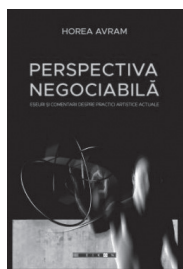


Book Reviews

Horea Avram,
Perspectiva negociabilă.
Eseuri și comentarii
despre practici artistice
actuale, București
Editura Eikon, 2021



In his latest work, Horea Avram offers a compelling, enthralling, and thought-provoking commentary regarding contemporary artistic practices through the lens of *Perspectiva negociabilă. Eseuri și comentarii despre practici artistice actuale*. by employing a meticulous theoretical and conceptual framework, as well as a wide, diverse range of literary sources. Varying from photography, sculptures, and installations to videography, digital animations, participative arts and performances, the subjects considered in this book have fuelled one of the most intricate and provocative debates concerning the digitization of the artistic domains. In this respect, the author seeks to accentuate the puzzling, ambiguous, and complex connection between art and present-day times, a relation he describes as being rightfully negotiable.

Having a notably arbitrary structure, the book comprises a foreword part through which the author justifies his literary and creative approach, as well as three other sections consisting of compelling commentaries in relation to Romania's artistic scene over the past few decades. The author's main objective is stated clearly from the beginning, namely that of analyzing and underlining both the cultural, political dimension of recent artworks, as well as the innovative, insightful methods used to illustrate the societal changes we are all taking part of.

The first section of the book focuses on topics such as the fine line between art, politics, aesthetics, and poetics in contemporary artistic practices. One of the most engaging and provocative arguments of this section deals with the political discourse implied in many artworks signed either by subREAL collective, or by Dan Perjovschi, two of the most prominent and outstanding names in Romanian artistic scene over the past thirty years. In the case of the subREAL collective, the reader can easily find out that their political dialogue focuses mainly on the stereotypical dimension of the country's history, as well as other emblematic, recognizable clichés that have become a local trademark. The intersection between politics and aesthetics, assumed here as the meeting point of collective and individual experiences, archive, memory, and history, can be instantly traced in many renowned artworks, as *Alimentara* (1991), *Draculalând* (1993–1995), or *Castelul din Carpați* (1994–2010). Opposed, to a certain extent, to this perspective, Dan Perjovschi's works are notably ephemeral, temporary, and thus imply a political, institutional dimension aimed at highlighting the significant risk of “museification” of artworks that Walter Benjamin notoriously warned us about. The author also points out that Perjovschi's politically engaged work facilitates the transition from site-specificity to social-specificity, understood here as the condition of non-ideological discourse that centres around the possibility to generate a social dialogue.

In the following section, the author outlines the rich, multidisciplinary tradition of the Venice Biennale, as well as some of the major Romanian exhibitions that have been featured there. This part also

implies a more subjective, personal tone, as the author himself was one of the curators for Romania in 1999, a year he describes as being the turning-point for later development of the country's displays. Prior to this moment, more exactly between 1960 and 1990, Romania failed to captivate the audience's interest and curiosity, due to the inclination towards conventional, traditional art forms that have had a limited influence on the international scene. Overcoming the burdensome transition to democracy, Avram mentions that the legacy of the 1999 Venice Biennale mirrors the conceptual, artistic, and bureaucratic openness and acceptance innate to present-day artistic practices. Two examples that accurately illustrate this paradigm shift are the project *Report*, curated by Judit Angel and Aurora Dediu, and *Alberti's Open Window/ Windows 98-Open*, curated by Horea Avram. The same tendency towards virtuality, visuality, and digital animations can be traced in 2019 Venice Biennale, where the author witnesses the abundance of installations in works signed by Hito Steyerl, Ryoji Ikeda, or Arthur Jafa.

The last part of the book tackles topics such as NFT art, the implementation of technologies in theatre and performances, as well as the predilection for a conceptual media discourse aimed at encompassing the virtual experiences of contemporary artistic practices. One of the most riveting arguments of this part deals with the interpretation of NFT art as a way of mirroring the socio-political, economic, and technological dimension of modern days society. Operating with a rich, ample, and varied conceptual framework that traces the extra disciplinary dimension of the main subject, Avram proposes a brief synopsis through

over thirty years of post-soviet, liberal artistic approaches.

Patricia-Ana Pop

Hugo Francisco Bauzá,
Miradas sobre el suicidio,
Ciudad de Buenos
Aires, Fondo de Cultura
Económica, 2018



Why do people resort to suicide? Does the act represent courage or cowardice? How has society looked upon it over time? All these questions and more are posed by Hugo Francisco Bauzá in his book *Miradas sobre el suicidio*.

The volume comprises five extensive chapters, to which the author adds a prologue, a short epilogue, a list of bibliographical references and an index of names, that offer the reader a chronologically structured overview of the subject of suicide and the way it has been perceived from medieval times up to the 21st century. The author does not try to formulate a totalizing theory or find a pattern for all suicides – as it is impossible and futile – but rather to analyze and ponder different views, beliefs, myths or artistical uses of the concept to inform the reader of the many theological, mythical, philosophical, and literary approaches that humanity has had on this subject throughout time.

The first chapter discusses the *taedium vitae* – the loathing of life – as a motive for suicide while the author narrates the apocalyptic atmosphere of the Middle Ages with its suicides caused by a fear for

the imminent end of the world around the year 1000, created by the *ad litteram* reading of the Scripture, and the Plague a few centuries later. Onwards, the author exposes the origins of the suicidal imaginary through the analysis of classical antiquity – mythical suicides, such as Ajax, Heracles, or Narcissus, as well as historical suicides (Cato the Younger, Mark Antony, Seneca, Petronius etc.). Bauzá also distinguishes two opposite philosophical positions on self-inflicted death during this period: the idealist orphic-Pythagorean-Platonic view that condemns suicide and the cynical-Cyrenaic-Epicurean-stoic view that accepts or even recommends voluntary death in certain cases.

As the world advances and modernity arrives, the view on suicide and its connections to art change. During Romanticism, melancholia and death are key themes for poets like Lord Byron or John Keats, whose art and lives became intertwined. In Germany, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* created a phenomenon known as *Werther fever*, that led to people imitating the character's death in a series of *copycat suicides*. The vulnerability of the artist whose life and work entwine is underlined by Bauzá through poets like Sylvia Plath, Alejandra Pizarnik and Delfina Tiscornia and visual artists Alberto Greco, Mark Rothko and Oscar Bony – all of them suicides.

In the fourth chapter, the author brings attention to the Latin American political space by discussing the suicides of the Argentinian politicians and poets Leandro N. Alem and Leopoldo Lugones, to which he adds the tragic endings of writers Horacio Quiroga and Alfonsina Storni. He then moves on to the European horrors

of the war through the life and suicides of Walter Benjamin, Paul Celan, Cesare Pavese, Primo Levi and, finally, the American Ernest Hemingway.

In the last chapter, Bauzá concentrates on literary suicides and writers that, in his opinion, seem to have made their characters commit suicide because they couldn't do it themselves. He analyses Dostoyevsky's *Demons* – insisting on Kirillov's *logical suicide*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Gabriel García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Antonio di Benedetto's *The Suicide Victims*, and the works of contemporary writers Bernhard Schlink, Patrick Modiano and Delphine de Vigan. Apart from literature, the chapter highlights the status of *work of art* that suicide achieves in the eyes of Dadaist and surrealist artists, for whom destruction and self-destruction were the norm.

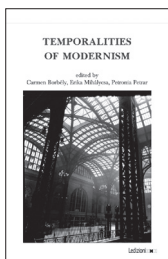
Another work tackled in this chapter is Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, from which the author extracts one of the book's epigraphs. Camus rejects the concept of suicide and argues that life must be lived despite its absurdity. In the epilogue, Bauzá suggests that Camus' perspective of life, suicide and freedom should be followed, as opposed to stoic beliefs or the *logical suicide* of Dostoyevsky's characters.

Miradas sobre el suicidio represents a complex volume, whose strength lies precisely in the unrestricted presentation of diversified and even contradictory expertise about the concept of suicide. Hugo Francisco Bauzá combines in this book his impeccable knowledge of classical antiquity and mythology, areas of interest for the Argentinian professor and researcher, with philosophy, history, and literature, offering a comprehensive synthetization of

the history of suicide. He sets forth psychoanalytic, biological, theological, psychiatric viewpoints on the matter using bibliographical references to Seneca, Sigmund Freud, Albert Camus, Erwin Stengel, Émile Durkheim, Alfonso Reyes, William Styron, Yolande Grisé y Al Alvarez and many others, but concludes with the idea that each suicide has its particularity and that all which remains in the face of suicide is resignation and a respectful silence.

Georgiana Teșu

Carmen Borbély,
Erika Mihálycsa,
Petronia Petrar (eds.),
*Temporalities of
Modernism*, Milano,
Ledizioni, 2022



A collective undertaking, *Temporalities of Modernism* aims to recast our understanding of the modernist fascination with temporal ambiguity and to showcase how the contradictions and paradoxes surrounding the aesthetic treatment of time continue to influence contemporary thought. The collection is accompanied by a relatively brief but wide-ranging introduction that announces the main aporias and the suitable tools and strategies by which they have been reckoned with. Not simply a note of intention, this initial piece of writing starts the string of collaborations, as it attunes the ideas of three Romanian scholars, and implicitly the volume's editors Carmen Borbély, Erika Mihálycsa and Petronia Petrar. Drawing on

the key findings of prominent members of the modernist studies scene such as Paul Ricoeur, Tim Armstrong or Adam Barrows, the editors situate the volume in relation to influential theories of temporality and foreground the conceptual consistency of the enterprise. The coupling of an up-to-date theoretical apparatus with perceptive close readings is perhaps the prevalent strategy by which these studies uncover the characteristic incongruences of modernism. There is no lack of ideas or of progress that needs to be concealed by stiff concepts or elusive statements. The core of the novelty resides in the extensive exploration of fruitful paradoxes, and, consequently, in the thematic and methodical enlargement of the aesthetical and ethical programme that is deemed "modernist". As each case of temporal incongruence demands of its researcher a different approach, the respective volume aims to do justice to the specificity of the included studies while assuring their proper alignment with its overarching scope. Thus, while the analyses differ in terms of strategies, theoretical and philosophical arguments, and even selected chronotopes, they also reinforce the principal objective presented from the very inception of the collection, namely to acknowledge the enabling fragmentation and the undecidability reflected in the oxymoronic formula *discontinuous continuity*.

Fittingly, Jean-Michel Rabaté's essay opens the discussion on the indefinite and incomplete nature of the modernist programme, expanding this Habermasian postulation at the level of individual artistic projects which (in-)advertently succeeded in rendering temporality radically interminable. Rabaté's main points of interest are Duchamp's unfinished artworks,

T.S. Eliot's poetics of deferral in his first collection, *Prufrock*, and even Schubert's incomplete musical phrases or Beckett's successive "abortions" culminating in *From an Abandoned Work*. The diversity of inherently incompletable works that Rabaté invokes clearly defies established chronologies. In concert with the temporal expansion, the very notion of modernism is enlarged and redefined as an "archive" meant to accommodate a plurality of manifestations and modes of writing that can be deemed modernist. One could say that Rabaté's critical intuitions led him to plead for an initiative that recently has been associated with the new modernism(s) studies, which aim to recuperate the various forms of a yet-to-be-defined "after-modernism". What singularizes this study in relation to other scholarly ventures is that Rabaté leaves the debate open while hurrying to draw the reader's attention to the temporal aporias that will result from placing under the same label a series of discontinuous and incongruent manifestations. The tension produced by irreconcilable opposites seems to dissipate in the second study, where Randall Stevenson integrates the emergent temporalities in the broader scheme of modernity and proves that fragmentation and continuity are not mutually exclusive, but, on the contrary, they presuppose one another. It comes as no surprise that such postulations are accompanied by a broader acknowledgement of the modes of perception that one can classify as modernist. Stevenson translates the Bergsonian attempt to flout stasis and discontinuity into an acute consciousness of the paradoxes posed by temporal divisiveness and demonstrates that what he and his contemporaries framed as the indivisible

"streams" of interior life may be a smoke-screen for the true object of their distinctively modern apprehensions. Examining the prose work of consecrated modernist authors such as Virginia Woolf, Marcel Proust, Wyndham Lewis and many others, Stevenson ingeniously demonstrates that the collections of recollected images, moments of being, "memorious moments" (which, in their function, seem to resemble the Deleuzian "remarkable moments" foregrounded as they are by the "accumulation of banalities") reflect a pattern not of denial but of resistance to "reductive temporalities", proving that the acknowledgement of fractures and antinomies may become the modernists' weapon of choice.

The second section of the volume brings to the reader's attention the various ways in which the most veritable fulcrums of modernism were prone to acquire a political edge. The newly formulated perspectives and conceptions degenerated into fabricated visions of a nationalist Italy (Mimmo Cangiano), divergences and ideological disagreements within the same artistic groups (Louis Armand and David Vichnar) and even persecutions and deportations of writers (Verita Sriratana). In all these instances, the component of the modernist ideology that makes it politically relevant is, at its core, temporal, because, only through the exaltation of the fracture, the interval and the particular, one can ethically embrace the fragmentariness of the "continuous becoming" and avoid the chaos of "contradiction" (in Luigi Pirandello's terms). The three essays warn against the dangers of ideological overidentification threatening to undermine the fuzziness of extremely elastic concepts so that they could be instrumentalized in political or

purely utilitarian debates. The potential for fallacy lies in the attempt to squeeze modernism into a “pigeon-hole” (to use a Beckettian formula) and exploit the term’s intersection with a politicized intellectual framework that would legitimize either the extolment or the condemnation of certain works.

The following researchers shift their gaze from the public scene to the private. By linking the plurality of temporalities with the unpredictability of (self-)consciousness, Ilaria Natali’s study not only reconciles antipodal conceptions of time that have been previously perceived as divergent but also explores a supplementary one associated with reflecting-devices capable of interminably multiplying images, experiences, and implicitly selves. In keeping with this prismatic logic, Annalisa Volpone traces the threads that inextricably link the writings of Sylvia Plath with those of her forefathers, prolonging the timeline associated with modernism. Similarly, Corin Braga’s macro and microtextual investigations favours the temporal and spatial expansion of the concept, forefronting the cost of not thinking about autochthonous works in terms of modernist temporalities. The alignment of the Romanian modes of writing with the new paradigms presents a series of particularities, especially in the fictional treatment of illnesses, conflicts and belligerence, that prolong further the ongoing debates over what is worthy of being redeemed “modernist”. The psychological experiments performed by writers such as Max Blecher or Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu recast their contemporaries’ understanding of modernism and its “new structures”. In the former case, delving into the recesses of the self becomes the means

of accessing the “immediate unreality” and brutally usurping the “actual” reality, while, in the latter, it represents a stylistic fallacy that the author should avoid at all costs to the detriment of pure objectivity (according to Eugen Lovinescu’s thesis). In both cases, Corin Braga documents the processes by which veritable instances of modernist temporalities emerge as mechanisms of distorting and brutalizing experience or even inaccurately reflecting the role of fiction.

At this point, no less than three essays explore the disjointed types of temporal experiences that find their correlative in warfare and its aftermath. One of the key incentives for the reader of this fourth chapter is to discover whether an innovative pronouncement on the relation between the modernist *angst* and the turmoil unleashed by the Great War can still be made as its repeated invocation in the academic environment transformed the correlation into a “critical cliché”. Angelika Reichmann’s thesis breaths fresh sense into this well-worn association by illustrating how David Jones’ work twisted T. S. Eliot’s famous injunction to resuscitate ancient myths, and repurposed mythical sensibilities not in the name of recuperating the temporal unity of the past, but of presentifying disjointed times. By tracing the modernists’ engagement with the ancient and the occult, scholars such as Chloé Thomas retrieve, in fact, their fascination with the mystery of omission, of the relentlessly postponed meanings. Ultimately, Sanda Cordoș examines how Interwar Romanian writings chart the fractures in the flow of history as steps towards the imminent breakdown of order. Associated with a state of continuous and irritating delay, a

“short-circuiting temporality”, the prophesies of revolution and unrest seem to accurately reflect another facet of modernity.

The last section inscribes the volume in a series of recent surveys that explode the hegemonic notion of modernism and pulverise it in multiple subtypes. Gábor Schein’s analysis of Imre Kertész’s novels invokes the newly drawn category of a postwar late modernism that defies traditional timelines and reaffirms the power of aesthetic legacy. The plurality of categories is accompanied by the multiplication of artistic mediums and areas of inquiry. Aura Poenar’s study exceeds the literary field and proposes an incursion into the realm of visual arts and post-WWII cinematic imagery. Both scholars are interested in exploring the newly emerged ethical programmes whose main scope is “liquidating” the previous forms of exposition that chose to camouflage catastrophic truths. While Schein finds in the selected novels exemplary attempts at adhering to such ethics through the medium of fiction, Aura Poenar denounces the methods by which well-acclaimed directors continue to flout it.

Temporalities of Modernism brings thus to the front fourteen meticulously (re-) drawn perspectives that interrogate the latest and most relevant theories of temporality while clinging faithfully to insoluble, but fruitful, aporias. A veritable exponent for fostering diversity in a clearly circumscribed area of research, the collection claims its distinct position as a scholarly venture for which unpredictable findings, permanent problematizing and stretching current conceptions constitute the paramount guidelines.

Ștefania Burlica

Nina Corcinschi,
*Realitatea ca
hologramă. Eseuri*,
Chișinău, Editura
Cartier, 2022



Nina Corcinschi’s *Reality as a Hologram* joins the collective efforts of developing a more consistent and comprehensive reception of Bessarabian literature in Romanian. Struggles with being othered and with othering oneself are both part of writing from within and about Bessarabia, as the region’s history of denationalization and russification continues to shape both its cultural production and how it is perceived nationally and internationally. As such, brief essays and book reviews take the mantle of fighting interpretative biases, and Corcinschi’s collection of exegetical texts appears to assume this same responsibility.

Despite formal constraints and the focus on newest volumes, Corcinschi manages a thorough overview of Bessarabian authors and their work across the ages. Also, she writes not only with critical and analytic precision and accuracy *about* the text, but also *with* the text itself, borrowing from its stylistic resources and experiential weight. In this way, the volume is an excellent introduction to contemporary Bessarabian writing that, at the same time, achieves an idiosyncratic effect. When read together, the essays appear to suggest a different approach to writing literary history. Freed from the constraints of impartiality or strict timelines, this approach is fitting for a literature that questions its marginalization within the canon. Corcinschi

acclaims Gheorghe Erizanu's innovative gesture of publishing his blog posts under the self-coined term *bookiseli*, a wordplay on the English word *book* and the Romanian *a buchisi*, to do something diligently, yet unproductively, and, even though she maintains the responsibility of someone who is "condemned to have an opinion", her writing engenders a similar feeling as blog posts – it "allows the freedoms of prompt and subjectively assumed expression" and is rather "a puzzle of ideas, attitudes and feelings" (p. 219).

Nevertheless, Corcinschi's essays are connected conceptually as much as formally. The overarching pattern is of a personal reflection on the interferences and interdependence between life and literature, which she explains through the hologram principle of quantum physics: life turns into literature and literature turns into life (p. 10). To her, one's cultural experience(s) always mediate his or her daily life. They preface, influence, and even condition how reality is understood – "everything new that comes into our existence acquires meaning only *in relation to something specific*, something already known, assimilated, in a factotum that is both *nature and culture*" (p. 8). The essays are arranged into five sections according to generic distinctions: poetry, prose, literary criticism, and studies of Bessarabian history and culture at large. They all show the author's skill both as an analytical writer and as a passionate reader. While the first two inquire into an achieved harmony between actual reality and the metaphysically possible to demonstrate literature's impact on everyday experience, with social poetry as the most illustrative example, the metacritical section reflects on the status of Bessarabian

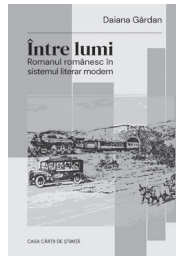
literature in the world system and puts it into perspective by indirectly suggesting different works and concepts that show the importance of preserving one's national, ethnic, and historical ties. Corcinschi reviews an impressive array of poets, among which Andrei Țurcanu, Emilian Galaicu-Păun, Silvia Goteanschi, Iulian Frunțașu, Teo Chiriac, Grigore Chiper, Eugenia Bulat, Ana Rapcea, Margareta Curtescu, Oxana Gherman, Leo Bordeianu, Alexandru Vakulovski, and deals with prose works by Tatiana Țibuleac, Vitalie Ciobanu, Oleg Serebrian, Valentina Șcerbani, Pavel Păduraru, Anatol Moraru, Dumitru Crudu, Doru Ciocanu, and Moni Stănilă. Her readings of critical works include Bessarabian authors like Andrei Țurcanu, Maria Șleahțițchi, Luminița Bușcaneanu, Tatiana Ciocoi, or Adrian Ciubotaru, but also extends beyond national borders to studies by Eugen Simion, Doris Mironescu, and Ligia Tudurachi.

The next section, "It's different here...", explores different works that showcase Bessarabia's cultural identity as both akin and unlike the Romanian one. As such, the volume exposes that its status as a minor culture should prompt a reassessment of the power relations that superordinated processes of identity formation in both spaces. Through analysing the works of Sorin Alexandrescu on ruptured identities, Iurie Colesnic on Bessarabian biographies, Vasile Bahnaru and Gheorghe E. Cojocaru on the Bessarabian soviet period, Ștefan Susai on the Bessarabian village, or Vladimir Beșleagă's historiographic methods, these essays convey the difficulties to confidently exhibit or, at times, even know one's cultural identity. To conclude, Corcinschi's volume works

altogether to explore Bessarabian specificities and, simultaneously, to corroborate its synchronization with Romanian literature and culture. Even though restricted to brief snapshots of several works and authors, Corchinschi's volume allows the outline of a literary history of the extreme contemporary to slowly take shape.

Ada Beleuță

Daiana Gârdan,
*Între lumi. Romanul
românesc în sistemul
literar modern*, Casa
Cărții de Știință, Cluj-
Napoca, 2023



Through the recent publication of her book, *Between Worlds. The Romanian novel in the modern literary system*, Daiana Gârdan claims that the Romanian novel needs a new theoretical vocabulary through which Romanian modernity can be revisited. The new theoretical vocabulary is formed with the help of a systemic and sociological perspective through quantitative analyses, assisted by digital formalism, the reading of novels as part of World Literature, comparative approaches to the Romanian novel with other peripheral cultures and a transnational perspective on the novel. The author uses the tools of digital formalism and statistical analyses to review a literary period from a transnational, sociological and sociocritical perspective.

The first part of the book consists of two chapters. The first chapter focuses on the way in which transnational and quantitative studies have influenced the theory

of the literary genre of the novel. In this part, the relationship between the formalist beginnings of genre theory and the current paradigm of digital formalism and World Literature was presented. The development of genre theory is explained by the different vision of the Russian formalists who did not see the literary object as a tool, but as an autonomous artistic phenomenon. Further, the idea is reached that the novel is a living organism in continuous development and evolution that incorporates social, ideological and political influences from local and global contexts. This is the vision of the new comparativism in which each individual product is part of a collective. By involving the digital in literary studies, the chance of experimental or unread novels, of those individual novels that have been forgotten by critics and readers, is democratized. The place and function of the novel changes with the recovery of what Margaret Cohen and Franco Moretti call the Great Unread because using digital programs certain elements related to form or content can be investigated.

The second chapter acquaints the reader with the terms and tools used in the case studies because terms such as distant reading, digital formalism or procedural comparativism are relatively new methodological frameworks in Romanian literary analysis. She also argues with clear arguments that quantitative and digital analyses do not exclude but complement traditional hermeneutic analyses. The author's style surprises with the clarity with which she presents the thesis of her research paper and the importance of literary production in Romania seen as part of a world system. Each argument is supported by examples, she motivates each step in the construction

of the book and announces the utility of her approach. The research also represents a way to export Romanian literature as a subject of interest for transnational studies and World Literature.

If the first part is a metacritical discussion that presents the theoretical and methodological framework used, the second part serves to exemplify the case studies of three socio-spatially delimited literary subgenres. Daiana Gărdan wants to restore the proposed dual division of the modern Romanian novel - rural novel and urban novel - in a tripartite distribution, by adding a new subgenre, the *interstitial* novel. The interstitial novel is a new socio-spatial subgenre that is going to negotiate its position around the discussions about the spatiality of the Romanian novel because it is in an in-between relationship with the other two subgenres presented. The importance of this subgenre provides the title of the book, which also includes the position of the Romanian novel in the modern literary system. The transitional spaces exposed in the *interstitial* novel faithfully exemplify the reality of the harmful effects that the rural community felt with the imposition of a capitalist economic model. The fact that modernity consists in the unequal installation of capitalism worldwide is exemplified by the *interstitial* novel.

One of the fundamental points of interest in the research is the quantitative-geocritical and thematic analysis of the production of novels that were published between 1845 and 1939 and fall into the subgenres - rural novel, urban novel and interstitial novel. The book culminates in the last chapters that attest to its value and on which I invite the reader to dwell. The nuances that the author emphasizes in

each sub-chapter dedicated to sub-genres and the vast theoretical support demonstrate the competence of the young researcher who proposes and launches new directions in literary studies.

Anca Pașca-Saturn

Incursiuni în imaginar,
Vol. 11, Gabriela
Chiciudean (ed.), Lumi/
universuri paralele,
imaginar și literatură,
Alba Iulia, 2020



The volume *Lumi / universuri paralele, imaginar și literatură*, published in 2020 by the Centre for Research on Imagination “Speculum” in Alba Iulia, brings together a series of essays and articles exploring the themes of parallel worlds and universes in literature from different historical moments. This collective volume makes significant contributions to the field of fantasy literature and speculative imagery, attempting to reveal through their analyses how various authors and their literary creations enter into dialogue with the science, history, religion and mythology of the time to which they belong.

Regarding the book's structure, it is organized into three primary sections, each part focusing on a different perspective related to the theme of parallel worlds/universes and speculative literature. Through this multi-perspective approach, each part of the volume passes on to the reader an essential idea, that the discourse of literature, including fiction and science fiction,

is not just about imagination and fiction, it is about the world. The fantasy worlds and universes created by these writers represent an authentic cultural asset, as well as defining element that shapes and materializes their own identity.

The first section of the book, titled "Parallel Worlds/Universes and Science", focuses on how science from different historical periods left its mark on the writers, the latter using, almost unconsciously, different theories and concepts from physics (such as quantum theory or metaphysical speculations about electricity) in the creation of their fictional worlds and universes. The first study looks after historical and discursive contexts that might explain the emergence of mental representations of parallel worlds in the mid-twentieth century, recalling universal wave function theories and counterfactual histories that influenced Andre Norton's novel. The second study discusses the metaphor of electricity in the literary works signed by Adam Mickiewicz, intending to answer the following questions: "How did scientific theories affect the minds of poets in the nineteenth century? How did scientific methods change the way writers described the world?". In essence, Maria-Ana Țupan and Piotr Urbanowicz's work approaches the subject with the tools of interdisciplinary studies, proposing a textual analysis of works that are "at the intersection of traditional scientific novels and speculative fiction", demonstrating that the opening of the metaphysical gate "was inaugurated by science", which is a "mixture of religion, politics and other modes of existence".

The second section focuses on the relationship between religion and parallel universes in fantasy literature. If Petru

Adrian Danciu makes a foray into the history of beliefs in order to explore the parallel worlds ("Heaven and Hell") split by the crisis of Jewish monotheism, bringing into question the political-religious reality of the time, Ayusman Chakraborty's study talks about the novel of a Bengali writer and the various religious-cultural influences to which he was exposed during the period of colonization, but which he was able to combine to serve him artistically in fantasy literature, in the creation of parallel worlds. However, as Ayusman also points out in his essay, the approach to the interpretation of the world beyond, outlined from the perspective of the Bengali writer's religious influences, is by no means exhaustive, leaving room for future interpretations. After all, both essays bring into question, in a very well researched manner, how literary works have been influenced by religious beliefs in the construction of parallel worlds since the beginning of civilisation.

As for the third section, suggestively titled "Parallel Worlds/Universes and Mythology", it explores how myths, dreams, mystiques, sacred/profane concepts and archetypal projections of the collective imaginary have been used in fantasy literature to explore the idea of parallel universes. The essays and articles included in this part offer a comprehensive analysis of the representation of the parallel worlds and alternative universes within the fantastic novel *Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien, the fantastic prose *Remember* by Mateiu Caragiale, the fairy tale *Făt-Frumos din lacrimă* by Mihai Eminescu and Vasile Voiculescu's short stories. Ultimately, the authors examine how these writers have portrayed the concepts of portal, archetype, imaginary, fantastic, space, and how they have been

used in order to explore broader themes of identity, sacredness, knowledge and the nature of reality itself.

In conclusion, the entire volume makes a valuable contribution to the current scholarly discussion on the role of the imaginary, the imagination and the archetypes in literature, while bringing to the attention of readers works from different parts of the world and historical periods for revisiting through the perspective of recent studies of parallel worlds. It contends that imagination is a critical component in the development of new worlds and the discovery of new ideas, not just a “frivolous feature of writing”.

Alexandra-Maria Anca

Incursiuni în imaginar,
Vol. 12, Gabriela
Chiciudean, Corina
Bozedeau (eds.),
*Călătorii în imaginarul
literar*, Editura
Aeternitas, Alba Iulia,
2021



The members of the “Speculum” Research Centre from the “1 December 1918” University of Alba-Iulia return in 2021 with the twelfth volume of the comparative literature journal devoted to the inquiry of religious, historic, literary and imagination studies, *Incursiuni în imaginar* (*Insights into the imaginary*). The aforementioned issue, entitled *Călătorii în imaginarul literar* (*Roaming through literary imaginaries*) and edited by Gabriela Chiciudean and Corina Bozedeau, is centered

around the prominent discourse of imaginary constructs in literature, dividing it into four distinct subject matters: *Lecturi sub vremuri* (*Reading in time*); *Folclor, simbol și literatură* (*Folklore, symbol and literature*); *Literatură și geografie* (*Literature and geography*) and *Literatură reflexivă* (*Reflexive literature*), thus bringing together an eclectic collection of case studies and readings exploring numerous perspectives on each of the subthemes.

The volume opens with an essay written by Rodica Gabriela Chira, bearing the title *Matei Vișniec – “Omul din care a fost extras răul”, O fabulă filosofică într-o ficțiune jurnalistică* (*Matei Vișniec – “The evil-free man”, a philosophical fable in journalistic fiction*). It proposes an enthralling reading of Matei Vișniec’s play as an existential apologue through the establishment of the rat metaphor as the nucleus of meaning in the play, as Rodica Chira reflects. The topography rendered is that of a post-capitalist, frightfully consumerist society, in which the only factor which drives humanity is the hegemonic free-market economy and its coryphaei, represented by the mass-media, the political apparatus and the journalists. The singular flicker of redemption in this dystopian framework is viewed through the intervention of rats – the new heroes, even the new gods of this society as Chira rightly observes, which only further the mortification and the atrophy of the individual and the society as a whole, through the construction of a collective, singular consciousness and the deconstruction and annihilation of language, in Ubuesque fashion. Rodica Chira’s in-depth analysis of this sardonic and painfully precise play reveals and certifies once again Vișniec’s wit and mastery in lucidly taking the pulse of the contemporary.

In the subsequent article, *The otherness of the sexed, raced, and classed body in Mircea Eliade*, Maria-Ana Tupan assembles a much-needed re-reading of Mircea Eliade in the light of the underlying ideological agenda of high modernism revealed by recent works such as Christopher Butler's *Early Modernism* (1994). Tupan remarks and explores the reverberations of such ideologies in Eliade's fantasy prose, namely in *Miss Christina*, as the encounter of characters from different social classes which "plunges into trauma and spectrality"; *At the Gypsies*, which explores raced bodies, the proliferation of racial stigma ("The gypsy skin carries signs of witchcraft, irrationality, libidinal energy, and the intersection with civilization causes an exit from history"); and *The three graces*, where corporeal femininity is associated with sin and doom, and the multiplicity of meaning is concentrated into the unity of the signifier.

The following chapter, *Folklore, symbol and literature*, encompasses discussions such as the affinities of fairies and UFO entities, explored in the comparative study "*Old devil moon*": *time, memory and oblivion in the narratives of catabasis and abduction* written by Sibusiso Hyacinth Madondo, in which he ingeniously juxtaposes the theme of abduction as it appears in folktales or medieval romances and modern narratives about the occupants of UFO's, both displaying the same pattern of entities endowed with supernatural powers that can abduct mortals, affecting their memory and consciousness through inducing hypnosis-like states. In the same chapter of the journal, Petru Adrian Danciu puts forward an intriguing phenomenological perspective on the history of demonology and the demonic imaginary, choosing as

his starting point the shamanic pattern. He argues that there are three constituents of the shaman that are of utmost significance for the birth of demonology, namely the sense of perception, knowledge and self-control, thus accounting for the three classes of demonological practice: sensorial, gnostic and exorcistic.

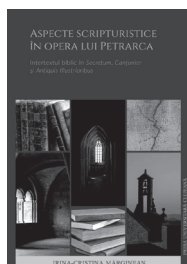
Another thought-provoking take on Romanian folktales is that of Alexandra Gruian in the sub-chapter entitled *The ascension into the real world: Prâslea The Brave and The Golden Apples* (Petre Ispirescu). Gruian writes about the joy of evasion through folk tales, pleading that in order to understand them we must take a leap into the unconscious: "we know, but we don't know that we know", as Slavoj Žižek phrases it. She chooses the folktale of Prâslea as a point of reference, as this particular tale encompasses both catabasis, the regression into the earth's belly, and the following anabasis, which is, as she points out, just as perilous as the descent. Prâslea becomes henceforth "the civilising hero, the one making Cosmic the space that belonged to Chaos". His crossing to the centre transports him to a space of spectrality, an interworld space, which evades both inner and outer reality.

Other noteworthy discussions include the exploration of the geographical space of Transylvania and its abundant occurrences and echoes in the imaginary and in literature, the interconnectivity of Transylvania's touristic image and its literature image analysed by Cosmin-Gabriel Porumb-Ghiurco in works such as Mircea Zăciu's *Ca o imensă scenă, Transilvania* (*Like a grand scene, Transylvania*), or Liliana Danciu's investigation of the erotic imaginary in Mario Vargas Llosa's *Eulogy to the stepmother*.

All things considered, this issue of *Insights into the Imaginary* becomes an eclectic collection of intriguing perspectives on imagination studies in literature, reaffirming once again the abundance and fertility of this methodological framework.

Maria Ungur

Irina-Cristina
Mărginean, *Aspecte
scripturistice în
opera lui Petrarca*,
Cluj-Napoca, Presa
Universitară Clujeană,
2022



Irina-Cristina Mărginean is an associate professor at the Faculty of Letters of Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, being a member of the Italian Language Department and teaching translation, cultural studies, media and textual typologies. The volume *Scriptural Aspects in the Work of Petrarch* is the result of her doctoral study completed in April 2020, with the thesis *Biblical Intertexts in the Work of Francesco Petrarca*.

The author analyses Petrarch's work in the context of the Little Renaissance, which was severely subordinated to dogma, and which borrowed from Antiquity the figures of great thinkers and writers such as Homer, Aristotle, Horatio, Cicero etc., as Corin Braga observes in the introduction to the work. The author focuses on some of the Italian author's secular texts: *De secreto conflictu curarum mearum*, *The Songwriter* and a corpus of 10 letters from the collection *Familiarium rerum libri*, addressed to

important personalities of classical culture. In the first chapter of the work, the author makes a conceptual synthesis of intertextuality, arguing the applicability of this system of analysis within the chosen system with the help of the premises of theorists such as Mihail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Cesare Segre, Maria Corti, Giovanni Pozzi and Ioana Bot. As a synthesis of the theories developed in the paper, intertextuality is conceived as "a reference system that does not imply intentionality", as a "crossing of textual codes" and "a symbolic sign (...) in paradigmatic or syntagmatic relations" (pp. 34, 41). In this sense, the demonstration is inevitably also based on the writings of the Holy Fathers, which become indispensable in the analysis of the biblical intertext in Petrarch's work.

In the *Historical Perspectives* sub-chapter, the study's author examines the literary context of the author's period, providing behind-the-scenes editorial and technical information on the Little Renaissance. In letter 19 of *Familiares* XXIII addressed to Boccaccio, Petrarch confesses his thesis regarding the difference between plagiarism and inspirational model, the latter being defined by him as a process that must involve the modification of the taken subject. The other authors may constitute a template at the stylistic level, but not at the lexical level. Those who imitate inauthentically are classified by Petrarch as "monkeys".

The following chapters contain the actual analysis of the biblical intertext in the textual support chosen by the author. About *Secretum*, Irina-Cristina Mărginean states that the writing "seems to express Franciscus' inner struggle with his own doctrinal *super-ego* (D. Marsh), a debate that

precedes (or constantly accompanies) the tension towards what seems to present itself as an existential and intellectual conversion" (p. 77). The character experiences a vision of "Incarnate Truth" (p. 79), the wonder associated with various Old and New Testament revelations, and the description of the materialized divine in similar terms is highlighted. The similarities occur, as the study's author notes, at the syntactical level as well, with the visionary's first words of greeting being, at base, paraphrases of the phrase "Fear not!" In addition to comparisons of the text with Scripture, intersections with other authors such as Vergilius and Cicero, whom Petrarch uses as intertext, are also highlighted, so the study goes beyond biblical references, offering a more complex palette of interpretation.

Chapter III analyses the text *Cooperatrix gaudio* from the *Cantioner*, which is "a book-monument that has been built up over time from small writings recovered from his youth" (p. 129), being "the first autograph-ideograph literary text belonging to a significant writer to be preserved from the ancient world" (p. 130). In her analysis of this poem, the researcher focuses mainly on the metric, considering it specific to the inner order of lyric masks. She also observes that the experience of love between the self and his beloved, Laura, is part of a sacred, "liturgical" time, in which the two repeatedly relive the same experiences, but undergo transformations on an ontological level.

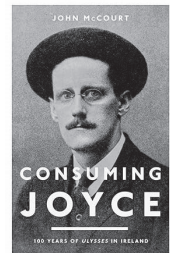
Finally, through the corpus of letters that Irina-Cristina Mărginean chooses for her study, she illustrates the biblical intertext in the usual language that the poet uses in his correspondence. In this way, the analysis becomes much more complex precisely by addressing scriptural references in

the socio-cultural framework of the Little Renaissance period.

Concluding with her study, *Scriptural Aspects in the Work of Petrarch*, the author approaches an existential reading of the Italian poet's texts, the biblical intersections giving the poems a metaphysical side. Although the study of a subject so far removed from contemporaneity might be a bold choice, the researcher's analysis is based on theories and concepts formulated in recent decades, revitalizing by "probing the biblical intertext" pre-Renaissance literature in the context of current studies, "placing the reader in the proximity of the auctorial perspective, in the process of scrutinizing the mechanisms of meaning" (p. 210).

Irina-Teodora Gorgan

John McCourt,
*Consuming Joyce. A
Hundred Years of Ulysses
in Ireland*, Bloomsbury
Academic, UK, 2022



Ireland gained its independence in the same year that one of its expatriates published a novel steeped in Irishness, yet European enough to ruffle the feathers of the nation's leaders for decades to come. A hundred years later, John McCourt publishes *Consuming Joyce* (2022), a stunning work of literary historiography that stands as a cornerstone in the realm of Joyce Studies, next to the author's equally noteworthy achievements like *James Joyce*:

A Passionate Exile (1999) and *The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste 1904–1920* (2000). The study focuses on *Ulysses*'s place in Irish history both as a product and as a work of art, and, in true Joycean fashion, it builds its scaffolding on the various facets of what it means "to consume", as in: "to do away with completely' (destroy); 'to spend wastefully' (squander); 'to use up' (finish); 'to enjoy avidly' (devour); 'to engage fully' (engross); 'to utilize as a customer'" (p. 2). The study traces the interferences and parallel trajectories of all these meanings throughout ten chapters, one for each decade since the novel had been published.

Each chapter traces the sociocultural reception of *Ulysses* in Ireland during a specific period, and, as such, each begins with a brief, panoramic contextualization of Irish history at that time. The text thus brings together an expansive chronological spectrum of opinions in a dialogue that speaks volumes as to the fraught relationship between a newly independent Ireland and a self-exiled author that lives and breathes his native city of Dublin. Indeed, one is impressed at the bevy of scandalized reviews aimed at demonizing Joyce as a pornographer, but McCourt's inclusion of these animated voices does not seem superfluous. More importantly, the author gives Joyce's friends, family, and supporters their due, demonstrating their crucial role in ensuring the country's "material Joyce heritage" (p. 105). As he investigates the material reality underpinning the Irish life of *Ulysses*, McCourt paints a poignant picture of how a minority of faithful readers enjoyed the "sense of change" that Joyce's novel brought to the national literary landscape, even though

the novel was almost impossible to get a hold of during the De Valera years. The question that guides McCourt through this bevy of historical sources stems from an issue raised by Elizabeth Bowen in a post-*Ulysses* Ireland: "The English can never know us – and are we ready to know ourselves?" (p. 88).

The work shows plenty of nuance in how it treats the hostility that Irish literary critics displayed towards their "American counterparts," noting the biases of "Joyce's Irish followers," but also those of "the growing American brigade jostling for position in the race to produce the Joyce book that would launch or consolidate a university career" (p. 130). But while Irish literary criticism was quite late to catch up with the American Joycean scholars, McCourt also demonstrates the importance of those voices that did champion his work, as well as the efforts of many to popularize and disseminate *Ulysses* on the stage and the radio – attempts that were often met with resistance by the Censorship Board, the Catholic Church, and the Joyce Estate alike. And while certain novelists confessed to being intimidated by the legacy of *Ulysses*, McCourt argues that this was not the case in the realm of poetry, as he cites a variety of poems that engaged with Joyce's works confidently and enthusiastically (p. 188).

McCourt is also apt at venturing outside the scholarly side of *Ulysses*'s afterlife in Ireland, as he goes through the administrative and financial developments surrounding his manuscripts, personal belongings, and the various landmarks in Dublin. He also weaves into the picture the fascinating history of how Bloomsday grew in relevance and popularity

during the Eighties. This development made it profitable for various companies to hijack Bloomsday to their own advantage. The commercial value of the Joyce brand made his acceptance possible – once profitable, his so-called sins were forgiven (p. 157). The book thus brings up an important issue regarding *Ulysses*'s spot in the cannon today, as we witness an ever more blurred “line between genuine commemoration and mere tourist packaging” (p. 208).

In the last chapter, the author shares his cautiously optimistic views regarding the state of Joyce's place in today's Ireland. He also synthesizes what he deems to be most note-worthy Irish theory on Joyce in the 21st century and suggests that the “work of excavation” around the novel may be hitting its limits. Nonetheless, the Irish theorist also professes his belief in the dawning of a “multidisciplinary” approach in the future of Joyce Studies. Finally, McCourt subtly turns his attention to the question implied by the title of the work: is there anything new left of Joyce and *Ulysses* for future readers to “consume”? The answer, despite so many voices rushing to claim otherwise, is a clear-cut yes.

Andrei-Bogdan Popa

Virgil Mihaiu, *Jazz Contextele mele*, Iași, Junimea, 2022



In *Jazz My Contexts*, Virgil Mihaiu explores a very diverse array of the genre's expressions through the detailed examination of various artists, groups and movements. The aim of the volume is a truly global one and to the detriment of the United States, the country usually associated with jazz, it focuses on regions such as Eastern Europe, Central and South East Asia, Africa and South America. Through this lens, the analysis becomes centred on the geography of jazz, instead of its history, and revealing much geographical interference in the form of unlikely collaborations and performances. There is an increased emphasis on Romanian artists and events, not necessarily as a consequence of the author's interest, but rather of his methods. As the title suggests, the book showcases a personal experience of jazz, complete with many anecdotes outlining the unique contexts in which certain albums or events have emerged.

Much like the genre itself which is not constrained by compositional boundaries, the book too is free-flowing, as the essays included in it do not come together to build an argument, but instead celebrate their particular subjects. In this sense the volume becomes almost Proustian at certain moments either through the inclusion of poems written by the author at the time of specific events or inspired by them, or

through passages that reminisce childhood moments in the aim of identifying the root of certain interests such as framing the fascination for Brazilian music through an early admiration for the country's football team. More importantly, the author's tremendous experience in the field, allows for many of these anecdotes to shed a bright light on the lives and personalities of artists as outlined through Virgil Mihaiu's personal encounters with them. Similarly, the emergence of musical, and more widely cultural events is related through the author's own involvement in their organization, thus allowing the reader to peak behind the scene and observe how, often through unlikely circumstance, certain occasions materialize.

The historical component of the volume does not constitute an analysis of the titular genre's history, but the description of material historical conditions that have allowed (or disallowed) particular artists and ensembles to gain success in a certain time and geography. Thus the discussions on musicians from former Soviet states in both Asia and Europe are often accompanied by a description of the socio-political circumstances they had to overcome, often through fleeing their native land. Some musicians that did end up being persecuted by the state are also mentioned and eulogized through the retelling of their stories. In this sense the author often takes on the task of singing the praises of the unsung heroes of jazz, not only mentioning them, but presenting detailed explanations of their importance to the genre, their influences, as both their cultural heritage as well as international sources of inspiration that echo in their music, and the idiosyncrasies of their styles. Successful artists are

also celebrated in this way, those from the Romanian scene specifically having larger pieces dedicated to them. The effort of weaving this intricate tapestry of important jazz figures is furthered by the frequent inclusions of vast yet non-exhaustive lists of various instrumentalists and musical groups that relate to the topic discussed in any particular chapter, presented in non-hierarchical order.

There are also interdisciplinary nuances present in the volume, that although are not extensively explored, add flavour and context to the discussions on music. Aside from the aforementioned poems, one short chapter on the interaction between jazz and fine arts emerges almost like an interlude. It presents a historical argument for the interplay of music and visual arts, and then focuses on Mati Klarwein's *Annunciation* and the way it has been used as a cover for the album *Abraxas* by Santana, pointing out the symbolic valences of both art forms, in this specific example as well as in general. Similar passages appear in other chapters too, touching on poetry and film.

To conclude, *Jazz My Contexts* represents the labour of a profound love for music and the people that make it. The vast panoply of factual information about artist's lives and careers, movements within jazz and historical backgrounds of various regions is always framed through the author's personal experience with the topics and accompanied by anecdotes and witty observations. This serves to make the volume's tone deeply conversational, and at times intimate, perhaps best represented through the way in which the book ends, with a poem told within an interview. Thus, the collection of essays, by mixing the academic and colloquial styles, becomes

as bewildering and free as the genre it discusses.

Radu Corfus

Laura Pavel, *Ionesco. Antilumea unui sceptic*, ed. revăzută și adăugită, Cluj-Napoca, Școala Ardeleană, 2022



20 years. That's how long it took for an extraordinary curiosity to be revived and brought back into the theoretical discourse. This happened to Laura Pavel who proposed to print a new edition of her study on Eugène Ionesco, after the one published in 2002. *Ionesco. Antilumea unui sceptic* is the result of a curiosity regarding a writer whose literature no longer seemed to offer new interpretive grids, but which has returned with increasingly strong arguments.

The author proposes personal and unique methods of analysis, using new theorists and studies to widen the playwright's interpretative horizon. In the nine chapters, of which might be mentioned "At War Against the Generation?", "Ionesco's 'English' Identity", "The Donquijotism of a Post-Romantic" it can be observed the attempt to go beyond the statement which places these plays as a part of the theater of the absurd and that is happening because the label "absurd" limits Ionesco's entire literary work and locks it into a redundant zone, according to Laura Pavel. The great challenge is to utilize some theoretical

concepts not only for aesthetic analysis purposes, but, according to what they are called in "Argument", as "transgressive concepts of cultural analysis." In this context, Eugene Ionesco no longer remains a mere canonical author among many others, but is transformed into a real character.

The character's status was born from Ionesco's very typological complexity, because, from his earliest years of literary activity, he had been a self-critical author who invented the boundaries of his own fictional universes and due to the fact that Laura Pavel does not restrict herself to these literary texts and extends to the writer's press articles and essays, new ways of reception could be found. For instance, in the fourth chapter of the book it is demonstrated, through a method confident in its own strengths, that dramatic subjectivity is a paradigm for the problematization of the whole "Ionesco conglomerate".

The author calls Ionesco "almost pathologically obsessed with his own self" (p. 120), in other words obsessed with a constant series of redefinitions and re-examinations of the ego in relation to the work and then of literature in relation to its creator. From this approach, Ionesco's literature can no longer be seen exclusively as an aesthetic performance, but one to which more vital assertions are attributed, His fiction becomes an autonomous body "more real than history and the quotidian" (p. 268). To respond beyond the encroachment on the boundaries of absurdist literature, the theorist responds with the perspective of a melodramatic and parodic theatre. It is particularly interesting to watch how the arguments flow and support what is claimed, while leaving behind both outstanding new information but also

places where there are still question marks for the readers.

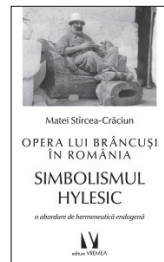
The melodramatic sense derives its sources of subsistence primarily through the aplomb devoted to its own ego and to literature as a being, above-mentioned things. By this way of explanation, since once it is stated that literature has its own strengths, it is almost inevitable not to position it as an altera instance, as the Other. It is understood that when you're dealing with someone else, the dialogue is really fractured. Under this umbrella it can be deemed the meaninglessness and impossibility of inter-human communication of the characters in the dramatist's plays. The Smiths' perpetual journeys for recognition, Macbett's tragism and the rhinocerosization are just a few of the extremely important aspects of this state of existence and (literary) thinking about the world. A new other dimension of the melodramatic is accentuated in the book through the role of the Englishman, also called as the stranger or even the Martian, present in most of her writings. As it might be suspected, Laura Pavel associates the foreign Englishman with Ionesco's own experiences as an expatriate in France as well as the style he proposed in the literary works, which is an innovative and daring fact for the author's exegesis.

Nevertheless, the absurd is not entirely denied by the theorist, just it is not a limiting grid. On the contrary, it is defined as a conceptual vortex "created from the collision of several codes" (p. 8), such are the codes of both literary and theatrical representation. It is an atypical absurd, which does not resort to Sisyphean methods in times of crisis, instead it is resorting to parody, the oneiric fantastic,

the sublime miraculous (p. 9) and other artistic subcategories described in the study. This even demonstrates a cyclical nature of the literary acts, however strange it may seem at first. The early plays are considered avant-garde, by systematically and deliberately losing the meaning, and the later ones propose precisely the intertextual and transdiscursive recovery of that meaning, a journey that is showing a grander project than just performing the features of the absurd. Laura Pavel has managed to capture all these almost neurotic connections of Ionesco's literature, but the most valuable thing about this study remains the certainty of the arguments and their power to exist through a method based on concrete examples from the plays.

Adelina Traicu

Matei Stîrcea-Crăciun,
*Opera lui Brâncuși în
România. Symbolismul
hylesic, o abordare
hermeneutică endogenă*,
București, Editura
Vremea, 2020



Constantin Brâncuși is one of the 20th century's most influential sculptors, an individual of great talent that is considered by many the pioneer of the modernist movement in his field. Although he receives a lot of recognition for his talent and influence, some art critics, as Matei Stîrcea-Crăciun himself points out in the present book's preface, tend to be apprehensive when it comes to attempting

complex hermeneutic discussions regarding the master's work. Brâncuși's art has been often described as abstract and surrealist and, while such affirmations are by no means wrong, they should not express a lack of discernable meaning behind each and every sculpture. Through his book, Matei Stîrcea-Crăciun attempts to demonstrate that Constantin Brâncuși was an incredibly deliberate artist, with a very deep understanding of the philosophy of art and strong (while not immediately obvious) ties to Romanian folklore and spirituality, although he made his career in France. As such, it is not at all difficult to derive meaning from his works, no matter how abstract they might seem, as long as we understand the person behind the chisel.

The author walks us through several groupings of Brâncuși's sculptures, outlining major themes and their evolution throughout the artist's career. He approaches the sculptor's body of work through the lens of *endogenous hermeneutics*. Throughout the book we come to understand that Brâncuși creates a sort of personal universe of meaning within his sculptures, mostly detaching himself from the aesthetic tendencies of those around him. As such, interpretation of his art should not necessarily be made by comparing it to that of his peers, but by seeking the development of certain outstanding patterns and motifs that the artist obsessively used to express his own views on topics such as love, divinity, beauty, damnation and redemption.

Derived from the Greek word *hyle* (pertaining to matter, the material) the term *hylesic symbolism* is used to point out that Brâncuși's choice of material

was never coincidental. He didn't choose what he sculpted out of from purely visual principles, nor did he choose whatever he found easiest to work with. For Brâncuși, each material had a specific and meaningful purpose. Sometimes, in the case of works such as *Sculptură pentru Orbi* (*Sculpture for the Blind*, 1920), the matter speaks for itself, the marble being manipulated to a bare minimum in order to suggest a shape that's been ever present throughout the artist's career – that of the human head, but reduced to a primordial, featureless essential.

Matei Stîrcea-Crăciun's exploration of Brâncuși's sculpture is easily comprehensible even for those who are uninitiated in the field of plastic arts. The sculptor's most important series of works (and some understated ones) are carefully placed into categories related to their main themes. The author presents a variety of interpretations which he argues for by reconstructing the context behind the making of each sculpture. As such, he helps us understand Brâncuși's creative process as a whole, the meaning behind the work almost revealing itself once we understand *why* Brâncuși sculpted in the way that he did. From the creative conflict with his master Rodin to various details about his muses, the study is full of insightful biographical information that reveals the inner workings of the seemingly incomprehensible artist.

The works are discussed in relation to grand, overarching themes such as the redemption of Eve through love and the reinterpretation of Mihai Eminescu's poetic masterpiece, *Luceafărul*. It is important to emphasize Brâncuși's heavy use of motifs (such as the left side of the subject being

a symbol for sin and damnation) and his tendency towards reaching the very essence that is hidden within the material. The sculptor strived to achieve sublime simplicity that evokes an idea without explicitly showing it, perhaps most obvious in the way his depiction of birds evolved overtime, from *Măiastra* (1910-1912) to *Pasăre în Văzduh* (*Bird in Space*, 1923). The final section of the book is dedicated to the Sculptural Ensemble of Târgu Jiu, Brâncuși's *magnum opus*, a war memorial that manages to detach itself from the horrors of war, praising the eternity of the human spirit without glorifying any violent acts (or even explicitly stating that it's a war memorial) – an ensemble which turns the town itself into a work of art by having the visitor undertake a spiritual journey from *Masa Tăcerii* (*The Table of Silence*), through *Poarta Sărutului* (*The Gate of the Kiss*) in order to reach *Coloana Fără Sfârșit* (*Endless Column*).

Full of historical and biographical contextual notes, well-argued interpretations and thematic delimitations, Matei Stîrcea-Crăciun's book makes for an incredible introduction to Constantin Brâncuși's art while granting those who might already be initiated some newfound appreciation for the master of modern sculpture.

Andrei-Teodor Radu

Bogdan Suceavă,
Adâncul acestei calme creste. Programul de la Erlangen și poetica Jocului secund, Iași, Polirom, 2022



Published in 2022 at Polirom, *Adâncul acestei calme creste. Programul de la Erlangen și poetica Jocului secund*, is a monograph dedicated to the poetic work of Dan Barbilian/ Ion Barbu, which not only doesn't lose sight of the Barbilian/Barbu's double nature- mathematician and poet but embraces this dichotomy to show the uniqueness of the case in the history of Romanian literature. Bogdan Suceavă, the author of the volume, from the perspective of a connoisseur of Barbilian's mathematical work, proposes a different approach to the subject, different from that any philologist could provide because he tries (and succeeds admirably) to interpret Barbilian's poetic work in its spirit, the way the mathematician probably thought during the elaboration of the volume *Joc secund*. His argument is that the poetics of *Joc secund* admits many connections with the field of mathematics frequented by Dan Barbilian in the interval 1928-1935 and because the two aspects cannot be separated, one must focus on the connection that unites them.

The volume is organized into ten chapters, with the last one being the conclusion. Whilst each chapter is standing on its own when viewed in relation to the others a new (relational) meaning emerges. The first three chapters address and explain the significance of Felix Klein's Erlangen

program, then the next three represent a biographical detour of the people that influenced directly or indirectly Barbilian as a mathematician and as a poet, more precisely: Élie Cartan, Gheorghe Țițeica and David Hilbert. In the last three chapters, the author shows that the poems in *Joc Secund* extend to poetics the exploration of a general framework that in mathematics was stated in the Erlangen Program.

While reading a poetic work, one cannot abstract from the poet's vision, his knowledge nor what he tried to achieve, and in the effort to understand a series of poems such as those in *Joc secund*, the reader must immerse in the poet's vision. In the first three chapters, Bogdan Suceavă introduces the reader to the most important representatives of the Erlangen school and identifies the thought paradigm of Felix Klein, Sophus Lie, or Jean Gaston Darboux not only in mathematical studies but also in Barbilian's poetry. The author's interpretation is grounded by the series of explanations that Barbilian himself gave along the years, considering himself a representative of the movement of ideas known as the Erlangen Program, founded by Felix Klein in 1872. As a third generation of geometers who apply and extend Felix Klein's ideas when non-Euclidean geometries become popular, Dan Barbilian extended the idea of organizing geometry under the structure of transformation groups to a poetic construction.

The following two chapters, focus on Élie Cartan and Gheorghe Țițeica (the latter also having the greatest influence on Barbilian) who were part of the first generation of mathematical students who followed the integrative vision of the Erlangen Program and developed, because

of this philosophy, new techniques in geometry. In the next chapter, the author of the monograph argues that the poems in the volume *Joc secund* should be analyzed from the perspective of things that change and those that remain invariant. For Barbilian as well as his mentor Gheorghe Țițeica, it is important to investigate what does not change, because what does not change when everything changes is worth being translated into the poem. The idea of the invariant is associated with the idea of beauty. If for the mathematician Dan Barbilian, it is important to identify what remains unchanged when studying a transformation, for the poet Ion Barbu this might as well represent the set of rules for what is important to record in the poem. Suceavă shows in the same chapter why for Barbilian the 20 poems from *Joc secund* are fundamental, reminding the readers of David Hilbert's axiomatic system. Dan Barbilian imports from the foundations of geometry, concepts and converts them into poetics with the purpose of amusing the readers while they try to decipher them.

In the next two short chapters, the discussion turns from how Barbu/Barbilian's poetry was received in the context of the era while taking into account the environment from which he originates to an explanation of the elegiac accents present in the poet's work. The last chapter proves to be all-encompassing though, with the author of the volume trying to reconstruct the universe of ideas inspired by mathematics and the philosophy of science that allowed Barbilian to write the poems in the volume *Joc secund*. The question regarding how this transdisciplinary connection happened in Bucharest finds its answer in the figure of Barbilian, a geometer working

in the paradigm, established by Klein, Lie, and Darboux, which uses abstract algebraic structures and helps to erase the boundaries between fields. The author's assertion that the vision of the Erlangen Program would admit an extension to other fields proves to be accurate in the territory of literature in the singular case represented by Dan Barbilian whose unification efforts didn't pass unrecognized.

All and all, the volume *Adâncul aces-te calme creste Programul de la Erlangen și poetica Jocului secund* by Bogdan Suceavă is a distinguishable study concerning the literary and scientific biography of Dan Barbilian, whose intuition was right about the importance of the role of the Erlangen Program.

Maria Chirilă

Transylvanian Review, vol. XXXII, Supplement No. 1, Sanda Berce, Carmen Borbély, Dan Octavian Cepraga, Elena Păcurar, Petronia Petrar, Liliana Rotaru, and Sorin Șipoș (eds.), *The Conflict of Interpretations in Geocultural Contexts*, 2023



The special issue published in the *Transylvanian Review* Journal in 2023 is a result of the collaboration between many well-known scientists and young researchers interested in the way that, on the one hand, historical constructions could be revisited nowadays, and, on the other hand,

how culture and literature benefit from some rereadings in the spirit of interpretative conflicts. The volume is divided into two major sections, the first one including historical studies, and the second one bringing together contributions related to cultural and literary studies.

Therefore, the section *Latinity. Romanity. Romanianity* proposes some analyses and (re)interpretations “of the medieval history of the Romanians, of Romanian politics and the Romanian spirituality in the Middle Ages”, as the editors announce in their argument. In this sense, the studies are dedicated to the Romanian language and its periodization (in Federico Donatiello or Ion Eremia’s contributions, for example), traditions and mentalities (see Cristina Gherasim’s case study about the influence of the Tsarist dominations on the population in the Bessarabian region; Radu Romînașu and Laura Ardelean’s reconstruction of Vasile Stroescu’s figure as a model of philanthropy and patriotism, or Liliana Rotary’s comments about the foreign impact upon the education of the Republic of Moldova in 1998).

Besides the focus on historical events or periods, the articles from this first part take into consideration even some important personalities, such as King Michael I and His representations in the recent literature from Bessarabia (study signed by Aliona Grati), or Silviu Dragomir and his work (analysed by Ioan-Aurel Pop and Sorin Șipoș). The role of microtoponymy in the (re)construction of the rural settlement from Transylvania, Bista Valley, is investigated by Cosmin Patca and Laura Ardelean, while Gabriel Moisa is interested in the role played by students on the political side during the communist

regime in Romania. Last, but not least, the studies signed by Nicola Perecind and Zeno Verlato combine the historical preoccupation with a certain literary dimension, approaching respectively the variants of the Cupid and Psyche (ATU 425) in Romanian folktales, and the ideas of “total philology” or “inner Romanity” in two *Festschriften* written in honour of Lorenzo Lenzi.

The second part, entitled *The Conflict of Interpretations: Literature/Culture and Its Readings*, starts from the assumption that the multifariousness of the mechanisms of interpretation could be managed “by providing a diversity of approaches and examples, ranging across theories, media, forms and themes”. Thus, the result is a collection of case studies that intend to reveal “the inherent collaborative nature of the act(s) of interpretation, its intersubjective grounding that makes a shared world possible”, as the editors reveal. The authors explore different areas, from literature and cultural studies to studies on mentalities or memory.

The section begins with Horea Poenar’s article that relates the history of jazz to politics, starting from Bill Evans’s creative forms. Petronia Petrar also analyses the form and its ethics in Muriel Spark’s novel *The Ballad of Peckham Rye*, while Călina Părau investigates the role of ambiguity in relation to the historical fiction writing, basing her premises on Colum McCann’s novels. Carmen Borbély is interested in the temporal polymorphism and the rhythm-analysis revealed by Mike McCormack’s novel *Solar Bones*. Ruxandra Cesereanu’s study is centred around the international research on the imaginary, but also the Romanian contributions to the field, her

synthesis being focused on some renowned works and figures (Gaston Bachelard, Gilbert Durand, Jean-Jacques Wunenburger and Corin Braga, as the most important researches, to name just a few).

Moreover, even the subject of memory is approached through the filter of conflicting interpretations. In this sense, Amelia Precup emphasises the interference between environmental and trans-generational memory or the construction of the pre- and postmemory, in other acceptance, illustrated by Anthony Doerr and two of his short stories, *The Demilitarized Zone* and *The River Nemunas*. Rareș Moldovan also investigates the technologies by which memory is recorded in Beckett’s play *Krapp’s Last Tape*. Focusing on two of Colum McCann’s novels (*Let the Great World Spin* and *Apeirogen*), Elena Păcurar examines the stories through Roy Sommer’s concepts of “narrative dynamics” and “cultural narratology” that could explain the language of conflict, but also its possibilities of reframing and translation, in order to construct a coherent idea about memory. Alina Preda’s article analyses Jeanette Winterson’s *Art & Lies*, already a canonical work due to the conflicting readings (*id est* interpretations), revealing not only its strategies of intertextuality or other experiments, but also the construction as an *ars poetica*. Last, but not least, Paul Mihai Paraschiv is interested in *The Life and Perambulations of a Mouse* and *Biography of a Spaniel*, two eighteenth-century novels that give voice to (literary) animals; Dragoș Bucur synthesises the divergent views about interwar Jewish-Romanian literature, but also its reception in the Romanian cultural field, taking into consideration three marginal figures such as Ury

Benador, Isac Peltz and Ion Călugăru; Mia Biligan's study revisits Sorin Titel and his "tolerated" formula of the *Nouveau Roman* during the communist regime in Romania and finally Mihai Ignat investigates the compositional playfulness, the mechanism of fragmentation and other experimental strategies in Camilo José Cela, Gilbert

Adair, Anne Garréta, Milorad Pavić and Mircea Horia Simionescu's prose.

All in all, the most recent *Transylvanian Review* issue is a mandatory reference for any scholar interested in the similar approaches, methods or rereadings.

Ioana Pavel