

## **Book Reviews**

---



Balázs Imre József,  
*Rețele avangardiste,*  
*afilieri multiple,*  
 București, Tracus Arte,  
 2023



Balázs Imre József, a literary historian, poet, and translator, serves as a professor at the Faculty of Letters in Cluj-Napoca and is a researcher at Lucian Blaga University in Sibiu. His book, *Avant-garde Networks, Multiple Affiliations*, focuses on the interconnections between Magyar and Romanian avant-garde networks, examining them not only through their periodization but also through their imagined frameworks and internal mechanisms.

Rather than offering a traditional preface, Balázs embarks on a historical exploration of the “meta-avant-garde,” addressing the literary canon within Eastern Europe, issues of regionality and exile, the chronology of the avant-gardes, their multilingual dimensions, and, notably, the concepts of intermediality and relevance. He emphasizes the structural differences between the Magyar and Romanian avant-garde networks, highlighting distinct trajectories and dominant trends—constructivism being a notable point of convergence. One remarkable observation is that, during the 1930s and 40s, the Romanian avant-garde displayed an intensely vibrant literary quality, especially within the surrealist movement. Meanwhile, its Magyar counterpart, though seemingly less prolific during this period (with the publication of monographs virtually halting after 1930), prompted the author to

delve further into the literature representing the so-called “second wave” of surrealism, revealing a complex and understudied facet of the Magyar avant-garde. One of the focal points in Balázs’s analysis is his assertion that one of the most essential facets of the avant-garde—the emphasis on irrationality from thematic, ontological, and structural perspectives—must be analyzed through its intercultural dimensions, including its translations and multilingual influences.

In the first essay, Balázs embarks on an in-depth examination of *textual and material hybridity* in Urmuz’s works, approached through a post-colonial lens. He explores the concept of “synthetism,” which manifests on multiple levels as a blend of expressionism, dadaism, surrealism, and futurism. This hybridity appears in various forms throughout Urmuz’s writing, emerging both in character construction and in the unique textual mechanisms and poetics he employs. Balázs highlights a psychoanalytic interpretation of hybridity that brings to light the anthropological dimensions of surrealism, in which the human is conceived as fundamentally hybrid—a flawed, mechanical being, sometimes portrayed as part human, part animal. In this framework, surrealism’s engagement with otherness serves as an implicit critique of European culture at large, Balázs suggests.

In another essay, “Notes on the Presence of Dada in Magyar Literature,” Balázs explores the influence of Tristan Tzara’s work on Magyar literature and the contributions of writers such as Gyula Illyés and publications like *Dokumentum*, which played an essential role in the development of surrealism, given dada’s direct ties to surrealist history. The evolution of the

Dada movement in Hungary, Balázs indicates, remains a challenging subject due to the fluid boundaries between avant-garde movements in Central and Eastern European literature: futurism, expressionism, activism, dadaism, constructivism, and surrealism frequently overlap and interweave, making it difficult to categorize works within a single movement.

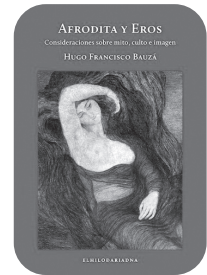
In the essay suggestively titled “On the Way to Non-Oedipal Surrealist Utopias: Freud-Marxist Interference,” Balázs delves into the intersection of surrealism and Freud-Marxist aesthetics, underscoring the emerging need for a theorization of the sociology of the unconscious. He explains that during this period, surrealists took on explicitly Marxist political stances, a revolutionary avant-garde orientation marked by the renaming of their key publication from *La Révolution Surréaliste* (1924-1929) to *Le Surréalisme au Service de la Révolution* (1930-1933). In the Romanian context, Balázs notes, the 1930s saw an increasing focus on social issues, particularly around sexuality. Marginalized individuals faced limited access to a normalized sexual life, often resulting in neuroses, addictions, aggression, and other psychosocial issues. This theme of marginality features prominently in Balázs’s comparative analysis of Geo Bogza’s *Expletive Poem* (*Poemul invectivă*) and Gherasim Luca’s *Holy Sacrament* (*Sfînta Împărtășanie*), which he explores in another essay.

Balázs’s *Avant-garde Networks, Multiple Affiliations* (*Rețele avangardiste, afilieri multiple*) offers a rich intercultural and multidisciplinary exploration of Eastern European avant-garde movements. His work presents not only a comparative-historical interpretation of the Romanian and

Hungarian avant-gardes but also engages with key concepts in French surrealism, referencing figures such as Marcel Jean and Claude Serbanne. Balázs further extends his analysis to the 1947 International Exhibition of Surrealism, the surrealist Cobra group, and the avant-garde networks of Central and Eastern Europe, situating these movements within a broader, transnational framework.

Ioana-Maria Biscă

Hugo Francisco Bauzá, *Afrodita y Eros. Consideraciones sobre mito, culto e imagen*, Buenos Aires, El Hilo de Ariadna, 2022



Bauzá’s book is an exhaustive and intricately detailed work of intersectional literary theory that traces how the representation of two central deities has evolved and shifted across time and across Western cultures. In its comprehensive analysis, the book compiles both textual and visual references, drawing on Aby Warburg’s mnemonic theory and using psychoanalytic paradigms from Freud and Jung to contextualize these representations within the collective (un)conscious. These hermeneutic tools, alongside various aesthetic paradigms, support the book’s central aim: to define and conceptualize the human body as “the great temple of Aphrodite” (18).

In the volume’s first section, Bauzá explores the shifting theological views on

female deities from the earliest forms of human society. Through comparative mythology, he highlights the widespread prevalence of matriarchal deities across many isolated cultures, offering multiple theories on primordial female divinity. However, Bauzá cautions that the broad representational presence of womanhood (e.g., the *Venus of Willendorf*) does not necessarily imply the same hegemonic power later associated with patriarchal deities. Instead, he situates the genesis of the Great Mother myth within a symbolic framework of matriarchy or gynocracy, suggesting that it is the metaphysical investment in the female body and its cultural association with nature that underpins the emergence of primordial goddesses.

Bauzá then examines the shift toward a phallogocentric regime, symbolized by the pervasive myth of a male protagonist who ritually slays a primordial, often female-coded monster. He links this nearly universal myth to the praxis of colonization, drawing on Nietzsche's concepts of the Apollonian and Dionysian as representative of the colonizers and the colonized, respectively. According to Bauzá, this mythological shift contributes to the decline of the unified female deity, giving way to a pantheon of specialized female deities – a transformation driven, in part, by patriarchal and colonial practices.

In the book's second section, Bauzá reaches the point in the mythological timeline where Aphrodite emerges. He traces various interpretations of her origin story and introduces the figure of Eros, exploring different philosophical and aesthetic understandings of desire. Bauzá contextualizes Aphrodite within the Greek pantheon, suggesting that under the patriarchal paradigm, the comprehensive

female deity was reduced to a goddess of love, while women's power was restricted to the domain of sexuality. He carefully emphasizes Aphrodite's dual origins as Urania and Pandemos, concepts central to Plato's *Symposium*, a foundational text to which he frequently returns. Bauzá meticulously avoids conflating love with Aphrodite or desire with Eros, while illustrating the interdependence of these concepts within the mythological framework.

Eros subsequently becomes a focal point in Bauzá's study, as he delves into various depictions of the god and situates Eros among other forms of love in ancient Greek culture. Bauzá also considers other cultural practices to provide readers with a richer context for understanding love, lovemaking, and desire in antiquity. His discussion of homosexuality, particularly in relation to practices such as pederasty and the works of Sappho, is especially insightful, clarifying the ancient Greek view of homosexuality as a practice rather than an identity – an important distinction that enhances the structural depth of the book.

Following his exhaustive exploration of Aphrodite and Eros in ancient Greece, Bauzá extends his analysis to their representations in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Neoplatonic movement. While not as comprehensive as his coverage of antiquity, this section provides valuable insights into how figures like Ficino and the Neoplatonists sought to Christianize Plato's ideas and adapt the notion of platonic love. Bauzá tracks the evolving portrayal of Aphrodite and Eros in literature and examines the changing roles of women in society over time, observing how the figure of Aphrodite has consistently shaped the representation of women in art.

In the third part of the book, Bauzá turns to visual art, analyzing depictions of Aphrodite from Praxiteles' monumental *Aphrodite* to the postmodern *Venus of the Rags* by Michelangelo Pistoletto. He offers incisive commentary on women's nudity and nakedness, tracing how societal views on eroticism are reflected in art. This section provides a nuanced perspective on the depiction of women as both subjects of artistic expression and objects of desire.

The book concludes with an appendix that serves as a case study on the theme of love in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. This thoughtful addition rounds out Bauzá's comprehensive and nuanced examination of Aphrodite, Eros, and their evolving symbolism across cultures and eras.

**Claudia Bereşteanu**

Cristina Bogdan,  
Cristina-Ioana Dima,  
Emanuela Timotin (éds.),  
*Représentations de la  
Vierge Marie entre culte  
officiel et vénération  
locale: textes et images,*  
Études runies par, Herlo  
Verlag UG, 2022



This collection of studies was made possible within the framework of the international conference with the same name, organized in Bucharest in 2020, which focused on the representations of Virgin Mary across various historical periods and cultural contexts. The book is

divided into four parts, corresponding to the main directions of study.

Part I, *The Virgin's miracles*, opens with Jean-Louis Benoit's talk about the lactation miracles disseminated in medieval London by monk Adgar. According to his interpretation, the beneficiaries of lactation miracles are subject to reach the eternal life, in their symbolic infantile condition. Déborah González discusses the way monarch Alfonso X's work, *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, instrumentalizes Marian devotion in order to reinforce his image as a savant and pious king. Elisabetta Barale's article presents the diffusion in the 15<sup>th</sup> century of the stories about a miraculous salvation of Chartres city by analysing different French translations that witness it.

The intercession role of the Mother of God, played during her life, is reinforced within the Medieval compilation *Vie et Miracles de Nostre-Dame*, the focal point of the study made by Loula Abd-elrazak. Ilişinoa Nuh presents the Marian miracles as depicted in the theatrical manifestations of a medieval guild of goldsmiths. The Slavic dissemination of the 17<sup>th</sup> century compilation *Les Miracles de la Vierge* in the translation of Samuil Bakachich is analysed by Dessislava Uzunova. Furthermore, signed by Uzunova and Margaret Dimitrova, the next article conducts a quantitative and qualitative survey regarding the dissemination of the same Athonite narratives in Cyrillic alphabet between the 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*Local veneration of the Virgin* is the object of Part II, where a first discussion about the Italian Tre- and Quattrocento representations of the virginal maternity is held by Simona Drăgan. Fabrizio Lollini presents a painting of *Madonna* from Bologna, attributed to the evangelist Luke

and its further replicas. Jean-Luc Liez makes an inventory of the Marian statues from Southern Champagne (13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> c.), analysing their aesthetic and theological message. Fiammetta Campagnoli demonstrates that the representations of *Our Lady of the Pillar* are a form of Spanish local veneration, which reinforce catholic monarchy and papacy, in a form of “cultural territorialization”. The last study of the section belongs to Cristina Bogdan, who reflects upon the representations of Mary’s protective mantle in Romanian pre-modern iconography, correlated with the historical and religious context.

Part III traces the presence of *Virgin Mary in some literary texts*. The Aphroditien’s legend translated in Romanian by Moldavian Metropolitan Dosoftei gives Cristina Dima the opportunity to scrutinize the translation policies employed in order to enhance the dogma in a period of interconfessional disputes. Monica Ruset Oancă sheds some light on the Marian devotion in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, a story comprised in the Arthurian cycle, analysing the characters’ speech, habits, narratorial descriptions and the emphasis on virtue and morality. Catherine Negoivanovici investigates three texts depicting the Virgin in the guise of the apocalyptic woman that the *Book of the Apocalypse* mentions, showing their impact on the crystallization of the Immaculate Conception dogma. Emanuela Timotin studies the intervention of clergy in the revision of the apocryphal narrative *The Dream of the Virgin*. Interestingly, between the 18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Romania, the text was carried as an amulet and read as a funerary sermon. Carine Roucan reads Joris-Karl Huysmans’ first person documentary called *Les foules de*

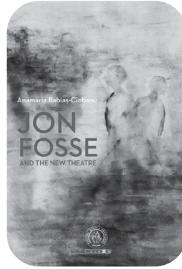
*Lourdes* (1906), where the classical miracle as a literary genre is actualized in accordance with a modern sensitivity, while classical Madonna becomes *La Petite Danseuse de quatorze ans* sculptured by Edgar Degas, showing author’s belief that art and transcendence are two sides of the same coin.

The last part, *Interwoven discourses*, gathers studies that analyse different Mariological discourses, from theology, to musicology and folklore. Ephrem the Syrian’s thoughts about the Virgin are the object of Georgiana Păunoiu’s investigation, who revisits his hymns from the perspective of their artistic and catechetical value. The following study focuses on secular medieval music dedicated to Mary. Mariana Neț outlines the intersection between popular, jocose music and serious Marian verses. The Declaration of 10 February 1638 at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, in the reading of Christine Mengès-Le Pape, is indicative of the way in which the cult of the Virgin is instrumentalized in the political agenda of Louis XIII, who places France under her protection. Laura Jija Iliescu talks about the Virgin in the hypostasis of a spinner, investigating the autochthonous legends about Mother of God and the spider.

Marian representations in different periods and cultures constitute a provocative subject in Humanities, as this anthology demonstrates. The approaches are open to different traces of interpretation, methodologies and disciplines, ranging from classical textual analysis, to translation history, cultural studies and ethnology. Mariologists shed light on different societal aspects, which continually shape the beliefs and devotional practices.

Alexandra-Teodora Mândra

Anamaria Babiș  
Ciobanu, *Jon Fosse  
and the New Theatre*,  
Cluj-Napoca, Editura  
Școala Ardeleană, 2020



Anamaria Babiș-Ciobanu's interdisciplinary approach offers an innovative reading of the 2023 Nobel Literature Laureate Jon Fosse's theater. In her book *Jon Fosse and the New Theatre*, based on her doctoral research, she explores multiple ways of perceiving time and space as depicted in Fosse's plays. Her analysis delves into the intricate connections between characters and the ways time and space twist and interweave, hallmarks of Fosse's distinctive narrative style.

Babiș-Ciobanu employs scientific methods as interpretive tools, which, though not explicitly referenced in Fosse's works, provide valuable insights alongside philosophical and philological approaches. In the book's opening, she contextualizes Fosse's impact on both the Norwegian and European literary and linguistic canon, emphasizing the significance of language in the Norwegian social sphere. Written in Nynorsk, Fosse's plays contribute to Nynorsk literature while deepening discourse on language in Norway. The author highlights a dichotomy in Fosse's use of language: while it serves as a means of communication, it also gives way to silence, allowing unspoken elements to convey meaning. This silence is reinforced as spatiality and temporality converge, forming another method of perceiving – spacetime – a concept Babiș-Ciobanu elaborates on.

The first chapter of the book presents an overview of several time theories as a foundation for examining contemporary understandings of time and space. Key thinkers across disciplines – including philosophers (Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty), scientists (Stephen Hawking, Roger Penrose, Amir D. Aczel), literary critics (Mikhail Bakhtin, Hans Meyerhoff), and scholars (Hans-Thies Lehmann) – are introduced and discussed to set the stage for the primary investigation. In the first chapter, the author explores concepts such as “spacetime,” “empirical entanglement,” and “nearness” as they emerge in Jon Fosse's plays.

The second chapter delves deeper into the role of time and space in Fosse's drama, where these elements are fundamental yet depicted in ways that impart both “static value” and “continuous suspense,” creating a unique form of “shaped” movement. This section highlights the distinctive qualities of Fosse's drama, focusing on recurrent themes in his portrayals of spatiality and temporality. Special attention is given to how Fosse's works transcend mere stasis, embodying a “poetic drama” where relationships between characters—or “figures”—are influenced by this unique conception of spacetime. A sense of estrangement, akin to the Norwegian concept of “situational drama” (*tilstandsdramatikk*), shifts the focus from external realities to subjective, emotional landscapes. This shift, according to German scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann, centers Fosse's drama on inner life and affect. Anamaria Babiș-Ciobanu interprets the depiction of time and space in Fosse's drama as elements that stand apart from conventional representations of movement,



situating his work at the intersection of situational and poetic drama.

*Jon Fosse and the New Theatre* presents a structured investigation that moves from overarching scientific theories to specific literary conceptualizations of time and chronotope, setting the stage for an in-depth exploration of Fosse's drama. The study culminates in a practical close-reading chapter, where key concepts are thoroughly explained, analyzed, and applied. In this final chapter, five of Jon Fosse's notable works are analyzed—*And We'll Never Be Parted* (*Og aldri skal vi skiljast*), *Sleep My Baby Sleep* (*Sov du vesle barnet mitt*), *Sleep* (*Svevn*), *Shadows* (*Skuggar*, translated into Romanian by the author as *Umbre*), and *Sea* (*Hav*). Through these close readings, the author examines and substantiates the hypothesis of spacetime in Fosse's drama. This chapter not only addresses themes of locality and temporality in specific texts but also explores the ritualistic style characteristic of Fosse's work. The investigation concludes with a revealing interview with Jon Fosse, offering insights into his personal perspectives on time, space, and life.

Anamaria Babiaș-Ciobanu's study occupies a unique place in Fossean scholarship, urging readers to consider the intersections between scientific and philological approaches. Her analysis of Fosse's plays highlights a theatre of silence and repetition, where space and time blend to create an immersive experience. With innovative tools and methods, the study opens new avenues for discussion, as Jon Fosse, in the author's words, remains "the poet of the unknown."

**Diana-Maria Ciot-Monda**

Roxana-Ema Dreve,  
*În umbra trecutului:  
relații familiale în  
literatura scandinavă*,  
Cluj-Napoca, Presa  
Universitară Clujeană,  
2023



Can Scandinavian literature be interpreted through methods other than traditional comparative approaches? And do the family dynamics within it lend themselves to fractal analysis? These are the questions Roxana-Ema Dreve explores in her newly published book, *În umbra trecutului: relații familiale în literatura scandinavă* (2023), where literary analysis intersects with scientific principles to examine the complexity of family relationships. Dreve's study begins with three central themes – death, shame, and loneliness – which she meticulously analyzes through a fractal perspective. Among the theoretical concepts Dreve draws from mathematicians like Benoît Mandelbrot are self-similarity, nonlinearity, homothety, scalar invariance, and, most notably, the fractal – a complex geometric shape that exhibits self-similarity at various scales.

The volume is divided into two main sections, each dedicated to a different gender perspective on family relationships. One section examines the works of male authors (Karl Ove Knausgård, Göran Tunström), while the other focuses on female authors (Hanne Ørstavik, Linda Boström Knausgård). Dreve supplements her analysis with a foreword, an introductory chapter on the theoretical framework, a conclusion, a glossary of scientific terms, and indexes of terms and authors.

The author examines how homothety, hazard, and asymmetry, along with recurring patterns in the novels under study, underscore the impact of an absent parent on a child's journey to adulthood. Fractal analysis here serves as a metaphorical tool that transcends formal analysis (such as in lexicometric studies), moving instead into thematic and character-driven exploration. Through this approach, the author juxtaposes consistent, repetitive elements with stochastic ones, rarely resulting in a linear interpretation.

The analysis opens with Knausgård's *Ute av verden* (1998), *En tid for alt* (2004), and the six-volume autobiographical series *Min kamp*, works in which themes of identity crisis and childhood are pervasive. Knausgård's characters grapple with their pasts on a fractal plane shaped by shame and death – concepts that recur as self-similar motifs. The father-son relationship, in particular, is emphasized through a homothetic pattern of behavior, underlining a cyclical, self-similar dynamic.

In Göran Tunström's novels, *Julaoratoriet* (1983) and *Tjuven* (1986), the premature loss of the father figure – a recurring autobiographical motif in his works across various self-similar scales – gives rise to the “incomplete” child marked by marginalization. The recurrence of father figures, along with the overlapping or substitution of characters and blending of past, present, and future, accentuates a fractal structure of childhood where the parent-child relationship exists “under the sign of remembrance and temporal fluidity.”

In the second part, the author turns to Hanne Ørstavik's *Kjærlighet* (1997) and *Tiden det tar* (2000), where characters confront their pasts, guided by the motif

of the mirror as a self-similar fractal element. Here, the interaction between past and present, dreams and reality, and a pervasive lack of communication become central to the analysis. The mirror serves both as a tool for introspection and as a homothetic element that underscores identity struggles, alongside other fractal *strange attractors* like the book and the dream. The absent, indifferent mother also emerges as a self-similar element, with intergenerational relationships depicted as “perverted mirror reflections.”

In her analysis of Linda Boström Knausgård's *Välkommen till Amerika* (2016), silence entwined with shame, guilt, and fear becomes both a weapon and a mechanism for self-defense and self-punishment in the strained relationship between a trauma-affected daughter and her parents. In *Oktoberbarn* (2019), the shame of forgotten memories and the pervasive silence between partners re-emerge as self-similar fractal elements. Both novels are marked by temporal discontinuities, an effect of the trauma they explore.

While fractal analysis serves as the primary interpretive approach, Dreve also incorporates insights from socio-critical, psychoanalytic, and socio-poetic theories. The volume stands as a thoroughly constructed and well-documented study, enriched by the author's intimate familiarity with the texts – many of which she has translated herself, allowing her to fully immerse in their narratives. Dreve effectively reveals fractal structures in both the narrative style and thematic content of these works. While her approach does not aim for exhaustive analysis, it compellingly illustrates how motifs such as death, silence, and the absent father shift and transform

across narrative layers, demonstrating the value of fractal analysis for understanding family dynamics in Scandinavian literature.

### Georgiana Teșu

Ion Manolescu,  
*Benzile desenate și  
canonul postmodern*,  
București, Editura  
Cartea Românească,  
2011



The volume *Benzile desenate și canonul postmodern* (*Comics and the Postmodern Canon*) brings together studies in literary and cultural theory, chronicles, and literary history, compiling articles by Ion Manolescu published from the 1990s to the 2000s in local cultural magazines such as *România Literară*, *Contrapunct*, *Dilema*, *Vineri*, and *Observator Cultural*. Manolescu's works are organized according to the themes and “symptoms” of the evolving canon shaped by consumer culture in the latter half of the 20th century.

This collection begins with the premise that both the concepts of literature and the literary canon have transformed significantly in the postmodern era. In the context of postmodernism, the traditional canon has been either undermined or re-evaluated, as Romanian culture has aimed to synchronize with and democratize itself. Postmodernism resists a fixed canon, favoring diversity, pluralism, and the dismissal of rigid norms. Accordingly, Manolescu's research follows two main directions: the first approach examines comic strips,

exploring them as a “paraliterary” phenomenon, while the second investigates visual forms of literature from a “techno-cultural” perspective. Through these dual lenses, Manolescu invites readers to embrace a flexible and inclusive canon, familiarizing them with a postmodern concept of literature that is hybrid, permissive, and – most importantly – open.

A primary theme in *Benzile desenate și canonul postmodern* is the tension between popular culture and high (or elite) culture. In the first part of the volume, Ion Manolescu addresses this ongoing debate, focusing particularly on comic strips. He argues that comic strips represent a legitimate literary form, though they have been denied this status, especially within Romanian culture, due to the resistance and criticism from literary authorities who have prevented their integration into the canon. Manolescu frequently critiques historians and critics for excluding comic book creators from literary dictionaries and histories. He contends that comic strips, as a unique medium combining image and text, deserve recognition as a form of literary expression. Illustrating this point, Manolescu explains that if we were to distill a fairy tale narrative into a schematic form based on fixed narrative moments, we would find remarkable similarities to the structural “technology” of comic strips. By doing so, he demonstrates that the perceived gap between so-called “true” literature and consumer sub-literature is much smaller than traditionally assumed, suggesting that the textual complexity of comics rivals that of established literary forms.

Ion Manolescu draws on Francis Lacassin's work, identifying three key characteristics of comic strips (and, by extension,

all paraliterature): the active role of the audience in shaping both texts and heroes, the collective identification of readers with these heroes over time, and their documentary or testimonial value. To illustrate this, Manolescu references the character Terry from *Terry and the Pirates*. When Terry is expelled from his occupied island by the Japanese, a scandal erupts in the United States. President Roosevelt personally requests that cartoonist Milton Caniff help Terry retake the island, recognizing that the character's failure might impact American troop morale. This example highlights how comic strips, much like popular novels, reflect the concerns and spirit of their times.

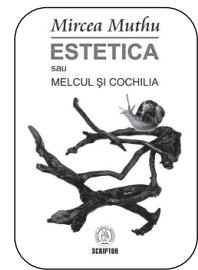
The second major theme in the volume is the literary canon, examined against the backdrop of postmodernism. Looking toward the future of literature, Manolescu envisions a landscape populated by cyberpunk, hypertexts, and fantasy. He critiques conservative literary criticism for lagging behind cultural evolution, asserting that in an era marked by constant shifts – often labelled with prefixes like “neo” and “post” – the literary canon must be democratized, if not entirely dismantled. To advance this democratization, Manolescu proposes seven transformative ideas in essays such as “Literatura de mâine” (“Literature of Tomorrow,” 1996) and “Șapte idei radioactive” (“Seven Radioactive Ideas,” 1997). These ideas challenge traditional aesthetics and call for redefining “great truths” in literary history, dismantling the monopoly of critical infallibility, postmodernizing critical discourse and historical methodology, adopting a pluralistic and open theoretical stance, rejecting the celebratory nature of canonical works, democratizing

the canon itself, and liberalizing historical competitiveness.

Ion Manolescu's collected works represent a rallying cry against the constraints of the Romanian literary canon, long affected by aesthetic taboos and remnants of communist clichés. This volume, aimed at both specialized and general audiences, challenges these restrictions, advocating for a more liberated and inclusive approach to literature.

Denisa-Mihaela Craus

Mircea Muthu, *Estetica sau Melcul și cochilia*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2021



Aesthetics is a multifaceted investigation of the perceptual knowledge and evaluative mechanisms underlying artistic and sensory experiences. Rooted in philosophical analysis, this scholarly endeavour seeks to discern the intrinsic nature of what is aesthetically pleasing, by interrogating the nuanced interplay of subjective and objective factors that influence human apprehension. Over time, the social context has proven to be particularly important in influencing the concept of “work” or aesthetics, which should always be referred to in its analysis. Aesthetic theorists therefore had to navigate historical centuries, canons and concepts, and were constantly caught between the past and the extremely contemporary reality.

This is certainly achieved by Mircea Muthu, in his study *Estetica sau Melcul și cochilia*, published in 2021. The author is known for his studies of literary theory, especially with his Balkan studies. This book is the result of an ambitious research endeavour, perhaps spanning decades, which aims to synthesize the course of aesthetics in European cultural history, particularly in the short Romanian literary history. These may include *Studii de estetică românească* (2005) and *Estetica între mediere și sinteză* (2016), titles that prove the study of aesthetics as the primary focus of Mircea Muthu's research interests.

As an extensive study of over 570 pages, key chapters include: *Antecedente românești*, which talks about of the foundation of Romanian aesthetics, with remarkable bio-bibliographical portraits of writers such as Titu Maiorescu ("the concept-man"), Mircea Florian, Benjamin Fundoianu, Lucian Blaga and many others, *Între mediere și sinteză, Reiterări și Asimptote*, in which the author proves his openness to recent theoretical studies.

What strikes a positive note right from the book's introduction is the author's personal definition of this theoretical field. He does not resort to a classical, standard definition, like "The science that studies the laws and categories of art, considered as the highest form of creation and reception of beauty; a set of problems concerning the essence of art, its relationship with reality, the method of artistic creation, the criteria and genres of art", as mentioned in the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, for instance. He rather proposes an inventive syntagm, such as "The self-consciousness of the work of art as an anthropological fact" ("Estetica este

conștiința în sine a operei de artă ca fapt antropologic") which means that the ways in collecting aesthetic studies are not limited to genres or styles of creations, but can in practice extend them to the status of the very defining imprint of man in his ongoing creative process.

The title is closely related to this clear perspective of defining the "battlefield" of aesthetics. *The snail or shell* is a subtle metaphor for the characteristic spiral of the mollusc, which is, as the book also points out, constantly oriented to the right, with four labyrinthine turns that suggest infinity. It is also relevant that the snail, during its hibernation period, usually covers the opening of its shell with a protective membrane, which, when the time of release comes, it penetrates with unsuspected power. In this stunning phenomenon of nature, Mircea Muthu has discovered a clear link with aesthetics. He believes that this is how this science has managed to resist the erosion of time, always reviving itself after "dead" periods of hibernation. To support this argument, the quote "Aesthetic discourse is an elastic system" ("Discursul estetic este un sistem elastic") is self-explanatory.

Mircea Muthu demonstrates that he is indeed familiar with the recent theories that speak of popular culture, transmediality and the notion of moving the analysis of literature (through distant reading) or all literature (through inventive art forms and mediums) into a virtual medium. However, there seems to be a slight uncertainty in the tone of the speech. There is no such thing in terms of the power of literacy to communicate with other scientific media, the author believing in the relationships that aesthetics can establish and branch out into other fields and subfields, but on

the functionality of aesthetics as a *symbolic good* à la Bourdieu does not seem to offer the same optimistic perspective, giving the impression of a nostalgia for the golden age of aesthetics.

It remains certain, after reading the entire study, that the field of aesthetics transcends the mere exegetical analysis of artistic artefacts, embracing a holistic investigation of the ontological foundations of aesthetic encounters that are endemic to mundane existence. Aesthetics is functional, even as the primacy of the power of literature has shifted in accordance with the rise and fall of different historical periods and conflicts.

### Adelina Traicu

Ioana Pavel, *Canonul (im)perfecțiunilor. Excurs comparatist*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2024



Regardless of the theoretical lens used, the concept of canon remains one of the most debated issues in literary criticism and history. The topic has a wide array of aesthetic, didactic, religious, ideological, and social implications, in addition to its evolution across different literary periods. A study like the one authored by Ioana Pavel, titled *The Canon of (Im)perfections: A Comparative Excurs*, and published in the Metacritic Collection, coordinated by Mihaela Ursa, is certainly a valuable contribution. It adds to the broader understanding of the concept of

the literary canon and its ongoing evolution, which remains a “hot spot” (p. 13), as the author herself describes it, both in past and current research.

Based on her doctoral dissertation, Ioana Pavel’s volume outlines a well-researched theoretical framework, which is further refined through the case studies examined in the second part of the book. The author uses the montage technique for two key reasons: first, for its flexibility, allowing the theoretical and practical components to coexist without one undermining or overshadowing the other; and second, for its ability to explore a wide range of historical-literary levels, utilizing a highly versatile corpus. This approach is particularly intriguing, given the subject matter. From a methodological perspective, the research favours a comparative approach, presented theoretically and enriched by a more applied process. The author aims to refine “the representation of the canon, in all its forms and variations, as well as what remains after its monumentalization” (p. 19).

As Ioana Pavel acknowledges, such an approach comes with its own challenges, as the goal is not to draw absolute conclusions or adopt exhaustive positions. This explains the avoidance of a singular methodological framework, thus placing the volume within the field of comparative literature, where hermeneutic, sociological, and imagological studies, as well as studies of the imaginary, are favoured (p. 20).

The author notes how proponents of the canon have contextually framed their conceptual developments, analysing the polemics, points of convergence, and moments of rupture that shape both older and contemporary canonical debates. At the same time, the researcher highlights the canon’s shortcomings, given that it is often viewed

through the lens of perfectibility, while also examining its stability, reinforced by both its defenders and critics. In this regard, Pavel focuses on problematizing the aesthetic canon through literature, addressing secondary aspects that have been obscured over time. These include “the image of the successful writer, the fairness of awards or the harshness of value judgments, the (ir)responsibility of art, and its deconstruction through intertextuality” (p. 14, m.t.).

The central thesis of this study is divided into two key levels: the object of study and the needs of the reader, both of which guide the author’s approach. Regarding the object of study, Ioana Pavel focuses on the inclusive nature of current research, which is no longer limited to canonical literature but also considers marginalized works. In this theoretical context, she references Pierre Bayard, who discusses the failures of canonical authors, arguing that the beauty of their texts often lies in their aesthetic fragility, which naturally creates a hierarchy even among works by the same author. Nonetheless, abolishing the canon is not a viable option for democratizing readings, as it carries the risk of endorsing banal, mediocre literature that, by avoiding canonization, escapes scrutiny from any critical framework. Ioana Pavel expands on this idea, drawing on the thoughts of Alex Ștefănescu. Regarding the needs of readers, these can be traced back to the conceptualization of cultural levels emerging in the French context, which are reflected in phenomena such as *high culture* and *popular culture* in the American sphere. This notion is supported by the understanding that the act of reading is not confined to canonical literature, given that there are no immutable criteria for distinguishing between the “first shelf” and the “second shelf” (pp. 16-17).

In the theoretical section, titled “Premises: The ‘Journey’ of the Canon: A (Un) Canonical History,” the researcher, while not claiming to be exhaustive, effectively outlines a broad map of the etymological development of the term “canon.” Before it reached the Western world, the concept was rooted in an ancient tradition centred on the duality of original and copy, as well as the ideas of fidelity and representation of the original. The derived meaning here refers to “a system of proportion, as an anthropomorphic measure for the carefully calculated ratios of dimensions that offer security, beauty, perfection” (p. 35). This definition is more closely associated with architectural and sculptural canons, imbuing the term with a metaphysical significance as well (p. 36). During the Medieval Age, aesthetic beauty began to be viewed from a secondary perspective, with moral and ethical codes taking precedence (p. 40). The Renaissance revitalized the dialogue with the Ancients, though this engagement was complex, influenced by other traditions such as Neoplatonism and Arab adaptations. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a notable shift away from an algorithmic view on art, placing greater emphasis on its emotional resonance (p. 43). Building on this historical and cultural overview, the author highlights the transformations in perspectives on the canon and the concepts of beauty, ultimately associating the canon with the epithet “traveller.” This term is understood in light of the conceptual developments introduced by Edward W. Said and Mieke Bal, which address the transnational quality of theory, allowing terms and concepts to be reinterpreted as they move from one culture to another (p. 47).

One of the key strengths of Ioana Pavel’s study is her acknowledgment of the biblical

canon as a precursor to the aesthetic canon. She argues that this connection arises partly from the criteria of hierarchization and evaluation among church writings, which mirror the conflicts within the aesthetic canon (pp. 46-47). Additionally, both canons carry a sense of omnipotence (p. 50). The similarities between the biblical and aesthetic canons are numerous, and the author lists them insightfully. These range from the staged construction of each canon and the need for continuous updating, to their elitist aspirations and acute relevance. She also notes the transnational nature of the canon, its didactic role, and how both canons serve as an orbit around which various texts – whether accepted or not – gravitate, often marked by hyper-canonization despite longstanding criticisms (p. 56). The schism between the biblical and aesthetic canons is highlighted by the establishment of the first universities, which relocated monastic figures outside the church's coercive environment, leading to a lack of theoretical boundaries. This shift facilitated the elevation of figures through the notion of genius and prompted investigations into the status of the masterpiece (pp. 58-59).

A pivotal example given by the author is the controversy surrounding the course *The Great Books* taught at Stanford University (1987-1988), which she regards as a critical moment in the canonical debate. Here, her positioning within postmodernism and relativism does not provide her with a methodological or terminological advantage; instead, it serves as a *Welthanchauung*. As the author notes, referencing Cosana Nicolae, this course exemplifies “how American society (and others) (re)reads its past” (p. 99). Following this line of thought, she highlights the cyclical and iterative nature

of canonical conflicts as a consistent feature across different epochs and cultural issues, rather than a phenomenon solely of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She draws on the insights of Mircea Martin and Cosana Nicolae, discussing how definitions often arise in the negative, particularly through the lens of decanonizers and the counterculture of the 1960s (p. 99). In this context, the American debate serves to relativize the absolutist vision of aesthetics, imbuing it with political, ideological, and social nuances. This shift favours what the author terms “canonical pluralization,” aiming to integrate authors from marginalized groups that emerged in the 20th century. Consequently, the canon becomes the product of a threefold striation: “the mono-canonical right, the relativist left, and the centre where moderates and plural-canonical voices reside” (p. 102).

Ioana Pavel also reviews the vulnerabilities of the volume written by Harold Bloom, marked by the absolutization of the Western canon, as well as by Shakespearean and aesthetic obsession, given the refraction to the School of Resentment interested in feminism, Marxism, new historicism, deconstructivism, semiotics, and Lacanian philosophy (p. 107). The overall image is enriched by the figure of Antoine Compagnon, who examines the canon in terms of cultural heritage and memory, an area identified as fragile by the author, given the emergence of multiculturalism and transnationalism (p. 115). David Damrosch's views are also brought into the discussion, introducing a democratizing perspective through his delineation of the *hypercanon* (the consolidated and undisturbed major authors within the canon, despite additions or eradications), the *countercanon* (the voices of authors of minor literatures), and the *shadow canon* (the



literary defunct authors, known only to the older generations). Paul Cornea's perspective is also addressed, presenting a pyramidal structure that is more axiological, organized on an elitist level, one of lasting authors of a certain period, respectively one of the lack of systematization of contemporary literature (pp. 116-118).

This theoretical overview, in which Ioana Pavel positions herself either polemically or preventively, concludes with an observation about the interdependence between the canonical and the non-canonical. She argues that the former, along with critical judgments, cannot exist without the "delegitimization" of the latter. Finally, the author offers a focused discussion on the didactic canon, drawing inspiration from Mihaela Ursă's volume, *The Indiscipline of Fiction: The Afterlife of Literature* (Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2022). In this context, she argues for the rehabilitation of canonical literature lists by employing "non-canonical" approaches such as intermediality and transmediality. She does not shy away from criticizing the Romanian school curriculum, which she rightly identifies as outdated, conservative, and misogynistic for its failure to include female writers and a diverse range of contemporary authors.

In the second part, titled "Meta-Narratives of the Aesthetic Canon," which focuses on case studies, the discussion remains anchored in theoretical underpinnings rather than being purely application-focused. Instead, a concentric approach is evident, moving from contextual analysis to *close reading*, with the latter reinforcing the overall framework. Ioana Pavel's goal is to present a view on the recovered canon, where the subjective selection of various narratives from multiple national literatures employing the montage

technique aims to create a (meta)narrative representation of the aesthetic canon that is as comprehensive as possible.

Another significant idea framing this section of *The Canon of (Im)perfections: A Comparative Excursus* is the emphasis on crisis as a crucial element in shaping the history of the canon. This concept reflects a striking resemantization of the struggle between the Ancients and the Moderns. As the researcher notes, "regardless of the theoretical lens through which we examine the subject, the canon and its counter-canonical/anti-canonical versions are perpetually situated within a horizon of crisis, whether methodological or cultural" (p. 141, m.t.). The case studies encompass a diverse range of authors including Dante, Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, Varlam Shalamov, Umberto Eco, Julian Barnes, Ludmila Ulytskaya, Azar Nafisi, Dai Sijie, Lewis Carroll, J.M. Coetzee, and C.S. Lewis. Ioana Pavel examines these writers not only as candidates for inclusion in the canon or as its restorers through intertextuality but also highlights the bookish, aesthetic, and ideological representations of the central figure in this theoretical work: the canon itself.

For instance, in her analysis of Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ioana Pavel highlights the antagonism between the canonical and the anti-canonical through the relationship between Abbot Zosima and Father Ferapont (p. 169). In this context, the canonical battles are resemanticized and explored in J.M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg*, where the canonization of Dostoevsky's themes and his own literary status is embodied in the novel's protagonist, who grapples with his own literary implications. From a more sociological perspective, Pavel

also discusses Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. This work is significant not only for its role in rehabilitating a marginalized genre like children's literature within the canonical framework but also for its exploration of the importance of literary prizes in the process of an author's or text's consecration (p. 201).

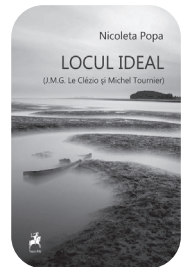
This approach is further enriched by the exploration of the Jamesian text *The Figure in the Carpet*, which examines the birth and questioning of the literary institution, highlighting how its seemingly immutable values are nuanced through sensory understanding (p. 231). Pavel also revisits *Madame Bovary*, emphasizing the disjunction between the dogmatic canon and the secular counter-canon (p. 206). In Zola's *Creation*, she reframes the struggle between the Ancients and the Moderns, which plays out narratively through the dichotomy of institutionalized art versus new art (p. 239). Additionally, the themes of exclusivism (as discussed by Borges) and censorship (as noted by Umberto Eco and Cervantes) are addressed in the context of the library, while the "Procrustean" nature of the canon—an idea Pavel associates with Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*—adds another layer to her analysis. This complex tapestry of ideas comes together like a jigsaw puzzle, incorporating the memory of Dante as the first organizer of the aesthetic canon, the subversive texts of Lyudmila Ulytskaya and Solzhenitsyn, and discussions of the avant-garde, whose profoundly anti-canonical character paradoxically grants them canonical status.

In conclusion, Ioana Pavel's volume *Canon of (Im)Perfections: A Comparative Excursus* achieves depth not only through its substantial page count but also via the interplay of theoretical ideas and refined *close reading* analyses. These elements work

together to explore the metanarrative constructions of the aesthetic canon and their revitalization in contemporary works. The author's conclusions centre on two key aspects. First, she highlights the dialogical relationship between canonical and non-canonical art (p. 395), suggesting that the former gains richness by reflecting the latter. Second, she uses the metaphor of a shadow to represent the concept in question, pictorially translating this into the third dimension of the volume. This metaphor facilitates a nuanced analysis of (im)perfections, guiding readers along a path that is consistently oriented toward the aesthetic canon itself.

**Iulia-Maria Virban**

Nicoleta Popa, *Locul ideal* (J.M.G. Le Clézio și Michel Tournier), București, Tracus Arte, 2022



Nicoleta Popa scrutinizes the novels of the writers Le Clézio and Michel Tournier to demonstrate that, in their journeys, the characters are alienated beings searching for their spiritual selves in order to free themselves from the conventions of an absurd world and to reach transcendence. The journey from the exterior space is always doubled by an inner journey, an attempt to return to the origins – both to the origins of the being and to the original space, which the author calls the ideal place (*Locul ideal*). The title of the book borrows the concept defined by Jean-Jacques Wunenburger to

announce the search of the heroes towards the centre of the being where the consensus of the self with the divinity is produced. In the pursuit of the journey that marks the inner becoming and the rediscovery of identity, the author uses a mytocrITICAL analysis focused on the configurations of space.

At the beginning of the book, the author offers an overview on the obsession for the original space. She motivates the fascination for myth and the relativization of searches in space and time. The starting point is "Only by knowing where he is from does man have self-awareness", so the ideal place at this stage of the discussion is the lost paradise of childhood. The characters of Le Clézio and Michel Tournier who return to their native places realize the impossibility of reconciliation with the space left behind due to the change in time. Between departure and return, it is time that articulates the difference between the original self and the returned self. The individual projects an ideal, mythical, utopian world generated by the state of melancholy towards the original space that he cannot reach. The author uses Gaston Bachelard's hypothesis according to which melancholy determines nostalgia for origins. The pilgrim in a state of alienation and nostalgia for the original space reconstructs the space in a new temporal order of cyclic journeys. At the same time, the search for the paradise of childhood plays the role of restoring the original mother status to the earth by imitating an archetypal model. Thus, the horizontal search becomes a descent into the vertical, a *regressus ad uterum*, in which the contemplation of the constellations and the cosmic map gives rise to the need to discover the depths of the self in us. Analysing the novels, the reality of the exterior space with its inner counterparts – the

self, the origin, the making – is problematized, because "the origin of the world is resumed in the origin of man". For example, in Le Clézio's prose, the childhood home is the secure space representing the essence of paradise. However, not only space plays an important role in mytocrITICAL analysis. Access to myth and pure self becomes possible only in timelessness, with the attainment of archetypal sacred time. Utopia cannot be reached without reaching zero-temporality because it is an ideal space-time. Utopia is not only a perfect architecture, but also a place of self-discovery. That is why the analysed texts have a narrative form whose action leads to an unknown world, a world of nowhere where the hero finally comes to himself. The utopia that the characters seek cannot have a concrete shape because it is formed based on *sermo mythicus*. Nicoleta Popa brings to light a set of myths, images, symbols that she analyses in sub-chapters. For example, regarding Michel, the mythical theme of the island as a utopian space of inner transformation and the marine imaginary in which water is the source of the cosmogony are explored. Water is invested with symbolic function as an element of circularity because it destroys and purifies through rebirth. Thus, the flood is a symbol of the rebirth that comes close to reaching mythical time. Analogously, fire is invested with the same functions, and together with the earth symbolism of Mater Gaia, Sacred Mountain, Insular Space, it is one of the elements that can reconstruct the ideal world as a reflection of the inner map. Another important component in the composition of the utopian space that follows the four named by Bachelard – water, air, earth, fire – is language. In addition to the origin and the split self, the character is looking for his story, he

wants to save himself through the word. The demiurgic force of the divine *logos* contributes to the becoming of neophytes who find their origins through writing, through an intimate process of creation and recreation.

The interdependence of the discussed themes is exposed through the network structure, each symbol depends on another and is interpreted through it. For example, the water and the island are restructurings of the archetype of the woman, of the *anima*, where the identity quest marks the way to the *anima* through the symbols of femininity. The island is a feminine hypostasis of the maternal womb, a myth associated in the two authors with the terrestrial paradise. The woman – anima – becomes the face of paradise through which the dual opposition of the feminine-masculine principle is reconciled. The woman is a positive opposite that is part of the hero's initiation. The myth of the androgyne is also reflected in the image of the twin who rearranges the world on a mythical basis. When in Tournier's book Paul follows in the footsteps of Jean, he is actually looking for his lost half. Other mythic symbols associated with the twin are the mirror or the photograph which works with the theme of bringing into eternity through temporal restructuring. The interdependent relationship of the analysed elements is demonstrated in the continuation of the book through the symbolic swing between self-alter ego, singular-plural, one-two. The self-other relationship is emphasized in the sub-chapters dedicated to the guide or the monstrous figure, and the one-two dynamic in the sub-chapter on the study of numerology where the idea of splitting the self and mirroring in another is explained not only through the image of the twin, as well as through the use of the number 2 or the

appearance number 4 as a sign of cosmic harmony. It is the number that organizes the chaos. Numerology conceals the meanings of the mythical, metaphysical and archetypal plane.

Therefore, using a thorough analysis of all the elements that make up the book, Nicoleta Popa assumes the idea that: Paradise is a myth that lives in us and revitalizes the Paradise of the soul.

Anca Pașca-Saturn

Dominique Samson  
Normand de Chambourg,  
Dany Savelli (éd.),  
*La Sibérie comme paradis*,  
Centre d'Études  
Mongoles & Sibériennes,  
2019



The challenge taken on by the collective volume *La Sibérie comme paradis* requires a considerable amount of effort: reimagining Siberia in terms of its assertion as a natural and cultural paradise. Thus, the volume aims to transcend the representational limits particularly imposed by Russia's history throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and to redeem Siberia as a land of cultural, social and environmental fruition; or, as Ksenia Pimenova refers to the phenomenon in her text, to think about Siberia as a “paradis à reconquérir” (p. 269).

The majority of the featured texts ponder upon the influences the Russian conquest of Siberia had on the depictions of the region. For example, in Chapter I, Alexei Chtcherbinine, Nina Chtcherbinina and Arkadi Sentsov dismantle these symbolic clichés

through a decolonial approach of Siberian history. The chapter thoroughly discusses the implications of imperialist thought in the storytelling found in medieval manuscripts, as well as the abstract shaping of Siberia into a barren land, “antéchristique” (p. 47) and unquestionably in need of atonement provided by Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Hence, the text targets the somewhat overlooked pre-Russian indigenous cultural baggage and its persistence, while also underlining the alternative histories of the region and the autochthons’ pride in their land.

Naturally, the approach of Siberia as either a *Paradise on Earth* (*paradis terrestre*) or as a hostile environment represents the main topic of the imaginary-research-based undertaking of the subject of Siberia. In the fifth chapter, Clément Jacquemoud proposes an exploration of Burkhanism beliefs and the cultural and spiritual contexts that made its flourishing possible. This “millénarisme messianique” (p. 122), the author argues, constitutes a special case when compared to other local or Western religious movements focused on the imperative search for a terrestrial paradise which would ensure the survival of the human race. The reason is its lack of a geographically imposed development and the converted indigenous people’s belief that they had already reached paradise within their own territory. The text insists on the religious synthesis of Orthodox Christianity and autochthonic shamanic faith in Burkhanism in spite of its emergence meant to denounce Russian cultural colonising efforts.

Similarly, Chapter VI focuses on the connections between the beliefs and legends of the people of Altai and Buddhism, beginning with the ideas and writings of painter Nicholas Roerich and his wife, Elena. The synchronicities found between the two

regions regarding their faiths make Dany Savelli open a further discussion about the Russian spirit itself, divided into a Western sphere and an Asian one, the two of them standing almost immutably incongruous. Apart from the imaginary analysis powered by the transmutation of the Shambala into the Altai Mountains, the text talks of the political tensions from the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century between the soviets who contested the semi-independence of the Republic of Altai and the voices that opposed the USSR expansionist plan for the region.

Towards the end of the volume, Ksenia Pimenova enters contemporaneity, outlining the many ideological interpretational facets of the ground-breaking discovery made in 1993: the preserved remains of a woman, dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC which would later be referred to as the Princess of Altai (*Princesse altaïenne*). Pimenova highlights the potential of cultural redemption and revival of the Siberian region the artefact held upon its discovery. Concurrently, the text reconsiders the different reception of the event, emphasizing the cultural and the inherent eschatological disparities which frame the conversation on the subject between the Russian state and the native communities.

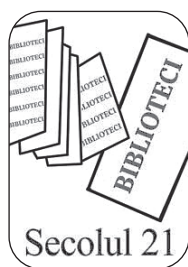
The political nuances of this long-lasting disjunction are not only explored in the above-mentioned chapter. The tensions between the Russian state marked by Western tendencies, as many of the texts claim, and the peripheral (geographically and culturally speaking) territories of Siberia constitute the overall topic discussed in other chapters of the volume as well. The research conducted in the region focuses on socio-economic aspects, as reflected in the studies authored by Cécile Lefèvre and Svetlana Russkikh, or Sophie Hohmann and Marlène Laruelle’s

analysis on the destiny of the city of Norilsk in the post-soviet era.

As shown, the volume meets its desired outcome, portraying a large array of stages in Siberia's history through the set lens of exploring the numerous instrumentalizations of the concept of *paradise*. Moreover, one of the main merits of the featured texts is their ubiquitous aim to become part of a decolonial thought system meant to restore the specificity of the vast Siberian cultural baggage. Consequently, *La Sibérie comme paradis* draws from world history and imaginary research practices in order to make a valuable step towards a prejudice-free sociological and cultural analysis of Siberia, turning away from its prevalent culturally secondary status.

### Cassandra Corbu

Secolul 21, no. 7-12,  
Biblioteci, București,  
Fundatia Culturală  
Secolul 21, 2017



The *Biblioteci (Libraries)* issue of *Secolul 21 Journal* is dedicated to the exploration of the polysemy of the library, from public and personal libraries to the nuanced meaning of a worldwide treasury of literature. Thus, the collective volume focuses on the many connotations the library has received throughout history and depicts it as an idiosyncratic space shaped by its institutional nature, the histories and the cultural inheritance contained by library

collections and the somewhat idealistic approach of the ones delving into these vast archives. The collection of featured essays does not wish to be a scientifically driven project, but its aim seems to be the genesis of a space animating the exchange of ideas for the benefit of cultural development in many forms.

Svetlana Cârstean's text, for instance, subjectively approaches the library in a candid manner, targeting the numerous implications of an existence marked by the permanency of books and highlights the relationship between childhood and reading, strongly linked to the ideas of exploration, curiosity and freedom. Similarly, Robert Ștefan explores the influence of reading throughout his life and its impact on his formative years. Apart from the inwardness-driven project of the two texts, the significant common ground they share is the attention they offer to the personally owned library. Perceived as a both material and immaterial object, the family book collection becomes relevant for broader discussions about parent-guided curation of reading and the Romanian book market during the communist era. Hence, the personal book collection is depicted in the two texts as a means of sharing cultural heritage and literary preferences from one generation to another.

The communist regime and its attitudes towards literature represent one of the main heads paid in the essay written by Monica Pillat. Intended to be a thematic addendum to the biographies of Ion and Dinu Pillat, the text focuses on the fate of the extensive personal library of the family during the political and socio-economic changes in 20<sup>th</sup> century Romania. The degradation of the Pillat book collection is

presented as a symptom of communist-authority-imposed literary restrictions, the text thus becoming a testament to a significant paradigm change from the interwar period regarding the circulation of reading materials. Monica Pillat recalls a time when Western literature editions or copies of them were smuggled into the country and passed around secretly within certain groups of intellectuals, a phenomenon which led to what she calls “the first-hand experience of the *open library*”, marked by “cultural altruism” (p. 81-82).

The aforementioned communal aspect is notably considered in Ioan Pinteau and Elena Darabont’s texts reviewing the impact different book collections have had on the town of Bistrița over the last centuries. Commenting on the statistics and the reading habits resulting from her analysis, Elena Darabont reveals the ties between the rising literacy levels and the religious schools’ activity in the area starting from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, hinting to the status of Transylvania as part of the European religious networks.

Mariana Neț goes beyond the personal or national aspect of the library, addressing the characteristics of some of the most famous libraries in Western Europe and North America. The most compelling line of discussion Neț proposes is the relationship between the library and the museum, highlighting the institutions’ co-dependency. She points up the survival of the library being reliant on museum practices and argues that a library which does not break the habit of gatekeeping its collection and a museum showing books as only material artefacts both defy the greater purpose of accessibility to knowledge.

This diagnosis and the call for newer practices in the library mark the somewhat universal doubt about the survival of the library as we know it. In spite of the literaturocentric framework many of the featured texts bear, the authors’ prospects on the matter do not seem as catastrophic as one might expect. George Banu and Tompa Gábor’s notes on their adaptation of Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard* in which they envision the dismantled orchard as a forsaken library convey a sense of hope: “[...] readers always exist. We are not entering the age of barbarism. The decline of the book is not synonymous with the mourning of reading.” (143) Just as other co-authors’ texts in the issue suggest, the prognosis admits the changes in reading practices in the digital era and thus, the need for the library to adapt to the necessities of its users.

Although the issue is titled *Biblioteci (Libraries)*, I believe it would be more fitting to view it as an ode to book culture in general and a multivalent appreciation of different reading practices. Through the essays’ varying approaches, going from specific standpoints to more general ones, the issue succeeds in providing the *Secolul 20* and *Secolul 21* collection with a selection of texts constituting “a meditation on the role of books and reading” (6-7), as the editorial board stresses in their opening remarks.

**Cassandra Corbu**

Laura Lazăr Zăvăleanu,  
*Locul unde odihnește  
 cerul. Timpul și spațiul  
 în literatura română  
 veche*, București,  
 Editura Pro  
 Universitaria, 2023



The most recent study signed by Laura Lazăr Zăvăleanu, *Locul unde odihnește cerul. Timpul și spațiul în literatura română veche* [*The Place Where Heaven Rests*], confirms the main author's interests. After her study *O lume într-un text. Predosloviile în literatura română veche* [*A World in a Text. The Prefaces in Old Romanian Literature*], published in 2013, Laura Zăvăleanu recovers a generous corpus of art, while trying to recreate the way in which time and space are configured in both literary works and visual representations.

Beyond the methods and the concepts used and explicitly assumed (namely hermeneutics, poetics, history of mentalities, Georges Didi-Huberman's theory of image, Martha Nussbaum's moral philosophy, comparatism etc.), the originality of Laura Lazăr Zăvăleanu's book comes precisely from the decoupage that approaches the old Romanian Literature from a thematic point of view, including the historical, the poetical or even the religious perspective. The study begins with an argument ("Grădina închisă. Premise" – "The Imagined Garden. Premises") that wishes to explicitly emphasise the prejudices that such literature faces, advocating for its (re)reading. Throughout the study, the literature is analysed from a sapiential, moral, but also aesthetic perspective,

in close connection with iconography that addresses the same thematic horizons.

Besides the introduction, the book contains five main chapters, and each section configures the relationship between time and space, seen from literature and illustration alike. The first chapter, entitled "Topocronii filosofico-literare în Antichitate și Evul Mediu. Persistența memoriei: recurențe românești" ["Philosophical-literary Topochrones in Antiquity and Middle Ages. Persistence of Memory: Romanian Recurrences"], is dedicated to history imagined as a succession of temporal cycles or ages, aspects observable in chronicles (which are considered "forms of recapitulation of world history in a moral key" – p. 31), but also in iconographic representations. The examples analysed and invoked in the demonstration start from Plato and Aristotle and reach revisitations of the folkloric fantasy in the representations signed by contemporary artist Rada Niță. In fact, the variety and multitude of associated references is constant throughout Laura Lazăr Zăvăleanu's work.

The second chapter, "Cronotopul auroral. Arhitectura întemeierilor" ["The Auroral Chronotope. The Architecture of the Foundations"], investigates the cosmic history projected as a global reference. This section highlights the theme of cosmogony from the biblical *Genesis* to chroniclers such as Miron Costin, Constantin Cantacuzino and many others, also in addition to the microhistories that are subordinated to the universal time. The next section of the book, entitled "Cronotopul istoric. De la perspectiva totalității, la detaliul cotidian miniatural" ["The Historical Chronotope. From the Perspective of Totality to the Miniature Everyday Detail"], discusses



temporal clues, myths and their association with history or space, as well as the details of Christian representations in the Romanian cultural space. The arguments are based on examples such as Constantin Cantacuzino's *The History of Rumanian Country* [*Istoria Țării Rumânești*], Grigore Ureche's *The Chronicles of the Country of Moldavia* [*Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*], Miron Costin's *Polish Chronicle* [*Cronica polonă*] or *From the Moldavian Nation, from which Country Did Their Ancestors Come* [*De neamul moldovenilor, din ce țară au ieșit strămoșii lor*], but also on visual representations such as *The Siege of Constantinople* [*Aseidiul Constantinopolului*] from Humor Monastery, painted by Toma Cehan, and anonymous illustrations from chronographs and manuscripts.

Starting from the concept of the "art of removal", proposed by Toma Pavel, characteristic to the seventeenth century, the fourth section, "Topocronia cărților populare: kalokagathie și alteritate" ["The Topochrony of the Popular Books: Kalokagathy and Otherness"], analyses the specificity of popular books from the perspective of the continuous oscillation between closeness and distancing, following

the symbolic spaces in apocryphal books, as well as the spatio-temporal structures in the hagiographic legends.

The last chapter, "Dinspre spațio-timpul firii, spre spațio-timpul scrierii și al lecturii" ["From the space-time of nature, to the space-time of writing and reading"], comments on writing as a symbolic form of both preserving history and securing space. For the author, the narrative indicates a settling/ fixing of the context through the imprint of the chronotope, especially in mediaeval Romanian literature, through the prefaces that accompany the texts and chronicles. Based on all the examples analysed, the author argues that "The representative image of man and the world, as it is revealed in old Romanian literature, is a fundamentally chronotopic one" (p. 329).

All in all, Laura Lazăr Zăvăleanu's book *Locul unde odihnește cerul* is an essential study that reveals the profile of Romanian culture of the Middle Ages and beyond. The work demonstrates that meticulous documentation and (re)reading can uncover a literature that has, perhaps, been unjustly forgotten.

Ioana Pavel