleeping Beauty*…

By reason of the occult numerologies which they base their projects not only on utopian socialists but also on the British colonizer Ebenezer Howard with his Crystal Palace, or Sir James Silk Buckingham, the author of 'the perfect urban planning' in the mid nineteenth century (a planning that reminds Borbély of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*...) appear to us as modern Pythagoreans, mentally modeled by Christian patterns and fascinated by the mythologies of science. Let us add to this the essayist's enlightening excursus concerning the Russian civilizing Christhood, from Peter the Great onwards (the sequences about the utopian spirit in Sumarakhov, Odoevsky and Bulgarin), everything culminating with the surprising analysis of Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?* – see: *The New Sophia or The New Gnosis; Towards a World Led by Women; About Sloth, Cakes and Other Idle Pleasures*… The richness of inferences in the book is difficult to sum up. When speaking about Le Corbusier's geometricizing rationalism bearing a gnostic essence and his idea about architecture as a 'disciplinary collective instance', the comparatist relativizes the myth of the sanitary reason lying behind the demolition of medieval Paris in 1860 by means of Baron Hausmann's systematization; actually, the main reason – approved as such by Napoleon the third – was that of 'facilitating the control of the population, carried out by the army and by law enforcement authorities. The recent historical events prove that, within a web of sinuous, winding, impenetrable streets, setting up barricades could generate insurmountable difficulties, resulting in the army's relative incapacity to intervene in such situations in order to instill social peace.' There are other exciting interpretations as well. Following Pascal Bruckner's footsteps, the author reclaims Charles Fourier as the precursor of 'the new love disorder' and the postmodern era's eroticism without borders. *Nota Bene*, before Bruckner, André Breton debates on the subject of the French 'phalansterist's' image, reductively accredited by Engels to the conservative Eugen Duhring (the same Duhring that was the author of an onomastic irony starting from a false etymology – 'fou' – pertaining to the name Fourier). Compelling analyses are also dedicated to the underground civilizing utopia called *Vril*, which belongs to Edward Buller Lytton, where literature is execrated as an expression of a 'civilization of frustration, nostalgia and lust'. Actually – as it is often suggested – there is no place for the anarchical 'disorder' of literature in ordered utopias. From this point of view, *Civilisations of Glass* develops a subtle defense of literary complexities against 'luminous' utopias and brutal simplifications. One of the most stimulating examples is contained within the pages about the urban, progressive, enlightened and humanistic utopia of the France-Ville community in Jules Verne's *The Begum's Millions*. A France-Ville which is threateningly doubled by the bleak, dystopian Stahlstadt (City of Steel) of the 'tenebrous' professor Schultze; *Nota Bene*: Verne's novel was written as a polemical reaction to the war between the French and the Germans, and the two cities are symbolically placed on the Western Coast of the United States of America; if, however, *The Begum's Millions* is criticized for its schematized thesis, Verne's visionary work called *Paris in the XXth Century* instigates Borbély's enthusiasm. As rightly reasoned, the French writer

felicitously anticipates 'the Americanization' of the global society, persuasively described by Gramsci after the enforcement of fordism. It also vivaciously anticipates 'the spectacularization' of the new type of civilization, that of 'the eye, the image and the exacerbated sensations, dominated, in essence, by innovation, by novelty'. With a sense of amusement, titles with 'avant-garde' resonance are taken down (*Electric Harmonies, Meditations on Oxygen etc.)* from some Parisian poems of the 1960s, farseeingly imagined by Jules Verne and emerged from the untrammeled unilateralization of pragmatic sciences to the detriment of humanistic "fossils".' According to the French anti-utopian writer, the Parisian woman, sensual since 1860, would give way, after one century, to another female model: the tasteless and pragmatic American woman; the writers of the future would then turn exclusively into calligraphers and scriveners, abandoning any elitist preoccupations or pessimistic inclinations, while optimism and humor would become the primordial demands of the market, foreshadowing 'the lax and hypocritical rigors of *pop culture* which the Americans would turn into a norm only after the huge, depressive social shock caused by the economic crisis in the 1930s. If the author of *Civilizations of Glass* makes no bones about forgathering his 'good students' to signal the compatibilities between Jules Verne's and Jean Baudrillard's visions, 'the good students' shall be able, in their turn, to savor their professor's leap back in time, from the cyborg ontology theorized in Donna Haraway's manifesto, to Lucian of Samostata's *Secret History*, a 'brilliant histrion' and a 'postmodern man among the ancients'…

It may be possible that, in the future, other books may develop from the body of this work. A chapter rich in subtle interpretations about *The Glass Bead Game* is the prefiguration of a monograph in the making, as we find out from the text ('I propose that, after I have finished this work, I can finally succeed in writing the monograph of Herman Hesse, something which I've meant to do for quite some time'). A truly hermeneutical spectacle, *Civilizations of Grass* overall performs an X-ray of the European civilizing mentality, in the abyss of which we find projected both its 'celestial', utopian transparencies and its 'demonic', dystopian shadows. One possible subjacent moral would be the fact that the road to Hell is paved with good intentions and that literature, in spite of its apparent weakness, represents a considerable form of resistance to uniformity and dehumanization.

Paul Cernat

Translated into English by Radu Stoica

Şandru, Cristina. *Worlds Apart? A Postcolonial Reading of Post-1945 East-Central European Culture*. Cambridge Scholars, 2012. Print.

Cristina Şandru's book (in its initial form a doctoral dissertation successfully defended in 2006, fully reshuffled and thoroughly updated by the time of its publication) is a compelling reading of the postcolonial-postcommunist connection that aims to locate recurring political, intellectual and cultural practices at the level of cognate ideological constructions and similar functioning mechanisms.

By fully acknowledging her problematic position as an East-Central European scholar working within the Western academe, Şandru turns it into a vantage point for a poignant analysis of, on the one hand, postcolonial studies' failure to engage with the 'Second World' represented by the former Soviet Bloc, and, on the other hand, the region's changing cultural identity (Chapter One: 'Cultures of Empire', Chapter Two: 'East-Central Europe as Colonized Space: The Empire of Communist Ideology'). Of particular interest for Easterners and Westerners alike is Chapter Two, building upon a tension still visible in postcommunism-related debates. While the perspective of the left-leaning practitioners of postcolonial studies operating 'within the historical legacy of Marxist critique' (Young 6) is still very much shaped by the notion of the emancipative potential of communist ideology in Third-World contexts, from behind the fallen Iron Curtain there is an ever increasing flow of testimonials and analytical works arguing that the 'ultimate realization of the utopia of social equity' was in fact the worst form of ideological subjection that modernity engendered. This clash of perspectives is partly responsible for previous forms of resistance to the postcolonial-postcommunist analogy in both East and West, and Şandru judiciously stresses out the challenge that postcolonial studies face from their eastern counterpart: 'to reformulate neo-Marxist models of postcolonial critique to account for a post-communist set of realities and the resurgence of neo-liberalism in the former Second World'.

An ambitious and timely contribution to an ongoing debate, her study begins with an exercise in theoretical relocation which stresses the need for the otherwise fertile and flexible discipline of postcolonial studies to address its 'own blind spots and ideological biases'. If, as Neil Lazarus aptly points out, this neglect is symptomatic, not incidental, the chief reason is perhaps the fact that 'postcolonialists have found it difficult to think outside the frame of Cold War discourse'. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, notable scholars like Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Anne McClintock or Diana Brydon have repeatedly albeit superficially tackled the possibility of a comparison between (post) colonialism and (post)communism, and yet the attempts to deal with this relation in a rigorous and systematic manner have remained few and far-between. Rich with in-depth knowledge of the field acquired as a contributor and editor for the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* as well as co-editor of the collective volume *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for the New Millennium* (Routledge, 2009), Şandru is particularly well equipped to fill in the blank spot that the undertheorization of postcommunism has left within the paradigm of postcolonial cultural studies, and therefore enhance 'the scope of postcolonial theory to an area where it can meet, and thus conceptualize, its borders'.

On the other hand, her direct exposure to the mix of ethnicities, religions, and imperial legacies that constitutes East-Central Europe allows her to deal discriminatively with the region's historical experiences and their reflection and imprint on the cultures thereof. A substantial part of the book is dedicated to the systematic examination of ideological structures, cultural trends, and literary practices in 20th century East-Central Europe in terms of their accommodation of, or resistance to, various forms of 'imperial' influence or occupation. In doing so, Şandru's main aim is to address a failure that has been repeatedly remarked on (Moore 2001; Oţoiu 2003; Popescu 2003; Ştefănescu 2012): the inability of postcommunist studies to produce a forceful and coherent theoretical construction similar in conceptual reach and germinative potential to the type of cultural critique that postcolonial studies has been practicing for four decades now.

Where her study largely differs from similar undertakings like Nataša Kovačević's, *Narrating Post/Communism: Colonial Discourse and Europe's Borderline Civilization* (Routledge, 2008) is in a shifting of accents by means of 'the insertion of the postcolonial problematic into a comparative framework in which communist (post)totalitarianism is the main analytic category, rather than the various forms of Western hegemony over East-Central Europe'. Subtle as it may seem, this reversal of focus is nevertheless of crucial importance in estimating the true relevance of postcolonial perspectives in an East-Central European context. Şandru's interest in the matter lies not with the use of the postcolonial as a 'theoretical matrix for postcommunist transitions' – as a transitologist approach would have it – nor with applying 'ready-made postcolonial precepts and methodologies' to examine instances of ideological imperialism in East-Central Europe – as pioneering cultural studies texts such as Larry Wolff's, Maria Todorova's, or Vesna Goldsworthy's have done in the late 1990s – but with the possibility to formulate a model of analysis which may be usefully applied across a variety of texts produced in the region. If the postcolonial can prove to be instrumental in the elaboration of such models, it is by its ability to compensate for the scarcity of critical tools as well as by its capacity to offer guidelines for the systematic treatment of diverse cultural practices[1].

In the second part of the book, the cultural theorist gives the floor to the Comparative Literature scholar. The cogent Chapter Three ('Dissidence, Complicity and Resistance: The Poetics and Politics of Literary Production in Post-Totalitarian East-Central Europe'), which bridges the two parts, focuses on what the author dubs *overcoded fictions*: heteroglossic or otherwise polyvalent narratives, 'heirs to the Bakhtinian tradition of ironic subversion, carnival and hybridity', which 'illustrate the complex trajectories of silent complicity, oblique subversion and open dissent' forming the underlying currents in East-Central European cultures under Communism. In this chapter, Şandru aims to identify a number of thematic dominants and narrative strategies pertaining to fictions produced in colonized spaces, with a special focus on the specificities of the East-Central European literary discourse. Building upon Mikhail Bakhtin's and Homi Bhabha's understanding of *hybridity*, the author reconstructs a poetics of 'deliberate narrative instability' which points to the 'inherent power of fiction to disrupt the monologic self-sufficiency of imposed ideological discourse'. Intended for

a (predominantly) Western public, this chapter aims at disclosing 'the underlying epistemological dimension of the East-Central European 'periphrastic style'', while at the same time suggesting a discriminate explanation of the predominance of obliquely subversive narratives over more directly oppositional fictions.

Finally, Part Two heightens this textual engagement by tackling the work of two writers (Milan Kundera and Salman Rushdie) whose thematic emphases and narrative devices illustrate the more general tendencies discussed in Chapter Three. Staged out as a meeting place between cultures, a space for encounter and exchange between paradigms traditionally perceived as being 'worlds apart', the three final chapters of the book examine the 'cultural geography' of Kundera's and Rushdie's novels, focusing on the tropes that shape an imaginative landscape of exile. Singled out among many other potential case-studies by virtue of their representativeness for the cultural formations under scrutiny, the two authors analyzed at length end up by disclosing, after a thorough reading of the conclusions to the book, the ultimate reason of their convocation: commenter and commented belong to the same intellectual tradition, they are all similarly 'ironic, lucid and experimental, suspicious of established verities and seeking to problematize given hierarchies and meaning-systems'.

Note

[1] In this respect, Şandru's approach is akin to the recent advances of the Cambridge *Memory at War* team lead by Alexander Etkind in developing a 'memory paradigm' that casts the variety of the cultural and political transformations in Eastern Europe (Poland, Ukraine, and Russia being the cases in point) as differential responses to legacies and traumas of the imperial, Soviet, and national pasts. Although they operate with different conceptual frameworks (Postcolonial Studies and Memory Studies, respectively), Şandru shares with the Cambridge scholars a commonality of purpose—to transform and adapt recent theoretical approaches in order to productively account for the current state of the cultural practices in the region—as well as the central assumption that importing concepts, methodologies, and guidelines for analysis into a new cultural context cannot be done without interrogating the paradigm itself.

Anca Băicoianu

Ghiţă, Cătălin. *L'Orient de l'Europe romantique. L'altérité comme exotisme dans la poésie anglaise, française et roumaine.* Préface Al. Cistelecan. Bucarest: Les éditions Tracus Arte, 2013. Imprimé.

Cătălin Ghiţă est un auteur connu pour ses études sur la poésie visionnaire *(Les Mondes d'Argus*. *Une morphotypologie de la poésie visionnaire. A*vant-propos Eugen Negrici. Piteşti: Éditions Paralela 45, Collection „Debut", 2005. Imprimé.) et sur les scénarios narratifs de la terreur (*La Déimographie. Scénarios de la terreur dans la prose roumaine.* Avant-propos Ștefan Borbély. Iaşi: Editions „Institutul European", Collection „Academica", 2011. Imprimé.) et pour un charmant livre sur le Japon, écrit à deux mains avec Roxana Ghiţă *(Les Cadeaux de la déesse Amaterasu.* Avant-propos Alexandru Călinescu. Iaşi: Editions „Institutul European", 2008. Imprimé.). Peu de lecteurs, cependant, ont eu accès à la monographie sur William Blake, publiée en anglais (*Revealer of the Fourfold Secret: William Blake's Theory and Practice of Vision.* Préface David Worrall. Cluj-Napoca: Maison du Livre de la Science, 2008. Imprimé.). *L'Orient de l'Europe romantique. L'altérité comme exotisme dans la poésie anglaise, française et roumaine*, livre écrit grâce à une bourse post-doctorale, conjugue sa passion pour le romantisme avec sa fascination pour l'Orient, développant ainsi son penchant manifeste de chercheur orienté vers le comparatisme littéraire.

Dans une première partie, synthétique et théorique, Cătălin Ghiţă circonscrit la bibliographie essentielle du sujet et définit les concepts de travail, partant des binômes « intérêt pour l'Orient et pour l'Orientalisme » et « altérité et exotisme ». En fait, l'auteur prend ses distances vis-à-vis de toute polémique concernant les perspectives idéologiques postcoloniales (des critiques qui font « la chasse à tout non-respect des règles du politiquement correct »), soutenant d'un point de vue moderniste (ou tout simplement d'un bon sens historique et littéraire) l'autonomie de l'esthétique (le plaidoyer sera réitéré de manière fulgurante tout au long de l'ouvrage, accompagné par des piques ironiques lancées contre les « policiers » qui enquêtent idéologiquement sur la pensée artistique): « Je plaiderais, dans l'approche critique, pour une position d'équilibre entre l'autonomie de l'esthétique dans un sillage moderniste (cela reste, à mon avis, l'attitude artistique la plus productive) et le radicalisme idéologisant postmoderne. Ainsi, s'il existe des situations claires de discours lyrique où peuvent être détectés des éléments d'idéologie, ceux-ci doivent être identifiés et examinés honnêtement ; en ce qui concerne les vers imprégnés de métaphores des poètes romantiques que j'ai examinés, ces situations-là sont pourtant virtuellement absentes. […] L'utilisation d'outils de lecture inadéquats entraîne la pulvérisation de la raison d'être du discours poétique, qui dépend au plus haut degré, pour survivre esthétiquement, de la liberté la plus large possible dans le champ de l'interprétation, qui exclue l'application d'une grille préétablie et la manipulation idéologique des contenus du texte » (34-35). Cătălin Ghiţă n'est pas préoccupé par l'investigation mentalitaire de l'altérité orientale (tâche de l'imagologie) : il restreint son objet d'étude à la projection lyrique de l'exotisme chez les plus importants romantiques européens. Pour explorer « L'Orient de la pensée poétique », c'est à dire des

représentations du monde oriental dans la poésie anglaise, française et roumaine (avec une sélection illustrative „de haute volée"), Cătălin Ghiţă fait appel à l'approche (néo) thématique. Cette méthode lui permet de structurer de manière stimulante son trajet exégétique, même si l'analyse elle-même des configurations thématiques l'incite le plus souvent à combiner une pluralité de perspectives : l'herméneutique y côtoie des éléments d'histoire littéraire, des analyses de poétique, de stylistique ou de prosodie. L'auteur a pour objectif de cerner « L'esthétique de l'espace oriental », naturel (le désert, le jardin profane et le jardin sacré, le monde aquatique et la faune) et artificiel (les ruines, l'habitat et la ville) et « La poétique des figures orientales », humaines (la femme, l'artiste, l'intercesseur spirituel: le prophète, le derviche, le mufti, le sorcier; le juif errant, le guerrier, le tyran et l'antihéros) et non-anthropiques (les dieux, les monstres et les esprits).

Quant à la relation des poètes roumains avec la magie de l'Orient (qui, selon Mircea Anghelescu dans *La littérature roumaine et l'Orient*, suit plutôt un trajet de récupération que d'appropriation fantasmatique de l'altérité exotique), l'interrogation critique, très attentive aux nuances, aboutit à une conclusion importante: un espace géographique et culturel fatalement proche (le Levant) se défamiliarise au niveau de l'imaginaire (ce qui, loin de déranger, serait au contraire un signe de vitalité de l'imagination poétique), tout en acquérant un caractère artificiel du point de vue rhétorique, sous l'influence du modèle stylistique anglo-français: « Ainsi, quel que soit le niveau de connaissance des auteurs français et anglais, ceux-ci continuent à considérer le Proche Orient comme un espace éminemment étranger et les éléments de couleur locale ne se retrouvent pas dans leur poésie. Le pittoresque aurait dû cependant être magistralement mis en évidence dans les textes des romantiques roumains, qui auraient pu trouver dans leur propre langue les outils pour explorer et cartographier l'ouest ottoman […]. Que cela se soit produit si rarement s'explique par le choix des poètes autochtones d'écrire sur l'Orient obliquement, par le biais du modèle anglo-français » (290). Tout en relevant l'incontournable mimétisme des romantiques roumains, Cătălin Ghiţă maintient une critique équilibrée, pointant avec une neutralité scientifique leurs succès ainsi que leurs insuffisances (bien qu'il écrive parfois à l'encre acide sur des tentatives poétiques involontaires « douloureusement drôles » ...).

Malgré le sérieux de la démarche universitaire, le discours exégétique passe de manière spectaculaire du style recherché (quelquefois même précieux) à l'expressivité merveilleuse d'un essayiste (« Delilah, une Mata Hari des temps anciens », « Blanche-Neige conjuguée avec des détails esthétiques de peintres comme Ingres ou Delacroix : voilà l'image archétypale de Bolintineanu », « les vers [de Kubla Khan] se drapent comme un brocart embrassé par la fumée de l'opium », etc.) et voire au dialogue familier avec le lecteur, pigmenté d'un fin humour intellectuel : « Tout livre de critique littéraire survit également grâce à d'insignifiantes erreurs, qui, semées correctement et avec le bon dosage, assurent une complicité tacite entre le lecteur réconforté par leur découverte et l'auteur qui les admet humblement » (43). En outre, le livre est présenté comme un voyage dans l'univers poétique des « auteurs exotiques » romantiques, tout au long duquel Cătălin Ghiţă assume son rôle de guide. Un voyage désinvolte et loquace qui mesure inlassablement le chemin parcouru, l'auteur signalant parfois excessivement

à son « partenaire » tous les détours de la route et sa destination finale (ce comportement discursif pouvant être rattaché à une forme de didactique, légèrement agaçante, mais aussi à une convention narrative, comme moyen de (re)*captatio benevolentiae* permanente). Dans son souci de conserver le choc des tropes relevés dans les textes originels, Cătălin Ghiţă n'offre pas de traduction en roumain, laissant le lecteur, pas tout à fait polyglotte, *« sur sa soif »*. Preuve que, sous son apparente nature amphibienne de savant sympathique, subsistent cependant les tics élitistes de sa personnalité.

Grâce à une documentation rigoureuse et une bibliographie à jour, grâce à la pertinence de l'analyse et de l'interprétation, mais également (et peut-être surtout) par le mariage heureux entre la grande ouverture culturelle de l'auteur et l'équilibre critique des points de vue axiologiques*, L'Orient de l'Europe romantique* constitue une œuvre de référence dans le domaine des études de littérature comparée roumaine.

Gabriela Gheorghişor

Ştefănescu, Bogdan. *Postcolonialism/Postcommunism: Siblings of Subalternity.* Bucharest: University of Bucharest Press, 2012. Print.

The emergence of postcommunist studies as a discipline in its own right took a long time after the fall of communism in 1989. Throughout the chaotic atmosphere of the 1990s, when Eastern European states were struggling with various problems associated with the legacy of the communist regime, the perspective of a comparative theoretical discussion between postcolonialism (by then a recognized academic field of inquiry) and postcommunism, still in need of an appropriate theoretical jargon, was there, yet little was being done about it. It was only after the turn of the millennium, when it seemed somewhat easier to deal with postcommunist trauma, that the question of the applicability of postcolonial concepts in the postcommunist space became a more constant preoccupation of world academia.

Published at a point in time when postcommunist studies seem not only to have come of age, but also to have gathered momentum, Bogdan Ştefănescu's topical, impressively well-researched and passionate book sets out to make a convincing case for the validity of comparing postcommunism and postcolonialism, while being fully aware of the historical and methodological difficulties of such a comparison. This thorough study of the (post)colonial condition of former colonies and former Soviet republics and satellites is inspired, as the author confesses, by his own difficult positioning 'as a Romanian academic and critical intellectual who has been teaching or publicly debating postcolonial issues and has been engaged for a while now in American or British Cultural Studies projects' (Ştefănescu 9). The book is the fruit of its author's long-term practice of the topic within his MA courses on nationalism, postcommunism and postcolonialism at the University of Bucharest, as well as of a significant amount of research and testing out of ideas in conference presentations and invited lectures that have ensured a wider circulation of his ideas in the past several years.

The starting point in Ştefănescu's analysis of the various stages in the shaping of a postcommunist discourse is an examination of the reasons behind the reluctance of academia to expand the applicability of colonialism outside the immediate preoccupations with Western imperialism. This is followed by a thorough discussion of the grounds for comparison between the two discourses, built around the similarity of their focus on *cultural trauma*, on which the theoretical definition and discussion of coloniality is based. Before actually engaging in a discussion of the topic, the study addresses the ambiguity of the terms 'coloniality' – used as the abstract and generic category for 'collective subordination' – and 'colonialism' – defined as 'any *historical* situation in which a political and/or economic power displays a consistent colonial policy and practice of colonization' (Ştefănescu 11). The study is highly context-aware, avoiding generalizations and defining its terms rigorously, while also acknowledging the rhetorical constructiveness of all theoretical discourses under discussion.

Thus, following the position of cultural critics of postcolonialism such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ştefănescu opts for a discursive definition of colonial identity formation (Ştefănescu 83-85). Coloniality is described as

a generic category, seen as primarily a *mental* condition, by which representations of cultural identity are performed in a (post)traumatic mode. The colonial condition is therefore 'para-territorial' (going beyond the obsession with occupied spaces and spatially confined populations). That is why it may occur without physical and violent territorial intrusions, as in the case of 'self-colonialization' (Al. Kiossev). Ştefănescu calls this approach 'subjective constructivism', as opposed to objectivist accounts like those of Benedict Anderson, Eric Hobsbawm, Ernest Gellner, Hans Kohn, Elie Kedourie etc., which focus on the material circumstances and instruments of identity construction (capitalism and the modern state, the printing press, industrialism, public education or public ceremonies).

Ştefănescu's use of a trans-historical and trans-territorial definition of coloniality, informed by Hayden White's discursive notion of history and by Jürgen Osterhammel's broad understanding of colonialism, allows him to show that, although not technically synchronized, Third-World postcolonialism and Second World postcommunism are similar from a 'kairological' perspective (they display 'timeliness' with the right circumstances for the post- condition). This innovative concept proposed by the current study, which implies an understanding of temporality in terms of the opportune moment rather than strict chronology, follows in the line of Braudel's *longue durée* and of Maria Todorova's 'relative synchronicity' (Ştefănescu 106-7). This legitimates a comparison between postcommunism and postcolonialism as phenomena that occurred in similar, even though not identical historical circumstances, involving, as 'posts' usually do, the exhaustion of paradigms of domination which can broadly be defined as being of a colonial nature, the emancipation of marginalized groups, the relaxation of the repressive state apparatus, and the adoption of the poststructuralist critical paradigms (Ştefănescu 128-151). Ştefănescu examines imports from postcolonial theory into the historical discourse on Eastern Europe and the Balkans in the works of Larry Wolff and Maria Todorova, who, based on Said's imagological model, have shown that the West uses a fictionalized discourse on the European other in order to perpetuate its hegemonism and justify its colonial and imperialist tactics in the region (Ştefănescu 96).

Ştefănescu's detachment from universalist schemes that supposedly criticize the domineering universalism of modernity allows him to suggest rather boldly that liberal and Marxist ideologies do not have a fixed position in history. They operate within a hierarchy established as a function of their 'progressive' nature, but may be perceived as either progressive/liberating or retrograde/oppressive, depending on the inverse circumstances of Western and Soviet colonization. Thus, Ştefănescu's analysis places a strong emphasis on the practically opposite meanings of Marxism in postcolonialism (where it has been *the* progressive ideology) and postcommunism (where it is interpreted as an extreme left doctrine encouraging abusive governing practices). In full awareness of the advantages and the drawbacks of a comparative approach, as well as of contemporary assimilationist forms of Western neocolonialism, the author takes a stand against Westcentric accounts according to which colonialism has been solely the outcome of Western modern (usually capitalist) powers. On the contrary, these are shown

to be no more than particular historical instantiations of colonialism, the Soviet being an equally valid type of colonialism in the modern age.

In discussing the colonial trauma in Romanian (East European) culture, Ştefănescu proposes the concept of 'triangular identity formation', claiming that the construction of self-images is more complicated than both simple oppositions like us/them or West/East and the 'in between peripherality' (Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek). Marginal postcommunist cultures are confronted with three different 'others' – the capitalist West, the Soviet East, and the Third World (former) colonies – all of which are the same time adversarial and contaminating. All of these categories of subjects are the result of clearcut binary oppositions, and all have what peripheral identities like the Romanian lack: a definite identity (Ştefănescu 108-110). In such uncertain areas, there is a scramble for 'honorary secondariness', a constant appeal to (usually Western) 'surrogate hegemons' (Ewa Thompson's term) to grant a certain group a better status than their neighbor's. Hence the insistence on subdivisions which create internal hierarchies: Central Europeans over (South) East Europeans, the Second World over the Third World, Asian over African immigrants (Ştefănescu 110).

It is one of the merits of the book that a significant space is dedicated to the Romanian case, analyzed through a rich range of examples (of which that of Constantin Noica ranks first) of surviving traumatic forms of colonization of the mind through culture. Romanian culture is placed under the trope of the regenerative void – 'the way in which a traumatized culture compensates the handicap of multiple colonization' (Ştefănescu 211). Ştefănescu insists on the theme of the 'void', shared by the critical discourse of both postcolonialists (Homi Bhabha, Achille Mbembe) and postcommunist scholars/East Europeanists (Maria Todorova, Alexander Kiossev), and uses it to trace an interesting genealogy of cultural trauma in the Romanian tradition from Dimitrie Cantemir through Constantin Noica to Andrei Codrescu. The Romanian topos of the regenerative void is based on a persistent invocation of meaningful lacks and absences which Romanian intellectual elites have used in order to generate a recuperative image of their cultural self (Ştefănescu 190 and passim, *Conclusions*). One strong contribution of the book is the interesting new typology of identity (re)construction discourses in the recent history of Romania, one that uses a 'tinkered' version of Hayden White's tropology, as the author calls it (Ştefănescu 11). The resulting analytical grid allows him to avoid the simplistic description of modern Romanian history as caught in the endless fight between modernizers and traditionalists, or between civic (liberal) and ethnic nationalists.

Bogdan Ştefănescu's book is the result of an impressive effort that challenges theoretical concepts old and new and tests them out against concrete historical situations, boldly spanning whole territories and categories of thinking. Whereas the reader may occasionally have the feeling that a more in-depth exploration of the case studies invoked (maybe with some more examples from other Eastern European cultures) may have strengthened an otherwise flawless argument, this study makes a strong contribution to the debate around the applicability of postcolonial concepts to postcommunist contexts. An outstanding exercise in comparative cultural theory, the book highlights the particularities of the Romanian case among other countries of the former Eastern

European communist bloc and thus is an important contribution to knowledge about reconceptualizations of the region in the new millennium. Having already entered the Eastern European and international circuit of ideas, *Postcolonialism/Postcommunism: Siblings of Subalternity* is a valuable resource for contemporary researchers and students of postcommunism and postcolonialism alike.

Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru

Campos II, Joseph H, Ghita, Catalin, eds. *At the Nexus of Fear, Horror and Terror: Contemporary Readings*. Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2013. Print.

Fear, terror and anxiety represent different aspects of the same self-preservatory state of mind that individuals feel during their struggle with a seen, unseen or imagined, but always imminent, adversity or adversary. Fear in its various forms: more or less acute or chronic, located or nebulous, individual or societal, has held the attention of human beings (and not just artists, writers and philosophers) from the oral tradition through myth and ancient tragedies, through modern creative media and psychoanalytic or neurological investigations.

The extreme political experiences of the 20th century increased the pervasive sense of terror to a level of intensity and scale unprecedented during the whole of previous history. Thus, this field of study is not only a particularly rich mother lode of potential research topics, but is also rooted deep in the perception of any community, finding expression – or suppression – in almost every aspect of what could be called culture. We are living in a period of history in which the wounds of the past century have not yet healed and residual fears still darken the mind of the masses. In parallel, the diverse new challenges of the contemporary world have led to the emergence and refinement of new expressions and forms of anxiety.

At the Nexus of Fear, Horror and Terror: Contemporary Readings published by Inter-Disciplinary Press (Oxford, UK) in 2013 and edited by Joseph H. Campos II and Catalin Ghita, gathers in its pages the works presented at the *Sixth Global Conference: Fear, Horror, and Terror*, held at Mansfield College, Oxford, grouped into seven sections. The variety of viewpoints (from North-American to Japanese, from Occidental, East-European, Hebrew, Sanskrit, and from diverse disciplines, including political sciences, literature, Cultural Studies, psychology, sociology and film studies) makes this a challenging synthesis, encouraging and embracing diversity rather than presenting a complete theory.

After a short introduction by the two editors, the first section is dedicated to 'Opening,' where we find two contributions from the borders of Gothic literature: 'Still Scary after All These Years: Gothic Tropes in Stephen Mallatratt's *The Woman in Black*', by Beth A. Kattelman, focusing on adaptations of the 'Gothic Novel' for stage, and 'The Fear Factor: Exploiting the Gothic in Turgenev's Early Sketches' by Katherine Bowers, an analysis of the Gothic influences in Turgenev's *Sketches from a Hunter's Album*.

The second section is dedicated to The Power of Fear and Terror. In 'The Iron Heel of Chinese Hegemony: Tibetan Rebels on the Sacred Path', Vijay Prakash Singh, the author of the book *Mountain Travelogues on the Himalayas and Tibet*, pleads for religious liberty and for human dignity, taking into account the drama suffered by the Tibetans after the Chinese invasion. Referencing another huge tragedy, this time a European one, Lily Halpert Zamfir writes: 'Cries from Hell: Holocaust Literature between Testimony and Documentation', an analysis taking Imre Kertész's masterpiece, *Fatelessness*, as its starting point. The third section, *Reading Fear and Terrors*, contains two examples of how terror can be aestheticized, used for rhetorical purposes (in Franziska Edler's essay, 'Fear and Horror in Pierre Corneille's *Médée*: The Power of

Rhetoric to Incite Emotion in the French Tragedy of the 17th Century'), or have social signification (analysed by Catalin Ghita in his paper 'An Example of Romanian Terror Fiction: Aestheticism and Social Criticism in Mircea Eliade's *Miss Christina*'). In the fourth section, entitled *Shadowing Fear and Terror* the fear is placed in a religious context, in the North African space, and closely related to sexuality ('The Fear of Sexuality in Traditional Kabyle Society: A Cultural Anthropology Study', by the Algerian author Sabrina Zerar) or in the South African space, related to fundamental existential questions that every individual experiencing the crisis asks ('Fear and Terror: A Pastoral Hermeneutic Dialogue within the South African Context', by Madelein Fourie and Stella Potgieter).

After these approaches rooted in Cultural Studies, sociological studies and to the studies of mentalities, the fifth section represents a return to the fictional core (*Fear and Horror Embodies in Fiction*) through the works of Gen'ichiro Itakura ('Representing the Pain of Others: Pat Barker's Double Vision'), Milan Miljković ('The House That Virus Built: Tracing the Changes of Spatial and Corporeal Setting in the Novel *Rabies* by Borislav Pekić') and Uroš Tomić ('The Wolf-Man's Dilemma: Exploring the Nature of the Contemporary Werewolf in Literature').

The sixth section of the book is focused on responses to Fear, and includes several very interesting analyses, among which stand out Magdalena Hodalska's 'Marketing of Horror: Media Coverage of a Family Drama', analyzing the commercial nature of the 'Horror' phenomenon, Katharina Donn's 'Witnessing Terror: Graphic Responses to 9/11', about the terrible drama which shook America and the world at the beginning of this century and its graphical configurations, and Doreen Triebel's 'Manipulating Empathic Responses in Horror Fiction'.

Finally, in the seventh section, *Fictional Experiences of Fear and Horror*, Agnieszka Styła's 'Blinded by Fear: Shifts of Perception in the Selected Stories of Ambrose Bierce' is a foray into the prose of the famous English humorist, divided into three main categories: horror stories, war stories and 'tall tales'. The author chooses two horror stories and one war story in order to analyze the idea of death that forms the nexus of these stories, in a relation to the idea of appearance that also creates the substance of the narration, always offering a surprising end.

This rich and diverse volume proposes entirely new modes of investigation of the vast space of human experience which is opened up by fear. What seems to be particularly important is the suggestion, present throughout, that this is just the entryway to a wide, exciting and enthralling discursive space and an opening of an interpretative space to examination. It does not pretend to offer a 'solution,' 'explanation,' or 'singular interpretation' of the necessary though intimidating discussions of fear, terror and anxiety which must take place if we are to understand the world and ourselves. We cannot but eagerly await new contributions to this discourse in the years to come, in this area of research that only now seems to reveal its multiple and attractive interpretative valences.

(The help of Michael T. Stowers in the preparation of this translation is gracefully acknowledged.)

Mihai Ene

Creţu, Bogdan. [*The Unicorn at the Gates of the Orient. Dimitrie Cantemir's Bestiary*] *Inorogul la Porţile Orientului. Bestiarul lui Dimitrie Cantemir.* Vol. I *Premises. Bestiae Domini*. Vol. II *Bestiae Diaboli*. Iaşi: Institutul European, 2013. Print.

The obsession of the 'origins' – or of the more conventionally titled 'old age' – of Romanian literature has been very active in the field of Romanian studies. The question regarding the actual moment when Romanian literature began to exist was at the core of G. Călinescu's *History of Romanian Literature* in 1941, and it remained just as important in Nicolae Manolescu's *Critical History* of 2008 (significantly subtitled 'Five centuries of literature') or in Mihai Zamfir's *Alternative Panorama* from 2012. It may seem a fastidious or anachronistic question, but it is neither: although all these literary historians hoped to find an answer that would provide a confirmation of their aesthetic engagement, the dilemma of the origins of literature is primarily related to the issue of cultural memory. What does one select from the old age of literature (which is generally an 'a-literary' one), and on what grounds? How can forgotten ancient authors or the great scholars of the 16th-18th centuries be reintegrated into the same literary tradition? Which context of communication should have priority in the actualisation of old texts: the past or the present one, cultural archaeology or aesthetical recuperation?

Bogdan Creţu's recent research of the work of cosmopolitan scholar Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723) confronts all these questions of methodology. As Creţu observes, Cantemir, a prince of Moldavia for a brief time and hailed as 'our first novelist' for his *Hieroglyphic History*, is a 'difficult' author. One reason for that is the fact that his main achievement, a novel written between 1703 and 1705 in Constantinople in Romanian, was published almost two centuries later. In 1883, when the Romanian Academy edited it for the first time, Dimitrie Cantemir's work was already an 'old' one. *The Hieroglyphic History* was initially seen as a cultural monument and was later recuperated aesthetically and integrated in the history of the Romanian novel, but it has yet to be considered in its appropriate epistemic context. This is the very idea which sets off Creţu's investigation: Dimitrie Cantemir must not be regarded as 'our contemporary'. 'His books must be read for themselves, but they must also be set in an appropriate cultural, religious, ideological, historical and, eventually, *aesthetical* context', he claims in the *Epilogue*. The novelty of his perspective, also suggested by the title of the book, is here explicitly stated. *The Hieroglyphic History* is not a novel, as it was declared by literary historians, but rather a bestiary. Actually, an atypical bestiary or a pseudo-bestiary that separates polemically the beastly masks from their traditional signification (which had been, nevertheless, shifting periodically since the Antiquity, through the Middle Ages and up the Renaissance) and bringing forth the image of an emerging world that leaves behind the theophanies and the sacred codes of the medieval world.

The ample introduction, taking up almost half of the first volume of this book, discusses critically the situation of Cantemir's work in between different epistemes, insisting on the relationship between literature and knowledge at the turn of the 18th century. Being a scholar with a fair experience of various fields of humanistic culture such as history, religion, philosophy, rhetoric and musicology, Dimitrie Cantemir seems almost an exile in the Romanian culture of the time. His intellectual achievement and his Romanian works, among which are *The Divan* (Iaşi, 1698) and *The Hieroglyphic*

History, have no precedent and no immediate continuators in the cultural space of the Romanian Principalities. The author underlines this observation, building a maieutical scenario that demonstrates a thesis formulated early on in the book: 'Had [Cantemir] been educated in this discontinuous cultural space, lacking organicity? Does his allegory represent a logical effect, a natural result of a coherent, consequent accumulation, following a systematic cultural sedimentation?' (60).

The questions cited above contain an irony towards the commonplaces of the discipline. Bogdan Creţu does not uphold an organic vision of culture, on the contrary, he pleads for relativization and for the contextual reading of cultural documents. In the case of Dimitrie Cantemir, the tentative contextual readings were limited to the interpretation in a factual-historical spirit of the book, as it happens in the 1965 edition published by P.P. Panaitescu and I. Verdeş, who see under the animal masks in the book the political figures of the time, proceeding to a step-by-step blowing of their 'cover'. But the text does more than to stand in for a 'political Physiologue'; it appeals to the Bible, to the *Latin Physiologue* and to other medieval bestiaries, borrowing parts of their codes and deforming others. The significations of these codes are of the utmost importance. If one ignores these symbolization systems, Bogdan Creţu warns, 'numerous perils arise. One risks, for instance, translating animals in a different system of knowledge than their own [...]. One risks assigning a positive reputation to animals which represented, in their symbolic system, negative values. Or, finally, one risks to lose very many intertextual signals, very many allusions, or even to undo the point which the text strives to make according to the codes, values and prejudices of the age when it was born' (19).

Understanding, in the footsteps of Michel Pastureau, the dangers of anachronism when the moderns address medieval topics, Creţu asks the essential question of his exercise in the archaeology of symbols in Cantemir's work: 'What is an animal in the Middle Ages?' Ever since the first centuries of Christianity, when it had been moved from its natural reign to the realm of allegory, where it still 'acted' according to its original nature, the animal became an instrument of moral knowledge. Creţu uses the suggestions of Foucault's *The Order of Things* about the medieval knowledge through compilation and interpretation of 'all that has been *seen* and *heard*' about things and observes the interference in the time of Cantemir between knowledge and the imaginary. Nature is in itself a network of symbols, but the symbol is never an all-encompassing, all-accepted convention. On the contrary, it functions inside a code and a context which can offer the interpreter the appropriate key. In the case of bestiaries also, the context confers a particular interpretation to the animal symbol, an interpretation which is always ambivalent.

By placing Cantemir in the trans-disciplinary cultural context of his time, Bogdan Creţu remakes in the two volumes of his book – *Bestiae Domini* and *Bestiae Diaboli* – the exercise in the compilation and interpretation of animal symbols that the Moldavian prince must have made as he was writing his *Hieroglyphic History*. There is a great deal of encyclopaedic information about the animal representations from the Antiquity up to the Renaissance, with special attention given to the medieval symbolism that dominated at the beginning of the 18th century in the Romanian space. However, the merit of Bogdan Creţu's book lays in the interpretive work which illuminates many of the obscure

pages of this canonical text of our literary tradition. The appropriate interpretation of symbols was, in fact, the very ambition of Cantemir himself, or at least this is what his book tells us: some of the animal characters know how to interpret symbols, while others don't. Lacking an initiation in the domains familiar to Bogdan Creţu, from epistemology to the study of biblical sexuality, the reader of *The Hieroglyphic History* may fall a victim to his/her own ignorance, like the Chameleon character in the book. If this negative presence, which is punished ostentatiously by the narrator-author, had known how to 'detect and interpret the symbols as he encountered them', he might have avoided the cynical irony of the narrator, and he might have been spared a terrible and useless torture (which he is subjected to... in a dream).

Although he seems to reject the aesthetic actualisation of Cantemir's coded history, Bogdan Creţu asks a question that still revolves around the birth of literature. What is literature to the scholar Cantemir, aside from a way of perceiving and symbolizing the order of the world, in the tradition of medieval knowledge? The answer is not easy to pinpoint. Bogdan Creţu is aware of that, since he warns in the beginning not to equate the 'rhetorical ease' mentioned by Cantemir in the preface of his book with literariness, as it is the critics' habit. It is important here to look at the context again: for Cantemir, literature must have meant not just 'the whole of letters', but also the whole of knowledge. Literature was an instrument of knowledge, but also a 'sum of thought' which, Creţu makes clear, doesn't accept aesthetical pleasure among its values. This doesn't mean that Dimitrie Cantemir didn't 'deliberately' use literary procedures and techniques 'for the purpose of achieving aesthetic effects'. One must remember that many of these techniques are consubstantial to narration, irrespective of its goals. Creţu notes that for Cantemir, who makes an investment of affectivity in his work, literature is a vindictive discourse, but also a fascinating one, that allows him to repeatedly explore and to freely experiment. The complicated sentences of *The Hieroglyphic History*, with its characters – animals 'emancipated' from the tradition of medieval bestiaries – tell the story of a world which is not only politically corrupt, but degraded in its very core – a world 'which no longer respects the harmony of the universe conceived as God's design'. The secret code of *The Hieroglyphic History* might be that literature conquers its autonomy once it trespasses the active symbolic codes, but then it also becomes a degraded discourse about a world which falls into history.

By adopting an intelligently interdisciplinary perspective, exhausting the primary bibliography of a complicated theme and questioning the bases of the discipline of Romanian literary history, *The Unicorn at the Gates of the Orient. Dimitrie Cantemir's Bestiary* is not only a groundbreaking achievement in the field of Romanian literary studies, but also a manifesto of good practices in the research of literary texts – and not just the 'old' ones. The diversity of the bibliography in the second part of the book makes the list of Romanian sources describing pertinently the phenomenon under study seem poor. But the present research alleviates this inconvenient and fills a large gap in the textuality of its discipline.

Andreea Mironescu