

Romanian Literature as World Literature

Mircea MARTIN, Christian MORARU, Andrei TERIAN (eds.),
Romanian Literature as World Literature, New York, Bloomsbury
Academic, 2017, 357 p. Includes bibliographical references and index

Keywords: *World Literature; Romanian literature; methodological nationalism; planetary turn; politics of reading; cosmopolitanism*

Introduction

The idea of inviting to this symposium several scholars of Romanian literature and placing their reviews in a transnational, intercultural, and cross-methodological dialogue was inspired by the truly dialogic architecture of the book under scrutiny. *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (RLWL) is a collection of 15 solid case studies, prefaced by an introductory epistemological “manifesto,” which argues, step by step and essay after essay, for a cosmopolitan geopolitics of reading national literature(s). The outcome of the book review symposium is twofold. First and foremost, it offers a critical overview of the volume under discussion, in relation to other comparative literary histories, on the one hand, and to Romanian literary historiography, on the other hand. Second, and more importantly, the dossier outlines a methodological debate. RLWL posits a paradigm shift in the study of national cultures, and the said shift calls for a radical rethinking of the discipline’s idiom, as well as for reframing the “objects” of study – be they individual authors, literary works, artistic groups or “Romanian literature” as a whole – in the broader context of world literature. Among the contributors to this book review symposium, Romanița Constantinescu, Roberto Merlo and Christian Moraru are teaching either Romanian, or English and comparative literature at Western universities, Andrei Corbea-Hoișie and Andrei Terian are professors working on comparative literature and critical theory in Romania, while Cosmin Borza and Andreea Mironescu are researchers of literature and literary theory also working in Romania. Their interventions offer different views and arguments on key-issues such as “methodological nationalism” in literary research, the “exportability” of Romanian authors, literary works and ideas, the politics of reading, and the practice of cross-cultural comparison. (*Andreea Mironescu*)

Romanian Literature beyond National “Complexes” and Nationalist Idiosyncrasies

Cosmin BORZA *

Romanian Literature as World Literature (RLWL) indisputably possesses an inaugural character. Any doubts in this regard are resolved by merely comparing it with other supposedly influential projects (also) focusing on Romanian literature.

First of all, in Romanian contemporary criticism, approaches resembling those featured in the volume published in 2017 by Bloomsbury may be found in several individual and isolated studies carried out by researchers of the new wave of young critics (many of them contributors to this project) commenced after 2000. To search for signs of forerunning/pioneering efforts in the volumes published by the leaders of the 1980s generation would be far-fetched for a number of reasons. On the one hand, because methodological principles such as pluralism, multiculturalism, essentialist anti-nationalism, touted by the Romanian postmodernists, do not result in an actual analytical reconsideration of national literature; instead, they serve to describe the differentiae of their own creative generation. For them, Romanian literature might be a world literature only beginning with the last two decades of the twentieth century. On the other hand, the 1980s critics' approach to the Romanian literature's relation to the great Western hubs of cultural influence develops a predominantly colonial/auto-colonial perspective, enhancing former “complexes” of “inferiority,” “belatedness” or “marginality.” This is especially evident in the manner in which – according to Wai Chee Dimock's theories – the “peripheral-central” and “minor-major” relations are defined in RLWL: “the ‘grainy,’ the trivial, and the micro” are no longer perceived as “a docile repository and mimesis of the global, but [as] the fine print in which the inscriptions and prescriptions of uniform globality are unwritten and reinscribed” (p. 17).

Then, the volume edited by Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian, and the *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe* (2004–2010), coordinated by Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, appear to share a common ground in both the methodological shift triggered by transnational studies (which postulate that “the nation-state” has become “increasingly inadequate as a knowledge tool”), and, more specifically, in the epistemological mutation triggered by the “nodal” approach, the national literature thus being no longer perceived as an organically evolving system nurtured by a cultural territory with clearly delineated institutional borders, but as an intersectional, palimpsestic and nomadic product, impossible to confine within a single ethnical-cultural space.

However, similarities could be traced instead in terms of theoretical premises, because analytical results are significantly and sometimes completely different. To illustrate the mutation brought by replacing the national with a transnational vantage point, Cornis-Pope and Neubauer use the classical rabbit-duck illusion, which reveals

* “Sextil Pușcariu” Institute of Linguistics and Literary History, Cluj-Napoca Branch of the Romanian Academy, Romania (cosmi_borza@yahoo.com).

to them that “[t]he rabbit is neither better nor more authentic than the duck, and switching to it cannot be labeled as progress in an absolute sense.”¹ In a similar manner, their *History* relies on “an ethical imperative rather than an epistemological longing” (p. 15). On the other hand, the preface signed by Moraru and Terian projects a considerably more programmatic-revisionist reading grid, which the term “manifesto” describes accurately. “Countercultural, *because* cross-cultural or culturally intersectional” (p.12), “an antidote to the epistemological ‘tunnel vision’ [imposed by the nineteenth century methodologies and ideologies]” (p. 4), “breaking the epistemological mold of methodological nationalism” (p. 13), “move forward so as to leave behind its epistemological paradigm and its heavily ideological and political baggage” (p. 21) – these are the lines along which the polemical tone of RLWL is fashioned. It is more than a mere difference of rhetorical intensity; it is a paradigm shift. While Cornis-Pope, Neubauer and their contributors attempt “to reconceptualize rather than erase national histories” (p. 17), this volume, published as part of the “Literatures as World Literature” Bloomsbury series, refuses to paint an alternative history of Romanian literature, revealing instead the moments, phenomena and authors which confirm the capacity of Romanian literature – or, more accurately, the capacity of the literary systems labeled as specific, respectively as adjacent to Romania – to integrate into or to mirror transnational (planetary) webs, hubs, nuclei, routes, interchanges. For this reason, the national and the regional both make room for the global, just as temporal nodes, common landmarks of traditional historiography, are substantially superseded by spatial nodes. Compared with the critical metaphor used by the editors of the *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe*, the paradigm shift effected by RLWL deliberately avoids instating an organic image, resorting instead – as stated by Moraru and Terian – to a mere patchwork of images, worlds, texts, all of which operate as “communicating vessels.” Romanian literature is no longer seen through the lens of great canonic/representative writers, of referential historical data, of literary movements practicalities, and not even from the point of view of the privileged phases of synchronization with the Western literary systems or from the perspective of the more circumscribed cases in which the merging of regional cultural flows speeds up; instead, it is analyzed according to the transnational networks with which it establishes relations. Hence, the (culturally “ecumenical”) early Romanian literature, developed prior to the establishment of the national state, the Romanian “poly-territorial” or “extraterritorial” microliteratures of the Serbian, German, Hungarian, Bessarabian authors, the cosmopolitan avant-garde movements initiated in Romania, the exiled/diaspora writers and their international careers, or the literary “generations” (the so-called “existentialists” of the ’27 Generation, and the “postmoderns” of the 1980s), which define themselves as alienated from the local, autochthonous, national traditions, become the main foci of the volume.

Besides re-reading Romanian literature in an updated critical language and, on the other hand, besides emphasizing its international academic relevance (in terms of

¹ Marcel Cornis-Pope, John Neubauer (eds.), *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Junctions and Disjunctions in the 19th and 20th Centuries*. Volume I, Amsterdam/ Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004, p. 15.

“translating” a national literature for the wider world), this volume is praiseworthy for bringing to the fore certain major interpretative directions, which usually go undetected or are downright obstructed by Romanian criticism. RLWL does not quite provide the global reader with clear resolutions to local theoretical debates; on the contrary, it reopens cases formerly considered closed. This goal is achieved both by Terian’s essay on Mihai Eminescu, which envisions “the national poet” as building a local ethos from elements borrowed from Hindu/Vedic myths, which are appropriated more easily than the anxiety-inducing West European traditions, and Alex Goldiș’s study of the great Romanian literary histories of the first half of the twentieth century, defined via “universalization without internalization,” “comparison without interaction” or “reference without comparison.” Fashioned along much the same line are also Mircea A. Diaconu’s analysis of the “Romanian exile” depicted in intra-territorial microliteratures; Mihai Iovănel’s survey of the famous cases of Mircea Eliade, E. M. Cioran and Eugène Ionesco, whose “cultural rebranding” the critic attributes to not only their access to a central cultural network or major artistic inventiveness, but also to cynical strategies meant to cover up a blemished past, all decisively supported by an element of arbitrariness; Doris Mironescu’s analysis of Herta Müller, Andrei Codrescu and Norman Manea’s fiction as representative of the fact that “nationalism and globalism are not always incompatible,” since “writers often find themselves trapped once more ‘inside’ spatial systems crystalized around power, influence, and prestige masquerading as ‘universal’ values and equal cultural opportunity” (p. 290). Other poignant arguments are also made in Bogdan Ștefănescu’s plea for a “comparative postcolonialism,” grounded in the realization that, despite their widely different contexts, former Western colonies and Central-East European ex-Communist states exhibit “similar symbolic mechanisms of national identity constitution” (p. 264). In like manner, Teodora Dumitru makes a compelling scholarly case, whose relevance has a wider applicability; she shows that the 1980s Romanian poets’ self-validation through the American beatniks “lacks a truly global perspective,” as, for them, the West remains a “depoliticized idealistic construct” (p. 281), whose anti-capitalist ideology is “mostly ignored or outright rejected” (p. 277).

For all intents and purposes, RLWL operates an undisputed shift of theoretical and critical vision, with often revelatory outcomes. Nevertheless, certain shortcomings of this project cannot be overlooked. The aforementioned inaugural quality manifests itself through epidemic bursts of theorization. Almost all contributors feel the need to conceptualize at length the paradigm shift generated by transnational studies. Although this tendency is understandable in the case of some studies featured in the first mainly meta-critical section of the volume, it becomes redundant in other parts. Theorizations that either systematically repeat ideas listed in the *Introduction* or are disconcertingly sinuous leave very little room even for the Romanian literature/culture. Despite their rather challenging topics – the cultural creative impact of imperialist pressures and the redefinition of imitation in modern Romanian literature – Caius Dobrescu’s and Carmen Mușat’s contributions seem to have fallen prey to this tendency. The same anxiety caused by a new field of research is obvious in the selection of topics in the 15 studies included in the book. In a rather large number of cases, the scope is selected so as to match the transnational approach as reverently as possible. Hence, no attempt is made to avoid

cases of overlapping: to the contrary, some of the authors approach – to different extents, of course – similar topics: the transnational legacy of the “old” “Romanian” literature (Bogdan Crețu and Dobrescu), the radical internationalism of the avant-garde movements (Paul Cernat and Ovidiu Morar), the Romanian “microliteratures” (Diaconu and Imre József Balász). It is likely that restructuring such articles would have caused important analytical losses. However, they might have been no more significant, for instance, than the absence of studies on Liviu Rebreanu, I. L. Caragiale, Tudor Arghezi, on the “Orientalization” of modern Romanian literature (roughly sketched by Crețu towards the end of his essay) or on the regional influence of Nichita Stănescu’s poetry. And not because this would recuperate so-called “canonical” Romanian writers, but because many works of the aforementioned authors do raise transnational challenges, whose assessment might indeed be more difficult, but which would definitely prove especially fruitful from a theoretical and analytical standpoint.

Of course, primary among the scopes of the RLWL project is specifically that of encouraging such continuations/ extensions. Beyond the revisionist manifesto of the *Introduction*, which may puzzle some readers, this volume holds all the premises for Romania’s great “national” literary landmarks to greatly benefit from such a much-needed innovative re-reading.

Romanian Literature in the Planetary Go Game. From Micro-Context to the Horizon of the Open Library of the World

Romanița CONSTANTINESCU*

The idea of a “World Literature,” as debated in the book *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (published last year in the prestigious series initiated by Thomas O. Beebee) from the perspective of a literature that claims a larger visibility for itself, is less abstract than it seems. Since I teach Romanian literature in Germany and Austria, I was able to immediately notice the “alteration” of the literary canon that I had brought with me in this new cultural environment: it was taken over, bluntly and without any restrictions, by the latter. The points of contact between the literatures of the Romanian language or German language in Romania were privileged. On the other hand, the quaint and exotic writers that allow a different world to shine through their work, upon which one could project alternative dreams, were privileged as well. I cannot get rid of the idea of the narrow subjectivism of these choices. Despite the gains obtained from the juxtaposition of the works in my students’ portfolio, from discovering the intersectionality of the two cultures, it seemed to me that I only move within the taste barriers of a private collection, which is as seducing as it is non-durable. Things got more complicated as, due to the world

* University of Heidelberg, Germany (romanita.constantinescu@rose.uni-heidelberg.de).

becoming more and more fluid, our seminars became more international: the French Erasmus students became interested in the Romanian exile, the Italians, in the literature of the immigrants and the Chinese, in absolutely everything. Moreover, I had to identify Romanian literature as a more “objective” intersection set of circles that are closer or farther away, albeit always moving, always changing. Nonetheless, this further opening did not satisfy me. What if World Literature were not a private and supranational private collection of works that are objects? Then it could not be an abstract museum, resulting from a large – preferably universal – consensus of a text corpus. Obviously, the questions raised by the participants did not have a common denominator either. Romanian Literature as World Literature was not already there, in the classroom, despite the interest for Romanian literature and the vast and varied knowledge of all those in attendance. The object had to be invented, as it could not be found either on the horizontal axis of the democratic intersection of cultures, or on the vertical axis of canonic hierarchies and of the questions brought to the table by the students. The merit of this book is to have made the widest, the most coherent and the best consolidated proposal of what Romanian Literature as World Literature might look like from the perspective of a “nodal epistemology” that discovers “the hidden map” of relations within the literary system. How and where does Romanian literature appear on this world map? In my opinion, in this equation, “World Literature” is *not* the *end*, but the *means*, the instrument of reestablishing the relationships between the literatures of the world, beyond borders and space fractures, a creative and offensive concept of redefining the world as an open place of meetings, exchanges and reciprocal influence. A major stake of this opening, which the foreword of the book signals, is the emancipation of the art of the word, the last among the arts, from the tutelage of the ideology of the national state.

World Literature appears to me as a less abstract idea and not because I encountered it as such in the classroom – even if it were an international one –, as a *corpus* or its anticipation. The current topoi of the secondary literary discourse, that of literary theory, criticism and history, the issues discussed in literary seminars, at international conferences, topoi and questions that the opening towards the possibility of a literature of the world orients at a global level, proving their validity and functioning in cultures of origin and cultures that provide echoes, enter into contact with each other. The opening of the discourse towards the possibility of a world literature has, therefore, another important stake: liberating the literatures of the world from the central-marginal taxonomy. Sometimes, the periphery can prove an “unorthodox centrality,” and some network nodes behave in a “marginal-centric” manner.

One of the most interesting studies of this book (since it aims to test precisely this stake of decentralization of global literary studies) belongs, in my opinion, to Teodora Dumitru. Elements of social criticism and left-wing politics, anti-establishment rebellion present in the works of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Ferlinghetti are included, by means of an unexpected change on the communism delimitation agenda in the Romanian poetry of the 1980s. Within this paradoxical situation, in which the prototype has changed its identity, the poetic impulses of the beat movement do not move linearly, but dialectically between two centers, which they

bring together in spite of distances and differences. Carmen Mușat alludes to Franco Moretti, who relativizes the hierarchies based on apparent priorities that occult, in the much more open space of literature, the complex game of influences. What lies on the inside and what remains on the outside becomes thus, like in a game of Go, much harder to be established – thus, for instance, the gothic novel finds its roots in Persian and Arab tales. The “central” cultures themselves are not only producing cultures, but also cultures of reception, which should reduce, on a global level, the anxiety of influence. Alex Goldiș shows that in the central cultures there are also periods of emergence alternating with periods of absorption, assimilation and adaptation. Absolute originality is nothing but a mere myth, and singularity does not ensure success or international visibility, instead, as one might say, contact and resemblance may do it better.

Mihai Iovănel writes about the transcendence strategies of the culture of origins, as well as about becoming successful on an international level. Eliade, Cioran and Ionesco are considered to be the exported Romanian authors *par excellence*: all three of them, after a Romanian debut that raised the attention of their countrymen, found themselves at the right time and place that guaranteed their success: in Paris. Nonetheless, Iovănel doubts that all these circumstances were also sufficient for their achievements, a more important thing being that what he calls “the transcultural protocols by which three Romanian writers [...] acquired major author status in the French culture of post-Second World War Paris” (p. 217). And these circumstances are very different in the case of each of the three authors. The comparison firstly highlights the failure of Eliade as an author of fiction in the realist short stories republished in the 1950s with an asynchronous strategy; Eliade only managed to make a comeback with his fantastic short stories riding the coattails of the South American magical realism. Cioran is also an anachronistic writer, like Eliade, yet a radical and innovative anachronist, who deliberately resorted to a classic rhetoric, while Ionesco joins the positions of the avant-garde. The “reinvention” of the self is less of a break, since the Romanian themes and motifs keep resurfacing in all three authors' works, and more of a risky repositioning along with the entire Romanian baggage. Sometimes this means the courage to harness useless resources in the environment of origins – Iovănel deservedly asks himself if *The Bald Soprano* would have remained in the Romanian culture as little more than an eccentricity. This question also echoes in the study of Ovidiu Morar about Tzara and Paul Celan. On the other hand, the connections from the past threaten, especially in the case of Eliade, of Cioran, and even in the case of Ionesco, to stir their canonic position, which Iovănel follows in the critical, but also literary and artistic posterity (Eliade as a character in the novels of Saul Bellow, Norman Manea and Caius Dobrescu), as well as in the media culture (Cioran and the TV series *True Detective*).

As we can notice, the globally open perspective about national literatures implicitly suspends the importance granted to the language and the place the works are written in. This is not about recovering at all costs any writer who might matter at an international level. Nevertheless, it might account for those individuals who, by means of education and/or biography are located in a transnational or transitional space, from Nicolae Milescu and Dimitrie Cantemir to Andrei Codrescu, Norman

Manea and Herta Müller. Bogdan Crețu reminds us of the fact that the resistance to consider works written in other languages as being part of Romanian literature removes them from any landscape of the intelligible and that this resistance can be clearly identified by its date of occurrence in the Romanian literary historiography. All intra-territorial literatures are being recovered from a global perspective, both those written in the languages of the minorities (about whom Imre József Balázs writes), and those that are extra-territorial, works of the exile, of the diaspora, of the immigrants, of the historical communities outside the country borders (Mircea A. Diaconu), etc.

The Romanian space itself is, as Caius Dobrescu shows from the perspective of post-colonial studies, a transactional one, negotiated among the empires according to different patterns. Dobrescu succeeds in painting a seductive positive typology of the answers to the question regarding the proximity of the empires, from the inter-imperial positions (Antim Ivireanul, Udriște Năsturel, Dimitrie Cantemir, C. Cantacuzino), to the para-imperial isolation (Ion Budai-Deleanu) and meta-imperialism (Nicolae Bălcescu). The negative answer, consisting of the interiorization of the blank gaze of the colonist, of the trauma of vacuity, is investigated by Bogdan Ștefănescu extensively, from A. D. Xenopol and G.I. Brătianu, to Constantin Noica and Cioran or Andrei Codrescu and Horia-Roman Patapievic. Finally, there is also the possibility of a radical imaginative intervention on space, as it is lived in its heterogeneity and its most vehement fractures. The new characters of the space, as it was shaped by the experience of exile, are the main object of Doris Mironescu's study.

The globalist literary perspective on Romanian literature naturally brings up mandatory topics such as the Romanian avant-garde (Ovidiu Morar), the exile literature (Mironescu) or even the literature of the communist era (Martin), as well as the role of translations, of bilingualism or trilingualism (Mihaela Ursa). Yet it also allows welcome reconsiderations of local dichotomies, such as the relationship between the avant-garde, the so-called traditionalism and the radical modernism, from the wider perspective offered by the comparison with the jazz age, the *années folles* or even with the Young Turks movement. Paul Cernat animates the frozen ideological landscape of the 1930s, which, due to successive simplifications, has become outright incomprehensible. He does this very convincingly, among other things with the help of references to the fine arts of the era, mainly to Constantin Brancusi, but also to Șirato.

But surely the most difficult answer this volume had to provide concerns the top of the Romanian literary canon from the perspective of a World Literature that is not viewed as an immutable pantheon, but as a vivid weave of lectures and interpretation. Andrei Terian masterfully completes this task. By rejecting exceptionalism as “the opium of small literatures,” Terian removes the label on Eminescu as a unique, inexplicable, isolated poet, or as, in the best case, “the last European romantic”. Terian explains Eminescu, a poet of the world, as a writer in search of a national mythology, of an ethos that would fit a national epos, who rejects all simple solutions, already affected by the anxiety of influence, for fear of remaining an epigone. The return to the Orient, to Vedic poetry, an avatar of the entire Indo-European culture – hence, also of the Romanian culture –, and then to the folklore sources, frees Eminescu from the fear of repetition. Terian reads

Eminescu no less than through Said, and he does it well: “uncovering the Eastern roots of European culture Eminescu re-Easternizes the West” (p. 51), even more so since he casts his new poetic experience, free of any conflict, into the classic Western forms of the glossa, the ode or the “epistle”.

The authors of this book proceed cautiously, with more questions than vanity, without attempting to save and collect everything they find for the national cause, without any unease and complexes, with intelligent clippings that could serve anytime as a point of reference for similar approaches within other cultures and even with the faint shadow of a *Witz* that makes any vanity fade. It is a collection of studies that question and answer one another, with a solid bibliography, commonly shared, with correct and collegial open references to the most important Romanian studies works have traced new lines or have drawn up concepts in recent years. Thus, I would necessarily attach to this collection Martin’s book about the “complexes” of Romanian literature, *G. Călinescu și „complexele” literaturii române* (1981), Terian’s book about the exported/exporting Romanian criticism, *Critica de export* (2013) and the chapter dedicated to Mircea Cărtărescu in Moraru’s book *Reading for the Planet* (2015). *Weltliteratur* was for Christoph Martin Wieland literature for a *Weltbürger*, for an ideal *homme du monde*. *Romanian Literature as World Literature* is, from this perspective, an open literary and political-literary manifesto of a lifestyle in an open world, without walls, and a volume with topopoetic virtues that prepares a world for meeting us.

National/ Transnational = Appearance/ Essence?

Andrei CORBEA-HOIȘIE*

When taking the briefest of glances over the summaries of the few published titles in Bloomsbury’s “Literatures as World Literature” series, one notices from the start a major difference between the aims of those who edit volumes dedicated to literatures primarily considered, in a tradition we might or might not agree with, as “large” (in a quantitative sense)/ “central” (in a symbolic sense, as a result of the “prestige” of the language they belong to) and the aims of editors dealing with “small”/ “peripheral” literatures: unlike the German or American authors, for whom the exercise is primarily selective and indicative of an “universality” seen as self-obvious, the Danish, Brazilians or Romanians struggle visibly to create an all-encompassing synthesis-overview, with the purpose to persuasively argue for an inclusion in the *Weltliteratur* that has yet to be recognized by the public opinion. It is understandable that, while the *German Literature as World Literature* volume, edited by Thomas O. Beebee, professor of comparative literature at Pennsylvania State University, has been (for now) completely ignored in the German-speaking public sphere, the one dedicated to Romanian literature by a team coordinated by Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian has met with multiple reactions

* “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, Romania (corbea.hoisie@gmail.com).

in reviews and debates, facing both support and criticism. Whereas the aim of the first volume was confined simply to the profile of the samples of selected “universalism” (Goethe, Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Brecht, Sebald etc.), one among many others, the second volume boasts a programmatic ambition, an assumed will to propose a different model of perception and description of the whole, the determination to overcome the ideological routine, still persistent in the various manners of conceiving culture according to substantialist schemata.

Although *Romanian Literature as World Literature* repeatedly assures its reader that it does not aim to present any alternative historiographic and canonical claim to the current syntheses and their accepted value hierarchies by its choice of a vein of writers that may be integrated in a global perspective, a clear delimitation from all the patterns currently used to refer to the “whole” that we call “Romanian literature” becomes apparent not only from Moraru and Terian’s introduction, but also from the majority of the contributions to the volume. Numerous unequivocal statements are made regarding the necessity to go, in reading, interpreting and classifying literary texts, beyond the barrier of the “national” towards the level of the “transnational,” to extract them from the ancient “Herderian mystique” which indistinctly binds language, literature, nation and “national” identity. Thus, Romanian literary studies are encouraged to embrace the shift of emphasis from the old certainties of homogeneity and organicity toward the heterogeneity and processuality of literary phenomena. Texts appear thus to be linked into complex systems through connections which integrate them in space-time networks, interconnected, in their turn, into a supra- and paraterritorial continuum which, through its great extent, profundity and exposure, determines an ample epistemological mutation, detached from the old “fictions” of teleology or from traditional comparatism, reliant on the “influence-reception” schema. Ultimately, such a theoretical platform interferes with various pre-established endeavors in the fields of cultural studies and literary theory of the recent decades – among others, “the rules of the art” stemming from Pierre Bourdieu’s cultural and literary “fields” theory or Moritz Csaky’s description of Central-European culture as a supraterritorial and supralinguistic “communicative space” of mutual relations between “multiple identities,” individual and collective, cultural “products” and “realms of memory” etc. –, but such “interpretive codes” have been only partially and circumspectly applied to the “matter” of the Romanian culture and literature, where only a few authors (most notably Paul Cornea) have dared to introduce methodological innovations. From this perspective, this volume constitutes, indeed, a pioneering initiative, even a “technical” benchmark for future analytical and synthetic explorations, free from automatism, prejudice and “received ideas.”

Undoubtedly, the questions stimulated by the “worlded” vision of Romanian literature, as it is “translated” in the summary of the Bloomsbury volume, are far from few. The most resounding, in our opinion, is the one hinting at the very *raison d’être* of the projection suggested by the title of the series: can Romanian literature *in toto* be considered as a “node” of a “network” with a global vocation, or can only certain moments, certain currents, certain authors can be integrated in such a series, while the significance of the others remains limited to the “local level”? Whilst the inherent selection which has been undertaken while developing the summary favors

the second assumption, the close reading of the *Introduction* points to a rather ecumenic conception, not at all exclusivist or reductionist. An example which we think is illustrative in this latter sense could be, among others, the moment and the action related to the *Sămănătorul* gazette, rightly considered as an expression of the autochtonist excesses in the Romanian cultural climate after 1900 – haven't the Bucharest students led by Nicolae Iorga, their professor, protested in the name of this ideology against the representation of French plays at the National Theatre? But, if we look no further than *Mitteleuropa*, an identical tendency was also manifested in the Germanophone culture and literature of the era: it gained consistence in what was called *Heimatliteratur*, as we see in the prose of someone like Peter Rosegger, where the atmosphere relies on the same late Romantic sensibility, nostalgic for the “lost paradise” of a rurality and “authenticity” that urban civilization, with its evils, would have crushed; such an atmosphere can also be found in the short stories of a young Mihail Sadoveanu. Even if some minor Transylvanian authors grew up reading this *Heimatliteratur*, it would be far-fetched to assess its direct influence over Romanian literature, another option being to consider it as a typical phenomenon of “concordance” (in Paul Cornea's understanding of this term) and, ultimately, why not? of European “alignment,” fueled by quasi-similar social conditions of a nationalistic and anti-European cultural movement par excellence! Another example: the young Paul Celan, a devout reader of Rilke and Trakl, was simultaneously fascinated by Tudor Arghezi, himself convinced of his European vocation, wanting to be translated – by Celan the adult, in 1964 – in German! A good illustration for such an integrative course of historical and critical reflection is undertaken here by Terian, in the study dedicated to Eminescu: the “national poet,” who, failing in the project of a national “epic,” ends up looking to the sources of a mythical India and becomes thus one of the first European authors who “dis-Orientalizes” it, and, simultaneously, in a “transnational” manner, “Orientalizes” European literature.

The most adequate field for a projection of Romanian culture and literature beyond territorial and linguistic borders remains, however, the so-called “old” period, when the space stretching between Constantinople, Jerusalem and the Caucasus, and, respectively, Kyiv, Lvov and Rome, witnessed the circulation of manuscripts and books, master typographers and dragomans, monks and secular scholars, and in which creations, books sacred or popular, original or translated, were written in Slavonic, Greek, Latin and, finally, in an archaic or Latinized Romanian. Bogdan Crețu's contribution to this volume delineates clearly the coordinates of this problematic complex, which was once defined with particular precision by Iorga with the formula “Byzance après Byzance” and which, through the recent decades' research of Virgil Căndea or Alexandru Duțu, could be noticed more poignantly in its connections with the whole of the European culture in its Early Modern period. As hallmarks of an “orientalism” open to the West, which is willing to receive it as such, are rightly named – including as founders of an “orientalist” movement (maybe rather “Balkan”?) in Romanian culture, which would later channel through the works of I. L. Caragiale, Sadoveanu, Mircea Eliade, Mircea Cărtărescu (also, why not Ion Barbu?) – Nicolae Milescu and Dimitrie Cantemir; an interesting observation is that the latter, a “transnational” scholar – I

wonder which language he used when talking to his children? – was transformed, in a process of posthumous mythologization, into a “national symbol.” On the other hand, the choices they make become symptomatic for the “manner” of work of most of the contributors to this volume, who only analyze “case studies” where the references (events and personalities) indicate an obvious supra- and transnational dimension. This begs, once more, the question of what happens with the rest, where, apparently, the introduction of Romanian culture in “World Literature” is either not at all or only slightly perceivable.

The authors of the various articles collected in this book have obviously and admirably enjoyed a complete autonomy from the theses stated in the *Introduction*, the frame of which they seem to accept only to a certain point. A diversity of topics and approaches is, ultimately, favored (compared to the “indicators” of language and space), which, in truth, gives color to the whole: one can find next to each other, for instance, the studies of Mircea A. Diaconu on the Romanian language literature written outside the borders of the country, in the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine or Serbia, which also considers the aspect of “ethnicity” (?), and those of József Imre Bálasz on the Hungarian language literature written on Romanian territory, those of Mihai Iovănel about Cioran, Eliade and Eugen Ionescu, and those of Doris Mironescu on Herta Müller, Andrei Codrescu and Norman Manea – although, with the exception of the last one, who continues to write in Romanian, the affiliation to Romanian culture and literature is, on a scale going down to zero in the case of the Nobel laureate, rather a “primary,” territorial and/or linguistic, moment in their work –, those of Ovidiu Morar about the Jewish (ergo, the author says, “international”) avantgardists – an ethnicist “halo” which, in its turn, raises various questions and dilemmas – or those of Paul Cernat on the relations between the (modern!) Romanian “anti-modernity” and the neoconservative “international” established in the interwar period. Equally exciting seem the historical-theoretical explorations of Carmen Mușat, who underlines the paradox of the willing “synchronization” of the modern Romanian culture with the Western one as a decisive moment in the discovery of its “specific” difference in its “national” dimension, as well as those of Mircea Martin, concerned with the theoretically “internationalist” moment of the adhesion of the official Romanian aesthetic, between 1948 and 1960, to the imported Soviet concept of “socialist realism.”

Certainly, this volume does not exhaust a set of issues to which one could add, in future editions, other topics or developments of the topics already approached, with the potential to shine a light on the “global” dimension of Romanian culture: the exile/exiles of Romanian authors, multilingualism (Al. Macedonski, Panait Istrati etc.), the contribution of translations and translators (for instance Lucian Blaga, Immanuel Weissglas and Ștefan Aug. Doinaș translating Goethe; Vladimir Streinu, Radu Cioculescu, Irina Mavrodin translating Proust) etc. But this book itself is a testimony to the complete integration of the Romanian critical reflection in a theoretical *Weltliteratur* – a voice which is scholarly and, at the same time, original in its conceptual bricolage and speculative-creative subtlety (masterfully illustrated, among others, in Caius Dobrescu’s study!).

Translated by Radu Diaconu

Navigating the Flux: The Many Routes to Romanian Literature

Roberto MERLO*

In a recent critique of several supranational and international literary histories, the late Remo Ceserani, a renowned Italian literary critic and comparatist, comments on a book dedicated to Romanian literature, a volume which, in his view, amounted to a continued adherence to a *geistesgeschichtlich* identification between nation, language, tradition and identity, by not taking into account the literatures of the cultural and linguistic minorities of Romania, and by focusing exclusively on the literary works written in Romanian, even in the case of authors who achieved international recognition writing in other languages². Agreeing or not with Ceserani's criticism (I don't entirely), in any case one could safely speculate that he would have been thrilled with *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (RLWL), which has it all: deconstruction of the national(ist) discourse, "microliteratures," exile and migration literature(s), and much more.

The first impressions I had when reading the essays that make up RLWL were a powerful sense of unity of perspective and the gratifying realization that the framework articulated in the theoretical *Introduction* was not the usual token paid to academic fashionable trends, but an accurate pinpointing of the actual methodological coordinates within which the various authors carried out their individual exploration. The remarkable congruity of both the premises and intents of the various essays is built upon a shared bibliography comprising a number of contributors crucial to the shaping of the humanities and criticism in the last decades (among the most frequently quoted: Immanuel Wallerstein, Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti, Christian Moraru, Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Wai Chee Dimock and – for Romanian critics – Andrei Terian and Mircea Martin). And I think it justifies the assertion made by Moraru and Terian that "the particular authors and texts under discussion are less important than their handling" (p. 22). (Therefore I will not comment on what *is not* in the book.)

The "handling" of the very diverse variety of topics and issues RLWL touches upon revolves unanimously around notions such as plurality and multiplicity, cosmopolitanism, interaction, intersectionality, transition, in other words around the programmatic *transgression* of the rigid boundaries set in place by the "national(ist)" understanding of literature and culture, linguistically conveyed by the iconic use of *cross-* and *trans-* formations ("crosspollination," "cross-cultural," "cross-identitarian," "cross-national," "cross-systemic," "transnational," "trans-territorial," "transcontinental," "transcultural," "transregional," "transmetropolitan," "transimperial" etc.). In my opinion, the interpretive effort underlying the overall *anti-exceptionalist* "critical-theoretical manifesto" that the Editors themselves acknowledge is "sort of" embedded in the RLWL project (p. xv), could be aptly

* University of Turin, Italy (roberto.merlo@unito.it).

² Remo Ceserani, *Nuove storie letterarie sovranazionali sulla scena mondiale*, in «Between», 6, 2013 (III) (DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13125/2039-6597/1045>, pp. 6–7).

described – with a quotation from Bogdan Ștefănescu’s essay on the postcolonial dimension of RL – as “an effort to move critical understanding away from static, nationalist or nation-centered teleologies and toward a dynamic and transnational mapping of cultural convergence and influence” (p. 258).

In fact, a prominent element in most of the essays is the criticisms of the “methodological nationalism” (Ulrich Beck, in Moraru and Terian, p. 13) and the “state-centric epistemology” (Neil Brenner, in Doris Mironescu, p. 289) of a good part of Romanian cultural and literary historiography. In 20th century Romania, well past its romantic roots, the national(ist) epistemology was eloquently embodied by the still highly influential *Istoria literaturii române* (History of Romanian Literature) penned in 1941 by G. Călinescu (which rightly figures as a prominent target of the deconstructionist discourse of several essays, chiefly the excellent one by Alex Goldiș) and later resurrected and fostered by the increasingly nationalist regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Quoting Cornis-Pope, one could say that the critical discourse of the RLWL project does not aim to “erase ... national histories [but instead to] reconceptualize them” (p. 4). Consequently, whereas the *pars destruens* of the book consists in the refutation of the “hard” tenets of the national(ist) epistemology, that assumes that “Romanian literature” (RL) substantively *is* a singularity amongst a finite number of discontinuous homologous entities delimited from one another by the clear-cut definition of “nation” (in its more restrictive form, what I would label – adopting the terminology of Carlo Tullio Altan³ – the “1LGT approach”: one *logos*-language, one *genos*-kin, one *topos*-territory), its *pars construens* proposes a “soft” approach according to which “RL” is understood as a plurality, a polysystem of coexisting and variously interconnected systems embedded in an ever-shifting world of overlapping, fuzzy-borders continuities in perpetual flux.

I find an unexpected, yet – for me – quite compelling analogy of this shift in the way Buddhism reacted to Brahmanist essentialism. Whereas the doctrine of the Vedas and particularly for the Upanishads preaches the existence of an eternal and immutable individual “essence,” the *ātman*, which identifies in various ways with the *brahman*, the equally eternal and immutable essence of the universe (a doctrine gnominically articulated by the *Chandogya Upanishad* with the sentence *tat tvam asi*, dear to Eminescu), Buddhism maintains that the “self” we wrongly take to be that kind of unchanging *essence* is in fact an ongoing *process*, the conjunctural product of the successive interactions of a series of factors (“aggregates”) in perpetual flux. As, for the Buddha, the “self” of living beings is not an immutable essence but an ever-going process, so nations – and even less literatures, as “national” as they could be – have no unchanging “soul” nor “personality” assigned to them at the moment of creation, as in the well-known incipit of Mihail Sadoveanu’s novel *Baltagul* (The Hatchet, 1930). What the national(ist) “hard” approach takes for the “soul” or the “personality” of a nation in a substantive sense is, in fact, nothing but a *persona* – a “mask” – a cultural artefact layered out by historical circumstances.

³ Carlo Tullio Altan, *Ethnos e civiltà. Identità etnica e valori democratici*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1995, pp. 19–32.

Once we void the “Romanian” attribute of its national “hard” content, though, one could argue in what sense(s) we could still talk about “RL.” In other words: if not that “national literature” the Romantics and later Călinescu and his followers past and present want(ed) it to be, what could “RL” be? The RLWL authors’ criticism addresses, first and foremost, the selective blindness of the national(ist) gaze that refuses to acknowledge, along the ILGT literature, the diverse, the plural, the “impure.” The refusal to abide by the tenets of the national(ist) epistemology means primarily that what it was by those tenets understood that “RL” *is*, is not the whole extent of what “RL” *could be*.

When we step out of that ideal “national” ILGT core, there is no short, simple and easy answer to the question of what RL is or could be. And rightly so, since the real world is most of the times confusing, messy, unfathomable and frightfully complex. Accordingly, whereas in calling into question the exclusionary practices of methodological nationalism and the “lingering allegiance of domestic historiography to the ethno-territorial and nationalist paradigm” (Moraru and Terian, p. 13) the RLWL authors are quite unambiguous and direct, the inclusion of new literary “chronotologies” is more implicit, despite the fact that its orientation is unmistakably laid out in the *Contents*. Alongside a multiple transnational, cross-cultural and/or comparative rereading of some staples of the Romanian “national” literary history, the book puts forth the exploration of several territories largely or completely overlooked by it: extraterritorial Romanian literatures and intraterritorial heteroglossic literatures; the contribution of translations, of the imitative drive, of the Jewish authors’ cosmopolitanism and of the postmodernist generation’s interest for American literature to the edification of the “worldly” profile of RL; the literary exile from Romania; the postcolonial dimension of RL.

In doing so, the well-coordinated essays of RLWL collectively chart, both theoretically and empirically, new routes to navigate across the changing tides of what *we agree to call* (rather than what *is*) “Romanian Literature.” In my opinion, the major general point this project gets across (and one does not need to agree on the minutiae of every single essay to appreciate the ambitious global – no pun intended – scope of the book) is that, just like every culture and literature, Romanian culture and Romanian literature are more productively understood as open systems of possibilities, as macrophenomena composed of a multiplicity of microphenomena (Carmen Mușat, p. 119) in dynamic balance across spaces and times, embedded in a similarly dynamic worldly polysystem.

In conclusion, I would like to make a couple of observations.

First, as a foreign scholar of Romanian language and literature, I did not grow up inside the Romanian culture, but instead became acquainted with it in adulthood. That means that in approaching it I have neither the advantages nor the bias or prejudices of an insider. (Of course, I carry those of my own education and formation.) During my studies and later my research I became very familiar with the narrow-minded and obsessive national(ist) streak of Romanian culture that so rightly becomes the target of many RLWL authors’ criticism. Likewise very familiar is the notion put forth by Moraru and Terian that “a twenty-first-century history of Romanian literature should deal with medieval literature in idioms other than Romanian, with translations, with Romanian literary works produced in the

Republic of Moldova, with Romania's 'minority' literatures, and with the writings of Romanian exiles and emigrants irrespective of the languages they have used in their new countries" (p. 13), because I have been trying to apply it both in my teaching and in my research for more than ten years. Medieval and premodern literature in Slavonic, Latin and Greek, authors from the Republic of Moldova, exile and migrant literature have been at home in my own classroom. This is not, naturally, a testament to my own ingenuity: I learned that from my professors and predecessors.⁴ Reading some essay of RLWL, I had a sometimes vague sensation of *déjà vu* because for me, from the outside of the Romanian "national paradigm," Romanian language and culture have *always* been about plurality, intersectionality and "creolity," as Spivak would put it. That is why I was, and still am, attracted to them, not because of their supposed "national character." (The fact that as a student I also studied Hungarian and Serbian has surely been decisive in shaping this perspective.)

Being published in English, RLWL is *ipso facto* addressed to a potentially planetary audience, which for the most part – I gather – will not have the slightest notion about even "traditional" Romanian literary history and its bias. Beside the uninformed but eager public, though, there will also be a number of Romanian scholars and scholars of Romanian, as well as of other cultures that underwent similar national(ist) drifts (the literatures from the Balkans come to mind). The very short 'intellectual biography' sketched above was just to explain why to me, as a foreign scholar of Romanian literature, that recurrent criticism rightly addressed by many relatively young RLWL authors to the "nationalist paradigm" felt somehow targeted to this second, restricted category of "insiders," and like the settling of an old (generational) score.

Second, although I vowed not to comment on what *is not* in the book, I cannot help but wonder at the paucity of references to the literature written in Romanian (or in Russian) in past and present Republic of Moldova, briefly touched upon only by Mircea A. Diaconu in his essay on "microliteratures." Sociologically and demographically, the weight of the presence of authors from the Republic of Moldova in Romanian literature is such (especially in recent decades) that I would have expected it to be granted a separate treatment, possibly in the perspective of the identification of a fertile "polycentricity" of the Romanian literature of the last two centuries. In this respect, the "Romanian" attribute in RLWL seems to come across still as a bit "state-centric."

⁴ I give only a few examples: when I was a student in the mid-90s with prof. Marco Cugno I studied poets from the Republic of Moldova (see Marco Cugno, *Letteratura moldava. Ritratto di gruppo: poeti della Bessarabia*, a cura di M. Cugno, in «Si scrive. Rivista di letteratura», 1996, pp. 234–285), along with the postmodernists from Romania, and exile literature along with the "great classics" and interwar literature; before her untimely demise in 2007, Teresa Ferro was working on an ample project dedicated to ancient Romanian literature which included Romanian literature in Church Slavonic (see Teresa Ferro, *Lo slavonismo culturale e i primi testi in romeno. Per un manuale di letteratura romana antica*, in Salvatore Carmelo Trovato (a cura di), *Studi linguistici in onore di Giovanni Tropea*, Alessandria, dell'Orso, 2009, pp. 219–240), while around the same time Luisa Valmarin studied multiculturalism and heteroglossia in ancient Romanian literature (see Luisa Valmarin, *Multiculturalismo ed eteroglossia nel canone dell'antica letteratura rumena*, in Furio Brugnolo e Vincenzo Orioles (a cura di), *Eteroglossia e plurilinguismo letterario*, II. *Plurilinguismo e letteratura. Atti del XXVIII Convegno interuniversitario di Bressanone (6–9 luglio 2000)*, Roma, Il Calamo, 2002, pp. 151–161).

Third, although I completely and enthusiastically agree with Moraru and Terian's above-mentioned statement about the wide-ranging and inclusive attitude of "a twenty-first-century history of Romanian literature," I also think that said history should not overlook completely the "national paradigm" as a phenomenon with deep roots and multiple ramifications in Romanian culture. Let me be perfectly clear on this: I do not endorse, in any way and at any extent, any form whatsoever of "national" substantive understanding of cultures. What I mean to say is that, while for "old" and, partly, for contemporary Romanian literature the "national" aspect is a matter of biased *reception* (reading) and illicit projection, for a consistent part of modern and even contemporary literature it is also a matter of *production* (writing), in the sense that most 19th century and many first-half of 20th century authors created within the framework of the "ethno-territorial and nationalist paradigm" mentioned above. Ignoring that would mean neglecting an important part of the mental representation of the world the work of those authors stems from. I argue for the necessity to not entirely dismiss the "national paradigm" in the study of Romanian literature, not by perpetuating it as a valid epistemology, for sure, but by moving it from the methodological toolbox to the work counter of literary studies in order to debunk it.

"Worlding" Romanian Literary Studies

Andreea MIRONESCU*

In spite of their widely acknowledged "literaturocentrism," or maybe partly because of it, the national cultures in East-Central Europe do not have a central place on the global stage and are mostly perceived as "minor," "peripheral" or "(post)colonial." It is possible that this very literaturocentrism may have engendered – in Romania, at least – a complicated and enduring phenomenon of protectionism active in literary studies, which enhanced the existing isolationism dictated by geopolitical and geoeconomical factors and by the apparent lack of what Pascale Casanova calls "cultural capital." This *methodological protectionism* developed mostly during the communist period in Romania, but is still in place after 1989. It favored the prosperity of a type of literary historiography based on an organicist model of chronological evolution, on the generalization of "aesthetic autonomy" in the study of literature, on the limitation of imports of theory and of interdisciplinary exchanges, as well as on the exclusion/ marginalization of entire subgenres (paraliterature, translations, foreign language works by Romanian-born authors) or subfields ("minority" literatures) in national literary histories.

Romanian Literature as World Literature (RLWL), a groundbreaking volume co-edited by Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian, in which individual articles are authored by renowned Romanian critics, sets out to address both problems described above: the hierarchical relationship between "central" vs. "peripheral" cultures/ literatures, and the self-centrality that dominates literary studies.

* "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, Romania (andreea.mironescu@uaic.ro).

Although it is not and does not aim to be – its editors repeatedly claim – a literary history, the book offers a wide perspective, both temporally and spatially, on Romanian literature. On the temporal axis, while deliberately avoiding a chronological perspective, the summary includes “pre-national” scholars from the 17th and the 18th centuries, the avant-garde and the Romanian “Young Generation” of the 1930s, and the Romanian “postmodern” poets from the late-communist period, but also transnational contemporary writers such as Herta Müller or Norman Manea, whereas the arc of the spatial compasses includes both Romanian language literatures from outside the country’s borders and the literature published in Romania by Hungarian “ethnic minority” authors. The method is “telescopic” in nature, in that it shuns, as I previously mentioned, the diachronical or thematical organization of the matter, in favor of a *zoom*-like focalization that narrows in on various “nodes” and points of contact – multiple, with a rich palimpsest-like structure and, most of all, surprising – between the “national” and the “world.” The *Introduction* signed by Moraru and Terian, as well as the 15 case studies in the volume approach methodically and analyze competently and sharply the processes, the phenomena and the epistemologies that have marked the development of Romanian literature, its dynamics – both within the limits of the national system and in the wider geocultural and geopolitical frame of what is today called *World Literature* – and the circulation of Romanian writers/ writers with Romanian origins at a global level.

The volume refrains from making the distinction between what might be called – adapting a formula from the preface to the Danish literature volume published in the same Bloomsbury collection – “a Romanian literary history” and “a book on Romanian World Literature,” a distinction on which the Danish editors are very firm.⁵ The Romanian editors shun this distinction precisely because their perspective is clearly anti-hierarchical and anti-canonical, and could more accurately be described as “a-canonical,” in the sense that it prefigures what Moraru, in a recent article, termed “flat aesthetics.”⁶ As a consequence, although they are mentioned in the *Introduction*, the Romanian “great” writers – with the notable exception of M. Eminescu, Romania’s “national poet,” ingeniously refashioned by Terian as “one of the ‘secret masters’ of [...] world literature” (p. 51) – are deliberately left out. This means that the “canonical battles” that mark the diachrony of national literature in the most recent literary history, published by Nicolae Manolescu in 2008,⁷ will probably lose their relevance, as we are witnessing now the first serious methodological battle in Romanian literary studies. For this epistemological assault moves well beyond the longing for a “more swift demise of the aesthetic canon” claimed by Sorin Alexandrescu in the 1990s,⁸ to propose a “reading protocol” that

⁵ Dan Ringgaard and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, “Introduction: Danish Literature as World Literature,” in *Danish Literature as World Literature*, edited by Dan Ringgaard and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2007, p. 5. Although they make the above mentioned distinction using the criterion of the transnational recognition of canonical Danish authors, the two editors state that their book can “also be read as a short history of Danish literature” (*ibidem*).

⁶ Christian Moraru, „Literatura universală nu există. *World literature* și recitirea literaturii române în secolul XXI”, *Observator cultural*, nr. 903–904, 22 December 2017, online edition.

⁷ Nicolae Manolescu, *Istoria critică a literaturii române*, Pitești, Paralela 45, 2008.

⁸ Sorin Alexandrescu, „Pentru un mai grabnic sfârșit al canonului estetic”, *Dilema*, nr. 245, 3–9 October 1997, p. 9.

builds extensively on Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory, Wai Chee Dimock's "deep time" and "deep space," or Stephen Greenblatt's "cultural mobility," to reframe Romanian (national) literature as trans-spatial, multicultural, if not hybrid, cosmopolitan, or, in Moraru's own word(s), "worlded."

In contrast to the hierarchic and competitive vision proposed by Casanova in *La République mondiale des Lettres*, for Moraru, Terian and other contributors to the volume, the marginal areas, which are intersectional due to their very positioning across ever-changing geopolitical maps, are privileged areas for the analysis of cultural and literary tectonics and for the circulation of texts, ideas, theories; in short, they reflect "the world in a nutshell" (p. 17). What may appear as marginal or exterior to the world literature canon (if such a thing exists) or to the national canon(s) acquires thus an "unorthodox centrality," an apparently oxymoronic "marginocentric" condition. One might object, however, that there are various degrees of intersectional density, both on geopolitical and literary maps in the real world, and in bibliometric networks such as Thomson Reuters, and that Romanian literature is far from being a nodal point on these maps. While the essays making up the volume argue minutely against the peripheral status of Romanian culture, the ample cross-references with authors, works, literatures, both near and far in terms of space, plead for the potential of Romanian literature as a "worlded" object of study and open multiple routes for future research.

A special mention is due to the type of comparatism practiced in the volume, since it programmatically overcomes the regional homologies indebted to common roots, influences or historical contexts. RLWL develops a multidirectional comparatism that often works at the level of virtualities. The best example is the concept of "spectral nodality" coined by Bogdan Ștefănescu in his essay on similar – although without sharing common cultural roots – discursive topoi that shape the "postcolonial imagination" of former Western and Soviet "colonies." In (few) other cases, however, Romanian transnational writers and the areas pertaining to a genuine political, cultural and linguistic in-betweenness do not achieve their full potential as "nodes" or as cases of "worlding." For instance, the Romanian-language literature and the writers between the Prut and the Dniester, discussed by Mircea A. Diaconu in his article, could profit from a perspective describing not only their double extraterritoriality, but also their position inside the triangle Romania – Bessarabia (Republic of Moldova) – USSR (Russian Federation) and the triadic cultural transfers they mediate both before and after 1989. Also, little attention is paid to the influence of Romanian writers or writers with Romanian origins on other authors, literary and artistic movements or schools of thought. In his captivating article on the international career of Mircea Eliade, Eugène Ionesco and E. M. Cioran, Mihai Iovănel discusses the three writers mostly as self-made cultural brands, who "'export[ed]' themselves to the wider world," rather than as artists or thinkers with a well-determined influence on other authors, belonging to different national literary systems or academic traditions. Iovănel's choice is not, however, a missed opportunity to plead for the relevance of the three on a global scale. Actually, this option may be justified by the fact that it actively emancipates itself from the hierarchical comparatism often practiced by representatives of minor cultures arguing the influence of "national" authors on world writers: for instance, in

Danish Literature as World Literature, the “influence” of Søren Kierkegaard on Kafka “became an example of the dissemination of Danish literature into canonical world literature” (p. 8). On the other hand, working with distant, coincidental, or “spectral” analogies, as do the Romanian critics in the book under scrutiny, may raise the question of the current circulation and influence of theories, authors and works from the cultural Romanian space in the world. It is worth mentioning that in her article based on the data from the *UNESCO Index Translationum*, Mihaela Ursa gives a rather pessimistic view of the translations from Romanian literature at a global level, compared to the situation in other East-Central European literatures. Readers must be aware, however, that the volume does not pursue the integration and, consequently, the canonization of pieces of the “national” – be they individual authors that had or might someday achieve international success, or pieces of Romanian “originality” and “specificity” – into the bigger framework of the “world,” but precisely the imbrications and the tensions between the former and the latter, or, as Moraru and Terian put it, the “copresence of the national and the worldly” (p. 3).

The main strength of “a cultural epistemological ‘worlding’ of Romanian studies” is, as the editors rightfully argue, political in nature and it may challenge the current hegemonic order in Romanian literature. Nevertheless, there are several difficulties in shifting from the nationalist to the cosmopolitan paradigm, especially in Eastern Europe. On the one hand, “methodological nationalism” is not just a problem of Romanian literary studies (often described as “History of Romanian literature”), and it is also not just indebted, as Ulrich Beck argues, to the advent of socio-humanistic sciences at the same time as nation-states were established and consolidated in Europe. After the end of the Cold War, the national became a key-issue of postcommunist cultures for several reasons: *politically*, because of the collapse of the federal entities in the region – not just the USSR, but also Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, the last one as a result of nationalist inflammation and violent interethnic wars; *socio-economically*, because of what was perceived in Romania and other states as a failure to transition to “Western capitalism;” and *culturally*, because the collective memory of communism and its discourses were shaped by the same national frames in almost all the states in the area. This goes to prove that nationalism and its methodological twist are not simply a matter of academic fashion. On the other hand, the nationalism in “methodological nationalism,” as well as the cosmopolitanism in „methodological cosmopolitanism,” do not refer just to ideologies or discursive modes, but mostly to an epistemological and ontological problem, as it identifies a perception of the world as caught in a competitive or, adversely, an inclusive relationality. The question remains, here, what factors can influence this perception, and what is the role played in this process by the subject’s position in the global world.

One must say that most of the contributors to this volume touch on some of these issues, whether they attempt a critique of methodological nationalism in Romanian literary historiography (Alex Goldiș, Carmen Mușat, Bogdan Crețu), or a critical analysis of methodological cosmopolitanism, when applied, for instance, to authors living and writing in communist Romania (Teodora Dumitru, Mircea Martin). Dumitru and Martin also address the multi-level divide (or delay, in Martin’s view) – economic, political, and cultural – between Romania, Europe, and

the global West. In the same vein, the critical metaphors and concepts that the contributors propose starting from Romanian case studies – such as “recursive globalization” (Iovănel) or “the deceleration of modernity” (Martin) – indicate their constant preoccupation with testing and re-framing “Western” theory. All in all, RLWL is a solid, compelling and elegantly written volume, and it hopefully will propel a paradigm shift in Romanian and comparative literary studies.

On *not* Shutting out the World

Christian MORARU*

Admittedly, *Romanian Literature as World Literature* is an ambitious book. It has been from the drawing-board stage, and, now that RLWL is out and enjoying a life of its own, neither beating around the bush nor false modesty on the editors’ part is likely to further its “cause.” As I have stressed on several public occasions, and as has been in fact noticed, the volume is a self-acknowledged manifesto cum evidence-based rationale. RLWL makes, quite pointedly, an argument or, better yet, a whole range of arguments. Each essay works out one – incidentally, to my knowledge, nobody has managed to tear down any of them. In turn, these painstakingly detailed cases – all of them groundbreaking monographs *in nuce* – make up, together, a strong argument for what Adriana Stan calls in a recent review of RLWL a “reset” of Romanian literature criticism. Should her claim strike the reader as rather presumptuous, I would be the first to recognize that no single book, be it the outcome of the kind of sustained teamwork that went into RLWL, is in position at this point in Romanian intellectual and political history to shake things up so dramatically. All the same, this is the idea. Along these lines, I would like to think that the collection provides the white paper – or, as the introduction insists, the map – for such an urgent undertaking.

I write “the” and not “a map” advisedly because, it seems to me, the priority of the moment is – to press into service Andreea Mironescu’s felicitous formula – pushing back against the “methodological protectionism” that has been demonstrably hurting the understanding *and* promotion of Romania’s *national* literature for way too long. Or, RLWL sets out to supply, consistently yet without coercing its contributors, the road map for the sort of methodological update or progress (yes, there is such a thing in criticism) that has to take place before we can start talking about rereading Romanian literature and literature generally in ways that can be shared with the world meaningfully and can make a real difference.

It is very important, I believe, to come to grips with the actual reasons we have had, historically, a lot of trouble doing this kind of sharing and by the same token closing the gap between the real value of our literary patrimony and its international recognition. Quite frankly, I am sick and tired of the usual suspects rounded up when it comes to accounting for this discrepancy, from the incompetence or lack of resources of the official agencies technically responsible for

* University of North Carolina, Greensboro, U.S.A (c_moraru@uncg.edu).

promoting national literature (literatures, I should say) to Romania's "marginal" (read: "insignificant") position (whatever this means in the 21st century) to assorted conspiracy theories and other "complexes." Some of this stuff is true, and some of it is laughable. But we are obsessed so much with it that we hardly find any time to take a hard look at our own work and ask ourselves what is it that we can do in what we normally do, *as critics*, to peddle our wares in the world arena more successfully. RLWL makes time just for this purpose, and so it raises this very question, theorizes its implications, and comes up with some concrete answers apropos of Romanian writers belonging to an entire spectrum of periods, locations, trends, and so on. I am going to set aside for now my suspicion that it may well be convenient to some of us to preserve the status quo and, by the same movement (or lack thereof), keep on practicing criticism as a sort of ethnocultural in-joke in line with the hegemonically nationalist historiography for which the rise of modern Romanian culture, nation-state, and attendant institutions is one big inbreeding narrative.

Two things bear emphasizing in closing. First, one cannot make a case to the world about the greatness of Romanian literature in a language – that is to say, in a form of criticism – that is obsolete, culturally ingrown, and, largely speaking, inadequate in more ways than I can name here. The long and short of it is this: one cannot appeal to others in the idiom of the selfsame. To put it otherwise, comparatism is the ticket, but RLWL explains at great length why comparing Bedros Horasangian and Cristian Teodorescu will just not do (as Dan C. Mihăilescu already suspected in the late 1980s) while also stressing that "aesthetic judgment" never occurs in social vitro, that literary and cultural studies necessarily go hand in hand, that reading is politics, and so forth. These are basic truths, but not within the oligarchic setup that is calling the institutional shots in contemporary Romanian criticism, outrageous as it may sound (and is). And second, but more significantly, shutting out the world to address it – if this is indeed what we are committed to accomplish at the dawn of the new millennium – is equally illogical because Romanian literature, in its most defining moments, has been nurtured by that very world, which happens to differ from our inherited representations of Romanian territory, ethnicity, language, "race" even, and other national identity designations.

Canons vs. Literatures

Andrei TERIAN*

First of all, I would like to begin by thanking all contributors to the thematic dossier of the *Philologica Jassyensia* for their extremely professional and in-depth readings of *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (RLWL). Irrespective of the nature and gravity of the critical remarks the five reviewers put forward, I can only be flattered and honored to receive feedback from critics such as Cosmin Borza, Romanița Constantinescu, Andrei Corbea-Hoișie, Roberto Merlo, and Andreea Mironescu. And, although I would not include mind reading among my strengths, I am nevertheless positive that the other coeditors and coauthors of RLWL think the same.

* "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Romania (andreiterian@gmail.com).

After all, you cannot but be delighted to see that the volume you have coedited is eliciting the interest of some of the most authoritative names in Romanian (and not only) literary studies, who speak of it in laudative terms such as: RLWL possesses an “inaugural character” as it ushers in “an undisputed shift of theoretical and critical vision, with often revelatory outcomes” (Borza); it is “the widest, the most coherent and the best consolidated proposal of what Romanian Literature as World Literature might look like from the perspective of a ‘nodal epistemology’ that discovers ‘the hidden map’ of relations within the literary system” (Constantinescu); it is “a pioneering initiative, even a ‘technical’ benchmark for future analytical and synthetic explorations, free from automatism, prejudice and ‘received ideas’” (Corbea-Hoişie); it provides “a powerful sense of unity of perspective” and testifies to a “remarkable congruity of both premises and intents of the various essays” (Merlo); it is “a groundbreaking volume” that “hopefully will propel a paradigm shift in Romanian and comparative literary studies” (Mironescu).

More important yet than these generous words are, at least for me, some of the reviewers’ in-depth remarks. For example, I have found particularly rewarding that Borza noticed the differences between RLWL and Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer’s already canonical literary history, which he expressed through the regional *vs.* the global dichotomy; that Constantinescu appraised it as a small step, if not towards transcending the opposition between center and the peripheries, at least to overcoming Romanian literature’s inferiority complexes; that for Corbea-Hoişie, it advanced an “ecumenic conception,” which accepted and even encouraged complementary mappings of Romanian literature; that Merlo traced out how it envisaged Romanian literature as a “polysystem,” whose frontiers are perpetually negotiable; and that Mironescu remarked that RLWL aimed to refute the stereotypical analogies that have so long and far pervaded Romanian literary history in the name of a “multidirectional comparatism.”

As for the objections raised, it is, I believe, evident that I will not be able to address them all here, more so as I find many of them to be particularly well-grounded. For instance, I agree with Borza that, in some cases, the topics of the essays tend to be “over-theorized,” yet it is the editors, obsessively preoccupied as we were with achieving a sense of conceptual unity throughout the volume, that should carry the blame for this rather than the contributors. It is true, as Constantinescu notes, that our volume does not lay enough stress on the linguistic dimension of the literary works therein mentioned, yet this is the by-product of the absence or poor quality of the translations of said works into English. I agree with Corbea-Hoişie in that a more thorough discussion of the cases of multilingualism and the Romanian renditions of foreign literary works would have unearthed especially interesting areas of research for world literature scholars. I admit that Romanian literary studies have not, of late, given duly recognition to researchers of Romanian literature operating abroad, as Merlo discretely suggested. Finally, I agree with Mironescu that the reception of Romanian literature in other cultures should have been devoted a more detailed account.

However, I would like to explore in more detail an issue that seems to become the main critical objection to RLWL: the insufficient coverage of the so-called “canonical writers.” I find this remark all the more relevant as, although the reviewers are aware of its theoretical obsolescence, they come to raise it more or less

openly nonetheless. Why does not our volume discuss – or why does it not treat in fuller detail – authors such as I.L. Caragiale, Liviu Rebreanu, Mihail Sadoveanu, Tudor Arghezi, Nichita Stănescu, etc., etc.? The editors have already replied twice to this question. The first answer, the polite one, can be found in the “Introduction” to RLWL, where the two authors reiterate on countless occasions that the selection put forward in the book is but an approach among many others; moreover, the editors themselves have touched upon these other viewpoints (see in particular pp. 18–22). The second, perhaps more cynical, answer is featured in the preface to my 2013 *Critica de export*, where I argue that the international canon of a given literature does not coincide with its national canon.⁹ Can Sadoveanu and Arghezi be aligned with the world literature framework? Maybe, but not implicitly, by virtue of their mere belonging to the national canon! The international relevance of Romanian “canonical writers” is, as we speak, not as much an open question as an uncertain issue. In any case, not all of them would benefit from their being brought into line with the planetary context and definitely not all of them to the same extent.

Apart from these two responses, I will do my best to give a third: neither polite, nor cynical, but rather pragmatic. Given the limitations of space, to introduce studies devoted to “canonical writers,” we would have been compelled to discard several of the already existing essays and, consequently, topics. The question then arises: which one? Is Arghezi more relevant than the *entire* avant-garde poetry? Is Nichita Stănescu more emblematic than the *whole* Romanian postmodernism? Is Rebreanu more important than *all* Hungarian literary works written in Romania? Is Sadoveanu more relevant than the *entire* Romanian literature produced abroad? Indeed, I admit that our volume has “lost” (only apparently!) several important writers or perhaps even the Canon as such. But what we have gained in turn is a cluster of literatures! For in RLWL, what we understand by “Romanian literature” is neither a (single and immutable) “national” literature, and to an even lesser extent a (single and immutable) “national” canon, but a complex system of (micro)literatures. And this is perhaps the most significant consequence of reframing Romanian literature as a literature in, of and for the World.

Abstract

The aim of this book review symposium is twofold. First, it offers a critical discussion of the volume *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (edited by Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian), in relation to other comparative literary histories, on the one hand, and to the Romanian literary historiography, on the other hand. Several critics and scholars of Romanian and comparative literature, as well as two of the RLWL editors, comment on the book. Second, the dossier outlines a methodological debate, as the volume under scrutiny pleads for a paradigm shift in reading national literatures in the broader frame of world literature. Some contributors address key-issues such as “methodological nationalism” in Romanian literary research, the “exportability” of Romanian authors, and the politics of cross-cultural comparison, while others share their own academic experience in teaching Romanian literature as world literature.

⁹ Andrei Terian, *Critica de export. Teorii, contexte, ideologii*, București, Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2013, pp. 21–23.