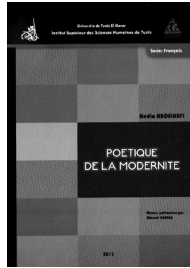


Book Reviews

Hédia Abdelkafi,
*Poétique de la
 modernité*, Institut
 Supérieur des
 Sciences Humaines
 de Tunis, 2013



Professor of French Literature at the Higher Institute of Human Sciences – University of Tunis, and founder of the “Intermédialité, Lettres et Langage – I2L” research facility, Hédia Abdelkafi published in 2013 a collection of thirteen essays – older articles and more recent studies. Revolving around the problematic concept of modernity, these essays examine the challenges raised by the term “poetics”. Because they were initially published in different academic journals, these articles do not seem to have, at a first glance, a strong connection with one another; they explore, in a manner which risks betraying a lack of systematic organization, a wide variety of literary works, written by French authors who do not only belong to different centuries, but also take a different approach in terms of creative endeavours.

Despite its fragmented appearance, the volume unites, under a suggestive title, *Poétique de la modernité*, texts which share the same aim: to portray the evolution of the concept of modernity and to assess how it was received at the end of the twentieth century. In this attempt, the author skillfully intertwines an entire network of concepts that are simultaneously derived from and reinforce modernity and its meanings. In order to support her argumentation, she makes a careful selection of poets (such as Pierre Jean Jouve) and novelists (Joseph

Rouffanche) whose literary works reveal a remarkable sensitivity towards changes of any kind – political, economic, and social (modernity being understood as the consciousness of change, or the transformation of the old into the new).

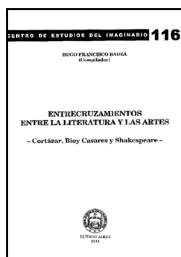
The volume covers a vast time frame which begins with romanticism and heads towards postmodernism, ending with the analysis of *Un été à Stockholm*, published in 1990 by Moroccan novelist Abdelkebir Khatibi. Five of the studies focus on Pierre Jean Jouve, who becomes the central figure of the volume. The text on Agrippa d'Aubigné reflects a set of attitudes which foreshadow classical modernity, while the preface describes its socio-political background. The research is extended towards poets such as Gautier, Baudelaire, and Corbière, whose evocations of reality are not generated by a fidelity to the external world; instead, they serve as a background for the tensions between the inner life of modern man and the outside world in a state of ruin. These conflicts give birth to rupture and alienation. At the origin of aesthetic modernity – which Hédia Abdelkafi separates clearly from the historical one – stands the consciousness which defines all of the poets examined, including Agrippa d'Aubigné, who, ahead of his time, shows more sensitivity to what can be identified as the condition of modern man, in comparison to many other twentieth-century writers. Modernity includes war and, therefore, the anguish which comes from the acknowledgement of a proximate death acts as a foundation for these writers' world views, regardless of their choice of literary representation modes: Jouve chooses myth and allegory, Aymé creates a social fresco. Nevertheless, their work attests the

referential context of historical consciousness and its tragic dimension.

Special emphasis is laid on the beginning of modern times and on the fundamental portrayals of modern consciousness depicted in the nineteenth century, as well as in the first half of the twentieth century; here, the author is interested especially in the dynamics between the images of modernity and concepts such as identity. Moreover, she brings into discussion the relation between identity, subjectivity, and otherness. She encourages multidisciplinary approaches, as they view crises as the “foundation of all changes”. Modernity – understood as a “political, economic, or existential tension,” – can be summed up, concludes the author, by “a crisis of meaning”.

Andreea Stoica

Hugo Francisco Bauzá,
*Entrecruzamientos entre
la literatura y las artes*,
Centro de Estudios del
Imaginario, Academia
Nacional de Ciencias,
Buenos Aires, 2014



This volume, edited by Hugo Francisco Bauzá, contains three essays on “The imaginary of ritual forms” which were included in the UBACYT 2011–2014 research project from the Institute of Argentine and Latin American Art of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, the University of Buenos Aires.

In the first essay, “Julio Cortázar, Literature and the myths”, Maria Elena

Babino discusses the presence of mythical perspectives in Julio Cortázar’s works and stresses his endless quest for finding an opening to the occult, barbaric world and the most fundamental sources of human behavior, with its ancestral angst and terrors. Julio Cortázar’s *Letters to Jonquières*, a volume that appeared in 2010, provides the author with a detailed insight on Cortázar’s views.

Cortázar’s link with Greek mythology is profound and indisputable and Maria Elena Babino makes, in the last part of the essay, an exhaustive analysis of “The Kings”, “Circe” and “The Maenads.” These are works in which Cortázar resorts to Greek mythology. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are a continuous fascination for him and *Oedipus the King* by Jean Cocteau possesses, in his opinion, the value of a beautiful testament. His deep knowledge of the Greek mythical context is also revealed through “The Greek urn in Keats’s poetry”, where he refers to the arrival, in Romantic literature of a non-Apollonian paradigm which emphasizes Dionysian sensuality.

However, Cortázar’s attraction for myths goes beyond the spectrum of Greek mythology. It is through Jean Cocteau’s work *Opium: The Diary of His Cure* that Cortázar experiences an epiphany, an *anagnórisis* as it is called in the language of myths. He understands that art in all its manifestations is a quest for the essential mysteries, for the hidden secrets of reality. Surrealism, symbolist poets and the literary territory where the rational ceases to exist are a source of inspiration for Cortázar. He uses the game as a tool for the exploration and discovery of the unusual. As the author observes, Cortázar’s most precious game instrument is not *hopscotch*, but language,

which he strips of all logical and rational clothing, in order to transcend to a higher form of consciousness. This can only be reached through the irrational.

In his inquiry into the mysterious he also explores, as Graciela Maturo points out, the mystical, esoteric schools, Zen Buddhism and Gurdjeff's beliefs, as well as the oneiric dimension of existence, the intersection between sleep and wakefulness, the hidden and the visible, the *myth* and *logos*.

In the second work, "Bioy Casares and the Invention of Morel" read at the "Crossing Arts" Conference organized by the UBA Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in 2013, Hugo Francisco Bauzá studies the intersection between cinema and literature in the aforementioned novel by Adolfo Bioy Casares. The author begins by offering an in-depth analysis of the story in question, highlighting the themes of the double, cloning and parallel universes. He completes his essay with an overview of Bioy Casares's background of thought.

The story is about a scientist named Morel, who assumes the proportions of a demiurge, a kind of cosmic puppeteer who invents a machine capable of replicating objects, plants, people in the manner of future holograms. Thus, he creates a double reality that is true to the original, which results in the material decomposition of the authentic. This *filming* as a substitute for life is recorded *in aeternum* in the monstrous island which the protagonist enters. Here, the author iterates the idea stated by Pichon Rivière, that "*The invention of Morel*" is a *metaphor of cinema*", as well a personification of the eternal return imagined by Nietzsche.

The protagonist falls in love with Faustine, the woman-image in the

projection. The theme of parallel worlds is obvious here, the author suggests. Just like Schrödinger's cat which is both alive and dead at the same time in different branches of the universe, the two protagonists are both real but unable to interact with each other. Therefore, the hero decides to let himself devoured by the machine in order to inhabit this spectral universe with her. The author brings into discussion Octavio Paz, who points out the metaphysical idea that the body itself is imaginary and all men are shadows in search of other shadows. Other reflections on images, dreams and visions are cited, including the Latin poet Lucretius, who, in his poem *De rerum Natura*, discusses the theory of simulation.

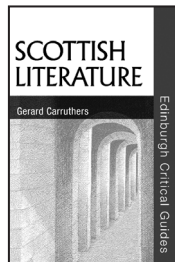
In the last part of the essay, the author examines the works that inspired Casares. Among these is Gustav Meyrink's novel, *The Golem*, which admirably portrays the motif of the double. It is through the magic of words that the Golem, a figure made of clay and mud is brought to life by the magician Rabbi Löw, reminding of the Platonic idea that "the name is the archetype of the thing". The theme of determinism and free will is discussed, as the Golem is nothing but a gruesome slave of the cosmic puppeteer who breathed life into him, an idea which is transferred to the human condition itself. E. T. A. Hoffman, Heinrich von Kleist, Borges, Kafka with the creation of a claustrophobic atmosphere, Philip K. Dick, and the British writers Carroll, Huxley and Wells with their problems of identity and parallel worlds are also cited as a great source of inspiration for Casares.

In the last essay in this volume, "Let love decide: About A Midsummer Night's Dream by Daulte/Kogan (1997)", Graciela C. Sarti focuses on a version of

Shakespeare's play – with dramaturgy by Javier Daulte and directed by Diego Kogan – that was staged at Payró Theater in Buenos Aires in 1997. The author emphasizes the idea that the Shakespearean theater is always there, waiting to be reread and represented in the most disparate times and the most diverse fashions.

Andreea Andreşan

Gerard Carruthers,
Scottish Literature
(*Edinburgh Critical*
Guides to Literature),
Edinburgh, Edinburgh
University Press, 2009



In the context of entangled literary traditions, skilful researchers choose to step outside the forms which have been defined by the canon, engaging in the difficult endeavour to find the truth, to question everything – even the ineradicable assumptions – repeatedly, to link literary manifestations with their social, political and historical background, without losing sight of the autonomy and the authenticity of the texts themselves. Such a researcher is Gerard Carruthers, a writer and a professor at the University of Glasgow, who has published a book entitled *Scottish Literature*, Edinburgh University Press, 2009. In a methodical and determined manner, the author organizes his analysis in five chapters, discussing the problematic concept of Scottish literature: its history, its rise as a field of study, and the ways in which it was perceived by literary commentators throughout the decades.

Without implying that the national context is the only element which defines literature, Carruthers does not hesitate to underline the importance of the “notion of nation” (2) in the construction of Scottish literary works, positioning it somewhere in the realm of myth. However, the author illustrates the predilection of this literature to be analysed mainly from the angles of nationality and Anglo-Scottish relations, and underlines the new possible theoretical approaches which may evolve in this dynamic and thought-provoking field of study. Ultimately, the debate transcends the limits of Scottish literature, interrogating the significance of authenticity in universal literature, and the role played by national circumstances in generating such genuine literary works.

In the first chapter, the book explores and questions the manner in which Scottish literature was built canonically. Moreover, it revisits some of the popular assumptions and perceptions which characterized the criticism of Scottish literature during the nineteenth and twentieth century, labelled as “generalist” (10) by the author. Emphasis is laid on the ideological and political background which gave voice to these perceptions. Even though the histories of Scottish and English literature are intertwined strongly, the relation between these two disciplines is marked by conflict, as the first has been considered inferior in comparison with the other. When referring to generalist Scottish literary critics, such as J. C. Smith and G. Gregory Smith, the author highlights the dichotomy between the Saxon and Celtic features described by Matthew Arnold, which served as a base for the idea of “Caledonian Antisyzygy” (11), a coexistence between “realism and fantasy” (11) in Scottish literature. These tendencies of critical tradition to focus

exclusively on the tumultuous cultural history and on the links between Scottish literature and nationalism are perceived by the author as limiting, and not inspiring, for the creative processes performed by the writers.

The next two chapters continue to present Scottish literature, offering examples of literary works from various periods of time (from Robert Burns's poems to Irvine Welsh's successful novel, *Trainspotting*), as well as analysing the languages in which these works are written. The second chapter focuses on the Scots language, the core of Scottish national identity, while the third one discusses the phenomenon of Scottish writers using English language in order to create their texts. At the foundation of all these dynamic changes lie various elements such as patriotism, multiculturalism, literary eclecticism, and ideological goals which have been changing constantly from the medieval period to the contemporary days. Even though the Scots language has been used effectively in order to help building the nation through literary means, the author argues that Scotland represents, just like any other territory of the world, a "melting pot for languages and literatures" (3). Therefore, the public – whether it consists of general readers or literary critics – must not forget to concentrate on what the text itself intends to offer, on the autonomous and experimental forms held within the conventional structures. In other words, while analysing literary works, the audience must also shift the focus from the external, historical determinants to the internal reality of the text, and from the aesthetical dimension to the existential one.

As for the language used by writers, Carruthers identifies a process of linguistic change marked by historical factors – English replaces the Scots language, which

does the same with Gaelic language. The book stresses the idea that all of these languages have the same potential and capacity of expressing cultural messages to their audience, so the superiority of English literature over the Scottish one is, in fact, illusory. Moreover, Scottish literature manages to maintain the same rate of progress as all the other types of literature around the globe.

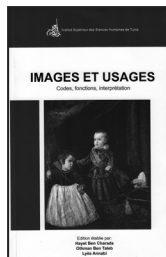
If the book has focused so far on concepts such as history, tradition and continuity, in order to define, characterize, preserve or cancel popular misconceptions regarding Scottish literature, the last two chapters debate further possibilities of analysing this field of study through various means, such as deconstructing the texts, applying contemporary critical theories, and placing Scottish works in the sphere of Comparative Literature. By making use of different angles of analysis and introducing new filters through which literature may be understood, the author does not neglect the importance of previous investigations of Scottish literature. Instead, he seeks to dig deeper into the reality of the texts, with the belief that new angles of examination may lead to astounding deductions.

Skilfully, Carruthers offers examples of critical tools such as feminist, gender, psychoanalytical theories, and New Historicism. With these instruments in mind, he makes a wide selection of texts, dating from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, which he chooses to discuss. He stresses the fact that, no matter how old or new the texts are, innovative approaches can be applied successfully. Therefore, the fourth chapter starts with the analysis of one of William Dunbar's fifteen century poems, only to conclude with a debate about Janice Galloway's contemporary classic, *The Trick*

Is to Keep Breathing. The conclusion echoes as a question, regarding whether or not it is time for the national aspect of Scottish literature to become minor in the analysis of the texts, offering space to new schemes to emerge, the ones of “individual literary artists” (169). The last chapter moves the discussion towards the idea of relations between cultures, exploring how Scottish texts fit in the wider picture of universal and comparative literature. In other words, the focal point of the book transcends the pretention of simply defining the concept of Scottish literature, but aims higher, distancing itself from cultural canons and critical traditions, and opening the discussions of new possibilities of analysis, different from the ones mentioned in the first chapters of the book. By doing so, the author does not encourage only the continuity of Scottish literature, but also its further development.

Andreea Stoica

Hayet Ben Charrada,
Othman Ben Taleb, Lyès
Annabi (éds.), *Images et usages. Codes, fonctions, interprétations*, Tunis, Institut Supérieur des Sciences Humaines de Tunis, 2011



Au cours du temps, la notion d'image est devenue un sujet de débats de plus en plus ardu, étant au cœur de divers discours théoriques ou artistiques. De nos jours, elle occupe un statut très important dans un monde accaparé par les technologies de toutes sortes et dominé par des compétitions acerbes, économiques tout

comme politiques. Le volume *Images et usages. Codes, fonctions, interprétations*, qui réunit les actes du colloque international organisé en 2008 par l'Institut Supérieur des Sciences Humaines de Tunis, retrace la problématique de l'image dans différents domaines et réfléchit sur les diverses perspectives à travers lesquelles on peut l'aborder.

La structure du volume, divisé en quatre grandes parties, répond à une réflexion en quatre temps, inaugurée par une analyse de nature plutôt théorique du cadre conceptuel et de l'évolution de cette notion pour aboutir à des réflexions analytiques sur les multiples fonctions de l'image. L'investigation commence ainsi par une approche du niveau cognitif de l'image. Les articles réunis dans le premier volet de l'ouvrage examinent le concept d'un point de vue psychologique, à partir du rapport existant entre la réalité et l'image mentale.

Le deuxième volet s'attache à surprendre les rapports étroits entre l'image et la création littéraire, de même que les modalités par lesquelles les images contribuent à la construction de l'espace fictionnel. Les articles réunis dans cette section circonscrivent aussi les fonctions de l'image dans diverses typologies textuelles comme le roman, la poésie, la fable, le discours critique ou le texte épistolaire afin de démontrer que les textes peuvent être eux aussi des images. Les premières études de ce volet approfondissent ainsi la problématique de la représentation dans les créations littéraires. Les études suivantes analysent les effets de la lecture productrice d'images mentales (Bérangère Voisin), ou examinent les fonctions de la fable qui est, par définition, image (Monia Kallel). La pluralité du concept est abordée aussi par

les études réunies dans le troisième volet visant les rapprochements entre texte et image. Les articles y réunis interrogent les fonctions de la représentation, entendue comme un élément qui complète le texte. Lyès Annabi examine ainsi le rapport entre l'illustration et le texte dans *Le Petit Prince* de Saint-Exupéry, tandis que Sabeh Ayadi Zoghلامي se focalise sur le rôle de l'image dans les annonces publicitaires.

Le dernier volet de l'ouvrage explore la place du concept dans plusieurs catégories du visuel : le cinéma, la technologie ou la télévision. Les textes abordent ainsi des adaptations cinématographiques qui soulignent la pluralité de l'image, dans le texte et dans le film : les transformations produites pendant le processus d'adaptation de même que les applications de la notion de Gilles Deleuze (« l'image-mouvement ») dans l'analyse filmique. D'autres articles abordent l'image en tant que « construction individuelle et culturelle » dans le cas de l'image photographique (Sylvaine Conord), objet de manipulation par le biais de la vidéo (Mohamed Khamassi) ou texte social dans le cas de la carte postale (Mohsen Bouazizi). Les dernières études du volet insistent sur la problématique de la représentation dans le domaine de la technologie ou du virtuel où l'image est l'une des plus efficaces stratégies de communication et, également, de marketing.

Le volume réunit, par conséquent, des articles dont les diverses approches (conceptuelle, littéraire, cinématographique, sociologique, etc.) exposent la complexité de l'image, les significations plurielles de la notion, les multiples fonctions de la représentation dans des domaines très différents. Toutes les contributions insistent sur la pluralité du concept, de

même que sur son potentiel interdisciplinaire. Leur richesse souligne le caractère transdisciplinaire de l'image et contribue à la construction d'une vision complexe du concept examiné.

Denisa Bud

Alex Cistelean and Alex Ciorogar (eds.), *Ce mai rămâne din Mai '68?* [What's Left of May '68?], Bucharest, frACTalia, 2018



After more than 50 years since the 1968 protest movements, the interest in these riots and their consequences remains equally effervescent among researchers in the humanist sphere. *Ce mai rămâne din Mai '68?*, the collective volume edited by Alex Cistelean and Alex Ciorogar, published in 2018 by the frACTalia Publishing House, is a systematic and transdisciplinary case of zooming in on the turbulent year 1968, based on the analysis of its conflict roots and the interpretation of the events it developed. The volume consists of a series of articles first published in a thematic dossier hosted by the *Vatra* magazine (no. 6-7, 2018).

Ce mai rămâne din Mai '68? contains twenty-seven articles that dismantle the “epochal” events of 1968, focusing on two important perspectives. The first is the birth of the “New Left”, which abandoned the traditional concept of “class” and created a versatile political identity based on marginality, so that class struggles are diluted and become “identity battles, carried out in the name of equality” (14). These

social-political and economic movements favour the insidious reformulation of the “new capitalist spirit” – a second perspective regarding the events in 1968 – where politics started to be regulated in economic terms, with the change of the discourse about work and with the establishment of the services sector, shifting the focus to “post-materialism”. The plurality of the volume is provided by the diversity of research areas addressing the theme: history, social and political theory, cultural, literary and visual studies etc. The editors chose to divide the book into three large sections, (1) “Între noua stângă și postmodernitate”/ “Between the *new left* and postmodernity”, (2) “Mai ’68”/ “May ’68” (3) “Ce mai rămâne din Mai ’68?”/ “What’s left of May ’68?”. These cover the theoretical and historical framework of the students’ and workers’ revolts, of what they meant for the citizens, with the structural changes that occurred at a political and economic level, with immediate, but also lasting effects, in the social area, and, not lastly, it also analyses deeper and more nuanced meanings of the subversive potential of the events and the legacy of May ’68.

The first part of the book, “Between the *new left* and postmodernity”, begins naturally with a discussion about how the capitalist system was restructured in the second part of the 20th century, in Lucian Butaru’s article, which coherently presents the neoliberal domination in the West. This is intensified by the new left’s failure to communicate with the masses, which is discussed by Cristi Rogozanu, in a Marcusean reading. Butaru stratifies the discussion about the transformations imposed by the capitalist reforms, focusing on the “re-classification of categories” of this new

system, on the evolution of work force and work demand, on the image of man as a resource or an object on the labour market. In his article, “Beyond May ’68”, Cosmin Cercel discusses about the Marxist referent and the revolutionary spirit that united the academic and the working levels, which should be discussed again in order to revitalize today’s left. Alex Ciorogar, Christian Moraru, Ștefan Borbély and others discuss about the relation of the ’68 events and the birth of postmodernity, in its literary, theoretical and historical dimensions – with postmodernism being challenged, to a large extent, by both conservatives and Marxists.

Next, the second part of the volume, “May ’68”, researches the focal points of the ’68 moment in Western and Eastern Europe, with a focus on Romania, in the articles of Adriana Stan and Alex Matei, who write about the situation of the country at the time of the riot (Matei) and the Francophone relations of the ’60s structuralist period (Stan). Researchers such as Dana Domoși, Alex Cistelean, Ciprian Bogdan and Mihai Ene deconstruct and reconstruct the historical realities in France, Italy and Germany through their historical, philosophical, political or even cinematographic dimensions.

In an attempt to answer the question that gives the volume’s title, “what’s left of May ’68?”, the volume’s last part investigates our present connections to the revolutionary movements, the echo of their consequences and how “social and human disciplines are redefined in relation to the specific thinking of ’68”. Anca Bucur, Bogdan Ghiu or Cristian Cercel, among others, tried to answer these questions and agreed that the events from the middle

of the last century must be permanently re-politicized and re-purposed, from multiple angles.

This coherent series of studies comes with a chronology of the major social-political events of 1968. This confirms that the volume edited by Alex Cistelean and Alex Ciorogar is a well-informed and ambitious project that anyone who wants to research this theoretical area should read. Although I have summarized the ideas of just a few of the articles in this volume, they all provide the necessary stratifications for understanding the historical events, the ideals and losses surrounding the year 1968. *Ce mai rămâne din Mai '68?* is not meant to provide definitive conclusions, but to invite researchers to rethink the way we relate to the '68 moment, to the revolutionary spirit and to the "private language of power" (30).

Eva Sărășan

Camelia Crăciun, *Scriitori evrei de limbă română: de la rebeli marginali la critici canonici*, Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", Iași, 2018



Even if the Romanian literary cannon includes a large number of Jewish writers, a monographic approach to this theme is yet to be undertaken. Camelia Crăciun's book proposes a study of the writers of Jewish origin who were actively present on the Romanian literary scene, mainly in the interwar period. The author's research is not intended as an exhaustive socio-literary study, which would include

all Jewish-Romanian writers, but rather as a panoramic investigation of the literary field, approaching multiple aspects such as: identity politics, the phenomenon of acculturation, various political and aesthetical affinities, and a focus on several representative authors.

The first part of the book describes the socio-political and cultural context of the Jewish minority in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Romania. The author follows the emerging Jewish-Romanian intellectuality, alongside the development of cultural institutions such as: the Jewish press, the Jewish school, the Israelite-Romanian school and later the Union of Romanian Jews.

Also, the study emphasizes the particularities of the Jewish communities in each Romanian province and region. According to the author, the Jewish community in Muntenia can be compared to the Jewish communities in Western Europe, given the high urbanization levels, the fact that it accommodates the capital city of Bucharest and the high degree of acculturation towards the Romanian language. The communities in Transylvania and Banat are also similar to those of Western Europe, but here the acculturation is towards Hungarian and German. The community in Moldova and that in Northern Transylvania can be assimilated to the Eastern-Galician type of Jewish community, organized in shtetls, speaking Yiddish and strongly influenced by the Hasidic culture. The communities in Bessarabia and Bucovina are also of the Eastern type, with a Germanized Jewish elite in Cernăuți. After the First World War and the unification of the Romanian provinces with the Romanian Kingdom in

1918, all of those communities belonged to the same nation. Their diversities were to influence later the development of Jewish-Romanian literature. The 1923 emancipation, after which the Jewish population was legally recognized as part of the Romanian nation, determined the emergence of a minor literature, which approached Jewish themes. This literary trend would eventually vanish under the pressure of the radical political context and the anti-Semitic legislations passed in the late 1930s.

In this tumultuous context, Camelia Crăciun distinguishes between two groups of Romanian-Jewish writers. The first one is represented by avant-garde writers who asserted themselves before the Emancipation, or immediately afterwards. The author argues for a sociological explication for this group's affinities towards modernity and the avant-garde movement. Considering their condition as *social outsiders*, but at the same time *cultural insiders*, the affiliation with the literary avant-garde movement represents an opportunity for those writers to step outside of the establishment by critiquing it and revolting against it. The writers whose works are considered the most representative for this trend and also include a visible Jewish component are: Benjamin Fondane, Ilarie Voronca and Max Blecher.

The second group is represented by writers who debuted after the Emancipation and who mostly published autobiographical literature during the 1930s. Their central concern was the Jewish identity and the condition of the minorities in Romania. The writers in this group whose works are analyzed in the book are: Ion Călugăru, I. Peltz and Ury Benador. The

engagement with the political left of this group and social critique, predominant in their writings, are contextualized as a reaction against anti-Semitism, represented directly by the legionnaire movement and the Romanian intellectuals associated with it. Having settled in Bucharest and become acculturated to the Romanian language, this group of writers did not consider Zionism as a feasible political option. Thus, they focused their attention on socialism and communism, viewed as a universal solution that could also solve the problems of the Jewish minority.

The last chapter of the book is dedicated to the concept of 'double identity'. Through its lens the author analyzes Ury Benador's article *de două ori eu =1* (*Two times I=1*) alongside Mihail Sebastian's *For Two Thousand Years*, a novel which generated a polemic in the Romanian cultural milieu because of its anti-Semitic preface, signed by Nae Ionescu.

In this way, Camelia Crăciun's study manages to construct a convincing map of the different trends embraced by the Romanian-Jewish writers in the interwar period. This extensive research, which investigates the social, political, economic and cultural situation of the Jewish minority in Romania, represents a significant contribution to the field of Jewish historiography, while also bringing to light several writers marginalized by the Romanian literary canon and offering new direction of interpretation for already famous writers.

Dragoş Bucur

Liliana Danciu, *Romanul din roman*, București, Editura Ideea Europeană, 2017



The present volume, *Romanul din roman* (*The Novel in the Novel*), authored by Liliana Danciu and published in 2017 by Ideea Europeană, offers an ample foray into the aesthetic experience of Mircea Eliade's novel, *Noaptea de Sânziene*. Supported by an impressive bibliography in fields such as: cultural history, mythology, the history of religion, philosophy and narratology, the author's major purpose is to define three realities of aesthetic experience in *Noaptea de Sânziene*, using various concepts from a wide range of disciplines. The book opens with an analysis of the whole thesis, written by Mircea Braga, where he emphasizes the great importance this volume has in Romanian theoretical studies.

Liliana Danciu's contribution is also notable in her analysis of Mircea Eliade's novel in order to expose the camouflage technique, in balance with the writer code versus the reader code, according to Braga. In addition to these, one of Braga's subtle observations that can be applied to this entire study refers to the concept of dichotomy used by the author in this volume. In other words, this volume can be interpreted from two different theoretical angles, as the title itself indicates: sacred versus profane, autobiography versus fiction, historical reality versus cultural reality, esoteric versus non-esoteric.

After Mircea Braga's introduction, the book opens with the author's argument,

whose prime focus is on exploring the hermeneutical meaning of *Noaptea de Sânziene*, along with its many levels of reading. Liliana Danciu's attempt is to offer a wide perspective on interpreting the analytic language used in the history of religion, which is articulated according to the metaphorical structures of the imaginary.

The first part of the volume, concerned with terminology and methodology, consists of two chapters, centered on the importance of the usage of a series of concepts and their connection to Mircea Eliade's biographical influences. The absolutely necessary analytical side of the author in this field contributes to the aim of the first part, which deals mainly with terminology, concepts and theories revealing the difference between the esoteric and the non-esoteric as well as the correct hermeneutical approach to the novel.

The second part of the volume focuses on the esoteric novel. Liliana Danciu's contribution is also notable regarding her examination of various aspects of Eliade's novels, such as: the Romanian and European historical realities of the twentieth century, Balzac's influence, along with concepts such as existentialism or idealism.

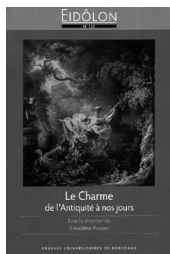
Besides offering possible interpretations of the novel from the standpoint of its non-esoteric dimension, the author often highlights some key concepts. Symbolism, the image of the double, eros, *coincidentia oppositorum*, kabbalah, gnosis, alchemy, fairytales, shamanism, yoga: all these are concepts around which the author builds original theories and leaves room for possible further interpretations of the novel. The focus shifts to the parallel between the novel itself and its various mythological frames. We remember

in this regard: the reconstruction of the Divine Comedy, the world as a spectacle (Shakespeare), different rituals from Romanian literature, Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The fourth part of the volume comprises the author's open conclusions regarding the symbolic interdependence between the sacred and the profane.

What Liliana Danciu manages to demonstrate on a theoretical level coincides with Eliade's purposes in writing *Noaptea de Sânziene*, namely the urgent re-integration of the human into the cosmic rhythms of the universe, the preservation of myth within the narrative dimension and the experimental novel hailing from the dawn of postmodernity.

Ana-Maria Parasca

Eidolon, vol. 125,
Géraldine Puccini (éd.),
*Le charme de l'Antiquité
à nos jours*, Presses
Universitaires de
Bordeaux, 2018



The one hundred twenty fifth volume of the *Eidolon* publishing house took its original inspiration from the collective discussions held throughout a year of seminars with the master students at the University of Bordeaux. As a result of these contemplations, a colloquium prepared by the main figures involved in the research materialized under the authority of Géraldine Puccini on 9-11 March 2016, within the LaPRIL (*Le Laboratoire Pluridisciplinaire de Recherches sur l'Imaginaire appliquées à la Littérature*). The central theme of

these analyses follows the manifestations of the ambiguous notion of charm, from Antiquity until the present day, in an attempt to capture its complex and polymorphous character encompassed in all forms of artistic expression. The publication is divided into four parts, each one focusing on a particular imaginative domain in which the subject develops, elaborating on the relationships between charm and music, art, fictional places and characters, as well as literature as a whole. The collection of essays gathered together in this volume can be considered a pioneering work in the field.

Attempting a general definition of the subject in the introduction to the study, Géraldine Puccini highlights the contradictions inherent in the idea of "charm", regarded as a notion which is neither investigated by philosophy, nor employed by aesthetic theories. Initially approached by Vladimir Jankélévitch in *Le Je-ne-sais quoi et le presque-rien*, a treaty published in 1957, charm naturally belongs to subjectivity and the fields of emotion, which could lead to the idea that it is neither a compelling component in a work of art nor an issue that is worth academic attention. However, as it is further demonstrated, the concept is one without which any oeuvre cannot claim to be completed. It exerts a fascination beyond habitual limits, taken into consideration by many influential figures, from Plato to Foucault. In support of a better understanding of its unpredictable, yet essential features, Jérôme Laurent includes the observations of Balzac in his *The Human Comedy* (*La Comédie humaine*), in which he remarks the 'charm of the charm': it is precisely the intervention of inadequacy or any sort of divergent tensions that

makes an object or a figure appealing. Perfection is often perceived as unnatural and suffocating. Any occurrence that shatters rigidity is desirable. Between the longing for contradictions there is a point which generates a place for charm's intervention.

One of the most compelling demonstrations which additionally strengthen the comprehension of the subject is presented by Pierre Sauvanet in his research entitled *Charm in the case of Nietzsche, between music and philosophy* (*Le charme chez Nietzsche, entre musique et philosophie*). Following the three terms adopted in the German language to describe the different meanings of the concept (*charm*, *reiz* used mostly in reference to physical charm and *zauber*, understood as spell), the critic notices that Nietzsche ultimately used only the third sense of the word in his writing. This comes as a result of its usage as a metaphoric term closely linked to music. The German philosopher brought into attention the relevance of charm's interference in relation to the Dionysian, as well as the feminine figure and ultimately music. Sauvanet's analysis succeeds in capturing the connection between the appeal of both irrational, liberating enthusiasm and the invisible constraint of this type of magical influence, which stands at the foundation of Nietzsche's understanding and usage of charm.

Subsequently, another research that highlights the irrational facet of charm is that of Katalin Bartha-Kovács, who associates the impossibility of capturing its essence under a theoretical form to its fleeting, diaphanous peculiarity. As a result, her text focuses on the visual representation of charm in the visual arts, particularly in the paintings of Antoine Watteau and

Jean-Honoré Fragonard, representatives of the Rococo and Renaissance periods, through the motif of the swing. In fact, the very cover chosen for the present volume is Fragonard's *Les hasards heureux de l'escarpolette* (1767), a work of art which, according to Bartha-Kovács, captures the point where "charm" and "grace" drift away from each other. Laying out a brief portrayal of the two terms through history and their employment in criticism, Bartha-Kovács later introduces the concealed traces of *sprezzatura*, that palpable ease which conceals and, at the same time, exhibits effort as smoothly natural. This diversion among the visible and the unseen generates a pressure released only through motion. The result of this discharge can be observed in the above-mentioned painting, brimming with deliberate sensuality that invites the viewer to participate in her game. Between the painting and the spectator, a sense of charm is born.

The study would be also incomplete without the intervention of Julien Maudoux and his investigation of charm from an apparently puzzling point of view. In his essay dedicated to the appeal of old women, the researcher traces the configuration of the implausible alliance from Antiquity to Middle Ages. It is here where we are confronted again with the mythical and magical valence of the term, which compensates for the commonly found weaknesses or the unattractive appearance of the characters, in comparison to the graceful figures employed in other works of art. Readers are presented with a reach array of examples, from Philodème de Gadara and Charito or the portrait of Mélité belonging to Agathias, the Greek scholar. Collectively, they underline the idea of charm no longer

being reserved to youthfulness and its voluptuousness. Furthermore, an excessive disclosure of beauty (to the point where it might turn into deception) conceals charm and makes it impossible to distinguish whether it exists or not, much to the dismay of those who fall into the trap of its glamor. This results in a peculiar capacity of old women, represented from Apuleius to Ovid, to retain their youth by means of charm. This can take the form of a strange kind of attraction, contiguous to enchantment, or that of stories and tales narrated by them.

Other studies present in the volume which must not be overlooked are Pierre Laforgue's ample analysis of the poetics of Homer, which addresses the crucial problem of the incompatibility between charm and truthfulness in the accurate depiction of history or that of Valérie Hugotte and the mystery surrounding the works of André Breton. The surrealist contribution to the understanding of charm is doubled by the ability of perception and the bewitching exploration of words through experiments. Last but not least, another category of enchantment brought into discussion is that of personal souvenirs and insignificant moments, which come into opposition with the grand narratives and crucial moments proposed by history. Through her study of *Les Années*, Annie Eranux's collection of small relics and unimportant points in time, Aziza Awad unearths the means through which charm is generated, paradoxically, through the apparent lack of it.

Overall, the present volume comes as a fundamental corpus of studies on a subject which is as alluring as the main subject of its research suggests. The interdisciplinary approach, as well as the multitude of

perspectives on the seduction of charm is best summarized by a remark made by Jankélévitch and quoted by Puccini at the debut of her consideration: we can live without charm just like we can live without literature, but we cannot live well.

Alexandra Cengher

Buata B. Malela,
*La réinvention de
l'écrivain francophone
contemporain (2000-
2012)*, Paris, Les
Éditions du Cerf, coll.
« Patrimoines », 2019



Buata B. Malela se recommande ces dernières années comme l'un des spécialistes des littératures francophones africaines et antillaises, avec un penchant à la fois vers la critique littéraire et vers la réflexion sur le phénomène littéraire dans l'espace francophone.

Son livre *La réinvention de l'écrivain francophone contemporain* invite le lecteur avisé à se pencher sur quelques notions difficiles à cerner, comme par exemple la définition de ce qui est « contemporain », démarche suivie en philosophie par un Georgio Agamben, Nathalie Heinich en art, Pierre Corcuff en sociologie ou le comparatiste Lionel Ruffel que l'auteur même cite. Le livre se propose d'attirer l'attention sur la production littéraire des deux dernières décennies (plus précisément 2000-2012), considérant que non seulement les classiques de littérature francophone, mais aussi les publications récentes, contemporaines donc, méritent de devenir objet

d'intérêt pour la critique littéraire et d'étude pour les universités, au niveau intrinsèque (pour elles-mêmes et en rapport avec d'autres publications) et au niveau extrinsèque (pour leur impact socio-culturel).

Le support théorique s'étaye de préférence sur les romans de quatre écrivains francophones, afrodescendants : Alain Mabanckou, Léonora Miano, Calixthe Beyala et Patrick Chamoiseau. Leur statut est complexe, vu leur double appartenance : au champ littéraire général (écrivains) et géolittéraire (francophones). Les analyses de texte sont précédées par deux grands chapitres de réflexions politiques sur les tendances actuelles (« Un monde subjectiviste ? ») et esthétiques (« Les postures de l'écrivain francophone »).

La riche bibliographie déployée par l'auteur rend compte de la complexité des aspects socio-économiques et politiques, ces substrats qui influencent l'écriture et éveillent l'intérêt pour certains thèmes littéraires et qui déterminent une prise de position de la part des écrivains. Ainsi les textes reçoivent-ils une fonction conative afin de produire chez le lecteur une certaine réaction.

L'auteur a suivi de près les débats médiatiques français sur la question identitaire pendant la première décennie du troisième millénaire. Il analyse comment les politiciens reconfigurent le concept d'identité nationale en y intégrant aussi la question communautaire. Il se demande où se placent les valeurs républicaines du « vrais Français » dans le cas des afrodescendants, pour constater combien ces démarches s'éloignent de la politique de la Relation d'Édouard Glissant qui la voyait comme reconnaissance ouverte des différences. Pour Malela (et d'autres), faire passer au

grand public l'image des migrants qui risquent de détruire l'identité nationale est seulement une modalité de cacher les échecs de la politique économique et sociale en France.

Ainsi, l'Africain d'Europe, « l'afro-péen » comme l'appelle Léonora Miano, personnage ou auteur, est soumis à certains déterminismes. Les écrivains se placent, selon Malela, entre l'effet Angot (de la subjectivité dénonciatrice) et l'effet Kourouma (de l'engagement extérieur), deux postures littéraires qu'il particularise pour le corpus choisi. Mabanckou, Miano, Beyala et Chamoiseau ne sont plus à encadrer dans le mouvement de la Négritude, ni dans celui des Indépendances, ni de l'engagement total, car leur « figure d'auteur » se construit selon d'autres paramètres.

Le livre relance aussi le débat initié par Jérôme Meizoz sur la « posture de l'auteur », car, soutient Buata Malela, à notre époque, la réception littéraire est influencée par l'image que les médias, dans leurs formes ultramodernes (internet y compris), façonnent. La posture diasporale des écrivains francophones semblent se calquer sur la structure d'une famille d'origine africano-antillaise, des études en France, des prix littéraires, une visibilité médiatique ; mais, à l'intérieur du livre, la posture de l'auteur se laisse déduire surtout par les formes des subjectivités assumées, par la manière de dire « je » et de se rapporter à l'Autrui ou au monde.

Dans la vision de l'auteur, Mabanckou laisse l'impression de quelqu'un qui s'est fait tout seul : né au Congo-Brazzaville, étudiant en France, écrivain de succès dans l'Hexagone puis professeur aux États-Unis, auteur primé et souvent médiatisé. Malela remarque que l'image établie par l'écrivain congolais à travers ses interviews télévisées,

sa page Facebook, son site, les couvertures de ses livres, peut se résumer par « le dandy cultivé et l'écrivain sympathique » (p. 86).

Pour Malela, Léonora Miano, assume une identité frontalière (africaine et africaine américaine) pour qui « la figure de l'écrivain transnational devient une figure déterminante (ou *historiale*) » (p. 59), car elle construit ses textes inspirée par la musique Soul, ponctuant son écriture d'intermèdes musicaux.

Dans le cas de Calixthe Beyala, l'auteur constate que son compte Facebook sert à soutenir ses prises de positions politiques et culturelles et à promouvoir ses livres. Même le contenu des livres mi-autobiographiques / mi-autofictionnels entretient les scandales médiatiques, car il est question de romans à clé où le public francophone décèle l'identité cachée des vedettes de télé visées. Tout cela confère à l'écrivaine une hypervisibilité qui nuit parfois à la juste valeur de ses textes.

Patrick Chamoiseau manifeste une subjectivité fort explicable par son origine insulaire antillaise. Dans la vision de Malela « l'écrivain francophone n'échappe pas à la tendance contemporaine du multisupport qui élargit nécessairement son œuvre et explique les possibilités de postures multiples » (p. 104).

Avec la même investigation attentive, Malela offre des interprétations de texte des quatre auteurs, qui toutes convergent vers les portraits esquissés dans les parties théoriques. Il relève leur dimension « transmédiatique » à partir des éléments paratextuels, surtout la couverture des livres. Leurs textes proposent parfois des parodies du discours social et politique et créent des intertextualités avec des œuvres appartenant à une autre période culturelle

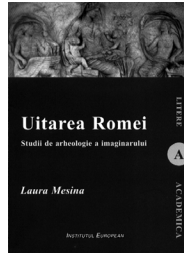
ou historique. Des analyses intéressantes visent les romans : *Bleu Blanc Rouge*, *Les petits-fils nègres de Vercingétorix*, *Verre Cassé*, *Mémoires de porc-épic*, *Black Bazar* d'Alain Mabanckou, *Tels des astres éteints* et *Blues pour Élise* de Léonora Miano, *L'empreinte à Crusoe* de Patrick Chamoiseau, *L'homme qui m'offrait le ciel* de Calixthe Beyala et d'autres encore. L'auteur fait souvent des parallèles avec les romans « français » signés par Christine Angot, Frédéric Beigbeder, Catherine Millet.

Ces quatre écrivains francophones sont, pour Malela et selon la formule de Foucault, des « fondateurs de discursivité » (p. 170) dans le sens que par leurs textes et leurs interventions dans les médias, ils s'affirment déjà comme des *influencers* (pour utiliser un concept propre à notre contemporain) dans le monde culturel francophone.

Il reste à réfléchir sur la situation des lecteurs qui ne connaissent pas la biographie de ces écrivains et ne sont pas au courant de la vie mondaine ou culturelle dont se nourrissent les médias, ceux qui lisent un livre de ces auteurs au hasard, sans en connaître d'autres. L'image qu'ils se font de l'auteur est tout ce que le texte (et le paratexte, s'il en existe) lui laisse comprendre. Ainsi la posture de l'auteur est une souvent subjective, floue sinon inconnue, faute de repères et de contexte. Mais cela n'entrave pas la valeur du livre que tout lecteur, amateur ou avisé, peut ressentir à la lecture. Le livre de Buata Malela est d'une réelle importance pour les professionnels de la lecture et ceux qui aiment réfléchir sur les particularités du monde littéraire et socio-politique contemporain.

Simona Jișă

Laura Mesina,
Uitarea Romei.
Studii de arheologie
a imaginarului, Iași,
 European Institute,
 2015



Uitarea Romei (*Forgetting Rome*) represents a collection of studies into the archaeology of the imaginary that aim to answer the question: What are the roots of the Byzantine Empire and, especially, how was it formed? In this work about the history of ideas, the author, Laura Mesina, who teaches at the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest, rigorously approaches these topics, applying Foucault's research method from *The Archeology of Knowledge* to the study of the imaginary. *Forgetting Rome* discusses fundamental subjects for the field of humanities, such as: myth, schemes of mentalities and social representations, narrative and time lapses, but also about archeological method through which the imaginary can be approached.

Constantine the Great's ascension and his conversion to Christianity represents an important moment in the life of images. This moment foreshadowed the decay of Roman civilization, particularly as regards the divine pantheon and the cultic forms of celebrating the ancient gods. The forgetting of Rome also meant the formation of another center, where memory did not have the meaning of forgetting but rather the meaning of imagination. This center of secular and spiritual power was Constantinople.

Collective memory recorded a change in the field of images, an opposition

emerging between an iconoclastic civilization and an iconophile one. The author analyzes the *funus imaginarium* ritual, from the imaginary of Late Antiquity, and even devotes an entire chapter to the celebration of the Roman emperors. This is analyzed from two perspectives: one from a terminological point of view and the other from a methodological point of view. The term *funus* is represented with meticulousness and the sequences of the ritual are rigorously reconstructed, each of them being animated by the substantial contribution of philosophical and religious concepts with their moral, mythological or classical metaphysical values.

The concept of *funus imaginarium* represents both a rite of passage and a collective psychodrama, the fundamental role of the imaginary being realized for the constitution and perpetuation of a certain social and cultural model. The core of the imaginary is shaped by its discursive formations, as old meanings, symbols, images, theories, historical or political details form this world of the collective mind. The author defines ritual as the experience of a certain moment of crisis in the life of a society, during which a peaceful transfer of power takes place, thus avoiding war or plunging the society into chaos. The methodological order, which delineates the field of research on the imaginary in a realistic, rational sense, exceeds the structuralist method; Laura Mesina makes many references to Gilbert Durand's research on the imaginary.

The anthropology of the imaginary entails undertaking archaeological research into images and symbols. These concepts analyze the semantics of some conceptual networks in which archetypes

are contextualized through rituals because they encounter the temporal and historical dimension and end up safeguarding political and religious ceremonies. They represent a certain historical age of collective thinking on faith or power.

Constantinople copied Rome's manner of organizing its institutions, its architecture but also the urban plan of the center. This concept of *funus imaginarium* becomes an anthropological testimony and a new form of collective memory, focusing on the imaginary of power. Although the emperor developed as a central figure, he did not only mirror his divine nature, but also the power disseminated in the world he ruled, that is, in a world that was constructed through image and word.

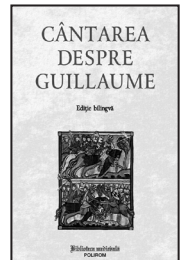
The imaginary consolidated in the Middle Ages that was not shaken by the so-called democratic political theories remained structured around a central pivot in oral cultures. It had a rigorous, schematic, strongly symbolic, effective internal construction for the large Christian communities. *Forgetting Rome* investigates the way in which society was built. To that end, it raises multiple questions, such as: what was *the word* and where it came from; what was its history; and, what was it transformed into and in what context; in relation to what kind of notions or phenomena. The writer approaches different working perspectives on various historical landmarks, located in large squares and venues, but also has more focalized approaches, down to the level of the revealing fragment.

Forgetting Rome analyzes the cultural layers of Greco-Roman antiquity by moving along the vertical axis of time periods, but also along the horizontal one of space, following the fourth-century translation

from Rome to Byzantium. Four periods are analyzed in this book: the fifth-sixth centuries BC, that is, the last age of Greek democracy, the first-fourth centuries AD, namely the Roman principality until the fourth century Constantinople, the eighth-ninth centuries, iconoclasm, the fourteenth century, hesychasm. Thus, communities projected their identity in their collective imagination. Constantine the Great left the West behind and changed both the fate of the city of Constantinople and that of Europe. The meaning of the title *Forgetting Rome* represents the temporary departure of the emperor from the city, the fortress being copied architecturally and symbolically duplicated in Byzantium, on Greek and Christian bases, from the vantage point of another ideology, its forgetting eventually becoming permanent.

Patricia-Paula Lelik

Cristiana Papahagi
(éd.), *Cântarea despre
Guillaume. Poem epic
francez din secolul
al XII-lea*, Iași, Polirom,
2019



Pendant les dernières années, dans l'espace littéraire roumain, on observe un regain d'intérêt pour le Moyen Âge occidental. Dans ce mouvement, les éditions Polirom ont initié la série *Biblioteca medievală*, dédiée aux œuvres de référence de la pensée médiévale latine, et, plus récemment, aux textes en français. Après le *Roman de Tristan* de Bérout et la *Cité des Dames* de Christine de Pizan, le troisième

titre français de la collection est consacré à l'une des plus anciennes chansons de geste françaises, la *Chançon d'Willame*.

Il s'agit d'un texte en décasyllables épiques, daté du début du XII^e siècle, conservé dans un seul manuscrit, qui raconte une série d'affrontements entre Guillaume de Barcelone ou d'Orange, défenseur de l'empire carolingien, et les envahisseurs sarrasins, au début du IX^e siècle. Le texte fait évidemment une large place aux scènes guerrières et tragiques, mais s'éclaire étonnamment par des traits ironiques, des scènes comiques ou résolument grotesques et des personnages hauts en couleur qui ne dépareilleraient pas dans les romans contemporains.

Le texte, en version bilingue, a été traduit en roumain, annoté et présenté par Cristiana Papahagi de l'Université Babeş-Bolyai de Cluj, spécialiste de l'ancien français. *Cântarea despre Guillaume* (le titre choisi pour la version roumaine) réussit à introduire auprès du public roumain et du lecteur moderne d'une manière éloquente et expressive une œuvre, certes importante, mais extrêmement éloignée dans le temps et l'espace. La traduction emploie une langue roumaine à la fois simplificatrice et poétique, avec une légère colorature archaïque, la lecture étant facile et accessible. La traductrice ne recourt pas à une forme versifiée, mais préfère la version en prose, pour favoriser la fidélité au sens lexical et sémantique du texte original ; ce choix formel, loin de déranger, rend la version en roumain plus compréhensible et facile à suivre pour le lecteur de nos jours. Ainsi, depuis les deux versions roumaines de la *Chanson de Roland* réalisées il y a un demi-siècle par Eugen Tănase, c'est pour la première fois qu'une chanson de geste française est disponible en roumain.

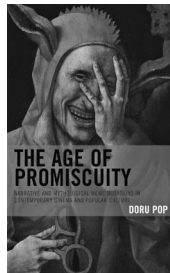
L'appareil critique, conforme aux exigences d'une édition philologique moderne, témoigne du travail ardu de C. Papahagi. Consciente de l'immense écart temporel, culturel et esthétique entre le texte ancien français et son public, l'éditrice s'est efforcée à fournir non seulement une traduction parfaitement conçue, mais également (sinon plus important), une mise en perspective du texte. L'Introduction fournit ainsi un bref résumé de la chanson, suivi par un commentaire littéraire et historique très pertinent, qui présente l'évolution du genre de l'épopée médiévale, la matière narrative qui se développe autour du personnage Guillaume d'Orange, la postérité de cette matière en France et au-delà. Une grande partie de l'Introduction, qui peut paraître fastidieuse, est consacrée aux aspects formels caractérisant la chanson de geste (la syntaxe alignée sur le mètre, les motifs, les figures récurrentes, etc.) en rapport avec le grand débat philologique autour du caractère oral des plus anciennes épopées médiévales. Les notes au texte visent à aider celui qui lit la chanson de geste et à donner de possibles pistes d'interprétation, sans toutefois influencer l'opinion personnelle du lecteur. Le texte est suivi par un index des noms propres des personnages, et par un index des toponymes, qui expliquent des réalités de la France médiévale jugées opaques pour le lecteur moderne. Nous ne pouvons que saluer cet ajout de l'éditrice au schéma classique d'une édition savante, étant donné le grand nombre de personnages qui défilent dans le poème, et l'inconsistance du cadre géographique de l'action. En fin de compte, on peut affirmer que la présence d'une Introduction tellement riche et d'un appareil critique consistant, soutenu par une bibliographie

riche facilite résolument la compréhension du texte et fournit au lecteur les réponses à toutes les questions qui pourraient surgir avant ou pendant la lecture.

C. Papahagi réussit ainsi à donner avec son édition de la *Chançon d'Willame* non seulement un livre agréable, mais en même temps un livre savant pour les spécialistes en lettres, philologie ou histoire. Le texte lui-même est certes destiné à tous les publics, car tout d'abord c'est de la littérature, et de la bonne littérature. Mais en y regardant de plus près, c'est aussi un ouvrage de critique littéraire et de philologie « à l'ancienne », destinée aux lecteurs avisés et aux philologues, une porte – entrouverte pour les premiers, largement ouverte pour les derniers – vers l'un des plus anciens chefs d'œuvre de la littérature européenne.

Andrei Anca

Doru Pop, *The Age of Promiscuity. Narrative and Mythological Meme Mutations in Contemporary Cinema and Popular Culture*, Lexington Books, 2018



If we analyze the current visual culture, many voices would conclude that we are living in a paradigm of the image. The power of image became dominant in almost every field due to its greater and faster impact on the audience. The visual language is constantly developing according to ongoing evolutions, and therefore, it needs to rethink its status and its implications.

Even the statement about living in a predominantly visual era is debatable. What is more fascinating is how different representations from different times are intertwined and cause various reactions in society. There is always an invisible thread that connects different patterns, epochs, structures, themes, motifs, and symbols.

A very engaging book that discusses the visual content in contemporary cinema and popular culture from a unique perspective is *The Age of Promiscuity. Narrative and Mythological Meme Mutations in Contemporary Cinema and Popular Culture* by Doru Pop. A Professor of Film and Media Studies at Babes-Bolyai University, Doru Pop has conducted a fascinating research on contemporary hybridizations of pop culture. The premise of the study is quite challenging because it launches new ideas for reflection about what we already know in terms of popular culture and contemporary cinema by questioning the well-established mainstream representations. The hypothesis stipulates that the contemporary situation is in crisis regarding the *myth-making process*. As the “death of originality” announced by F. Jameson is valid, we are entering an age of cultural promiscuity. Thus, the book aims to capture in which manner and to what extent the causes, mutations, and new patterns of film and media content have changed. In other words, if images, ideas, and myths are exhausted, how do they act and react in the new medium?

Critically assimilating the evolution of the history of images, the author examines the networks of images and cultural myths over time, outlining a varied puzzle of (re)combinations, (re)valorizations and (re)interpretations. The interdisciplinary

approach that combines media theories, film criticism, cultural studies, and myth interpretations allows the analysis of the transformations of these constellations of images by questioning the meanings they impose in a promiscuous present and amalgamated with a series of obscure and alienating semiotic systems.

In the first part of the book, "Mythologies amalgamated", the focus is on subjects such as ancient heroes, mythological gods, and iconography with burlesque figures. Doru Pop follows the transmutation of all of them into contemporary imagery. In the second part, entitled "Double Dark Mirrors in Cinematic Representations", the theoretical focus shifts to a narrative that examines phenomena such as zombie culture, post-human transformation, modern monsters, avatars. For instance, for those who are passionate about movies such as *Star Wars* or *Avatar*, the author delivers curious interpretations of specific aspects of these films by bringing into discussion the new transfer of meaning from one state of mind of a period to another. The author offers personal perspectives that enforce new significations of these endless recombinations by analyzing cultural stories and mythologies with a keen eye. It is interesting to note that there is some logic to the development of mythical imagination even if, at first glance, the multitude models of the hybridization and appropriation of myths seem to be overwhelming. In the end, this thought-provoking initiative is accomplished and a careful reading sheds light on this complex and sometimes tricky semiotic system of reused, recycled, and recuperated visual narratives.

The whole study proposes a new vocabulary that intends to understand and

to explain the new narratives of contemporary cinema and popular culture. It is a very dense reading but at the same time an entertaining one.

Maria Fărîmă

Eleonora Sava (ed.), *Ca la mama acasă. Familia și masa în dezbaterile Cercului Etnostud*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, 2019



Meals and family are the core cultural constructs approached in the collection of studies edited by Eleonora Sava, *Ca la mama acasă. Familia și masa în dezbaterile Cercului Etnostud*, which was published by Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca in 2019.

The volume comprises six studies elaborated around the main themes, meals and family, but what is worth noting from the very beginning is their construction itself, in the form of an ideological puzzle. After a rigorous introduction written by the editor, Eleonora Sava, who brings to the fore the main theoretical aspects of the topics analyzed in the individual studies, the volume is calibrated much like a table. Thus, at the risk of over-speculation, I will compare this first chapter with the table top itself, which has the role of holding the weight of the dishes, and the subsequent chapters with the table legs, which act like pillars supporting the whole structure.

Dragoș Bucur and Mihai Duma continue the construction of the table through an essay dedicated to a controversial topic

in Romania, the 2018 referendum organized by the Family Coalition in favor of the traditional family. The argument relies on a series of theories from the social, political or religious spheres. This chapter develops in the form of an ideological maze, starting from a theoretical substrate, which captures various aspects of the role of the family throughout history in Romania, continues with a genealogical perspective and outlines possible ideological directions for the future.

Rolurile de gen în contextual riturilor premaritale românești (Gender roles in the context of Romanian premarital rites), a study that proposes an analysis of gender attributes from the perspective of the evolution of marriage rites in the area of Bukovina and Transylvania, is another reference point in the development of this ideal puzzle. Mia Biligan and Simona Budii follow the applied-analytical route of the wedding in the nineteenth century, studying also the symbolic mechanisms that determine the corresponding roles of family members.

Following the internal logic of the entire volume, the fourth essay, elaborated by Olimpia Virvarei, is dedicated to the functions of dishes made of white flour in the context of the wedding rites organized in the village of Stamate, in Suceava county. The author builds her argument on the very shape of the bakery product analyzed, namely the *colac*, highlighting the family dynamics that develop around this ritual.

Ionucu Pop and Iulia Vintilă are the authors of an essay that deals with the role of traditional beverage, *țuica* and *horinca*. Starting with a brief history of how alcohol is distilled, the authors outline a regional map of these drinks, concentrating on the

areas of Maramureș and Galați. The key concept of this essay is that such drinks serve as catalysts of the most important social events in the Romanian families.

The volume ends with a study elaborated by Ioana Pavel, who proposes an incursion into the gastronomic imaginary of the Romanian fairy tales. The author analyzes a series of culinary references in fairy tales collected by Petre Ispirescu, arguing that nutrition shapes the lifestyle described in folklore.

A harmonious ensemble of eight essays, this volume is a solidly constructed around the thematic analysis of two core aspects permeating the imaginary of Romanian folklore, perhaps best exemplified by the image of some family members who are having a meal together.

Ana-Maria Parasca

Studies in Canadian Literature, Volume 43, Number 2, *Thoughts from the Eastern Edge: Rethinking Place of Atlantic-Canadian Literature. Essays in Honor of Herb Wyile*, 2018



A bilingual journal that has been continuously running since 1975, *Studies in Canadian Literature/Études en littérature canadienne* (SCL/ÉLC) has long established itself as a valuable asset to the academic community. The volume in question was assembled into a particularly unique, yet well-rounded arrangement, devised as a wholehearted tribute to the notable work of Professor Herb Wyile. One of the journal's

previous editors, he was a prominent critic acknowledged for having reenvisioned the study of Atlantic Canadian literature, as well as reasserting its place among the other world literatures in a globalizing context.

In fact, the journal tackles this very aspect in its opening piece: “*Passing: Herb Wyile and the Future of Atlantic-Canadian Literary Criticism*”. A light and pleasantly familiar tone is employed to efficiently expand on why “Herb Wyile had become kind of like Beyoncé: so well known within his field that he could get by with just one name” (6). Running through his most notable works and contributions, we are given a genuine and flavorful account of Wyile’s literary brilliance, candor, wit, and of a practical dimension to his methods that have unarguably inspired many others.

Even a frugal look over the table of contents will be engaging for a curious eye; the titles themselves are telltale signs of the complex and diversified approaches gathered within this volume. Its first part incorporates twelve critical essays (including the previously mentioned introduction), as well as a “Special Selection” – *Memories of Herb Wyile* – consisting of four additional stances on his work and influence over contemporary Atlantic-Canadian literatures (and, extensively, over the following generations of critics and scholars) as seen through the personal accounts and memories of colleagues and friends.

The flexibility of Wyile’s methods is made visible in the first textual analysis – a collaborative effort between Cynthia Sugars and Paul Keen – addressing the *conservative/liberal duality* in the texts of 18th century minister and writer Thomas McCulloch (particularly in *The Stepsure Letters*, which seemed to have “pioneered” Canadian humor).

The very next study, belonging to Christopher J. Armstrong, already diversifies its scope by engaging cinematic content: Donald Shakib’s *Goin’ Down the Road* (1970). Film commentary is further backed up by Alistair MacLeod’s short stories in an effort to assert automobility and road-trip narratives as symptomatic aspects of Atlantic Canada. Caitlin Charman also engages with Alistair MacLeod’s short fiction, but this time it is “Coal Nostalgia, Masculinity and Energy History” to be scrutinized and brought into focus within a discourse on the somewhat paradoxical longing for labor – for the bodies and identities it refines. Charman’s discussion is followed by Caroline Rae’s “Altering Subjectivities: Place and the Posthuman in the Michael Crummey’s *Sweetland*” her undertaking further expanding the thematic diversity of the volume whilst remaining in touch with previous motifs. As opposed to addressing mobility and wanderlust, Caroline focuses on searching the threads joining selfhood and ownership over a certain land (and identification with a certain industry), with the latter remaining regrettably oblivious to human demands – hence she also touches upon posthuman and nonhuman narratives. Bethany Daigle addresses similar topics as Caroline Rae in her analysis of Leo McKay Jr.’s *Twenty Six*, in fact a “fictionalization of the Westray Mine disaster” (21). Here as well, we are offered a thorough examination of the shifts between economical changes in regional labor and the loss of self and certitude.

Moving on to Thomas Halford’s analysis of Adam’s Richards’s *Principles to live by*, the reader is met with another fascinating standpoint on the molding of personal identity, particularly on how it influenced by the practice of surveillance (in the case

of Royal Canadian Mounted Police's officers), resourcefully exploring ethical issues in and through fictional narratives.

In "Contesting neoliberal reconciliation", Hannah Wylie innovatively elaborates her father's take on neoliberalism (and on the literary forms of resistance) when discussing the dynamic "relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and the lands that they share" (123); in this regard, she provides an insightful account of the performative work of Mi'kmaw poet Rebecca Thomas. Moving forward, we are met with Billy Johnson's essay on yet another remarkable Mi'kmaw poet, Rita Joe; he skillfully remarks that bringing her 'poetry of continuity' to the public was possible by means of a close collaboration with "small regional presses" (163) rather than through acknowledged Toronto editorials, thus pointing out that such choices are much in tune with her opposition and questioning of colonialism.

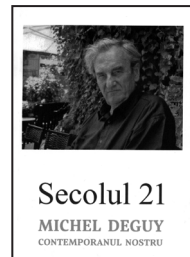
The following and final three additions to the corpus of this volume also turn some of their efforts to various debates in gender studies. In this respect, the ninth essay, belonging to Hanna Nicholas, makes for a rather daring read as she constructs a compelling critique of George Eliot Clarke's misogynistic take on female sexuality in *The Motorcyclist*. Similarly, Gemma Marr's insightful reading of Jessica Grant's largely unexplored *Come, Thou Tortoise* marks another innovative contribution to the volume. Musing over the categorical disapproval of any non-normative familial construction, she exposes the "pressure to aspire toward a normalized family" (219), in fact the stronghold of asserting heterosexual and heteronormative relations as the only permitted model. She then appreciatively points to

how Grant's work manages to disrupt this domineering pattern. The final addition to the volume is Mandy Roswell's study of gender in the 21st century Newfoundland novel based on Kenneth J. Harvey's *The Town That Forgot How to Breathe*. Roswell identifies several problems in the way a certain narrative of gender and community is arbitrarily pushed forward and distributed as an established 'mythology', thus touching upon many of Wylie's methods and concerns.

While the volume gracefully begins and ends with texts on Herb Wyile (as a remarkable scholar and equally remarkable individual), all of the essays in-between display diverse affiliations with his thought. In view of these facts, it becomes rather obvious that a given reader must be fairly familiar with certain in-depth propensities of Canadian literature, and it is for such a reader that SCL will be a most welcomed source of conceptual variety.

Oana-Antonia Stroe

Secolul 21, no. 7-12,
Michel Deguy.
Contemporanul nostru,
Fundatia Culturală
Secolul 21, București,
2018



Awarded numerous literary prizes for its exceptionally well-written editorials on various topics connected to the humanities, the magazine *Secolul 21* stands out again through a comprehensive selection of essays, stories and poems written by and about Michel Deguy, one of the most important French poets of international renown, who

has also been recognized as an essential figure of civic engagement throughout the second half of the 20th century and up to the present. This volume opens the series entitled *Contemporanul nostru* (*Our Contemporary*), which intends to deal with personalities who have left their mark on the first decades of the 21st century. It also offers the readers a glimpse into Deguy's life and literary work through his dialogues with Romanian writers, through various researches on his poetry and also through a bilingual anthology (in French and Romanian) of some of his best poems, ordered chronologically. The images that accompany the texts succeed in reconstituting the atmosphere of Paris and present a few representative episodes in Deguy's life, while the last section of the volume brings forth two permanent rubrics of the magazine, thus paying homage to their authors, Geta Brătescu and Mariana Celac, who have recently passed away.

The magazine opens with fragments from a dialogue that Deguy had with Jean-Pierre Moussaron in 2007, entitled *Auto-bio* and consisting in a rather defamatory self-portrait, but also in some reflections on poetry, philosophy and life in general. Among the most notable ideas is his regret that time passed too quickly and that he did not create anything in the cinematographic or theatrical sphere (as written phrases are forgotten easily, while visual images are not), the feeling that he was left outside the major events of history, which passed by him without his being able to get actively involved in them, and the fact that he was constantly hounded by misfortune and a certain sense of failure. While acknowledging his insignificance in comparison to the greatness of the world surrounding him, Deguy also talks about how hard it is

for the collective good to be achieved when everyone pursues their own interests.

These ideas are beautifully echoed three years later by Michel Deguy's 80th anniversary speech, entitled *Le 8ème âge*, where he argues that humanity knows everything it can know about death, and yet people have to choose life so that death itself becomes indifferent to them. He also underlines the therapeutic role of art and literature in one's life, as they represent a sort of "quixotesque homeopathy".

The following section, *Among contemporaries*, presents Deguy's poetry through the eyes and words of his friends and admirers, who underline different aspects of his complex writing style. To begin with, Martin Rueff acknowledges the lyrical power of Deguy's verses, the harmonious and poetic ways in which they always question identity and alterity and the energy that emerges from their intersections. Furthermore, he describes Deguy as a metaphysical poet, who creates poetry as a philosopher and who helps philosophy with his poetical perspective. Another exegetic analysis of Deguy's writing comes from Claude Mouchard, who emphasizes its dualism and the ways in which it resembles life by always oscillating between hope and disappointment, serenity and chaos, contemplation and disorder. Despite disfiguring art, literary life or poetry, Deguy remains lucid about these "minimal and grotesque aspects of literature in society" and he never gives up on collective actions (p. 54). Consequently, Mouchard points out how Deguy's poems should be a model for any new poetical works because they reflect the essential problems and political tensions that the world is facing nowadays: the religious crisis (which affected Deguy too), and the crepuscular aspect of the world, which

cannot get better because it is “the Danaidean and the Sisyphean barrel which is rolling like in a carnival, no blood bath being able to quench its thirst” (p. 55).

If the rhythm of poetry becomes a means of measuring society from within, there is also a mystical dimension attached to it, as Jean-Luc Nancy explains by quoting a couplet from Deguy’s book, *Actes*: “there is no other revelation/ but the flesh turning into verb” (p. 58). There is also a reciprocal influence that these two concepts exert on one another: when the flesh turns into verb, the former receives sense and notion, distinction and clarity, whereas when the verb turns into flesh, it receives a face and a voice, consistency and sonority.

The essay that probably presents the best in-depth analysis of Michel Deguy’s writing style belongs to Ștefan Augustin Doinaș, who characterizes it as a mixed type of discourse which erases the borders between domains such as poetry, philosophy and prose, a cosmogonic discourse that disperses literary genres while presenting an affinity for Heidegger and a resemblance with Mallarmé’s flow of words. In addition, Deguy’s poems seem to have an enigmatic character because of their vibrant rhythm and sharp language, which shatter classical syntax, while also pointing towards Deguy being a tautegorical poet whose signs and significations are solely literal, hiding nothing under their usual meaning. Doinaș underlines the magical force of words and their power to affect inter-human relationships and space as well, but he analyzes these ideas even further in an interview with Deguy, entitled *Poésie et philosophie sont modalités du penser*, where he debates with the French poet whether poetry is a divine gift or a histrionic game, whether words can

be defined or whether they have a will of their own or a soteriological function.

Another interesting section of the volume is the one that deals with the personal life of Michel Deguy, from which some of his friends describe a few instances. All of them emphasize how different Deguy is in person in comparison to what his poems might indicate, and this is clear from what George Banu says: if Deguy – the man is always smiling, loves to travel and to go to the theatre, Deguy – the poet is keen on encapsulating thought rather than emotions in his verses, thus delivering a poetry of daytime and lucidity, of the spirit which is confronted with the labyrinth of the mind. Intimate memories are also shared by Martine Segonds-Bauer and Dumitru Țepeneag, who recall simple but touching moments that they shared with Deguy and that give the readers access to some of the most ordinary aspects of this great man.

However, the volume not only presents various ways of interpreting Deguy’s poetry, but also selects some of his most representative poems (such as *Soir*, *Toute une ville*, *Prose du suaire*, *Géométrie de l’origine* etc.) and allows the readers to experience them directly both in French and in Romanian.

In the end, after an article in which the readers can see Paris through Deguy’s eyes and an essay in which he addresses the issue of translation by describing the way in which it oscillates between damaging the uniqueness of each culture and speeding up the pace of global transactions, the volume concludes with a series of texts written by and in memoriam of Geta Brătescu and Mariana Celac. These two Romanian writers, visual artists and architects contributed enormously to the magazine through their sharp observations of the world and the original

solutions with which they came up in order to embellish the space around them. Their impressive work is commemorated by their colleagues through their appreciative texts.

All things considered, this volume of *Secolul 21* succeeds in presenting a comprehensive yet innovative set of perspectives on Michel Deguy's life and poetry, while also highlighting the works and personalities of two outstanding Romanian artists. Through dialogues, essays, articles and even examples of poems, Deguy appears in front of the readers as both a complex poet and a simple man, who enjoys travelling and who has paid close attention to civic engagement throughout his whole life. Last but not least, the book offers multiple useful insights into the state of poetry in the current globalized and secularized world, a fact that may help readers understand some of the struggles that humanities have to face nowadays and maybe even apply some of the solutions that poetry proposes in their lives as well.

Maria Barbu

Constantin Tonu,
Deșertul în literatură
[*The desert in literature*], Cluj-Napoca,
Limes, 2019



In his debut book, *The Desert in Literature*, Constantin Tonu, a PhD student from the Faculty of Letters in Cluj, systematically analyses representations of the desert, which can be much more than a tenebrous, insipid and vapid space; these characteristics represent those of a simple

tomb. Not only does the author bring major references, both thematic and chronological to the desert; he manages to give us broad notions about a seemingly infinite and monotonous expanse, in which “man becomes a simple element among others, his ambitions as a leader of the trophic chain seeming derisory, and his anthropocentric claims, unfulfilled”. The book can be divided into two separate parts: the first part of the book is predominantly an analysis of desert representations, in a diachronic manner, in European, Western and Mediterranean culture and literature. In the second part, Constantin Tonu focuses particularly on novels of the 20th and 21st centuries, with the preamble to the first part of the book as a short history of the desert image. His thesis is intertwined: the representation of the desert as an ambivalent semantic load, both positive and negative at the same time, and on the other hand it would be the relational intervention of the human being with the desert setting. This shows us that the power and volitional regimes are reversed. As a result, man does not manage to conquer the desert wasteland, but he loses his supremacy in the pursuit of anthropomorphizing the desert space, and the desert abandons the man.

In the first part of the book, entitled “Sketches for the history of an image”, the author performs, in a diachronic manner, an analysis of the “space of radical alterity”, the desert, starting with the *Old and New Testaments*, progressing through the Essenian complex, continuing with the ideals and ascetic practices of desert monasticism and finally reaching, with the emergence of Islam, a medieval imaginary marked by three defining attitudes:

repudiation, demonization and fascination. The two novels that illustrate the Orientalist attitude towards the desert aim, first of all, an eroticized analysis of the desert space – *Salammô* by Gustave Flaubert and then, an inevitable encounter of the Arab barbarian with the European civilized man in a nomadic space between the two worlds – *In the Desert* by Karl May. A significant chapter is dedicated to the process of interior desertification of colonel T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia), and the mythical effervescence around it after the publication of the “monumental” book – *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. This undertakes what Constantin Tonu calls “a pioneering work” of a romanticized and heroized space, but by the means of a scientific approach, thus, launching a new visionary perception in a world led by harsh stereotypes. There follow two diametrically opposed novels through the careful analysis of a tense intersection between the two World Wars, the first one being an existentialist boundary-space – *Tartar Steppe* by Dino Buzzati, and the second being of a “desert construction based on the fervor of enforcement lines, in which people are forced to walk to rise to their own grandeur.” Following is a chronologically articulated analysis during World War II – *Legion of the Damned* by Sven Hasel and *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje. Sven Hasel’s book represents a desert of unrestrained freedom, as well as energetic explosions having the extravagant proximity of death, while Michael Ondaatje presents the desert’s enactment through “an anamnestic effort and auditory fictionalization, on the contrary, based on a non-desert space.” The fascinating thing about Ondaatje’s protagonist, Almásy, is that he goes through

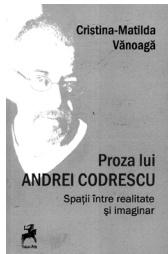
a completely violent desertification process which “gives him the status of the object of fascination for the other characters”. Another vast and extremely important chapter is the one dedicated to the fictional desert universe in the Science-Fiction novel series – *Dune* by Frank Herbert. The author delimits, for those who have not yet read the series, planet Arrakis, “a space of extremes, in which the process of desertification can lead to sudden death and to obtaining higher faculties alike” (in particular, the spice with geriatric effects, the mixture and existence of huge dangerous worms always ready to devour anyone). But the desert becomes decentered and destroyed, in search of another saving germinal space for the fictional civilization. In a post-modernist continuation, Constantin Tonu, an already initiated expert on the desert, takes us this time to a space of urban simulacra – Jean Baudrillard’s *America*, as well as through an antithetical extrapolation of Sahara’s barrens and the Parisian metropolis in – *The Golden Droplet* by Michel Tournier, positively valued in both books. The last chapter concentrates a series of geographical representations of the desert in a succession of novels of post-apocalyptic literature – *Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter Miller Jr., *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* by Philip K. Dick and *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood. Continuing Herbert’s tradition, we find the desolate space decentered where the Western man “experiences an identity desertification, whether this metamorphic process ends with an openness towards divinity, nomadic freedom, or, sometimes, death”, as the young, scrupulous researcher suggests.

What Constantin Tonu manages to create is a complex and competent analysis

of a specific topic, having a clear predilection for philosophy. We can borrow from the young researcher's conclusions the idea that "it is not man that anthropomorphizes desert, but the desert deserts man, makes it alike to himself, borrowing it its 'geography'". In conclusion, he offers us a fruitful reading of a foreign space, of radical alterity, through a close reading of desert literature, a journey that I consider absolutely formidable for those who have and have not necessarily been familiar with the subject.

Elena Chilari

Cristina-Matilda Vănoagă,
Proza lui Andrei Codrescu.
Spații între realitate și
imaginar, București,
Tracus Arte, 2019



Andrei Codrescu's writings have always been the subject of many articles, interviews and books written by the multiple readers and researchers whom he has captivated with his literary works. To these is added the monograph authored by Cristina-Matilda Vănoagă, an assistant professor at Alba Iulia's Faculty of History and Philology, who proposes a ludic and fascinating journey through the multiple real and imaginary spaces with which the writer plays in his novels.

From a structural point of view, the volume is divided into five chapters, each of them targeting one of the five spaces that the author considers to be central in Codrescu's prose: the sacred space, the virtual environment, the photography

workshop, the American space and the library. Cristina Vănoagă follows the various ways in which they are explored by Codrescu's characters, as well as the influence which the above-mentioned *topoi* have had upon the writer. Moreover, another recurrent theme is the novelist's identity. Codrescu always oscillates between his Romanian origins and the country in which he has spent the longest part of his life, America. As a consequence, his writing contains elements belonging to both cultures, but this fact only gives it unique qualities. As a result, the fresh character of his stories, where Romanian aspects blend playfully with sceneries and themes of American inspiration, is extremely attractive to the readers, who enjoy the fact that they are given the possibility to explore two rich but different cultures in a relatively small number of pages.

The unusual element in Andrei Codrescu's prose is, just as Cristina Vănoagă correctly notes, the fact that the majority of the spaces around which the action is built are presented in a reversed key. Representations belonging to the literary canon are broken and everything receives original meanings, which match the contemporary vision of the desacralized world more than the "conceptual metaphors" which are specific to a traditional view of the human life. Therefore, on the one hand, the religious space is no longer restricted to the sole institution of the church: instead, it comprises any place or moment of the day in which man can receive a revelation. On the other hand, America is "the land of all possibilities", an idea which corresponds with the ideal of total freedom for the Europeans oppressed by the communist repression. However, America also proves to

be only an illusion as well, but its realities reach the surface only after the characters spend some time in those spaces which are filled with all the ethnicities and religious confessions of the globe.

In other words, if we were to reduce Andrei Codrescu's writings to a dichotomy, probably the most suitable one would be that of Chaos vs. Eros. Firstly, since everything in his books happens almost simultaneously and without following a pattern that could resemble some kind of logic, it is very easy to perceive the ways in which the postmodern world turns everything upside down. There is always more to something or someone than meets the eye, there is always an unexpected event happening in a place where no one would ever be able to anticipate it, and proofs keep appearing regarding the fact that a traditional way of thinking is no longer valid in a world where everything has a new and maybe completely different meaning than before. Together with the ongoing technologization of today's world, its desacralization also appears, and the author goes as far as to wonder whether "the sacred can still function in a society where it has to limit itself to not bothering the profane". What is more, all of these observations are applicable to how America is perceived too, because out of the multitude of metaphors which have been associated with this space throughout history, Codrescu's characters discover that only a few are actually true, the rest of them being mixed together and transformed into a fusion of concepts which can only contribute (negatively or positively, depending on each individual) to any immigrant's situation who is determined to start a new life there.

Secondly, as far as the Eros is concerned, Cristina Vănoagă focuses on

the essential role that the body has in Codrescu's characters' knowledge about themselves and in their relation to the spiritual sphere. As "the escape from the quotidian through art was often doubled by an escape from time and space through a sexual experience", Codrescu raises Eros to a position where it appears in strong connection with miracles and also as a source of religious revelation, and thus it is important to acknowledge its value and to break away from the dogma that always viewed it as a taboo. While also presenting Mircea Eliade's theories about how suffering can be overcome through Eros, by using sacred techniques, and about how orgasm is an atemporal state, just like life, death and miracles, Cristina Vănoagă underlines the permanent occurrence of Eros in the everyday life of Codrescu's literary characters and thus proves the fact that his fictional world, which is of course inspired from the real postmodern one, is built upon various instances of Chaos and Eros.

With a complex bibliography and a fluid writing style, Cristina Vănoagă's research offers, besides an exegetical approach towards the prose of a famous writer, a pleasurable reading experience. Codrescu's literary work is itself extremely savoury, so its analysis can only bring forth its carnivalesque character and underline the pleasures and the challenges that it addresses to the reader, even though the research does that from a critical point of view. Furthermore, what is also worthy of admiration is the fact that the critic succeeds in bringing together nearly all the eccentric characters and symbolic spaces that dominate Codrescu's prose: from America's "beat" spirit of the '60s to the senseless

or purposeless life of the postmodern man, from Codrescu's birthplace, Sibiu, to the bars of New Orleans or from the spicy autobiography of an old Casanova to the chaos of the "witchy world of beasts".

Readers are invited to wander between the real and the imaginary and to offer their own response to Andrei Codrescu's works.

Maria Barbu