

Book Reviews

Ioana Bot, *Convorbind cu idealuri. 6 studii despre romantismul românesc*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2025



In a critical landscape often marked by a certain “fatigue” with canonical subjects, where the Romanian nineteenth century seems to have been exhaustively mapped by traditional literary history, Ioana Bot’s volume, *Convorbind cu idealuri. Șase studii despre romantismul românesc*, offers a necessary exercise in rethinking both Romanian Romanticism and our critical relation to it. Far from simply recontextualising established figures, the book proposes a shift in the study of Romanian Romanticism. It moves attention away from textbook monumentality and towards the deeper structures of sensibility, the fragility of biography, and the tension between imported cultural models and their precarious local assimilation.

A professor at Babeș-Bolyai University and one of the most authoritative voices in contemporary Eminescu scholarship, Ioana Bot writes literary history while also practising a refined form of cultural anthropology. Although the volume is fragmentary in structure, being composed of six distinct studies, it possesses a remarkable underlying unity, generated by the coherence of its method: the refusal of critical cliché and the search for the writer’s authentic “voice” beyond the rhetoric of the period.

The tacit premise of the volume is that Romanian Romanticism was, for a long

time, trapped in a grandiloquent mode of interpretation, one that privileged “titanism”, revolt, and national messianism, while often overlooking the minor, intimate, and domestic register. One of the most valuable theoretical contributions of the volume is its revaluation of “little romanticism”. While canonical literary history, from G. Călinescu to E. Lovinescu, tended to dismiss minor or sentimental productions as obsolete, Ioana Bot recovers them as essential documents of mentality.

In *Convorbind cu idealuri*, the author demonstrates that the “ideals” with which nineteenth-century writers conversed were not only high political or philosophical abstractions. They were also ways of negotiating everyday existence. Romanian Romanticism appears here as a phenomenon of acclimatisation rather than as a simple imitation of French or German models. The studies show how major Romantic themes are “domesticated” and brought to the scale of a young cultural space, where the institution of literature was still in formation.

Inevitably, the centre of gravity of the volume, its point of convergence, remains Mihai Eminescu. Yet Ioana Bot’s Eminescu is not the “National Poet” immobilised in the rigid formulas of interwar or communist criticism. The studies dedicated to him in this volume extend the nuanced work she began in earlier books, such as *Eminescu and Romanian Poetry of Today* and *Semne de carte*.

A remarkable aspect of the volume is the way in which Ioana Bot treats the relationship between work and life. Far from the biographical anecdotalism associated with Sainte-Beuve, she practises a critique of “life as work”. For the Romantics, and especially for Eminescu, life itself was a text

that had to be written according to cultural codes. Suffering, love, and illness were not merely experienced; they were also forms of culturally mediated self-performance.

In the studies dedicated to memoirs and to forms of frontier literature, the author identifies the mechanisms through which modern subjectivity was constructed in the Romanian Principalities. She observes how Western models were filtered through a Balkan sensibility, resulting in a distinctive cultural alloy, often marked by irony or melancholy.

Ioana Bot's style deserves attention in itself. Her writing displays an elegance rarely found in contemporary academic discourse, which is often shaped by imported and untranslated theoretical jargon. Her sentences are ample and enveloping, yet terminologically precise. There is a pleasure in the critical text that mirrors the pleasure of reading the primary works. She does not "dissect" the literary work. Rather, she resonates with it, while preserving the distance essential to critical enquiry. This is a form of empathetic hermeneutics, perfectly attuned to its object: Romanticism.

Quantitatively, "six studies" might seem like a modest contribution, but the intellectual density of each chapter turns the book into a bibliographical landmark. For the informed researcher, the volume offers new interpretive frameworks, such as the aesthetics of existence. For students and cultivated readers alike, it provides an engaging critical narrative about how the writers we believe we know came into being.

Convorbind cu idealuri is a book about becoming: the becoming of the Romanian writer, the becoming of a literary language, and, ultimately, the becoming of literary

criticism itself. Through Ioana Bot's writing, criticism proves that it can engage, on equal terms, with the major currents of European comparative literature.

Petre Nicolescu

Adina Dinițoiu, *Mircea Nedelciu. The Powers of Literature in the Face of Politics and Death*, București, Tracus Arte, 2024



In this book of literary criticism, Adina Dinițoiu undertakes the complex task of analysing Mircea Nedelciu's innovative post-modern prose from both a cultural and a biographical perspective. Writing in a tumultuous socio-political period, overshadowed by the oppressive atmosphere of communism, Nedelciu emerges as a powerful intellectual presence. His work, both theoretical and fictional, captures the energy of his generation through a subtle and incisive form of writing that moves across the boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical.

Adina Dinițoiu approaches Nedelciu's work with erudition and critical sensitivity, producing a study that is both detailed and distinctive. In doing so, she brings the author's memory back to life without reducing him to a cliché of the 1980s generation.

The most compelling part of Dinițoiu's study is the section devoted to the posthumous novel *Zodia scafandrilui*, a complex work that gathers many of Nedelciu's major themes and pushes beyond the limits of national literature. Although the novel

remained unfinished, as the writer died before completing it, it crosses the boundaries between the political, the existential, the symbolic, and the playful. This is visible both in the completed chapters and in the structure and notes that Dinițoiu recovered, with the family's consent, from the writer's notebooks. Her research is marked by respect, attention, and erudition. Although we will never have the opportunity to encounter the novel in its full form, Dinițoiu's study brings us as close as possible to that lost work.

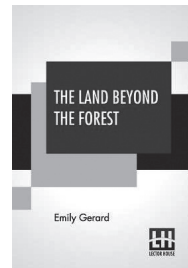
Zodia scafandrului, like Nedelciu's prose more generally, contains a subversive narrative that brings together socio-political criticism, reflections on the artist's condition, pathology, the human psyche, and the forces behind "sudden changes in life and destiny". Starting from scientific concepts such as meteorology, archaeology, and underwater pressure, Nedelciu develops an existential and surrealist narrative with autobiographical elements, centred on a mysterious disease, similar to a psychologised plague, which affects the protagonist, Diogene Sava.

The opening chapters are inspired by the writer's personal diary, more precisely by the notes written during the period when he first discovered the symptoms of the illness that would eventually lead to his death. The disease also functions as an analogy for the totalitarian communist regime, which produced both personal and social trauma. Through the themes he addresses, and through the intelligent way in which he treats them, Nedelciu gives this metatext a soteriological function. Dinițoiu's analysis does more than recontextualise this dimension of his prose. It also amplifies it.

"What conclusion, other than a direct connection between the novel and the illness, can you draw after the few months of such a rhythmic experience?" asks Nedelciu's narrator. This connection is strengthened by the autobiographical and quasi-spiritual relation between the writer's fears and the power of reading in a lifeless, suffocating world. We find the answer in reading and writing, even in times of crisis. Especially then.

Levi Muțiu

Emily Gerard, *The Land Beyond the Forest. Facts, Figures, and Fancies from Transylvania*, translation, introductory study, and notes by Ana-Maria Stan, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2024



Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there lived a princess, and one fateful day, that princess had the misfortune to be taken by gnomes. She lived in their realm for years and years, until she, after what bore a resemblance to eternity, was finally presented with the chance to return to her kingdom. If at first, her parents were elated to see their daughter by their side again, their joy dwindled, gradually growing into grief and woe as they realized that she simply could not find comfort in her own home anymore. Having grown too accustomed to the gnomes' gloomy living conditions, she now found the sun too bright, peoples' voices too clamorous, and

the overall agitation around her, far too overwhelming.

This little fairy tale is mentioned in the introductory chapter of *The Land Beyond the Forest*, although we are never told how it ends: whether the young princess eventually becomes reconciled with the world she had lost, or whether she returns to the gnomes' land. What is clear, however, is that this story parallels Gerard's own experience of living in Transylvania for two years and then returning to the British cultural space. How does one adapt to such a change, from the whispering woods and obscure legends of Transylvania back to the bustle of Western Europe? And once heard, can the call of the forest ever truly be forgotten?

Gerard's book, published in 1888 and translated into Romanian by Ana-Maria Stan in 2024, explores this question alongside many others. It addresses the political status of Transylvania in the nineteenth century, the diverse populations inhabiting the region, the legends and superstitions that fascinated the author, and the flora, fauna, and landscapes of the places she visited. Gerard's account therefore provides readers with both a wide-ranging ethnological perspective and the elements of a vivid geomythical cartography. She had already begun her research with the 1885 study "Transylvanian Superstitions", but her fascination with the subject continued to grow, eventually becoming the driving force behind *The Land Beyond the Forest*, a work of much larger scope.

Coming from a Transylvanian background myself, I was fascinated by this historical exploration of my homeland from a foreign perspective. The book is

part mythological study, part travelogue, and part journal. Personal observations are interwoven with factual information, creating a reading experience that is both enjoyable and educational. Given the period in which it was written, some of its observations are inevitably outdated, but this does not diminish the intellectual value of the work as a whole. Gerard's style is homely and earnest, yet sophisticated and ornate in its descriptive passages, without becoming excessive. It strikes a fine balance between academic inquiry and engaging storytelling. At times, one feels as though one is reading a detailed account of Transylvanian populations and customs, while in other moments the tone recalls *The Travel Letters* of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu or Mary Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*.

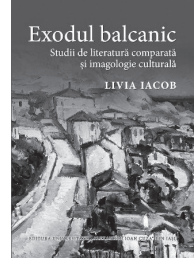
Like these works, *The Land Beyond the Forest* can also be read through a feminist lens. Emily Gerard grew up in a family of Scottish nobles and intellectuals, which gave her access to cultural and scientific pursuits at a time when women were still widely marginalised. Her first published texts were written in collaboration with her sister, but she was ultimately recognised as an independent author after the publication of *The Land Beyond the Forest*. The book became highly successful and later served as one of the sources of inspiration for Bram Stoker's gothic masterpiece *Dracula*. Several chapters of Gerard's work focus on local funeral rites and traditions, showing how the superstitious imagination of the Transylvanian peasant culminates in customs surrounding death omens and mourning practices, such as *bocet* and *priveghi*.

Other cultural elements, such as wedding traditions, popular sayings, local music, and dances, are also given individual attention. In addition, Gerard shows considerable interest in Transylvanian poems and chroniclers, even though, as she herself notes, Romanian literature was still relatively scarce at the time. Her position on this subject is particularly interesting. She argues that Romanians should not strive to imitate established Western models perfectly, but should instead draw on their own abundant folklore. In Gerard's view, traditional Romanian tales, with their memorable archetypes and rich oral history, had the potential to inaugurate a new era in national literature, an opinion with which I strongly agree.

Lastly, Gerard's depiction of well-known Transylvanian towns such as Sibiu, Cluj, Braşov, and Sinaia deserves attention. Whether she contrasts the apparent monotony of Sibiu with a brutal murder that took place there, describes a carnival celebration in the centre of Cluj, narrates her mountain excursions, or builds a morbid yet strangely optimistic image of Lake Bălea, Gerard presents Transylvania as a mythologised chronotope. In her account, the region is elevated from a mere geographical space into a mystical land where dreams and nightmares both arise from the gentle cradle of the forest, and where enchanted gardens become home to golden flowers, witches, and dragons alike.

Levi Muşiu

Livia Iacob, *Exodul balcanic. Studii de literatură comparată și imagologie culturală*, Iași, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași, 2022



In her book, Livia Iacob offers a thorough examination of the Balkan condition as reflected in the works of four important modern and postmodern writers. The Balkan Peninsula, marked by political conflict, instability, and the persistent tension between West and East, gave rise to a distinctive type of literature. Iacob studies this phenomenon by taking into account the geopolitical and socio-cultural context of each author she analyses. Her study follows the evolution of Balkan literatures from the peripheral complex that left its mark on them to the gradual formation of their own identity. This identity develops through originality and through the blending of Western and Eastern elements, allowing Balkan literature to distinguish itself between two dominant cultural forces under whose shadow it had long been obscured.

The first chapter, “Mărci identitare în romanul sud-est european de secol XX. O introducere în balcanismul literar”, presents the concept of *homo balcanicus* and its implications. Iacob discusses the duality and inadaptability of the Balkan man, a figure long associated with a pejorative understanding of the region: nomadic, forever bound to his homeland, and yet rejected by it. She also explains the concept of Balkan literature, with its predominant

traits: chaos, absurdity, and the contemplative attitude specific to the Mediterranean space. This is a literature that explores its own internal duality without repudiating it, and that finds new modes of expression once the relationship between identity and otherness, centre and periphery, begins to change. In this context, individual identity becomes increasingly important in the articulation of national identity.

The next chapter, “Predecesori sau deschizători de drumuri? Bizanțul din Balcani: o osmoză românească”, focuses on two Romanian writers and their novels: Mihail Sadoveanu’s *Creanga de aur* (1933) and Mateiu Caragiale’s *Craii de Curtea-Veche* (1929). Through an in-depth analysis of these novels, Iacob emphasises that the main motivation of these writers, like that of many other Balkan authors, is the thematisation and recontextualisation of history. Both authors turn towards the Byzantine civilisations of the past in order to rethink cultural identity and historical memory.

The third chapter, “Abolirea fratricidului, o istorie anti-balcanică: Panait Istrati și Nikos Kazantakis”, concentrates on the friendship between the Greek writer Nikos Kazantakis and the Romanian writer Panait Istrati. In spite of their differences, this friendship brings together two authors from the Balkan space. Iacob focuses on Kazantakis’s *Viața și peripețiile lui Alexis Zorba* and on the influence of the Greek space, where the legacy of antiquity remains visible. Moreover, the study shows how Kazantakis’s insular condition, imposed by geography, is also reflected in his work. In both cases, Iacob shows how these writers were shaped by national political histories marked by totalitarian domination. At the

same time, she emphasises how they succeeded in expressing their beliefs through literature, even while remaining marked by the feeling of clausturation produced by their surroundings.

The chapter entitled “Incurabilul filopater. Memoria ca formă a disidenței la Ismail Kadare și Danilo Kiš” explores the works of the Albanian and Serbian authors Ismail Kadare and Danilo Kiš, focusing on *Slujbașul de la Palatul Viselor* and *Clepsidra*. Iacob begins by showing that these two novelists reshape the perception of the national literatures they represent, which had long been considered peripheral and marginal. They succeed in recontextualising history and in creating what Linda Hutcheon called historiographic metafiction. In Kadare’s case, the human condition depends on the reality in which the individual lives, while also being profoundly influenced by Kafka as a literary paternal figure. In Kiš’s case, personal experience shapes literary style. Haunted by the impact of the Nazi regime on both history and his own life, especially through the death of his father, Kiš addresses family trauma through the thanatic and grotesque dimensions of existence and literature.

In the final chapter, “Sud-Estul mărturisirilor și condiția postmodernă. În loc de concluzii”, Iacob summarises the arguments developed throughout the volume and studies the postmodern condition, as well as the different meanings of postmodernism in different geographical spaces. In relation to the authors and literary works discussed, she shows how they become centres of power for both Balkan and universal literature. The complex political contexts and hardships that shaped these novelists produced works that differ from

American or British forms of postmodernism, surpassing their experimentalism through the specific stakes of Balkan literature. In the end, Iacob argues that the novelists of the Balkan Peninsula share a common perspective based on an intimate connection between religion, language, and community. They reject dictatorship and defend the right to freedom.

The imagological and comparative method used in the volume offers detailed insight into the social and geopolitical mechanisms at work in the Balkan literary space. The study is well documented and enriched by the author's personal and theoretical knowledge. It widens our understanding of the contrasting duality and controversial nature of the term "Balkan", which ultimately proves to be a rich source of inspiration and originality. In this sense, the book shows how a peripheral space came to occupy an important place on the cultural map of the postmodern world.

Raluca-Florina Pop

Nadejda Ivanov,
Fracturi identitare.
Secvențe critice, Iași,
Junimea, 2024



Nadejda Ivanov's volume brings together several studies of critical analysis and interpretation, along with a series of literary reviews dedicated to contemporary prose from the Republic of Moldova

and Romania. Yet the book is more than a simple collection of studies. Its unity derives from the coherence of its hermeneutic path, which gradually acquires an almost narrative structure. This path is built around a central idea: the recovery of the self from various forms of alienation, whether erotic, ideological, traumatic, or identitarian. The broader message of the book seems to be that identity fracture is more than a literary theme. It is an existential condition of the individual in Bessarabia and in the wider post-Soviet space. Through the hermeneutic construction proposed by the author, literature and the imaginary become privileged instruments in a process of anamnesis, a recovery of the authentic self through memory.

From the very first pages, the reader encounters the conceptual framework used by the author: Jungian analytical psychology, the phenomenology of the imaginary as developed by Wunenburger, Eliade's hermeneutics of the sacred, Bachelard's poetics of reverie, and contemporary relational psychoanalysis, represented by Kohut, Kalsched, and Stolorow. Ivanov applies this interpretive framework with sensitivity to the specific features of each text. In doing so, she also outlines a phenomenology of resistance through the imaginary.

The recurring pattern that unifies the studies in the first part of the book is clear. The fractured ego is confronted with a desecralised reality, shaped by family trauma, the pandemic, or totalitarianism, before which analytical reason and social mechanisms prove powerless. The path towards the recovery of the self opens through a descent into the depths of the imaginary, through erotic reverie, involuntary

memory, identification with mythical figures, or the act of writing.

This pattern appears at the level of eros in Ionel Bușe's *Femei de iasomie*. The female figures, Herta, Alexandra, Maia, and Victoria, may be read as embodiments of archetypal femininity. They function as initiatory thresholds through which the jasmine house becomes a sacred space of reconciliation between the masculine and the feminine.

The same pattern also operates at the level of memory. In the study devoted to Vladimir Beșleagă's novels, involuntary memories help the character recompose his mutilated being and rebuild, piece by piece, the world pulverised by the regime. The mother, the house, and childhood become nuclei of resistance in the face of the devouring father, Nichifor Fătu, who appears as the personification of sacralised political evil. Water, represented by the Nistru and the Water of Time, fulfils the role of a mythical and archetypal element of rebirth.

The pattern also functions at the level of collective trauma. In Val Butnaru's novel *Hypnotic*, the Mavroghini brothers, orphaned and separated through the intervention of the KGB informant Iorgu Apostolidi, an ideological Woland figure, search for their being by identifying with historical figures such as Prince Mavrogheni and Napoleon. The descent into the basement of the demolished house is interpreted as a psycho-spiritual *regressus ad uterum*. Nadejda Ivanov shows that these identifications function as an archetypal survival strategy, a way of repairing an existence emptied of meaning.

Writing itself becomes another instrument of recovery. In the study devoted to

Oleg Serebrian's *Woldemar*, the unwanted child, raised by three women who each carry their own trauma of the regime, reconstructs his identity through written recollection. This act becomes a form of ontological re-foundation through logos. The image of the snake in the dream, interpreted as an expression of the deeply ostracised self, demonstrates a remarkable critical intuition.

Perhaps the most original contribution of the volume is the study of ontological shame in Sașa Zare's novel *Dezrădăcinare*, with echoes of Annie Ernaux, Kafka, Tatiana Țibuleac, and Ocean Vuong. Here, fracture no longer comes only from outside, from the regime or society, but also emerges from within the primary relationship itself. Shame becomes an existential condition, a distorting filter that alters the protagonist's perception of herself and of the world. Sașa Vlas's journey, from the shame of belonging to the identification with Alice as the Ideal of the Self, is reconstructed with precision and empathy.

The reviews included in the second part of the volume extend these analyses in a more accessible register, confirming the consistency of Ivanov's critical vision. If one were to identify a limitation of the volume, it would be the abundance of theoretical references, which sometimes risks turning the argument into a demonstration. Yet precisely where it matters most, in the studies on Beșleagă, Zare, and Serebrian, Nadejda Ivanov produces original interpretations and moves beyond the authorities she invokes.

The volume sets out to demonstrate that, regardless of the policies of disintegration directed against the individual, whether totalitarian or globalising, an a priori structure remains within the human

being: the impulse to search for the self, which no regime can fully suppress. Archetypes, reveries, and latent memories are not forms of escapism. They are paths through which reality can be recomposed. *Fracturi identitare* is therefore both an exercise in literary criticism and an act of cultural self-knowledge, a necessary book in a space where the collective trauma of Bessarabia continues to shape contemporary literature.

Petre Nicolescu

Littératures classiques, n° 112, Léa Burgat-Chavrilion et Isabelle Moreau (éds.), *La paresse aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*, Presses universitaires du midi, 2023



Le recueil de travaux « La paresse aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles », sous la direction de Léa Burgat-Chavrilion et d'Isabelle Moreau, est le volume 112/2023, de la revue *Littératures classiques* paru aux Presses Universitaires du Midi. Les deux coordonnatrices se proposent d'y faire le point sur un sujet sensible et qui a des nuances fort significatives dans les dictionnaires de l'Âge classique par rapport aux lexiques ultérieurs. Si, pendant la Renaissance, la médecine et l'Église tentaient de prendre en charge les cas de paresse et de les résoudre (selon leurs propres critères), ses formes d'acceptation demeuraient rares et elles étaient principalement le fait de Montaigne, Ronsard, La Fontaine. Les enjeux religieux et moraux dominent la période,

tandis qu'une « littérature paresseuse » émerge pour tenter d'en faire contrepoids.

Tout d'abord, la paresse est conçue comme un vice repoussant, telle que Justine Le Floc'h la révèle dans son chapitre « Sur une opinion médicale commune à l'époque moderne : la colère comme régime minceur pour pituiteux ». L'autrice y présente une théorie populaire au XVII^e siècle selon laquelle pour réveiller les personnes paresseuses et les aider à maigrir il fallait les mettre en colère. La paresse devait être chassée, elle était une forme de mal. A cette opinion malveillante envers la paresse s'oppose toutefois celle de Montaigne, analysée par Dominique Brancher sur « l'arrêt tonique de la pensée. » Montaigne déconstruit l'association morale entre immobilité et oisiveté et il la voit comme indispensable dans son hygiène de vie et de sa pensée. Pour ce faire, « il esquisse l'anthropologie d'un sujet à la fois constant et changeant ». La paresse devient alors un « abandon réfléchi ».

Avec Emily Butterworth qui propose l'étude « Le profit de la paresse chez Marguerite de Navarre » un autre visage de ce vice est pris en compte. La paresse est alors perçue comme un péché capital lorsqu'elle concerne les femmes ou les moines, donnant lieu à des violences tolérées par l'opinion publique. En outre, certains hommes instrumentalisent et mettent à profit la passivité traditionnellement imposée aux femmes.

L'étude sur « La paresse dans les *Adages* d'Érasme », proposée par Blandine Perona, nuance les perspectives. Dans les *Adages* d'Érasme il y a tout une galerie de portraits de paresseux, opposant la rigidité de l'ignorant et du tyran, à la souplesse du sceptique. Si l'humaniste se propose de dénoncer le vice de la paresse, il signale néanmoins

l'importance de la souplesse, de l'abandon et du laisser-aller.

L'analyse d'Alberto Frigo sur « Désirs imparfaits et velléité » met en lumière la manière dont la théologie, représentée ici par Pascal, ne cesse de condamner la paresse. Pascal s'en prend directement à Montaigne, dont il juge les *Essais* coupables d'inciter à l'oisiveté. Dans la tradition biblique, le paresseux est d'ailleurs condamné à mourir de faim...

Le travail de Benjamin Bokobza souligne les rapports ambivalents entre les notions de paresse et civilité chez Antoine de Courtin. Ce texte observe une complémentarité au sein de ses œuvres, qui renforce le sens chrétien qu'il souhaite insuffler à la civilité : le chrétien doit se plier aux exigences de la hiérarchie sociale de son temps. Ainsi, pour composer avec la pituité qui domine chez certains et qui est à l'origine « d'une humeur endormie, pesante ». On devrait ajuster son propre tempérament en conséquence.

Daniele Maira se penche, quant à lui, sur le cas Ronsard. Le poète, paresseux par excellence, trouve des justifications à son état, qu'il qualifie de « puissance de ne pas vouloir ». Il lui faut d'ailleurs vingt-deux ans pour faire paraître son poème épique, *La Franciade*. Ses amis poètes ne cessent de se demander si l'œuvre verra le jour. Cette lenteur s'explique toutefois par une raison bien précise : le roi Henri II, qui avait encouragé ce projet d'écriture, n'a pas offert les récompenses attendues, incitant Ronsard à ne travailler que par intermittence. L'inertie de Ronsard découle de sa disposition psycho-physiologique, marquée par une mélancolie et une amertume courantes à la Renaissance.

Avec Nathalie Freidel on découvre le cercle d'écriture de Madame de La Fayette

où la paresse devient un espace de réflexion morale et le vecteur d'un rapport conflictuel au travail comme à l'écriture. Cet entourage apparaît, en réalité, comme un groupe de paresseux incorrigibles qui ne cessent de se reprocher mutuellement leur apathie tout en s'en vantant, une inertie alors qualifiée de « négligence », « oisiveté », « nonchalance », « inapplication ». La paresse est indissociable du mode de vie aristocratique et du loisir mondain. Elle demeure un défaut, mais un défaut jugé tout à fait acceptable.

Damien Fortin s'arrête, pour sa part, sur le cas de La Fontaine. Incapable de se soumettre à la moindre discipline, ennemi du labeur, le fabuliste était surnommé « Bonhomme » par ses contemporains. Ces derniers le considéraient comme un authentique paresseux, image que le poète a lui-même pleinement assumée. Ses biographes et ses critiques l'ont ensuite reprise dans leurs travaux, érigeant ainsi cette indolence en un lieu commun du discours critique des siècles suivants.

Isabelle Moreau nous plonge dans « Les lieux de la paresse », c'est-à-dire dans les manifestations discursives où ce vice se déploie : les écrits d'Antoine de Courtin et de Madeleine de Scudéry, ainsi qu'une pièce galante signée Pellisson, « Le temple de la paresse ». Chez les deux premiers, la chercheuse décèle des agendas politiques, tandis qu'à travers la pièce « Le temple de la paresse » le poète ose revendiquer ironiquement des « droits d'oisiveté ».

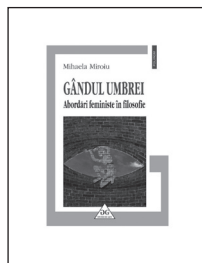
Enfin la dernière étude proposée par Léa Burgat-Chavrilion met en évidence des dynamiques sociales et politiques de la paresse à l'œuvre dans les *Conversations* de Madeleine de Scudéry. Si dans son « Traité de la paresse » Antoine de Courtin démasque tous les paresseux, Madeleine de Scudéry

aborde le sujet dans une longue conversation consacrée à l'oisiveté dans « Clélie » et plus tard dans un premier recueil de conversations autonomes. Chez elle, la perspective sur la paresse se révèle moins critique et beaucoup plus ambivalente que chez Antoine de Courtin. La morale chrétienne y est laissée de côté. La seule paresse condamnée est celle des oisifs qui refusent de remplir les devoirs de leur charge.

En conclusion, la paresse aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles se trouve à la croisée du médical, du moral, du spirituel, du social et du politique. Ses nuances sémantiques oscillent entre l'oisiveté, la négligence et la souplesse. Les glissements de perspective sont parfois brutaux : on passe ainsi d'une condamnation sans appel de l'opinion publique à une acceptation plus ou moins affirmée par les auteurs de l'époque, ainsi que par les membres de l'aristocratie qui assument désormais cette indolence sans la culpabilité d'autrefois.

Ioana Ilieș

Mihaela Miroiu,
Gândul umbrei,
abordări feministe
în filosofie, Editura
Polirom, Iași, 2020



L'ouvrage *Gândul umbrei* (qu'on pourrait traduire comme « Ce que pense l'ombre ») par Mihaela Miroiu constitue l'un des rares textes philosophiques roumains qui traitent du féminisme dans le

contexte postcommuniste. Par son analyse rigoureuse et nuancée, l'auteure met en lumière la manière dont les femmes ont été historiquement privées de leur autonomie, contraintes d'endosser des rôles préétablis par l'État ou par la tradition patriarcale : épouse idéale, mère parfaite, citoyenne exemplaire, mais jamais sujet pensant à part entière.

Dans une société marquée par des décennies de dictature idéologique, le féminisme émerge en Roumanie comme une voix nouvelle, porteuse de rupture avec l'héritage du passé. Mihaela Miroiu s'attache à démonter les normes sociales et philosophiques qui ont perpétué l'invisibilisation des femmes, et propose une relecture critique de la condition féminine à travers l'histoire des idées.

L'une des contributions majeures de l'ouvrage réside dans sa classification détaillée des différentes formes de féminisme. L'auteure distingue le féminisme moderne du féminisme contemporain, tout en identifiant plusieurs sous-catégories telles que le féminisme rationnel, le féminisme des Lumières ou encore le féminisme utopique. Ces typologies ne sont pas de simples abstractions théoriques : elles sont inséparables du contexte historique, politique et culturel qui les a fait naître. Elles montrent comment les femmes ont été empêchées de s'exprimer librement, toujours assignées à des rôles qui les éloignent de leur subjectivité propre.

Une interrogation centrale traverse l'œuvre de Mihaela Miroiu : qu'est-ce que la « normalité » ? Et surtout, dans quelle mesure cette prétendue normalité n'est-elle pas une construction masculine, érigée pour justifier la domination d'un genre sur l'autre ? L'auteure questionne la légitimité

de normes sociales qui exigent des femmes qu'elles soient tout à la fois discrètes, productives, dociles, maternelles afin d'être considérées comme acceptables. Elle propose ainsi une critique radicale de l'assignation sociale des identités féminines.

Miroiu s'inspire également des grandes figures du féminisme européen. Elle cite notamment Hélène Cixous, qui appelle les femmes à écrire, à penser, à extérioriser leur expérience sans peur ni honte. Elle évoque également Virginia Woolf et son célèbre essai « Une chambre à soi », dans lequel l'écrivaine souligne que le simple fait de disposer d'un espace personnel pour écrire était, pour une femme, un privilège rare, et non un droit garanti. Jane Austen est mentionnée comme exemple parlant : bien qu'elle ait produit une œuvre littéraire majeure, elle écrivait dans le salon familial, sans intimité, sans temps à elle.

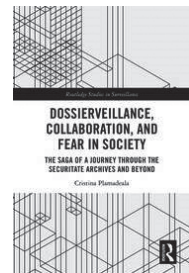
Ces références ne sont pas anecdotiques : elles illustrent combien la parole des femmes, bien que reléguée à la marge, a continué d'exister dans l'ombre, certes, mais avec ténacité. Mihaela Miroiu met en valeur cette résilience intellectuelle, ce fil ininterrompu de la pensée féminine, trop souvent négligé par l'histoire de la philosophie, dominée par des figures masculines qui parlaient des femmes, mais rarement avec elles ou en les incluant comme sujets de réflexion.

Une réflexion de Simone de Beauvoir « on ne naît pas femme, on le devient » est une formule célèbre qui résonne profondément dans le propos de Miroiu : elle montre que les femmes ont été construites socialement, modelées dès la naissance pour se conformer à des attentes extérieures, sans jamais avoir l'espace ni le temps de devenir pleinement elles-mêmes.

Gândul umbrei est un ouvrage fondamental pour la compréhension du féminisme en Roumanie, un pays où cette problématique reste encore marginalisée. Mihaela Miroiu propose une synthèse brillante, accessible et stimulante, qui invite le lecteur à réfléchir en profondeur sur la manière dont les femmes ont été historiquement privées de leur voix. Ce livre constitue une véritable introduction à la pensée féministe et un plaidoyer pour une philosophie qui intègre enfin l'expérience féminine dans toute sa richesse et sa complexité.

Claudia Cristea

Cristina Plămădeală,
Dossier Veillance, Collaboration and Fear in Society. The Saga of a Journey Through the Securitate Archives and Beyond, London, Routledge, 2025



Cristina Plămădeală's book offers a rigorous and systematically structured analysis of collaboration with the Securitate, Romania's political police under communism. Although the research began as a personal quest, born out of the author's need to learn more about Antonie Plămădeală's biography, the analysis is compelling and well documented, which gives the study clear methodological coherence. As the author writes, "this book articulates this intellectual journey entangled in my biography and vice versa" (p. 4). The question of collaboration is too rarely

approached from the collaborator's perspective, and this is precisely why Cristina Plămădeală's book is valuable. It raises awareness of the subject while also offering a bold, balanced, and stereotype-breaking point of view. The book encourages further reading on the topic, and its detailed historical contextualisations are especially useful for understanding the dynamics of collaboration and for situating the case within broader debates on memory and responsibility. The volume thus invites further inquiry rather than offering a merely moralising account.

The topics discussed in the book are presented neither chronologically nor thematically, but are instead organised around a series of guiding questions. The first of these asks what it meant to be a collaborator in communist Romania. As the author explains, "I propose a theory on collaboration based on three concepts while reading Securitate's files on informers recruited for collaboration. These concepts are psuchegraphy, dossiervilleance, and banalization of evil" (p. 8). She argues that these terms are necessary because none of the existing concepts proved suitable for properly describing the realities revealed by the archival material.

The second guiding question concerns the applicability of the proposed theory of political collaboration to other communist regimes in the Eastern bloc. In addressing this issue, Cristina Plămădeală describes the atmosphere of everyday life under dictatorship, drawing a complex and nuanced picture of what society felt like and what it meant to inhabit that world. Moreover, given the book's international circulation, Plămădeală's analysis provides Western readers with a coherent framework for

understanding what happened in communist Romania and, by extension, in other Eastern European countries. While acknowledging the harm caused by collaboration with the political police, the author seeks to interrogate collective trauma from within rather than excuse individual actions. In this context, the debate around lustration in post-communist Romania, discussed in chapter 10, emerges as a particularly relevant and timely contribution.

The author emphasises "the shame, stigma, and prejudice experienced by some collaborators in the post-communist climate and the role the theory of collaboration I put forth in this book aims to play in the current ongoing debate on lustration in Romania" (p. 151). Beyond the Romanian context, Plămădeală draws connections between surveillance practices in totalitarian societies and those in neoliberal ones, showing that "dossiervilleance is one of the threads that connects these seemingly very different regimes – totalitarian – versus neo-liberal societies like the USA and Canada" (p. 9). She further distinguishes between deliberate and non-deliberate dossiervilleance, as well as between institutional and centralised dossiervilleance. At the same time, she emphasises that the logic of data collection for profit cannot be equated with the coercive and punitive surveillance employed by the Securitate.

The final guiding question of the book concerns the forms of dossiervilleance experienced in neoliberal societies. By linking communist and neoliberal contexts through the broader framework of surveillance capitalism, Plămădeală argues that these dynamics expose the "invisible webs of surveillance's gaze", which are capable of generating fear and undermining

the human spirit (p. 15). The volume concludes with a reflection on the role of artificial intelligence, emphasising the growing complexity of dossierveillance in the digital age, when the once-dreaded paper file has been transformed into the immaterial “cloud”.

Plămădeală's research is based on Grounded Theory (GT), a methodology that “describes and interprets data; it analyzes individual and group experiences in both a conceptual and theoretical manner, by creating certain models and theories concerning human behavior” (p. 24). However, her study is not a mechanical application of this method, but a complex framework that brings together subjectivity and objectivity, written data and human experience, CNSAS files and literary texts. Focusing on Antonie Plămădeală's novel *Trei Ceasuri în Iad* [*Three Hours in Hell*], the fourth chapter outlines the novel's plot and analyses its role in developing the concept of psuchegraphy. As the author explains, this notion refers to techniques designed to destabilise an individual psychologically, eroding emotional resilience through constant pressure. The novel's depiction of a protagonist torn between two identities illustrates the internal turmoil of such experiences, which the author equates with “living in hell” (p. 51). The analysis concludes that this novel “describes what the psuchegraphic work can do to a human being and, most importantly, what it feels like to experience it first-hand” (p. 52).

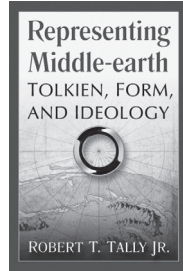
The theoretical discussion is further enriched by references to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. These references highlight Foucault's insight that, in modern societies, one “no longer needed to be tortured to be

transformed into a docile citizen” (p. 135). Plămădeală also argues that the “dossier” in dossierveillance can be understood as a functional equivalent of the Foucauldian panopticon. Moreover, in many cases analysed in the book, “the watcher takes on the persona of the watched as well” (p. 136), underscoring the paradoxical reciprocity of surveillance.

In conclusion, the book stands out both for the originality of its perspective and for the analytical framework it advances. By combining methodological rigour with personal engagement, Cristina Plămădeală offers new conceptual tools for understanding the mechanisms of collaboration and surveillance in totalitarian societies. The study challenges readers to reflect on the complexity behind the act of collaborating with the Securitate, moving beyond reductive moral judgements. The author also provides new instruments for approaching the complex study of totalitarian societies. Concepts such as dossierveillance and psuchegraphy, alongside the reworking of Hannah Arendt's notion of the “banality of evil”, shed light on the psychological dimensions of recruitment and on the post-recruitment relationships between agents and informers, encouraging new readings of a traumatic past. As such, the volume constitutes a valuable reference point for scholarship on Romanian communism, as well as for comparative studies of surveillance and collaboration in modern societies. The seriousness with which Plămădeală approaches the topic, the authority of the data she uses, and the personal dimension of her research make this book both an essential and an engaging contribution to the field.

Teodora Mirică

Robert T. Tally Jr.,
*Representing Middle-
 Earth: Tolkien, Form
 and Ideology*,
 McFarland & Company,
 Inc., Publishers,
 North Carolina, 2023



Known for his critical approach to contemporary literature, Robert T. Tally Jr. offers, in *Representing Middle-earth: Tolkien, Form and Ideology*, a substantial analysis of J.R.R. Tolkien's work, in which narrative form remains inseparable from ideological meaning. Tally does more than provide a critical reading of Tolkien's texts. He invites the reader to reflect on how Tolkien constructs a fictional world grounded in myth and legend, while also symbolically reflecting the cultural, social, and political transformations of the twentieth century.

One of the key aspects of Tally's analysis is his attention to the complexity of Tolkien's fictional world. This becomes clear in the preface, where Tally explains that the book is divided into eight essays which, read together, form a circular project. Their purpose is to enrich the critical perspective on Tolkien's work, on the films inspired by it, and on its place within contemporary literature. In the introduction, Tally establishes the theoretical framework of his study and situates Tolkien's fictional universe within a capitalist context, interpreted through Marxist critique. He explores the relationship between fantasy literature and the modern European social context, emphasising the relevance of Tolkien's work for understanding the modern world.

In the first two chapters, Tally addresses Tolkien's aim to "insist on the basic connection between this seemingly ancient, inaccessible epic and those living in present-day England". He then examines the relationship between narrative and history, showing how storytelling functions as a means of interpreting reality. In this context, Tally also refers to Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories", where Tolkien identifies three main functions of fantasy: escapism, consolation, and recovery. Tally argues that the appeal of *The Lord of the Rings* lies in its historical grounding and in the human need for untold stories.

In the following two chapters, Tally explores the transformation of Tolkien's work into a trilogy, analysing both the printed form and the cinematic adaptations, and assessing the extent to which these transformations shape public perception. He notes that, although Tolkien originally conceived his work as a single coherent volume, its division into a trilogy contributed to the construction of a classical epic structure, with conventionally distributed tensions and climaxes. Through his analysis of the film adaptations, Tally also reflects on how "the trilogy form affects, and in some sense alters, the work itself", as well as on how the geography of Tolkien's fictional world reflects political and economic realities.

Chapters five, six, and seven focus on Tolkien's main characters, the portrayal of orcs and other inhuman creatures, and the demonisation of the enemy within the Tolkienian universe. Figures such as Sauron, Galadriel, and Saruman are examined in relation to the ideological encoding of power, authority, and morality. Tally begins with Sauron, the embodiment of absolute

evil, who stands in stark contrast to Galadriel, one of the most virtuous figures in Tolkien's writings. Saruman occupies a middle position, as a figure of the corrupted intellectual drawn to power. In Tally's view, he can be read as a subtle allegory of modern technocracy, or even of veiled totalitarianism.

Tally avoids a simplistic reading of these characters and instead proposes an ideological interpretation in which the struggle between good and evil becomes the background for political and philosophical conflicts. Tolkien is thus placed in dialogue with the grand narratives of the twentieth century, in which corrupted ideals, totalitarian regimes, and the domination of power are reflected through character construction. Tally thereby demonstrates that Tolkien builds complex characters who represent the forces of good and evil, while also using them to shape broader conceptions of world order and authority. At the same time, Tolkien questions social stratification, as Tally himself observes: "The basic humanity of Tolkien's inhuman creatures invites readers to question the racial and moral hierarchies presented in the narratives themselves, and also in the world we live in."

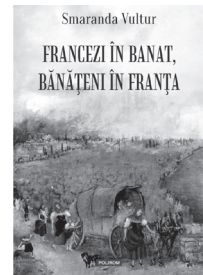
In the final chapter, "Places Where the Stars Are Strange: Fantasy, Utopia, and Critique", Tally continues the idea that Tolkien's characters reflect the conflicts of the world in which he lived, while also exploring the utopian dimension of fantasy literature. He examines how Tolkien's fictional universe offers a reflection on social and political reality. In this sense, Tolkien's impact extends beyond the fantasy genre and influences even authors traditionally committed to realism: "by the end of the

century, even authors deeply committed to the realist novel have often found themselves unable to resist the gravitational pull of the fantastic as a literary mode."

In the conclusion, Tally underscores the importance of a critical reading of Tolkien's work, encouraging reflection on the ideological and aesthetic complexity of the Tolkienian universe. Seen as a whole, *Representing Middle-earth* offers a detailed analysis of Tolkien's fictional world and of the characters through which he reflects the social and political issues of the twentieth century. Within a fantastic framework, Tally reaffirms the relevance of fantasy literature as a mode of understanding and interpreting the contemporary world.

Georgiana Cimpoiș

Smaranda Vultur,
*Francezi în Banat,
bănățeni în Franța, Iași,
Polirom, 2025*



Smaranda Vultur's *Francezi in Banat, Bănățeni in Franța* deals with questions of identity, emigration, memory, and history in the context of the ethnically French population of Banat, part of which returned to France after the Second World War. The study offers historical, sociological, and theoretical insights into these issues, developing a thorough and multidisciplinary approach to the topic announced in the title. Vultur uses an interdisciplinary

method, incorporating various theories and concepts, as well as interviews and historical documents, in order to uncover a complex web of interconnected narratives and lives that shape the phenomenon she studies.

The first chapter introduces the community that will become the object of Vultur's analysis throughout the book. It begins with a brief historical account of how the ancestors of today's ethnically French population of Banat came to be considered French. This opening section lays the foundation for some of the most important questions developed in the following chapters: What does it mean to belong to a place? What does it mean to belong to a country? Vultur then moves into the heart of the community and shows how its attachment to both Romania and France has shaped its local culture and customs. At the same time, she shows how those who chose to return to France engaged in a re-enactment of their own history. The mental model of colonisation as an odyssey-like journey had been imprinted on their identity ever since their ancestors first settled in Romania. This return also proved beneficial for the regions to which the migrants returned, especially Pernes and La Roque-sur-Pernes, as it practically revived these declining towns.

The second chapter addresses the complex problem of identity and its many transformations. Through interviews and rigorous historical research, Vultur shows how individual and collective identity evolved from ethnicity towards nationality, and how this change affected ethnic minority cultures. She also takes the reader into the past by exploring the important work of community leaders who ensured

the integration of their people into the new landscape of nation-states.

The third chapter expands on these themes, following the identity journey of a French ethnic population displaced from a German space into the Romanian Banat and examining the dilemma of this dual origin. Vultur suggests that the best way to approach this problem is through the lives of the people involved, by interrogating both their experience of space and her own, especially in places such as Tomnatic. The chapter also invites reflection on how collective memory and trauma influence the importance of clear identity for a community.

The fourth chapter has a more focused point of interest: *Heimat*, or homeland. This concept seems integral to the way in which most of the interviewed subjects understand their experience, whether as migrants to Romania or from Romania. Its flexibility proves especially valuable, since the citizens of Pernes and La Roque-sur-Pernes now relate to Banat as a homeland, infusing the French space they currently inhabit with elements of Romanian culture, especially in terms of culinary practices.

The fifth and final chapter examines the contemporary reality of the people settled in France. Vultur discusses the way in which the two French towns become experientially similar to Banat and seeks to understand this feeling through the accounts of the current inhabitants. The interviews reveal the permanence of a move that many initially perceived as temporary. For the community, the return to France was first understood as an escape from the consequences of the Second World War, only later becoming a lasting form of resettlement.

Another important aspect of the book is that it is a second edition. This allowed Vultur to conduct additional discussions with some of the people interviewed for the first edition, revealing interesting, though not entirely surprising, changes. Many of their opinions and evaluations of their own lived experience had been altered by time. In this way, Vultur once again shows that memory is a process shaped by change.

Overall, Smaranda Vultur's *Francezi in Banat, Bănăţeni in Franţa* is valuable both

for its conclusions and for the way it models a complex and self-aware methodology. The author carries out detailed explorations of local and transnational history, uses sociologically informed interviews, and develops theoretically rich reflections on the concepts that shape the lives of the people she studies. The book therefore serves as a model for future research into the identity and experience of communities across space and time.

Tudor Buduşanu