

Book Reviews

Ștefan Bolea, *Internal Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Literature: Reading the Jungian Shadow*, Lexington, 2020



Ștefan Bolea's *Internal Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Literature* proposes a rereading of a series of fundamental novels and novellas that traces a thick line between romanticism and post-romanticism and the Jungian concept of the *shadow*. The fundamental idea that guides the author's undertaking of the subject is that 19th-century literature represents an anticipation of certain analytical psychology concepts theorised between 1920 and 1930. Furthermore, another aspect that shapes the book is the belief that the present moment is unarguably the result of a process of questioning the concept of identity and self that was initiated two centuries ago. As the author himself puts it: "the 19th century is our collective shadow, and we will either integrate it or permanently experience it [...] as a 'continuous end'" (2).

One of the fundamental points of interest in the research is the complex intertwining of ideas and fields that construct the concepts and the imagery regarding internal conflict and, evidently, the "shadowy" character trope. As already mentioned, two areas that collide in this theoretical scheme are analytical psychology and romanticism and post-romanticism: there is a reciprocal exchange of ideas between the two, as the first identifies validating patterns in the other, while 19th-century literature, in

Bolea's perspective, attains multiple valuable new facets in its interpretation due to this close relationship with psychology. The author proposes a visual spin to the idea, comparing the intersection of the two disciplines to "springs from the same stream" and recognizing both as outcomes of the "attack" on subjectivity that began in the 19th century. In addition, analytical psychology is also regarded in close connection with psychoanalysis, pursuing the same view on the relations between fields.

The volume contains extensive explanations on the phases and features of the shadow, from its literary mode of use to its psychological understanding and its philosophical nuances, making it clear once again that these disciplines fuse together in order to form the unitary yet many-sided concept of the shadow. The introduction offers a simplified overview of this idea by illustrating the contrasts between the three general uses of the notion: analytical psychology describes the shadow as "an archetype and the personification of the evil" as well as "the inferior personality", literary practice institutes, in Bolea's opinion, "the double and the demonic" as "two versions of the shadow", and philosophy "mak[es] us aware of the danger of dissociation and the destruction of the unitary, self-centered identity" through "themes of alienation and estrangement" (3-4).

The first two chapters provide general considerations and categories that stand as fundamentals for the following literary inquiries. "The Shadow in Analytical Psychology" delineates several Jung-based concepts that trace the main theoretical vocabulary of Bolea's research. Thus, the chapter contains three subsections that thoroughly explain *the ego-self axis*, *the*

persona and *the shadow*. Moving to the literary realm, the second chapter focuses on articulating the notions of the *double* and the *demonic* as the author identifies them at the intersection of literature and a synthesis of psychology and philosophy. Associated with the *Doppelgänger*, the concept of the *double* institutes itself as a literary trope suggesting dissociation with the self and a tension between the *I* and *non-I*. The text reflects on the connection between the double and psychosis, as well as on the loss of a unified identity as a “vision of the inferno without the possibility of paradise” (31). The *demonic* embodies the second “subtheme” of the shadow and it defines the vicious, violent or monstrous non-ego or, as the author writes, “the patters of the ‘enemy’ in the constitution of the personality”. In addition, this subsection establishes the main considerations on the demonic double in the literary works to be analysed, briefly mentioning the general interpretation offered for each one and concluding with a contrasting description of the *daimonic* and its relationship with the demonic.

The next seven chapters represent the main body of the book, as they encompass the theoretical frame in an intricate rereading of the following 19th century texts: *The Devil’s Elixirs* (E.T.A. Hoffmann), *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley), “William Wilson” (E.A. Poe), *The Double* (F.M. Dostoyevsky), *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (R.L. Stevenson), “The Horla” (Guy de Maupassant), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oscar Wilde). From paranoia to hate, from what Bolea calls the *supershad-ow* to the dichotomic relation between the destruction of identity or the *persona* and the constitution of the double, from

anxiety to hedonism, *Internal Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Literature* offers an extensive commentary on the many literary facets of the shadow, following their morphing process from the beginning of the century towards the very end of it. Thus, the book offers not only a theoretic system of ideas and inferences between concepts and intellectual traditions, but also many meticulous practical examples of the new understandings this frame can offer and of how 19th century literature can benefit from a 20th century-based psycho-philosophic view.

Furthermore, the last chapter is dedicated to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and to Jung’s Zurich seminar on Nietzsche’s work. This part of the volume explores the “shadowy” characters that appear in the text, under the subtitle “Zarathustra’s Shadows”: the jester, the dwarf, the ape, the soothsayer, the last pope and the ugliest man are described as such archetypes, while connections and tensions between Nietzsche’s philosophy and Schopenhauer’s, as well as with Christianity, are explained through the concept of the shadow.

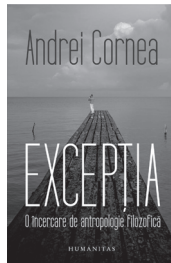
The book also includes six appendices meant to further clarify the ideas and to offer even more topics of discussion. These additional texts consist of a general portrayal of Nietzschean philosophy as an “Avant-garde of the Avant-garde”, a chronology of cultural and political events of the 19th century, a table of compared explanations from Jung and his commentators on the individuation from the *persona* to the self and a similar one on the phases of the shadow, a brief description of the evolution of the *archetype* as a concept and, lastly, a few ideas about the possibility of identifying the shadow in music (Beethoven,

Chopin and Schumann are the composers Bolea is interested in for this appendix).

To conclude, *Internal Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Literature* institutes a complex theoretical method of rereading romantic and post-romantic texts through a critical lens focused on the Jungian shadow. Ștefan Bolea's endeavour, apart from offering a perspective that combines literature, philosophy and psychology from the 19th and 20th centuries, highlights the undeniable idea that the present is a result of ideological, aesthetic, and philosophical permutations of the Romantic era, thus trying to show the continuous relevance of the Jungian shadow.

Cassandra Corbu

Andrei Cornea, *Excepția sau o încercare de antropologie filozofică*, Humanitas, București, 2021



When it comes to freedom, one of the most controversial topics of all times, the main tendency is to think about what compromises our freedom. Another tendency in the process of contemplating the human condition and understanding human liberty, be that conscious or unconscious, is to engage the concept of morality. The large spectrum of keywords, ideas and theories discussed by Andrei Cornea in his study, *The Exception. An Attempt at Philosophical Anthropology* is exposing this approach, and furthermore, by the retrospective radiography on previous societies mentalities he is offering a concrete image

on how liberty and, by default, morality was, is and should be understood.

Affects as shame or fear are consolidating what Gilles Deleuze was referring to be the human capacity to affect and to be affected. Cornea is making a clear distinction regarding two hypostases of shame: individual shame and a generic shame experienced by an individual subject symbolically and morally included in a social group. Both conditions imply the existence of a norm as a standard of judgement. The individual or the minority of a community not reaching this ideal is deviating from the normal state of affairs, from what Cornea explains to be the *fairness-rule*. And, since the individual or the specific part of the community becomes the *exception* from the rule, acknowledging their singularity within a majority becomes the main source of shame. The reverse scheme happens when it comes to the *rectitude-rule*. Not accomplishing the universal desideratum implied by the rectitude-rule is actually the normal state of affairs while the singularity of the exception becomes the ideal, the exception.

However, understanding the following distinction is mandatory. While fairness-rule implies a normal state of affairs and the human being *must* act accordingly, the rectitude-rule implies an ideal state of affairs the individual *may try* to comply with. Besides risking a distortion of message, shifting these approaches could prove to be hazardous. History is giving us a clear example: the Inquisition's attempt to transform the universal desideratum (rectitude-rule) into an imperative quest. Religious justification given for torturing and burning those considered to be heretics at the stake in order to save their soul is thus symptomatic.

The discussion on Inquisition crimes foreshadows what Cornea explains to be the human classic violent reaction to the new. People react violent when they are reminded that they are an exception. Humanity is thus defined by two opposite tendencies: the conservative and the groundbreaking one. The old is dull while the new is terrifying. Thus, it is entirely possible that when someone recommends me some odd ingredients for the recipe I got bored of, I impulsively reject their suggestion. The same will happen when the nowadays homophobic religiosity is asked to stop demonizing homosexuality.

Since I mentioned homophobia, the following question is significant: is the human subject assuming his freedom while they are committing evil or is the act of the crime a specific part of the causal chain? Human liberty is fragile, and the political evil the humanity faced at least in the previous century (the Nazi camps, Stalinist murders, the Cambodian genocide, colonialism outside the European space, etc.) is tragically proving this premise. Scientific determinism ranks such atrocities as key parts of an infinite causal chain of irrevocable events. In other words, injustices are unavoidable and explainable. As in the case of human evil nature, the monsters of humankind could be understood in sociological and medical/psychological terms, this way humankind being deprived of their main responsibilities: morality and justice.

Further, ignorance is the evil and science is the welfare as servitude is the evil and freedom is the welfare. Having the freedom to choose the real knowledge might be the supreme freedom. But what happens when a superstitious society rejects objective truth thinking they will

attain an absolute freedom? While attaining freedom *from* science one does not attain freedom at its fullest. Instead, deprived of knowledge by their own will, the human subject become easily manipulated, easy to be deceived and highly vulnerable while facing the reality. A vivid example is the tragedy humanity is confronting nowadays, a pandemic restraining our liberties once taken for granted and deplored today. Rejecting science only worsens this global tragedy.

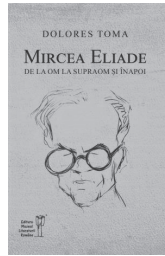
During humanity's continuously quest for the Garden of Eden, it became clear that freedom is a fundamental need. In Cornea's terms, freedom was, is, and probably will be rare in relation to the servitude and the oppressor. However, this aspect is making freedom valuable. Political evil the human being had lived in (slavery, racism, institutionalized social hierarchy, totalitarianism) and the sacrifices needed in order to refute political evil have proved it. Thus, the various historical and scientific sources mentioned in *The Exception* converge on a fundamental conclusion of the present study: when it comes with a price, the human subject is willing to relinquish their freedom. Induced alternate realities and, since, according to Cornea, nowadays we are "passive slaves of technologies", the new virtual reality through which the individual is escaping the actual reality, are the materializations of this fact.

However, applying Cornea's concepts, acknowledging the status of majority exception is a fundamental stage in overcoming this status. Or, in terms of the new affect theories, we need a supreme liberty, or, as Elizabeth Grosz has stated, the *freedom to*, an inherent form of freedom which shall reside in the freedom of action and in its

consequences. In essence, “I rebel – therefore we exist” (reminds Cornea by quoting Albert Camus) seems the key to success to this end.

Adnana Hales

Dolores Toma, *Mircea Eliade de la om la supraom și înapoi*, Ed. Muzeul literaturii române, București, 2020



L'ouvrage de Dolores Toma, étude herméneutique conçue de manière rigoureuse, se penche sur l'homme et l'écrivain Mircea Eliade. Les rôles culturels joués par Eliade – chercheur, homme de culture, historien des religions – alternent dans cet ouvrage qui se propose de restituer par le biais de références biographiques le point de convergence de la pensée et l'imaginaire littéraire éliadesque. En effet, Dolores Toma reconstitue le portrait du surhomme : elle prend en considération la contribution scientifique d'Eliade et les conséquences de ses réflexions sur l'histoire des mentalités.

L'auteure part des témoignages, des portraits, des anecdotes pour façonner la dépersonnalisation de l'homme naturel et la création de « l'homme *calice, solaire et osmotique avec les forces qui se trouvent au-dessus de lui* » (page 38). L'enjeu de l'ouvrage est de montrer que dans les œuvres d'Eliade il est question de la constitution de l'homme. C'est pourquoi il est important qu'il puisse manipuler le sacré, en tant que constructeur de sa propre représentation d'un monde ontiquement supérieur à

une existence aléatoire. Cette envie perpétuelle de devenir un autre, en éliminant le composant humain, est présentée comme une dépersonnalisation dans le but de dépasser le mondain et d'accéder à une initiation au-delà de l'ordinaire. Autrement dit, le fondement de la pensée d'Eliade réside dans l'acte de renoncer à lui-même pour s'approprier une nouvelle substance. Souvent, il imprime à ses personnages ce parcours inhérent de l'initiation par la mort symbolique. En outre, subir la souffrance, la mutilation, des obstacles constitue une victoire de l'homme transsubstantié. Dolores Toma évoque le tiraillement des personnages d'Eliade situés entre l'affirmation de soi-même et le désir de la transcendance.

La démarche analytique de l'auteure, juxtaposée sur une lentille holistique du sujet, souligne le composant surnaturel dans les écrits d'Eliade comme réalité présente dans l'ordinaire dans la mesure où l'homme participe au décryptage de la sacralité. Dans le champ des oscillations entre sacré et profane, les mondes imaginés regorgent de la tension entre l'humain et le surhumain ; c'est précisément ce rapport qui donne naissance au surnaturel. Pour « *l'homme égal avec les dieux* », sa capacité de se positionner simultanément en temps et hors du temps est définitoire. Faire des sorties de la durée profane devient l'équivalent de la transcendance au-delà de la condition périssable de la chair, de ce « *Temps qui court vers la mort* » (page 22). Le Credo de l'écrivain, renforcé par l'investigation de l'auteure illustre l'idée selon laquelle, tout comme ses personnages, l'homme est exposé à une transfiguration du réel. Le sentiment de l'ascension prend la forme du travail de Sisyphe. Ainsi, les expériences du matériel sont-elles vécues

avec une conscience de dépassement du contingent. Une fois la rupture de niveau atteinte, on assiste à une réalité qui précède l'humain.

Le pouvoir de déification correspond à « *la transfiguration de soi-même produite par soi-même* » (page 30). Dans les chapitres consacrés à l'analyse de l'œuvre d'Eliade, on observe que le surhomme est un état, une conviction, un positionnement dans le monde de l'individu qui s'abandonne pour créer en esprit. Les romans d'Eliade, aussi bien que ses nouvelles, émanent une soif ontique de transgression du réel, aspect évoqué par l'auteure lorsqu'elle examine la perturbation du rythme cosmique. Les bouleversements, la tentation, la chute inscrivent les personnages dans un enchaînement continu perte-redécouverte. D'ailleurs, le rythme cosmique est influencé par l'évolution sinusoidale de la crise de l'esprit. Dans *Le Serpent*, *Maitreyi* ou *Le roman de l'adolescent myope*, les hauts et les bas marquent un accouchement du surnaturel. Les chutes visent une suppression pour accomplir ensuite une fécondation cyclique.

En conclusion, Dolores Toma construit un palimpseste littéraire autant que idéologique imprégné des notes diaris-tiques. Elle invite les lecteurs dans l'univers d'Eliade afin qu'ils y découvrent « *les escaliers de la tombe vers le ciel* ». (page 48)

Elisabeth Baciu

Laura T. Ilea (coord.),
Inflexiuni. Dialoguri, Cluj-
Napoca, Editura Școala
Ardeleană, 2022



Inflexions. Dialogues (Inflexiuni. Dialoguri) is a book featuring a series of recorded cultural events hosted by Laura T. Ilea in her attempt to prove that interdisciplinary can be fruitful and that our atomized world might want to have a conversation from beyond the bricks that we call “home”. This collection of conversations is outstanding and provoking as the reader can witness the processes of thinking in their own spontaneity and inter-personality. All the distinguished guests offer their insights about issues concerning our contemporary society from the margins of disciplinary knowledge, broadening discursive limits and negotiating a conscious analysis of our social world spanning from arts to science, the individual dimension to communities, corporeality to digitized self-expressions, spectral consciousness to the viral form of thinking, stand-up comedy to philosophic hacking, multiverse to archetype, etc.

What is worth mentioning is that all of these discussions around ranging topics have in common a spatial point called Ceramic Cafe, a creative hub at the heart of Cluj-Napoca. This space that shelters arts as the background for social encounters somehow reminds us of Modernist artists' café from the 20th century, which fueled aesthetic attitudes fused with social and political concerns. Thus, the fostering climate of these debates was anything but academic as a setting, inviting people to step

outside their professional roles (as far as that is even possible) and engage with discourses that could not only draw a picture of the world but also reach a larger audience. The thirst for dialogue and reflection was obvious not only from the interesting interventions that followed the talks, but also from the point of view of the speakers themselves caught up in their own sub-fields of study, drawing on yet another level of alienation caused by the global pandemic. The series of discussions started in April 2019 and ended a year later, having navigated times of pressure, anxiety and widespread concern. The initiator and host of these talks, Laura T. Ilea, managed to create her way through all of these contrasting domains, bringing together, as direct partners of dialogue, people with intersecting backgrounds or researchers who shared nothing but the name of their objects of study. What is even more admirable is the individual initiative behind these meetings that triggered such an intensive need of finding common ground whilst remaining on distinct positions and bringing into question concepts that underlie a certain worldview.

The first debate took place between Ruxandra Cesereanu and Aurel Codoban, reflecting on the meaning of love and the *quest* of the self in our digital and fictional worlds, the distinction between symbol and technology, alternative patriotism and hope for a meaningful future from inside dystopian conditions etc. The second dialogue, between Eric Bordeleau and Horea Poenar, scrutinized the ways in which the new digital means of connecting people are constructing the self and the common in a world of intermingled desires, mechanisms of control and revolutionary open

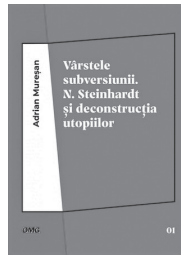
ends. The following set of speakers, that Laura T. Ilea set at a table with, are Augustin Cupșa and Adrian Florin Pop, a writer and a visual artist, who both shared their experience of living in a world divided between a center and its peripheries, trying to sort out the role of the artist in relation to marginalized positions and possibilities of looking at the world. The fourth meeting featured Elena Vlădăreanu and István Téglás and it was dedicated to the politics of the body, from the idea of a *presence-absence* of our mediated corporeality to the naked body and *cathartic* performance as a push towards the edge. The dialogue between Alexander Baumgartner and Zoltan Neda was extremely thought-provoking as it confronted the scientific notions of physical space-time and the need to understand time as a complex construction based on expectation, which divides beings between experience and what lies beyond experience. The sixth meeting offered the stage to Cristian Presură and Corin Braga and was no less speculative as it drew on physics and fiction writing to discuss distinct universes and parallel realities from the perspective of knowledge's relationship to limits and imagination. The last recorded discussion, between Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu și Doru Pop, brought a sharp analysis of social phenomena based on the ways in which we distribute and construct seriousness and detachment inside a political world that is full of paradoxes.

We might say that only time will unravel the testimonial nature of these dialogues as some of the speakers actually addressed the unprecedented global-scale context they were currently living in. Precious insights about many other contemporary relevant issues or untimely topics

are gathered under the umbrella of one single book that functions as an invitation to go deeper into the interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary search for meaning.

Călina Părău

Adrian Mureșan,
Vârstele subversiunii.
Nicolae Steinhardt și
deconstrucția utopiilor,
Editura OMG, Alba Iulia,
2020



Nicolae Steinhardt, a Romanian symbol for cultural survival under the repression of the communist regime, has enjoyed a rich reader response limited during the communism and flourishing after the revolution. If in 2009, when George Ardelleanu published his monography *N. Steinhardt și paradoxurile libertății* (Humanitas, București), Constantin Noica was much more popular than Nicolae Steinhardt, in 2020 at the release of this second great monography, after high efforts in publishing Steinhardt's work, he gained by far more popularity than the interwar philosopher. Generally, highly appraised as a survivor of the political prison and as an intellectual model, Nicolae Steinhardt is perceived from a different perspective by Adrian Mureșan, that of the literary critic that used criticism and essay as a form, not only as a survival technique, but also as a subversive weapon against the ideology of the regime or in Steinhardt's better words: "On the one hand, the experience and reality can underlain words, on the other hand, words have the demonic power to distort reality."

By the same token, in his monographic study based on his doctoral thesis, Adrian Mureșan brought forward the uninterrupted tendency of the intellectual Steinhardt to deconstruct utopias in a word fight by stealing their authority aura and revealing the truth in the cracks, of the marginal, of the abuse in totalization and equalization of every cultural and biographical spectre. Even though, his statute as a literary critic was a subject of dispute, Adrian Mureșan succeeds in defining the steinhardtian subversive aesthetics, suggesting a full literary acknowledgement and the enlargement of the critical canon with a new chapter. Actually, the fight for survival in a repressive world is intertwined with a strong opposition against any form of repressive, inflexible, authoritarian and absolute thinking. The aesthetic utopia seemed to be found in excesses of biographical criticism, in the claims to universality by the "quantitative" history, in the whole character decomposition of the New French Novel, in every exclusivism of positivist origin, structuralist, etc. In other words, freedom of thought must be defended both as a way of life, and as a cultural, theoretical endeavour against any form of totalization and absolutization. Significantly, Steinhardt example stands out as an incentive to fighting against ideologies before we have to fight against other freedom constraints and repressions.

Henceforth, his writings abound in dialogic networks with the majority of his lifetime cultural personalities and European authors: from Roland Barthes, Albert Camus, Gadamer, Simone Weil to Freud, plus the generations in Romanian culture. As best suppressed writers did, Steinhardt also used the regime techniques to treat the relevant forbidden themes. Under these circumstances,

he developed a brave way of inserting subversive fragments in literary reviews, essays and preaches, or to discuss forbidden writers in texts “dedicated” to accepted or ignored writers. According to Mureșan, Steinhardt manages “to transform the political courage in a true literary theme”. Must be remembered, that a great contribution of this book consists in the much broader dialogue that Adrian Mureșan propose between Nicolae Steinhardt and theoreticians like Linda Hutcheon, Marshal MacLuhan, Theodore Adorno, Karl Popper, Mihail Bahtin, Antogne Compagnon, Giorgio Agamben and not only, finding relevant similarities and differences.

Altogether, this book addresses to Steinhardt’s scholars, dissident literature scholars and, more or less, to the public willing to gain a perspective upon Steinhardt - the literary critique and esthetician of the subversive.

Georgiana Bodeanu

Mircea Muthu, *Estetica sau Melcul și Cochilia*, Școala Ardeleană & Scriptor Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2021



Recently published by Școala Ardeleană Press, in collaboration with Scriptor Publishing House, Mircea Muthu’s volume *Estetica sau Melcul și Cochilia* [Aesthetics or The Snail and The Shell] represents a study of meta-aesthetics focused on meditations that symptomatically focus on our contemporary cultural framework.

The volume is structured in three sections, as follows: I. *Antecedente românești*, II. *Între mediere și sinteză*, III. *Melcul și cochilia*. The first and last section each contain a subchapter: *Retroproiecții* and *Reiterări și Asimptote*.

The first section, *Antecedente românești* [Romanian precedents], represents an overview of aesthetic discourses and of the contributions brought by various personalities in the field on meditations on the aesthetic, such as: Titu Maiorescu, Anghel Demitrescu, Eugeniu Sperantia, Tudor Vișanu, Mircea Florian, Liviu Rusu, Lucian Blaga, Radu Stanca, Benjamin Fundoianu, and Henri Jacquier. The subchapter *Retroproiecții* [Retroprojections] continues the observations on aesthetic discourse, bringing to the fore the aesthetic of Al. Dima, Grigore Smeu and of the Cluj-Napoca School of Aesthetics.

In the second section, *Între mediere și sinteză* [Between mediation and synthesis] the idea which prevails is the necessity to integrate aesthetics in a wider horizon. This attempt has the purpose of reaffirming the general/applicative aesthetics which Mircea Muthu sees as being “the expression of the self-consciousness of spiritual creation as an anthropological fact”. This section reaches issues like: *Mutații generale în actul poetic/aesthetic*. *Determinări canonice spațio-temporale* [General mutations in the poetic/aesthetic act. Canonical spatio-temporal determinations], *Din gramatica creativității*. *Vocalitate - Vorbire - Scriere* [On the grammar of creativity. Vocality - Speaking - Writing], *Aporie și mediere în estetica generală și aplicată* [Aporia and mediation in general and applied aesthetics] and *Industria culturale și estetica* [Cultural industries and aesthetics]. The outcome

of the analyses, as the author states, represents a change of attitude towards a less philosophical aesthetic, one that is “rather integrable in a wider axiological horizon”. The section outlines the pattern of regenerating aesthetics through interdisciplinary analyses and mediation.

The third section, *Melcul și Cochilia* [The Snail and The Shell], illustrates the meta-aesthetic dimension of the study. This section and the related chapters are trying to offer an answer to the contemporary polemics of skeptics which believe that aesthetics is at the foundation of the general crisis of literature. The author brings forth other three causes cited by the skeptics in the problem of the crisis of literature: formalism, which generated an instrumental drift, solipsism, which generated an identity crisis, and nihilism, which generated a contagious drift.

Following the illustration of these causes, Mircea Muthu evokes the ability of the aesthetic discourse to intermediate. For the author, the dialogue line is kept open along the temporal phases due to the capacity of aesthetics to intermediate. Paradoxically, this gives the aesthetic discourse both a constancy and a change.

The constancy-change duality is associated to the symbol of the snail and the shell, through which the author seeks to explain the dimension of regeneration that aesthetics can develop. The author observes a spiral motion in the rebirth of cultural movements that structurally produces “Protean regeneration”.

This rebirth based on the spiral is associated to a heterogeneous dimension which comes from the asymmetrical growth of the shell, as Gilbert Durand also shows in *The Anthropological Structures of*

the Imaginary. This duality existing in the structuring mechanism of the snail finds its correspondent in the capacity of aesthetics to intermediate, through which the line of dialogue is maintained open along the temporal circuits.

The third section's subchapter, *Reiterări și asimptote* [Reiterations and asymptotes], contains interdisciplinary analyses such as: *Trivialul în estetică: Radu Voinescu* [The Vulgar in aesthetics: Radu Voinescu], *O teorie a poeziei moderne* [A theory of modern poetry], *Critica între teoria literaturii și estetică* [Criticism between literary theory and aesthetics], aiming to regenerate aesthetic discourse. Focusing on subjects such as modern poetry and the advertising phenomenon, the author's intentions in this subchapter are to follow the ideas underlined in the second section, about the necessity to integrate aesthetics in a wider horizon. The remarks on modern poetry are centered around theorists like Hugo Friedrich, poets like Alexandru Mușina, and critics like Gheorghe Crăciun, whose works, *Structura liricii moderne* [The Structure of Modern Poetry], *Eseu asupra poeziei moderne* [Essay on Modern Poetry] and *Aisbergul poeziei moderne* [The Iceberg of Modern Poetry] are cited along his incursions.

The final essay, *A rescrie estetica* [To rewrite aesthetics], represents an apology for the rebirth of aesthetics. The idea postulated by the author is that the crisis of art's legitimation gives birth to meditation on it. With a discourse on an interdisciplinary horizon, the author pleads for the regeneration of the discipline which “cannot give up categorical fitting nor philosophical projection”.

Estetica sau Melcul și Cochilia represents a well-nigh exhaustive research on

aesthetic discourse. The theoretical and applicative incursions related to the contemporary framework render the volume a vast and rigorous study of the ability of aesthetics to mediate. Through his powerful analyses, Mircea Muthu anticipates the rebirth of the discipline, which, with its capacity for intermediation, will remain, like the philosophical discourse, “the expression of man’s self-consciousness as a species”.

Cristian Priscorneac

Laura Pavel, *Personaje ale teoriei, ființe ale ficțiunii*, Iași, European Institute, 2021



The essay book *Characters of Theory, Beings of Fiction* was born after long research, and includes essays about criticism and postcriticism, about the literary and artistic phenomenon of being as fiction, as fictional reality, finally, as fictional characters. Through the theories of Bruno Latour, Rita Felski, Giorgio Agamben and other thinkers, the author carries the readers, as Antonio Patraș states on the cover of the volume, *on the less travelled paths of contemporary art and literary history*, thus making the volume easy to read, like a romance and, at the same time, as an impressive work of criticism. The researcher criticizes, through comparisons of the period, the novel and the novelist as a way of bohemian existence and artificial self-construction.

The essays in *Characters of Theory, Beings of Fiction* answer some complementary

hermeneutical questions, the answer itself being made up of demonstrations that can make up other questions, which are, most of the time, rhetorical. These essays complement one another and articulate, in fact, this book-essay structure. In three chapters with multiple subchapters, Laura Pavel discusses various theories of writers, critics, philosophers such as Bruno Latour, Rita Felski, Martha Nussbaum, WJT Mitchell, etc. The three main chapters are start with *Fictional beings*, where the main character is Bruno Latour and his study *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence. An Anthropology of the Moderns*, with its theoretical ideas about the beings of fiction, as he calls them. The second chapter is titled *Interpretive narratives* and here philosophical ideas and theoretical ideas overlap, presenting the reader with the idea of an indelible link between fiction and nonfiction; in this chapter Stanley Fish is a representative figure. The last chapter is entitled *Ekphrastic Interpretations* and encompasses various theories of art, including those of W.J.T. Mitchell, who juggles ekphrastic hope and ekphrastic fear. At the same time, this last chapter includes an argument for the absence of the potential not to (act) which reveals, to an artist, an error of aesthetic taste, a lack of taste. An example that the researcher brings to the aid of this idea is represented by the works of Victor Man, who never explains his works, only exhibits them.

The essay-book is not only a work of literary theory, but also a philosophical work, the author inserting in the volume various quotes from works of well-known philosophers such as Judith Butler, Jacques Derrida, Bruno Latour (around whom the volume revolves). For example, in the first chapter, the author inserts a passage

from Bruno Latour's work that refers to the philosophical part of his work: *To say that fictional beings populate the world means to say that they come to us and impose themselves on us, with the difference that they need, moreover, as Souriau had rightly remarked, our solicitude. We are, for them, the "supporting polygon"* (25).

Laura Pavel is an essayist, literary and theatre critic and professor at the Faculty of Theater and Television, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca. Her favourite fields of research are performing arts theory, aesthetics and cultural analysis. Although she writes and publishes this volume in pandemic conditions, the book is based on numerous essays previously published in various journals from 2016 to the present (*Studia UBB Philologia, Vatra, Dacoromania litteraria, and Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*) or in collective volumes (*Usages de la figure, Régimes de figuration*), appearing here in revised and complete form. Through this synthesis and addition, the researcher constructs her so-called essays in a didactic manner, making them easily assimilable.

Writing about the beings of fiction, the concepts and notions mentioned, argued and criticized in the volume are weighed against the ideas of various critics, anthropologists, essayists and philosophers to elucidate the researcher's queries about the fact/fiction conundrum. The essential elements of Pavel's study (being, fiction, ekphrastic interpretation, hermeneutic narrative, contemporary art, literary history, aesthetics, ethics, etc.) make the critical volume an important text of contemporary scholarship.

Laura Pavel states about fictional characters that they can be known more

deeply than the beings around us, due to their own present consciousness, noting their own character as fictional beings / creations. The researcher also declares the self as a transformable, fluid entity, a regenerating and self-regenerating paper being. The author concludes her work with an Abstract that sums up the purpose of her work, launching several questions about the use of infra-criticism as a way of interpreting conceptual notions (ekphrastic, discourse, aesthetics, etc.) to the detriment of metacriticism as a mode of interpretation.

Rahela Rusanu

Vasile Popovici, *Punctul sensibil – de la Mihai Eminescu la Mircea Cărtărescu*, Chişinău, Editura Cartier, 2021



What Vasile Popovici, professor of French literature at West University of Timişoara, presents in his last book, *Punctul sensibil – de la Mihai Eminescu la Mircea Cărtărescu* (*The sensible point – from Mihai Eminescu to Mircea Cărtărescu*), is a set of essays meant not to offer a scholastic visualisation over a brief history of the Romanian literary world, but to create a subjective excursus meant to penetrate the basic foundations of classical analysis in some of the Romanian authors, critics, cultural personalities, using close reading techniques in order to highlight important topics or motives which are briefly discussed in the general critics that formed the Romanian literary space.

On this note, the author opens the collection of essays with a chapter meant to explain what should be understood by the term of “sensible point”. Beyond the academic work which offers a system of theory and a general canon, the literary critic finds in authors – even if they are liked or not – a point of crossroads, where can be found the same intimate place, a common emotion that lies on both sides, linking the critic with the piece of work analysed. As it can be seen, the sensible point becomes the place in which the writer meets the critic. The author mentions that even though criticism is meant to be rational and objective, the best piece of work comes when it is led by a dimension of empathy, in a space of intimacy.

The book is composed of twenty chapters which explore different aspects regarding literary personalities. There are three different approaches that the author uses in his essays in order to create a more complex perspective over the literary dimension seen through the sensible point, as he defines it. The chapters dedicated to the critics such as Titu Maiorescu, Lucian Raicu, Nicolae Manolescu or Mircea Mi-hăieş create an intriguing view over the evolution of literary criticism and the way it survived in different times of crisis – cultural, artistic or political –, while the chapters dedicated to writers are meant to offer an example of close reading which expose new approaches or substantiates images and authentic topics of literary works. In this category we include the essays on Mihai Eminescu, Mateiu Caragiale, Marin Preda, Eginald Schlattner, Daniel Vighi or Mircea Cărtărescu. Finally, the third category is represented by a more subjective, intimate application over the cultural importance represented through

personalities such as Monica Lovinescu, Mihail Sebastian, Sonia Larian, Marian Papahagi. We will take a closer look at some of these essays in order to understand the new point of view which the author proposes, noticing the sensible point which characterizes these chapters.

In the first analysis, dedicated to Titu Maiorescu, founder of the cultural group “Junimea”, the sensible point raises from the influence that the 19th century critic had on the young generation of writers who came to be the classics of the Romanian literature – Mihai Eminescu, Ion Creangă, Ioan Slavici, I. L. Caragiale – all of them being only teenagers at the time Maiorescu developed his critic methodological criteria over the philological dimension, considering only three names from the eldest generation of writers that marked the middle nineteenth century: Dimitrie Bolintineanu, Vasile Alecsandri, Gr. Alexandrescu. The author portrays the image of the “new direction” through Maiorescu, pointing out the importance of a thorough literary structure in a history where authentic landmarks were missing, emphasizing that criticism had come before the literary works of the first mentioned above could be read by the public.

Throughout the book, Vasile Popovici explores the contribution of the Romanian critics in the 20th century, marking the relevance they had. As they are presented, Lucian Raicu becomes one of the most important hermeneutics, having the determination to enter in the universal literary dimension, creating a new language of criticism which has at its foundation the traditional laws of ethics and morals. On the other hand, the author dedicates a chapter to Nicolae Manolescu, describing

him as the critic that succeeded to keep a normal line, not influenced – as much as it was allowed to be – by the communist ideology that corrupted Romania in the second half of the 20th century. In an ideologized system, Manolescu became for the writers “the source of the enthusiasm of valid writing”. Naming him a “director of consciousness”, Vasile Popovici turns to the present and future wondering who can take such a place nowadays.

Moreover, the sensible point comes for the author in different literary motives or characteristics that mark a writers style, creating an approaching point between the critic and the writer. Marin Preda is analysed with a fascinating style in relation to Milan Kundera. Through what is called by the author “interpenetration of the conscience in dialogue”, two discussions from *Moromeții* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* are compared in order to highlight three metaphysical hypostasis which mark the consciousness of the dialogue in one person. The comparison of Ilie Moromete and Isosică with Tómas and S. proves the multiplication of the consciousness and the way an individual receives the other through multiple layers of interpretation.

Mihai Eminescu’s poetry is seen, in an exercise of close reading, under the image of the mirror. One of the main examples of stylization changes which came as a result of years of poetic practice can be seen in Lidia. The impossible idyll between the girl and the fisherman is seen through the mirroring power of the sea; the mirror does not show yourself, but the Other. Even more, in the author’s hermeneutic analysis, the mirror becomes rather a portal linking different worlds, creating a threshold between parallels images.

To conclude with, Vasile Popovici re-writes some of the typical critical vectors, portraying through the form of essays new views. Even more, with a personal aesthetic touch, he presents his own literature, with its high and low points, always taking into consideration the authors and what they represented not only for the academic world, but for he himself as well.

Horațiu Tohătan

Iulia Tegge, *Mirajul reflectării. Spre o istorie a metaficțiunii în romanul românesc*, OMG Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2021



This review follows Iulia Tegge’s attempt to situate the concept of metafiction in the Romanian literary context, more precisely, in the Romanian novel, starting from its timid beginnings and reaching the experimentalism of avant-garde writers. The volume *Mirage of Reflection. Towards a History of Metafiction in the Romanian novel* proves not only the author’s scientific maturity but also the curiosity and passion which led her to follow a subject minimally explored (in a systematic manner) in Romanian literary criticism.

The quality of Tegge’s study is largely due to the author’s vast experience in the academic field and literary space. She is a critic, literary historian, and professor of Romanian, and she holds a PhD in Philology from Babeș-Bolyai University. She has numerous scientific articles published in specialized magazines: *Caietele Echinox*,

Vatra, Steaua, Tabor, Transilvania, Tribuna, etc. and more recently in the collective volumes: *Studies in Recent Literature, vol. II, Contributions to the History of Socialist Realism*, published by Limes in 2017, and *Literature, Performance, and Somaesthetics: Studies in Age and Embodiment*, published by Cambridge Scholars, UK, in the same year.

The volume opens with a preface by Ioana Bot summarising the main points of the study, preceded by a short chapter entitled *Argument* and an extensive section entitled *Theoretical Premises*. These parts introduce the reader to key concepts associated with metafiction while offering details about the books to be examined in the following chapters, explaining the choice of certain bibliographical sources (e.g., Linda Hutcheon's *The Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*) and providing a well-documented history of the early metafiction practices. A significant fact we need take into consideration is that metafiction is more than a modern experiment designed to address the crisis of the nove. Although we associate metafiction in particular with postmodernism, the researcher shows that this process did not emerge without a warning sign in order to revalorize the species of the novel, but is actually the result of older processes that had 'escaped' literary conventions.

Thus, after being introduced to those 'ancestors of metafiction' such as the *Canterbury Tales*, *Jacques the Fatalist and his Master*, or even Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and the *Bible*, etc., various perspectives of literary critics such as Raymond Federman, William H. Gass, Robert Alter, Patricia Waugh, etc. are explored. This leads to the problematization of various

terms associated with metafiction, such as self-reflexivity, *surfiction*, *critifiction* or even Robert Scholes's theory of the four dimensions of fiction. In addition to these interesting viewpoints that demonstrate the complexity of the chosen subject, we retain as a definition of metafiction or *meta-art* the following structure, "any art form that turns its attention to itself" as the most suggestive as it can perfectly encompass although in a simplistic way, the concept of a metafictional piece of literature.

Other ideas worth noting would be that metafiction was considered by many theorists to be a form of experimentalism, a way of testing the fragile boundaries between reality and fiction. What the researcher deals with in the following chapters of the study is, if we may call it, the "writer-character" considering it the starting point of metafiction. Through the "writer" as a character, the author "mirrors" himself in his text. The texts that Iulia Tegge analyses from this perspective are *Manoil* by D. Bolintineanu and *A Romanian Bohemian* by Pantazi Ghica. She then further discusses novels from the "flowering" period in Romanian literature more precisely, the interwar period. In the case of the two novels mentioned above, as an early "form" of metafiction we understand the use of the writer-character as the author's way of conveying his artistic beliefs, principles of life, theoretical ideas, etc.

We find the same form of "mirroring" in the interwar novels, except that in the latter the *meta* character is doubled by the need for authenticity and subjectivity. In the case of Anton Holban's novels *A Death that Proves Nothing*, *Ioana* and *Dania's Games*, the writer-character can be interpreted as the *alter ego* of the author.

A final example that fully deserves the reader's attention in this chapter devoted to interwar novels is the example of the "randomly assigned writers" as the researcher calls them. In *The Bed of Procrustes* by Camil Petrescu, the author's artistic creed is apparent in the characters who become "writers" by chance or are persuaded to by someone else (the narrator in particular). As the researcher observes, Camil Petrescu expresses his disdain for *calophilic*, highly polished writing through his narrator. A clear example of this fact can be noticed the time when Mrs. T. expresses her concern about her inability to write in a "beautiful" way. The narrator's reaction to this illustrates Camil Petrescu's need for an authentic, anti-*calophilic* type of writing.

These are just a few examples of Iulia Tegge's detailed research, in which she also explores other perspectives in Mircea

Eliade's novels (*Diary of a Short-Sighted Adolescent*, *The Construction Site*, *Marriage in Heaven*) and in H. Bonciu's avant-garde novels (*Baggage... The Strange Double Existence of a Man on Four Legs*, and *The Pension of Mrs Pipersberg*). What is most interesting to watch in the last-mentioned chapter is the way the grotesque blends with the female traits of the characters.

Iulia Tegge ingeniously presents and argues each bibliographical choice made, each novel chosen and each source cited. Furthermore, she succeeds in distancing herself from the ideas of other critics or theorists, thus accurately offering her personal vision. The result is a complex study on the Romanian metafictional novel which deserves to be read, re-read, and analysed.

Rebeca Maria Oanță