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Abstract

The genre of literary history – as theoretically impossible as it may be (according to David Perkins) – employs subjective decisions from the historian’s part that often remain implicit. This paper analyzes the criteria involved in selecting the significantly historical ‘facts’ out of the heterogeneous amount of literary phenomena that fall under the scope of literary history. The case studies include several contemporary Romanian histories of literature and attempt to answer a few questions: Are there any recurrent patterns in leaving aside certain literary categories/forms that could be accounted for and explained through the logic of the literary field? In what ways these exclusions affect the configuration of the literary historical genre as such?

After 1991, when the first (and only) volume of the Romanian exile critic I. Negoïtescu’s *Istoria literaturii române (1800-1945)/ History of Romanian Literature* comes out in print, we witness a remarkable revival of a genre that had seemed to be stuck in admiration for a model half a century old. The model was G. Călinescu’s *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* (1941). Many literary critics and historians from different generations – among them, Dumitru Micu (2000), Dan C. Mihăilescu (2004), Alex. Ștefănescu (2005), Cornel Ungureanu (2007), Nicolae Manolescu (2008), Marian Popa (2009), Ion Rotaru (2009), Manuela Tănăsescu (2009), Eugen Negrici (2010), Mihai Zamfir (2011) – are now starting large-scale projects that aim at rereading and systematizing certain periods in the history of Romanian literature or even its totality. This paper analyzes the selection criteria (functioning also as criteria of exclusion) employed by contemporary Romanian literary historiography in constructing its objects. I have limited the analysis to three case studies: the histories written by I. Negoïtescu, C. Ungureanu, and M. Zamfir. One reason for this selection is the fact that none of them adopts a totalizing¹ view, nor does it seem to exercise any nostalgia toward the distant – and therefore legitimizing – origins of Romanian literature. Thus between literary value and national ideology no *a priori* connection is established.

Another reason relates to the three of them assuming a partial perspective/ organizing criterion that is explicitly stated. We are facing an *aesthetic* history, in I. Negoïtescu’s case, a ‘secret’ one (C. Ungureanu’s), and an ‘alternative’ one (M. Zamfir). In contrast, the histories (whether they carry this label or not) that are authored by Dan C. Mihăilescu, Manuela Tănăsescu or Eugen Negrici, the relationship between the organizing criterion and the literary-historical ‘facts’ is quite vague; they intend to offer an image, as complete as possible, of a literary period (the post-Ceausescu epoch, the old Romanian literature, the communist period until 1964).

¹ This is valid especially for D. Micu, M. Popa, Alex. Ștefănescu, N. Manolescu, I. Rotaru, historians whose syntheses have around 1,000 pages each.

It has to be stated from the beginning that we are not interested here in the ‘logic’ of individual absences from the table of contents, be they writers or works, absences that are caused by the idiosyncrasies of critical taste. In these three case studies we will follow the functioning and the consistency with which the selection criterion is applied. And secondly, the effects of the historian’s choice on the organization of the volume.

The Paradoxes of Autonomy. The aesthetic criterion in I. Negoïtescu’s literary history

The first volume of I. Negoïtescu’s *History of Romanian Literature (1800-1945)* massively illustrates what the Romanian critic and historian G. Călinescu used to term, in 1938, as “a history of values”, placed in opposition to “the cultural history” (the latter being obsessed by inventorying literary data in the framework of a national language/ tradition, without applying any axiological criterion of selection). This way Negoïtescu places himself in the interwar tradition of Romanian literary historiography, to be followed by the majority of the recent literary histories. It has been said many times, and the author himself reiterates it in the “Preface” to his volume, that Negoïtescu’s *History* is founded on the aesthetic criterion which is employed in the critical analyses of the selected literary works and, at the same time, represents the stake of the volume as such. Negoïtescu prepares his readers from the first page for the “feeling of confidence that results from the reality of the aesthetic values that are vitally and originally present in Romanian literature”² (11). A few lines below though, the prominence of the aesthetic principle (which is strangely linked to the ‘natural’ specific profile of Romanian literature) is felt as insufficient: “through the aesthetic level I have tried to search farther away and deeper.”³ (11) A quite unexpected and ambiguous structure! The more so as this deep level, as one could see in the pages of the book, cannot be associated with ‘the national spirit’; the optimistic tone with an ideological flare is explicitly used only in the Preface. Neither can it be referred to the so-called ‘exterior’ context of literature: history, politics, society. What is it about then?

In the chapter on the classic writer Ion Creangă, Negoïtescu unintentionally proposes an answer. The chapter commences in a negatively defining manner: Creangă is not an anti-religious writer, nor a romantic one, he’s not didactic, he has no fantasy. Then the author of *Amintiri din copilărie/ Childhood Memories* is compared to the Symbolist writer Mateiu Caragiale by virtue of their common insistence on aestheticism: “Creangă’s aestheticism cannot be paired but by Mateiu Caragiale’s prose, no matter how different the two writers still are, one of them reviewing the rural world, the other the universe of the city, one a serene and salutary figure, the other a dark one (...). Both emphasize the philological and expressive values of Romanian prose, the ‘poetry’ of prose and are, consequently, untranslatable.”⁴ (136) Yet, on the

² „sentimentul de încredere ce se desprinde din realitatea valorilor estetice vital și original prezente în literatura română”.

³ „prin intermediul estetic eu m-am străduit să văd mai departe, mai în adânc.”

⁴ „Estetismul lui Creangă nu are seamă decât în proza lui Mateiu Caragiale, oricât de diferiți rămân între ei cei doi scriitori, unul conspectând lumea satului, celălalt a orașului, unul senin și salutar, celălalt întunecat (...). Ambii mizând pe filologie, pe valorile de expresie ale prozei românești, pe ‘poezia’ prozei și, ca atare, ambii intraductibili.”

same page: “this axiological autarchy, this aesthetical focus also denotes a definite spiritual poverty”⁵.

For a critic that pondered so much on his style (often quite Baroque in this respect), choosing the words is no light business. “Reviewing the world” underlines once more his dominant bookish view on reality. And look how the aesthetic principle displays its insufficiency. Both Ion Creangă and Mateiu Caragiale undergo a paradoxical reading. They exemplify the victory of the aesthetic perspective and at the same time reveal its limits, thereby the necessity to supplement it through a spiritual dimension, in Negoïtescu’s view. This dimension functions at the deeper level of a writer’s personality. The failure to activate it results in the exhaustion of artistic power, as in Ion Pillat’s case, whose poetry recalls the fatigue of “a porcelain art, gracious and sad”⁶ (349). Beyond the stylistic “level” (not to be confused with either literary value or aesthetic intention), the historian-critic discovers – because he started looking for it – an undefinable core: “the kernel from which Blaga’s work has grown”⁷ (342) or “the obscure source of the poet’s feeling”⁸ (354, on Adrian Maniu); or “the ultimate strata of poetry”⁹ (365, about B. Fundoianu). It is unclear whether we should interpret this core as an impulse of a psychological, or affective, or intuitive sort; or something completely different. It looks like a specific *ethos*, a notion repeated several times in the chapters on Al. Odobescu, Pompiliu Constantinescu, I. Agârbiceanu, and others. This would be the origin of a writer’s stylistic mark. (This kind of attention is somehow surprising, as it looks beyond or behind the text, in contradistinction with the aesthetical exclusivism undertaken by Negoïtescu. It brings him closer to the principles of the Geneva school.) Here is a characteristic phrase: “This prose piece [by Tudor Arghezi] gives us the best key toward his profound ethos, (...) his fundamental views and sensibility”¹⁰ (331).

In this case, “the key” could be understood, in Leo Spitzer’s terms, as *l’ètymon spirituel* of a writer (the quantity of stylistic analyses is overwhelming in Negoïtescu’s *History*). Sensibility, as opposed to ideology, is nurtured from that profound, deep spirituality: “at its deep levels, E. Lovinescu’s criticism is the work of an artist, whose extraordinary aesthetic conscience was paired by an unusual moral sensibility...”¹¹ (213); in Tudor Vianu’s case he also remarks “a vivid moral sensibility”¹² (220). The meaning of these reconstructions is to build a “spiritual profile” that includes cultural, biographical, and educational aspects. When all these are harmoniously brought together (as it happens with M. Eminescu or T. Maiorescu, for instance), Negoïtescu emphasizes and highly appreciates the coherence of an intellectual project that has also an existential side (see also his former book *Poezia lui Eminescu/ Eminescu’s Poetry*, in this respect). The explanation and the unification take place at an individual level, for Bolintineanu, Alecsandri, Codru-Drăgușanu, I.L. Caragiale, Cezar Petrescu, C. Stere, and many others.

⁵ „autarhia aceasta valorică, concentrarea aceasta estetică denotă o sărăcie spirituală indiscutabilă”.

⁶ „arte de porțelanuri grațioasă și tristă”.

⁷ „sâmburele din care a crescut opera”.

⁸ „izvorul întunecos al simțirii poetului”.

⁹ „straturile ultime ale lirismului”.

¹⁰ „Proza aceasta ne oferă cheile cele mai sigure spre ethosul profund (...) spre concepțiile și sensibilitatea lui fundamentală”.

¹¹ „în profunzimile ei, critica lui E. Lovinescu este însă opera unui artist, a cărui extraordinară conștiință estetică a fost dublată de o neobișnuită sensibilitate morală...”

¹² „o sensibilitate morală extrem de vie”.

In the same paradigm can be included the idea of a writer's *posture*: Alecu Russo is regarded as a *homo aestheticus*; "the indirect, oblique view" is G. Călinescu's "lyrical attitude"¹³ (222); Arghezi was a "religious atheist"¹⁴ (334); Mihai Beniuc – a prophet. It is not relevant to see here an anticipation of J. Meizoz's theory that is built on a sociological methodology. Even when Negoïtescu discusses literary-ideological groups such as the nationalists or the existentialists he is only interested in the stylistic quality of their writings. Revealing a writer's originality and analyzing his/her style are the main stakes of this *History* that owes a lot to the Romantic understanding of literature. What is missing in this alloy is the national(ist) ideology which the author explicitly rejects in the "Preface" to the volume (11). Only the inclusion of some migrant/ exile writers could be interpreted as a weak reflex of such an ideology: Tristan Tzara, B. Fundoianu or Eugen Ionescu are present in "the patrimony of our literature"¹⁵ (349), but only through their Romanian writings. Every time ideology turns the aesthetic into an "impure" value¹⁶ the historian's reaction is strong. Nevertheless, the paradoxical, counterpointing nature of the critic undermines his own strict starting points; for instance, Lucian Blaga's philosophy puzzles him as it lacks any ethical perspective (341). Generally speaking though, Negoïtescu's understanding of literature is founded upon monistic-aesthetical coordinates that are also apparent in the starting point of this *History* – the year 1800, a choice which he motivates as follows: "literary prose in its true sense [that established by Romanticism, my note] had almost never existed before"¹⁷ (34).

Among the exclusions this *History* operates we can discover many of the traditional concepts and interests that animated Romanian literary studies (except the great genres): periods, schools, literary ideologies, minor/ marginal species, popular and regional literature. In short, everything that falls under the socio-historical background of literary works. The author points to all these categories (especially to literary periods) when analyzing his case studies. But they don't "survive" in the general structure of the *History*. Several women writers discussed at the end of the chapter on interwar prose might suggest their grouping into a category of "feminine literature"; yet no explicit, systematic reference or theorizing. Also, biographical data on the writers or references to the socio-political background of a literary period are lacking (or appear quite infrequently). At another level, Romanian literature is seen in isolation from other literatures¹⁸; even when comparisons are made, they function on an individual level, proposing suggestive associations and nothing more, without any detailed analysis (see for instance M. Sadoveanu compared to H. Hesse).

Even if one strives to read in this strict delineation of the corpus, sustained by an equally strict criterion, a sign of the author's concern for the unity of his book, or a reflex of his attitude

¹³ „privirea indirectă, piezișă, ca atitudine lirică”.

¹⁴ „ateu religios”.

¹⁵ „patrimoniul literaturii noastre”.

¹⁶ About Octavian Goga's poetry, Negoïtescu remarks critically: „În elaborarea acestor versuri (...), parcă rostirea lor însăși ar fi o îndeletnicire magică cu scop lucrativ, *actul poetic își pierde autonomia, fiindcă se leagă de ceva din afara sa*” (172, my underlining). [„When composing these verses, it seems that their chanting would be a magical ritual with an utilitary value, thus the poetic act loses its autonomy as it refers to something outside itself.”]

¹⁷ „proza literară în adevăratul înțeles al termenului aproape n-a existat înainte”.

¹⁸ Despite the principles stated in the article on „Istorie și literatură” („History and Literature”), published in *Dialog* literary magazine, nos. 139/141, Sept.-Nov. 1992 (selectively reprinted in Dan Damaschin's preface to I. Negoïtescu, *Scritori contemporani/ Contemporary Writers*, second edition, Paralela 45 Publishing, Coll. „Cercul Literar de la Sibiu”, Pitești, 2000).

towards his isolated and “pure” object (in the modernist sense), the impression of a paradoxical construction remains.

The Space of Romanian Literature in Cornel Ungureanu’s *Istoria secretă a literaturii române*

The delineating impulse is very poignant in *Istoria secretă a literaturii române/ The Secret History of Romanian Literature* (2007). The concept of border, in the geographical, historical, and cultural meaning of the term, provides the constructing principle of this work that relegates itself to the field of literary geography. Romanian literature is placed here in two cultural contexts, that of the East-Central Europe (including the Balkans as a symbolic region) and that of Europe as such. These spatial links/ extensions, which are emphasized by the methods of comparative literature, create the conditions for a historical view that is able to justly measure the local ‘peculiarities’. One of the gains is precisely the taking out of Romanian literature from the traditional and small universe of self-contemplation in favor of a diverse external set of relationships.

Replacing the usual temporal criterion with the geographical one obviously modifies the interpretation of Romanian literature’s beginnings. Cornel Ungureanu’s attempt towards an identity reconstruction projects the founding events of this literature onto a spatial horizon. The move away from the Turkish and Greek cultures, the refusal of the Russian influence, the Latinist migration in time and space (towards the Rome imagined by Transylvanian erudites and not only them) belong to the explanatory logic of Fernand Braudel’s *longue durée* (although the historians of mentalities are not referred to by the author).

Another important stake of this book is to include the political exile and the border regions into the Romanian literary and identity setting. These regions have been repeatedly lost and regained at several moments in history – this is the case of Bucovina, Bessarabia/ Moldavia, Transylvania, the Banate). This opening towards spatial marginality (seen by Ungureanu in connection to the theme of transgression) is rather rare in the field of Romanian literary historiography, a field that displays a strong canonizing vocation and tends to look down on these contributions. (This may happen because the distance from the Centre is converted, according to a pre-modern pattern, into delay and inferiority.)

The choice of the sources for the identity narrative that C. Ungureanu proposes is conditioned by the explanatory structures he envisions. Space creates identity – this might be the formula that guides the author’s analysis. (We can only regret that he did not adopt the methodology of cultural geography in place of that of political geography; although he quoted Paul Claval, for instance at p. 36, he doesn’t seem to realize the significant displacement that operates inside the research field through this option). *Balada Meșterului Manole/ The Ballad of Master Manole*, which puts the monastery of Curtea de Argeș on the map of Romanian literature, together with Ienăchiță Văcărescu’s linguistic will (originating in the cultural milieu of Râmnic) are forms of *territorialization*, of “taking possession of a territory that rightfully belongs to you”¹⁹ (42). To these the author adds travel literature, which is aptly privileged as a founding

¹⁹ „luare în posesie a unui teritoriu care, de drept, îți aparține”.

document of Romanian literature. Another important theme that emerges from the first pages of *The Secret History*... is that of the Romanian cultural capitals: Târgoviște, Brașov, then București function as identity landmarks, as cultural centers that orient local intellectuals' sense of the world. The space of origin often plays a formative role, as in the case of Rășinari, for Octavian Goga and Emil Cioran, or Ipotești, for Mihai Eminescu and also for such specialists in the latter's work as Constantin Noica and Petru Creția.

The historian sometimes indulges into nostalgic daydreaming, as when reflecting upon the 'alternative' profile of Romanian literature, if only destiny had been more indulgent with this part of the world. He laments, together with Lucian Blaga, movingly but uselessly, "the lost chances of Romanian literature"²⁰ (65), "what Romanian culture might have been if these names and examples would have been fruitful"²¹ (67). He is referring here to the erudite historians of the Transylvanian School (Școala Ardeleană) and to Petru Maior's would-be epic poem; they provide Ungureanu the pretext for a uchronic projection of a parallel history. All these lost chances find their place into a fictive archive of Romanian culture (69). Obviously, at the level of cultural activism his plea is totally justified. It is unacceptable for a culture to lack complete critical editions of its classics especially since this culture was not very rich in its initial phase. But from here the historian falls into a recurrent temptation of the "what ifs" and makes the conditional mode into a principle of historical structuring: "But can we possibly now what Maior might have written while in Buda, or Reghin or Blaj? Or Budai-Deleanu in Lwów?"²² (75).

To this context of the 'secret', 'alternative' profile can be relegated the literature on religious themes that Ungureanu attempts to revisit. Although the distinction between the aesthetic and the other values is part of the modern process of literature's gaining autonomy, Cornel Ungureanu insists on mapping the religious islands of inter- and postwar Romanian literature. Yet he does not strive toward an aesthetic reading but motivates his approach by the political interdiction placed on this form of literature under the communist regime. He does that by drawing V. Voiculescu's or N. Steinhardt's profiles as instances of *homo religiosus*; or by calling attention to the status of prison poetry. The literary historian's structuring principle is not the selection but the agglutination, the augmentation of the object he writes about. Everything that has been left aside by other historians has to be closely reexamined (yet without explaining the cause for these exclusions or inclusions). For instance, erotic or pornographic literature that are discussed in the chapter on "The Erotic Ages of Literature. And the Pornographic Ones"²³. Here also, the thematic approach is displaced by a discussion of the temporal and cultural context. This is about the "age of loisir" launched in the crazy 1920s, an age the origins of which can be found in the Austria of Freud, Krafft-Ebing and Sacher-Masoch. This chapter includes several canonical writers (Creangă, Bogza, Brumar) or peripheral ones (Luca Pițu, Dan-Silviu Boerescu, Ștefan Baștovoi) from this specific angle. (Creangă makes an appearance in *The Secret History* only through his licentious stories, a fact that justifies at least the coherence of this book's project).

The interest in avant-garde is motivated by the same logic of crossing the traditional boundaries of literature. Cornel Ungureanu dreams of future areas of research, of sensational

²⁰ „șansele pierdute ale culturii române”.

²¹ „ce ar fi putut să fie cultura română dacă aceste nume și aceste exemple ar fi rodit?”

²² „Dar știm noi, oare, ce va mai fi scris Maior la Buda, la Reghin sau la Blaj? Sau Budai-Deleanu la Liov?”

²³ „Vârstele erotice ale literaturii. Și cele pornografice”.

‘archaeological’ discoveries: “If a literary history so close to us is still full of mystery, how much more can still be done in order to write a good history of the avant-garde/s of the 20th century?”²⁴ (426)

Keeping in line with the dominant configuration of the geopolitical field, the historian’s eye unmistakably spots forgotten or failed topics that could easily find their place in a history of political rather than literary ideas. Otherwise how could we explain the presence here of A.C. Popovici, Iuliu Maniu, or Pavel Pavel? The latter is placed in a series of lost chances that we’ve mentioned earlier: “Given a little bit of luck, Pavel Pavel could have shown a path to the new generation”²⁵ (174), writes C. Ungureanu in a melancholy note.

In conclusion, every aspect belonging to a vertical exteriority (the images of the subterranean – occult societies, esoteric sciences, psychoanalyzable attitudes, abysmal themes) or to the horizontal one (the province, the slums, the exile), everything that surrounds the aesthetic core of literature – political, religious, scientific discourses – becomes a topic of interest in this book. *Închisorile mele/ My Prisons* or *Luntrea lui Caron/ Charon’s Boat* are obviously more interesting from the perspective of identity construction or the political challenges their authors were subjected to, than *Moara cu noroc/ Lucky Mill* or *Pașii profetului/ The Prophet’s Steps*. Vasile Lovinescu is treated in a separate chapter, while Eugen or Monica Lovinescu are referred to only contextually. And so forth. Striving to overcome the exclusivism of the aesthetic analytical paradigm and the rigidity of the critical canon, the historian’s eye loses itself in diffuse, indistinct horizons, sliding into a superficial tolerance. If the exclusions are (have always been) “caused by the historical moment”²⁶ (508), if every literary history “eliminates” and “falsifies”, then the revisions practised by *The Secret History* are also a sign of the times, a concession made to the “epidermic message”, from which its authors explicitly distances himself, but which he continues to fascinatedly look after.

Mihai Zamfir, *Scurtă istorie. Panorama alternativă a literaturii române (1800-1918)*

To Mihai Zamfir in *A Short History. The Alternative Panorama of Romanian Literature*, (2011), defining Romanian literature means delineating it. One might have expected an essentialist perspective and is offered instead a pragmatic-historical one. Not *what is Romanian literature* (no historian could ask that), but *when* or, more exactly, *from when* we should speak about its existence. The choice is clear for Zamfir: Romanticism represents the birth certificate of a literature that has slowly come into being. This choice is determined not by ‘local’ reasons, but by the embracing of a Crocean principle: “in almost every European culture, in almost every Mediterranean culture, literature has started with poetry, the most evolved of all verbal arts”²⁷ (9). The deduction that follows bring the stylist again to the front: “that is, with the genre that

²⁴ „Dacă o istorie atât de apropiată de noi este plină de mistere, oare câte mai rămân de făcut pentru a scrie o bună istorie a avangardei (a avangardelor) secolului XX?”

²⁵ „Cu un pic de noroc, Pavel Pavel ar fi putut da o direcție tinerei generații”.

²⁶ “solicitare de momentul istoric”.

²⁷ „în aproape toate culturile europene, în aproape toate culturile mediteraneene, literatura a debutat prin poezie, cea mai evoluată dintre artele verbale”.

marks the creation of a language not only different from, but programmatically opposed to the current one”²⁸ (ibid.). Let us ignore the fact that a remark of a historical nature (the verse, be it popular song or Homeric epic, is at the origin of literature) is superimposed on a formal-theoretical criterion from the 20th century (poetry uses a different language than everyday speech. Let us also ignore the generic inadvertence (poetry is not part of the system of genres before the poeticians of the 18th century); then, the fact that evolution presupposes a process, a temporal development, that is here obliterated by the *original* character of the poetic language in its perfect form...

There is yet another condition for identifying literariness: “the literary work should be the expression of a strong individuality, of a subjectivity that is displayed and assumed in a conscious manner”²⁹ (ibid.). Romanticism responds to both criteria and is validated in turn by them. For the author of this *Alternative Panorama*, value and canonical propensity depend on originality (see the second condition, of Bloomian origin), but also on primacy (according to the first condition). No wonder that this history is structured like a portrait gallery. The majority of writers from the Romantic age exemplify this originary state: “the founding father of Romanian poetry”, “the first Romantic hero”, “the vocation of inauguration”, “the creator of prose”, “the first novelist”, “the first synthesis”³⁰ and so on. Not only the portraits’ labels are constructed on this pattern, but also the axiological judgments in the micro-monographs: Heliade occupies “a place in splendid isolation”³¹ (66); Grigore Alexandrescu’s situation is “novel and paradoxical in Romanian society”³² (77); “with Bolintineanu we come across poetry at its pure state for the first time”³³ (84); “Anton Pann was the first professional writer in Romanian literature”³⁴ (98), etc.

It is interesting that this choice of object influences the manner of historical representation. Mihai Zamfir reads Romanian Romantic literature as part of a narrative of suspense (a device which was very dear to the mystery novel of that time). Thus, “when it reached the Danube, European Romanticism took unexpected forms, which would provide Romanian literature from the very beginning with the premises of an unpredictable way”³⁵ (23); Bolintineanu’s imaginary proposes “the unexpected union of two opposed horizons”³⁶ (89); “surprisingly, the integral reconstruction of the style of some exile writings had occurred very fast”³⁷ (110). This effect seems largely to have been simulated by the historian as it could have never appeared to the writers’ contemporaries and neither to today’s professional reader, who has the perspective of the historical evolution of literature. This impression is conditioned by the type of attention Zamfir pays to that literary period, as he is mainly interested in the canonical peaks

²⁸ „adică prin genul care marchează crearea unui limbaj nu doar diferit, ci programatic opus limbajului curent”.

²⁹ „opera ar trebui să fie expresia unei individualități marcate, a unei subiectivități afișate și asumate în mod conștient”.

³⁰ „părintele găsit al poeziei românești”; „primul erou romantic”; „vocația inaugurării”; „creatorul prozei”; „primul romancier”; „prima sinteză”.

³¹ „un loc aflat în splendidă izolare”.

³² „inedită și paradoxală în societatea românească”.

³³ „cu Bolintineanu întâlnim pentru prima oară la noi poezia în stare pură”.

³⁴ „Anton Pann a fost cel dintâi scriitor profesionist al literaturii române”.

³⁵ „pogorât la Dunăre, romantismul european a luat (...) forme neașteptate, care vor oferi încă de la început literaturii române moderne premisele unui traseu imprevizibil”.

³⁶ „unirea neașteptată a celor două orizonturi opuse”.

³⁷ „în chip surprinzător, refacerea integrală a stilului unor scrieri de exil s-a produs rapid...”

and turns his back to the “slaughterhouse of literature” (as Franco Moretti called everything that remains unread, forgotten even by historians).

Mihai Zamfir deals in this *Short History* – which is not actually a history, but an Art of Romanian writers – with an abstract category: style, understood in two different ways. Firstly, as literary style, then as an existential one, as a projection of a writer’s literary destiny. The latter represents the common work of the writers and their posterity and can only be wholly reconstructed through a backwards view. This option conveys unity to the volume and at the same time represents its limit.

As style is the fundamental constructing principle of the *History*, it commands the criteria for the selection and judgment of ‘facts’. Mihai Zamfir defines literary style as a deviation from the norms of common language, according to the structural stylistics of the 1960s. Alongside this conception the historian employs V. Shklovsky’s estrangement theory (to which he points out several times in this book). Literary facts are selected and integrated into historical structures to the extent in which they differentiate from their immediate literary context and display a kind of singularity. Moreover, the supreme axiological criterion is the extent to which they illustrate the autonomy of the aesthetic. The peak of this selection procedure is reached when the historian comments on Mihai Eminescu’s prose (setting his view apart from the dominant perspective in Eminescu’s criticism): “Eminescu’s prose has radically changed the local tradition by proposing a new literary model, with no connection to his predecessors’ prose. A strange and exotic appearance, its novelty remained so striking that Eminescu’s experience had no inheritors”³⁸ (264).

The rules of canonization are extremely strict; they are explicitly stated in several instances: “we preserve the most original literary works and the most visionary of writers”³⁹ (313). Obviously this is in keeping with the Romantic vision of literature, as I previously noted. The phenomena that belong to the institutional side of literature, the ideological movements that manifested themselves in the literary field during this whole period do not acquire historical meaning but if they leave aesthetic traces (as is the case of the *Contemporanul* journal).

At an implicit level, there is another criterion at work, which pertains to the modernist vision on literature (but it was also applied retrospectively by Zamfir): the criterion of purity. If in the case of Macedonski or Dimitrie Anghel such a requirement is justified as it corresponds to the writers’ aesthetic ideology, for Creangă or Caragiale, on the other side, as representative for another literary age, the effects of such a reading are utterly bizarre. Thus, Creangă is interpreted via Roman Jakobson’s theory of poetic language: “The gratuitous communication and the centering of message upon itself, both essential conditions for poetic communication, are in his work thoroughly realized”⁴⁰ (279). The anachronism is striking. Zamfir does not express here a historical judgment but an axiological reading situated in the framework of a literary vision

³⁸ „Proza eminesciană a inovat radical tradiția locală, propunând un model literar inedit, fără legătură cu proza predecesorilor. Apariție stranie și exotice, nouitatea ei a rămas atât de frapantă, încât experiența eminesciană nu a lăsat urmași”.

³⁹ „reținem operele literare cele mai originale, pe cei mai vizionari dintre autori”.

⁴⁰ „Gratuitatea comunicării și centrarea mesajului asupra lui însuși, condiții esențiale pentru comunicarea poetică, se află însă aici pe deplin realizate”.

where the poetic principle is dominant. This way Creangă becomes a decadent writer; and Caragiale, in another chapter, a disciple of Flaubert's.

Another focus of the volume is on the emergence of some literary forms and species. The progress of cultural ethnogenesis evokes G. Călinescu's principle of the organic evolution of literature. Anyway, style and generic form are more vividly and historically contextualized than writers and literary works. Mihai Zamfir is very well acquainted with the corpus of Romanian literary history (although he does not resort to the academic 'convention' of bibliographical references), from within which he filters his objects of study. Strangely, this vast panorama of individualities that form the originality of Romanian literature arises an involuntary effect of redundancy, largely due to the absence of contextualization that is so necessary to a historical understanding of literature.

The three histories that I've been discussing here display a definite will to innovate by distancing from the dominant historiographical model. For I. Negoïtescu, this model is Călinescu's, a model that mixed the aesthetic criterion with 'impure' biographical and historical elements. For Ungureanu and Zamfir, who publish their histories in another phase of the literary historiographical field, 'the norm' is more difficult to construct. Recalling the terms of Roland Barthes's dilemma in the essay on "History or Literature?" (*Sur Racine*), Negoïtescu is foremost interested in the agreement between history and the aesthetic specific of literature, which he defines in an essentialist manner (as literariness). As different from him, the other two historians work within a distinct historiographical form, looking towards its originality. The adjectives 'secret' and 'alternative' that qualify their histories are very relevant in this respect (even though not always justified). But applying to their discourse a requirement that was usually reserved for the object, the last two histories betray their attachment to the very tradition they explicitly reject at a superficial level. The canonical obsession continues to function even for Cornel Ungureanu who tries to validate an eclectic counter-canon of marginality in its various meanings. In comparison, contemporary literary histories published in other cultural spaces⁴¹ concentrate upon some problems of literary evolution, upon conceptual distinctions or methodological perspectives, and abandon the idea of the list of authors or works.

Both I. Negoïtescu and Mihai Zamfir see criticism as the first stage of a historical approach – if not also its ultimate reason. The aesthete's concern for expression can be triggered back to the same model – George Călinescu's. Cornel Ungureanu writes more hastily but displays a more careful attention to the contemporary theoretical debates and to the relationships that literature entertains with other series, especially the political and ideological ones. His *Secret History* is rather a treasure map from the same family as his earlier *Literary Geographies*. The concern for interpreting literature's evolution is secondary in all three instances. The attempt to write *another* history seems to lead every time to losing touch with the object's historicity as such.

⁴¹ Except for those of didactical use.

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