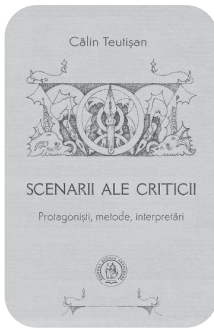


Călin Teuțișan, *Scenarii ale criticii. Protagonişti, metode, interpretări*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Şcoala Ardeleană, 2021



**IOANA PAVEL**

Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
indnpavell@gmail.com

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## LITERARY CRITICISM BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL PROJECT(S) AND A COLLECTIVE PERSPECTIVE

The most recent study published by Călin Teuțișan, *Scenarii ale criticii. Protagonişti, metode, interpretări* [*Scenarios of Criticism. Protagonists, methods, interpretations*], changes the focus of the author's interests. In *Fetele textului* [*The Faces of the Text*] (2002), *Eros şi reprezentare. Convenţii ale poeziei erotice româneşti* [*Eros and Representation. Conventions of Romanian Erotic Poetry*] (2005) and *Textul în oglindă* [*The Text in the Mirror. Reflections of Eminescu's Imagery*] (2006), the literary critic was more interested in proofs of close reading across the history of poetic(al) forms or in different texts of Romanian or world literature. In his latest book, Teuțișan pays attention to a so-called "sense of belonging to a community".<sup>1</sup> This community is defined not only by geographical parameters (i.e. the literary critical school from Cluj-Napoca), but also by common methods, original methodologies, inflections, peripheral complexes and so on.

In fact, the originality of Călin Teuțișan's book comes precisely from the synthetic perspective that he has on this community of literary critics. Moreover, this overview pays tribute to the most important personalities that set historical or theoretical directions in literary studies: D. Popovici<sup>2</sup>, Ioana Em. Petrescu<sup>3</sup>, Liviu Petrescu<sup>4</sup> and Mircea Muthu<sup>5</sup>. The study *Scenarii ale criticii* is the result of various contributions to these collective projects on "canonical" figures, although it should be noted that the author reexamines his own verdicts and amplifies them with assumptions regarding the contemporary

territory of literary history practised in Cluj-Napoca.

The study begins with an argument that wishes to more or less explicitly emphasise the relationships between the nodes in which critics from different (literary) ages meet inside of the same community of critical ideas. Besides the introduction, the book contains seven main chapters, each section taking into consideration one or more central figures. Of course, the critic's intentions are not to explore the entirety of the available area of investigation, because the principle of insufficiency – according to Maurice Blanchot – does not imply “the imperative of completeness”, proposing instead a permanent query through “the plurality of others”.<sup>6</sup> The first chapter, entitled “Sinteza critică a unui postlansonian” [“The Critical Synthesis of a PostLansonian”], is dedicated to Dumitru Popovici, a literary historian and comparatist from the first half of the twentieth century. In works such as *Ideologia literară a lui I. Heliade Rădulescu* [*I. Heliade Rădulescu's Literary Ideology*], *Poezia lui Mihai Eminescu* [*Mihai Eminescu's Poetry*] or *La Littérature roumaine à l'époque des lumières*, D. Popovici seems to be faithful – as Călin Teuțișan proves – to a depth model offered by Gustave Lanson's *History of French Literature* (1894), but also to a surface model transmitted by his French teachers Paul Hazard and Mario Roques. D. Popovici assimilates all these patterns in order to define his own critical method, which combines classic historicism with scientific determinism. As a consequence, D. Popovici does not practise Lansonism *per se*, exceeding the limits of the study by his interest in sources and influences through a more comprehensive perspective that includes the social linked

by cultural evolution and morphological transformations both in culture and literature. However, Călin Teuțișan comes to notice even the vulnerable aspects of D. Popovici's books, such as “precarious judgments regarding the axiology of values and the establishing of a literary canon”,<sup>7</sup> an aspect exemplified by the Romanian novelist Liviu Rebreanu.

The second chapter, “Critica între metafizică și raționalism. Utopia organică” [“Criticism between Metaphysics and Rationalism. The Organic Utopia”], investigates critical methodologies customised and applied by Ioana Em. Petrescu. (Re) reading the studies published by Ioana Em. Petrescu (*Configurații* [*Configurations*], *Ion Barbu și poezia postmodernismului* [*Ion Barbu and the Poetics of Postmodernism*], *Mihai Eminescu – poet tragic* [*Mihai Eminescu – Tragic Poet*], *Eminescu și mutațiile poeziei românești* [*Eminescu and the Mutations of Romanian Poetry*]), Călin Teuțișan identifies an “unusual formula of revealing criticism [...] based on rationalist instruments”.<sup>8</sup> Her theoretical innovations (such as the concept of cosmological model that offers the instrument needed for the explanation of consubstantiality between the human and the created or figured universe) and analytical hypotheses on the poetry of Mihai Eminescu and Ion Barbu reveal a method defined by a conjunction that balances Cartesian and metaphysical realism against the principles of modern science.

The next section of the book gravitates around Liviu Petrescu's criticism, starting from *Realitate și romanesc* [*Reality and Novelism*], his first volume published in 1969, up to the monograph dedicated to Dostoyevsky (1971), *Vârstele romanului* [*The Ages of the Novel*] (1992, revised

and republished in 1996 under a new title – *Poetica postmodernismului* [*The Poetics of Postmodernism*] or *Studii transilvane* [*Transylvanian Studies*] (1997). Liviu Petrescu seems to be interested not only in local literature,<sup>9</sup> but also in theoretical ideas or comparative approaches to foreign authors. Certainly, Liviu Petrescu's most important study is *The Poetics of Postmodernism*. Although it starts from a difficult and unsafe delimitation, description and prognosis for postmodernist phenomena, the book undertakes a huge effort to integrate Romanian (peripheral) culture in a European dialectic of ideas, with particular focus on the novel. In this context, Liviu Petrescu discusses postmodernism along theoretical lines proposed by authors such as Brian McHale, Ihab Hassan, François Lyotard or Jacques Derrida, with whom he engages in polemical controversy when their definitions are considered too inflexible. Perceiving postmodernism as an episteme, the critic proposes original concepts (the ontology of nothingness, the poetics of narcissism, textual productivity, the intransitivity of literary discourse and so on), applied and applicable to the postmodernist novel.

The fourth chapter, entitled “Poetici și stilistici convergente. Istoria literară ca mediere critică” [“Convergent Poetics and Stylistics. Literary History as Critical Mediation”], takes into consideration not only the critical model(s) practised by Ion Pop, but also his poetry, less commented on than his analytical ideas. In fact, the hermeneutics is based on the idea of the monograph that reveals an interdependence between writings and existence. This is why Teuțișan includes synthesis as a critical perspective in the vocation of monograph

writers. The latter may be interested in the works of Romanian poets such as Lucian Blaga, Nichita Stănescu, Ilarie Voronca, Gellu Naum or Ioan Alexandru). The critic may also build the monograph of an idea (in *Jocul poeziei* [*The Play of the Poetry*], 1985), a current (the avant-garde), a cultural dialogue (*Ore franceze* [*French Hours*], 1979 and 2002) or a literary model (*Poezia românească neomodernistă* [*The Romanian Neomodernist Poetry*], 2018). As Călin Teuțișan argues, the monographic path does not exclude synthesis, but “changes the character of the elements that come into summative equation: instead of authors, ideas, concepts and multiple works, with required historical and literary recontextualizations, the monograph brings together a single author's ideas, concepts and multiple creations, contextualised in an internal system of the work”.<sup>10</sup> Once again, Călin Teuțișan's demonstration implies, besides transversal and descriptive considerations, his own judgements regarding the object of investigation. The study concerning Lucian Blaga's lyrical universe offers, in this sense, the most relevant model, outlining the spatial structure of the poet's imagery as grounded in the geometry of the circle. At the same time, Teuțișan claims, books mapping avant-gardist phenomena may bring a strong case in favour of the specificity of Romanian avant-gardism in relation to the European context, including its political engagement, eclectic aspect and the character of modern synthesis. In order to recover Ion Pop's critical profile, Teuțișan sums up the story of *Echinoxism*, a cultural movement that began to gain shape around the *Echinox* magazine in 1968. As editor-in-chief and director of *Echinox*, the critic is a mentor and pioneer

who has ensured the eclectic character of the group. Last, but not least, poetry comes into attention due to its visionary model and its confessional, neo-Expressionist formula.

The fifth section, “Morfologia culturală, între estetică și balcanologie” [“Cultural Morphology, between Aesthetics and Balkanology”], analyses the two most important directions in Mircea Muthu’s work. Aesthetics is relevant not only due to its position between synthesis and mediation (in a post and anti-Hegelian perspective), but also because of the interartistic/transartistic syncretism specific mainly to the twentieth century. Therefore, the aim of Mircea Muthu’s studies is to resolve the post-Hegelian separation between the arts, by analysing the different ways of expression. The method is practised, for example, in *Alchimia mileniului* [*The Alchemy of the Millennium*] (1989), in which the author proposes structural isotopes between literature and visual arts, an approach that reveals his interdisciplinary preoccupation. At the same time, volumes such as *Literatura română și spiritul sud-est european* [*Romanian Literature and the Southeastern European Spirit*] (1976) or *Balkanismul literar românesc* [*Romanian Literary Balkanism*] (2002), to mention just a few, reflect his interest in the aesthetics of South-Eastern Europe, entering into controversy with important researchers that dealt with the same concern (Edward Said or Maria Todorova).

The next chapter comments on Corin Braga’s work in an attempt to recover his original critical profile in the Romanian cultural field. Teuțișan notices from the beginning the less common “hard” methods that Braga uses in his demonstrations,

stemming from psychoanalysis, psychohistory, psychogeography, psychocriticism and so on. Moreover, Braga’s discourse is individualised through a rational(ist) construction that “follows the premises up to the last consequences, and the rhetoric of demonstration crosses the logical steps in order to analyse the internal causalities of the researched object”.<sup>11</sup> This perspective could be seen starting from the first studies interested in Lucian Blaga’s or Nichita Stănescu’s poetry (where the cosmological model – defined by Ioana Em. Petrescu – is developed as an essential analytical instrument), up to books dedicated to archetypology, to the cultural function and morphology of the utopian genre, or to the cartography of European imagery regarding the configuration of unknown spaces (especially in the French books – *La quête manquée de l’Eden oriental* or *La quête manquée de l’Avalon occidentale*). As in the section dedicated to Ion Pop, Călin Teuțișan is interested not only in theoretical or critical studies, but also in the prose fiction authored by Braga. The interpretation is concerned with Braga’s first three neo-oneiric novels from a projected tetralogy, namely *Claustrofobia* [*The Claustrophobe*], *Hidra* [*The Hydra*] and *Luiza Textoris* (the fourth volume, *Ventrilocul* [*The Ventriloquist*], appeared in 2022).

The last chapter configures the methodological instruments and collaborative protocols that most researchers from the young generation have taken into consideration. The author highlights three directions that could be observed in recent times: first of all, critical monographs with theoretical scaffoldings (Cosmin Borza, Claudiu Turcuș, Adriana Stan, Adrian Mureșan); literary and historical syntheses

(Alex Goldiș, Adriana Stan, Cosmin Borza, Corina Croitoru); and, last but not least, World Literature and quantitative studies, practised by Emanuel Modoc, Ștefan Baghiu, Daiana Gârdan and Ovio Olaru. Besides the contextualisation of these new theories that have influenced the Romanian cultural field, Călin Teuțișan dwells upon the study published by Alex Goldiș *Critica în tranșee. De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului* [*Criticism in Trenches*.

*From Socialist Realism to the Autonomy of the Aesthetic*] and Emanuel Modoc's book *Internaționala Periferiilor* [*The International of the Peripheries*], seeing them as two models for the necessary shift needed in order to modernise Romanian literary studies. All in all, *Scenarii ale criticii* is a mandatory study that reveals the profile of a critical community with openings to the conceptual aspirations that managed to transcend limits, borders and (local) territories.

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## NOTES

1. Călin Teuțișan, *Scenarii ale criticii. Protagonisti, metode, interpretări*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2021, p. 7. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
2. See *Dumitru Popovici*, the eleventh volume of *Personalități ale Universității Babeș-Bolyai* [*Personalities of Babeș-Bolyai University*], edited by Ioana Bot and Adrian Tudurachi, published in 2022.
3. See *Portret de grup cu Ioana Em. Petrescu* [*Group Portrait with Ioana Em. Petrescu*], edited by Diana Adamek and Ioana Bot, 1996, or *Ioana Em. Petrescu*, the third volume of *Personalități ale Universității Babeș-Bolyai*, edited by Ioana Bot, 2016.
4. See *Spiritul critic la Liviu Petrescu* [*Liviu Petrescu's Critical Spirit*], edited by Sanda Cordoș, 2011, and the special issue of *Vatra* magazine dedicated to Ioana Em. Petrescu and Liviu Petrescu this year, 1-2/2022.
5. See *Mircea Muthu. În orizontul sintezei* [*Mircea Muthu. Against the Horizon of Synthesis*], edited by Iulian Boldea, 2014.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
9. See Petrescu's last book, which discusses – as Călin Teuțișan emphasises – the ethical aspects of epic realism.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 150.