

## BOOK REVIEWS

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ALEX GOLDIȘ, CHRISTIAN MORARU, ANDREI TERIAN (EDS.), *Pentru o nouă cultură critică românească* [For a New Romanian Critical Culture] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Tact, 2024)

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Edited by Alex Goldiș, Christian Moraru and Andrei Terian, the new volume published under the aegis of ICT (the Institute of Critical Theory in Păltiniș) is the third in a series that began with *Romanian Literature as World Literature* and *Theory in the Post Era: A Vocabulary for the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Theory Commons*. Unlike the first two, written in English, this latest volume was written in Romanian. The book consolidates the new wave of contemporary Romanian criticism, which seeks to intertwine local cultural studies with the main forces of emerging theories, particularly those inspired by *queer theory*, among others, widely circulated in literary criticism and international comparative studies.

On the premise that Romanian criticism is currently experiencing a moment of reflection and that a rational assessment of the state of literary criticism in Romania at the dawn of the third millennium is necessary, the new volume aims not only to establish a new direction within contemporary Romanian literary criticism but also to strive towards creating a new critical culture. This new culture would entail different cultural practices in literary interpretation and research. The main aspiration of the volume is to create a new Romanian culture that would surpass its local frame and that would be more permeable to new research perspectives, while also flexible in relation with the adoption of new practices. How precisely are the editors and contributors to this volume intend to accomplish this goal? Andrei Terian, Christian Moraru and Alex Goldiș suggest three analytical directions, which can be discerned from the titles of the book's three sections. First, there is a focus on the re-evaluation of Romanian literary criticism – a necessary endeavour intended to culturally and ideologically re-position the new criticism in relation with the traditional critical system. In the second part of the volume, the editors aim to establish a critical vocabulary aligned with the latest global literary research. Finally, in the third part, the authors emphasise the need for articulating a scientific, academic approach to research that aligns with the most recent international trends in literary studies, thereby displacing the old essayistic-impressionistic paradigm, which remains relatively influential.

In order to achieve these goals, the strategies proposed by the initiators of this process of critical and analytical re-evaluation of the history of Romanian literary criticism are clear and pertinent. Therefore, in the first part of the volume, Adriana Stan, Andrei Terian, Teodora Dumitru, Cosmin Borza and Ștefan Baghiu initiate the deconstruction of the

mechanisms underlying traditional criticism, subjecting it to a process of re-evaluation that begins with the first authentic literary critics in Romanian culture: Titu Maiorescu and Dobrogranu-Gherea. Titu Maiorescu, the initiator of aestheticism in criticism, introduced into Romanian literary criticism the research methods borrowed from German aesthetics, a marker in Romanian criticism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dobrogranu-Gherea, distorted through the ideological lens of the post-World War II communist ideology, nevertheless represented an alternative critical direction, sociologically and ideologically oriented, and became the foundation for later critical approaches of a sociological nature. This pair of critics was followed, equal in the extent of their influence in the inter-war and post-war period, by Eugen Lovinescu and George Călinescu. The final pair of critics under scrutiny, Nicolae Manolescu and Eugen Simion, who were representative for the literary criticism of the '70s and '80s, but highly influential after 1989 as well, also reinforced the belief in the role of critical authority in literary evaluation and in establishing the canon. The deconstruction of the influence and power that these representative critics in Romanian literature exercised in their eras, as well as the impact of their ideas on other generations of critics, represents one of the main objectives of the book. This is the direction approached by the two studies authored by Andrei Terian ("Un sistem perfect: oameni, instituții, și oameni-instituții în cultura critică românească actuală" [A perfect system: people, institutions, and people-institutions in today's Romanian cultural criticism]) and Teodora Dumitru ("Trecutul (in)utilizabil al criticii literare românești" [The (un)usable past of the Romanian literary criticism]), which rationally assess the entire legacy of the Romanian critical past, with an emphasis on the most influential critics in the Romanian culture. Andrei Terian focuses on the influence exerted by Eugen Simion and Nicolae Manolescu, particularly during the last two decades of their activity, suspecting them of constructing *closed systems that are immune to criticism and external interference* (109). Teodora Dumitru takes one step further in the critical re-evaluation analysis, accusing a phenomenon manifested by the two paths represented by the two critics – a phenomenon she refers to as the *zombification of Romanian criticism* (111).

The second objective, expressed from the very preface, is a reassessment of the critical vocabulary that needs to be adapted to the new social conditions and which, in its historical development, has privileged a singular point of view: the androcentric and heterosexual one. Without claiming to provide a definitive solution to this issue, the editors bravely and deliberately take on the challenge. This view serves as a manifesto and aligns, from this perspective, with the current directions in world literary criticism. Through this approach, the editors and contributors to the volume demonstrate a very up-to-date critical culture, thus joining similar efforts in Europe and the United States. Probably the most remarkable contribution in this sense represents the introduction in the Romanian critical field of the concepts and practice of *queer theory*. Despite certain shy and isolated attempts, *queer theory* has not previously succeeded in overcoming the gap that separates the normative discourse on sex, gender, and sexuality from the *queer* discourse on accepting the differentiation of individuals' lived experiences in relation to nature and the world created by the social system. The texts authored by Andreea Mironescu, Doris Mironescu, Bogdan Popa and Maria Chiorean

are inclined towards this approach, in an attempt to put forth critical instruments that could harmonise the two polarised discourses on the privileged centrality of the masculine and heterosexual viewpoint in relation with the formation of new identities that would engage profound changes in the practice of social interactions.

The third objective is to establish a new form of criticism, one based on research. Essentially, it is a form of criticism practiced by professionals, which stands in opposition to the practice of impressionistic criticism, despite its prominence within literary circles established by major schools and/or literary journals. This form of criticism would challenge the hegemony of the critical establishment by proposing an academic research methodology aligned with new international trends, thus engaging with recent issues introduced by contemporary critical literature, such as feminist psychoanalysis, queer ecology, or the new formalism.

Following an introduction written in the form of a manifesto, outlining the main guiding principles of the volume, the book is structured into three parts. In accordance with the themes chosen by the contributors, each of these parts confirms the possibilities stemming from the embrace of the three objectives of the critical endeavour envisioned by the editors.

Conceptually, the first part of the volume, "*Tradiție, instituții și critica la prezent*" [Tradition, institutions and criticism today], is linked to the collective article representing the conclusions, "*Coda: Încotro? Reconstrucția sistemului critic românesc*" [Coda: Where to? The reconstruction of the Romanian critical system]. This article revisits, in a more committed and polemical manner, the conclusions drawn from the clinical observation sheets on the ailments of the Romanian critical system, as expressed in the first part by Adriana Stan, Andrei Terian, Teodora Dumitru, Cosmin Borza, and Ștefan Baghiu. Thus, the solutions found by Romanian literary criticism to save itself after World War II from ideological insertions (whether referring to the autonomy of aesthetics or controlled *liberalism*) are considered by the aforementioned authors to be admirable solutions that ultimately saved nothing – quite the contrary. The second part, with contributions from Alex Goldiș, Daiana Gârdan, Andreea Mironescu, Doris Mironescu, Bogdan Popa, and Maria Chiorean, represents, conceptually, a kind of multi-voiced discourse on critical methodology. The authors discuss the traditional critical directions that have overused impressionism as a research *method*. According to Alex Goldiș, the aversion to methodology becomes a true *phobia* for post-war Romanian criticism (181), with the perpetuation of the aesthetic-impressionistic paradigm still functioning as a major obstacle to the reform of literary studies. The third part broadens the conceptual horizon of analysis towards the ideological and political fields, preparing the ground, once the disturbing excesses have been cleared, for the reconstruction of the critical system and the establishment of a new Romanian critical culture. Particularly interesting in this regard are the dialogues between Mihai Iovănel and Christian Moraru, which aim to be enlightening and clarifying regarding the new direction in criticism. With the critical input and the American experience of Christian Moraru, the conclusions that emerge are clearly systematised. This final part of the volume reaffirms the main ideas and aims of the new critique, which, opposing the anachronism, inefficiency, and injustice of the traditional model, seeks to develop an open, updated system aligned with the new 21<sup>st</sup>-century ways of thinking.

Thus, these are the main debate subjects in the present volume, for the Romanian literary criticism. By applying and enforcing new, up-to-date literary theories and analyses, the authors reveal to those interested in Romanian literary criticism a territory that is far from monolithic, today more than ever in a profound state of movement and reconfiguration.

The volume deserves to be read and analysed, both for its methodological inventiveness and the accuracy of certain statements, as well as for understanding the specific, local arguments regarding the proposed change in the Romanian critical system. The studies are important not so much for what they proclaim, but for the questions they raise, for the assessment of the limits/limitations of literary criticism. Where does literary criticism begin and where does it end? And why is literary criticism no longer enough for understanding and interpreting literature?

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