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NATURE WRITING IN ROMANIA DURING THE POST-WAR AND POST-COMMUNIST PERIOD

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Abstract: My proposal aims to investigate the changes in the Romanian literary discourse on nature and the effects of industrialization following the 1989 revolution in comparison to the ideological discourse of the post-war era. If Romanian post-war literary discourse is firmly tied to the underlying ideology of Communism, then any attempt to investigate the discourse on nature in this period must be made alongside a reading of the Communist discourse on nature. In this respect, the situation of Romanian post-1989 prose that contains aspects of the influence of Communist industrialization on nature provides an interesting case study on the effects of the post-industrial era on literature itself. Thus, my proposal will focus on a number of novels written after 1989 in an ecocritical mode of reading.

Keywords: ecocriticism, nature, ideology, Romanian post-war literature, 1989 Revolution

Seeing as Romanian post-war literary discourse is invariably subordinated to the Communist ideology, analysing nature writing, or any discourse on nature of this period for that matter, from an *ecocritical* perspective could be seen as both a productive and a fruitless endeavour. As paradoxical as it may seem, to talk about nature in Romanian Communism, and then to talk about the Communist discourse on nature implies a careful, exhaustive, and therefore productive analysis of its ideology. It does, however, also imply a methodological obstacle: no matter how hard

one tries to find pertinent associations between the Romanian literary space of this period and the suite of ecocritical trends that emerged since the 90s in the West, an unavoidable truth that all we can find in this respect is subscribed to a profound ideologisation and exploitation of nature as an “ideological asset” remains evident. If ecocriticism is merely “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty, xviii) (a definition that aroused more detractors than followers after the field of ecocriticism has become hyperspecialised in the 2000s), then reading the Romanian Communist discourse on nature can reveal some important alternative aspects of socialist realism. However, if we consider that the statement “the environmental turn in literary studies has been more issue-driven than method or paradigm-driven” (Buell 11) is true, applying it to the Romanian cultural field might be difficult. This is because East-Central European States such as Romania do not discuss environmental issues at the same level or with the same level of interest as Western countries, even though environmental effects of Communism present a more symptomatic case study than the most proficient and issue-driven ecological studies in the West. The same reason can be offered to justify the motives behind which an ecocritic such as Buell asks:

Why do the discourses of environment seem more crucial today than they did to Welty in the 1940s? The most obvious answer is that during the last third of the twentieth century “the environment” became front-page news. As the prospect of a sooner-or-later apocalypse by unintended environmental disaster came to seem likelier than apocalypse by deliberate nuclear machismo, public concern about the state and fate of “the environment” took increasing hold, initially in the West but now worldwide. (Buell, *The Future* 4)

Such problematisations cannot be found in marginal “second-world” countries, and because of this, ecocriticism can be regarded as a moot point for these spaces. This is due to a kind of *aporia*: if peripheral nations retain their marginal status in the global system, there will always be a cultural gap between East-Central European nations and the West (for example), and consequently, applying an ecocritical reading to these peripheral spaces will always result in some kind of insufficiency caused by the historical quasi-absence of an environmental conscience in these cultures.

What should also be considered is that ecocriticism is a more Americanocentric domain, through which English literature retains a central role in

the so-called “worlding of literature” (Bhabha 12). While an “ecocritical” discussion cannot occur outside of the theoretical concepts of ecocriticism, the very same theory is difficult to apply to peripheral/marginal literary spaces. Thus, the present study does not intend to test the limits and applications of ecocriticism in the Romanian literary space, but rather attempts to explain *why* ecocriticism cannot be used in this context, but a *an ecocritical manner* of problematizing aspects of Romanian nature writing can take place and, at the same time, some very interesting anomalies can be found which are pertinent to a more global perspective on these types of discourse.

There are, however, some limitations imposed in this study in terms of *what* does and does not matter as a symptomatic Romanian discourse about nature. Thus, not everything that denotes a relationship between man and nature counts as ecoliterature. In what interests in this essay, pantheism is not equivalent to ecocritical nature writing. What does interest me is how Stalinist-era ideological discourse approaches nature (with all its elements) as a product in service of its ideology. The first part of the study is concerned with discourses which, if they were to be stripped of any ideological/historical context, would be perfectly viable as ecocritical discourses. This is mainly to illustrate the way in which nature is ideologically morphed to advocate for forced industrialisation in Communist countries under the influence of the Soviet Union (between 1949-1964), and then as a revival of nationalism (the nature-based nationalism of Ceaușescu-era Communism is only a small part of a more complex system and I shall not dwell on it in this paper). The second part of this study will include a possible key of interpretation of several novels that reiterate, either through nostalgia or a critical anti-Communist approach, the post-industrial heritage of Communism and transform them into viable ecocritical discourses.

In a Soviet-influenced era, “nature writing” is a transnational endeavour. The transformation of nature as an ideological asset used to legitimize a form of identity, be it a Communist or a national identity, is one of the main aspects of Romanian nature discourse. In this respect, Ion Manolescu remarks: “The aesthetic value of the landscapes pales in the wake of its value as a product (...), and the pleasure of traveling is subordinated to utilitarian purposes, along the lines of political and economic training” (Manolescu 316). For the Romanian cultural space after the Second World War, something that can be termed as “reverse ecocriticism” occurs: the activist component that is inherently necessary to ecocritical discourse is

manifested through ideologisation. The Romanian cultural space under Communism is where cultural dynamics on nature are more prominent due to this ideologisation that utilises nature writing as a means to bolster a discourse that promotes industrialisation, which ultimately works against nature itself. To add some nuance to this complex rapport I will succinctly refer to one of Maxim Gorky's most well-known articles, written in 1909: "The Destruction of Personality". It is here that the "anti-nature" philosophy of socialist realism can be traced back to its most "revolutionary", albeit preparative form. For Gorky, as Evgeny Dobrenko explains, "the entire history of culture, the history of transforming man into man (and «Man»), is the history of his struggle against nature" (Dobrenko 78). Nature, in its absolute arbitrariness against the reasonable interests of mankind, did not create Man, but merely a beast characterised by spontaneity, a clear manifestation of "nature" in man¹. In socialist realism, utopian revolutionary projects only function as long as there is a clear submission of nature by mankind, while the struggle against the bourgeoisie comes second in this line of priority. In the wake of Maxim Gorky's discourse on nature, Romanian socialist realism loyally followed the same pattern of discourse.

There are two main tendencies of ideological discourse on nature in the Romanian literary space: reverse mimesis (socialist realism loyally renders reality only as long as this reality folds according to the ideological structures imposed by the political power) and the abolition of referentiality (propagandistic literary references to nature that, at the same time, sabotage nature's referentiality through its mythologisation, lyricisation and pragmatism – all for ideological purposes). Several novels from this period are symptomatic of this phenomenon: Petru Dumitriu's *Drum fără pulbere* (*Road without Dust*) – the most well received novel in 1951, Ion Călugăru's *Oțel și pâine* (*Steel and Bread*), Petru Vintilă's *Nepoții lui Horia* (*Horia's Nephews*), Francisc Munteanu's *În orașul de pe Mureș* (*In the City on the River Mureș*), Dan Costescu's *Pavel Dogaru*², as well as collected novellas (*Matei Ion*

¹ This is also why, according to Maxim Gorky, religion is born out of submission to nature: "In the days of his childhood, led by the instinct for self-preservation, struggling against nature with his bare hands, and in fear, amazement, and ecstasy of it, he [man] creates religion, which was his poetry and held within itself the sum total of his knowledge about the forces of nature, all the experience he had acquired in encounters with the hostile energies outside himself. The first triumphs over nature evoked in him a feeling of self-confidence, pride in himself, and a desire for new triumphs, and awakened him to creation of the heroic epos that became a receptacle for the people's knowledge and their demands made of themselves" (qtd in Dobrenko 76).

² An anecdotal detail: the central character of the novel is the son of a woodcutter that was killed by a giant fir which fell on him. The accident suffered by his father leads to him moving to the city, where he discovers class solidarity.

a cucerit viața/Matei Ion Conquered Life by Constantin Chiriță) and collections of literary reportage: Mihail Sadoveanu's *Lumina vine de la răsărit/The Light Comes from the East* (its title has been used as a slogan of that period) or Geo Bogza's *Porțile măreției (The Gates of Greatness)*, *Trei călătorii în inima țării (Three Journeys into the Heart of the Land)* and *Meridiane sovietice (Soviet Meridians)*. Literary reportage was widely exercised in this period by a suite of Geo Bogza's epigones: Petru Dumitriu, V. Nămolaru, Ion Istrati, Mihaela Dragomir, Eusebiu Camilar, N. Vălmaru. The acute presence of reportage in this period can be explained through its quality of being a highly efficient mode of socialist propaganda that is rapidly assimilated and disseminated by editors. In literary reportage, "the ideologically distorted information" meets "the compensatory mechanism of the rhetoric of magnification" (Negrici 177). The titles of some of these anthologies are more than suggestive: *Pe întinsul patriei noastre (The Vast Expanse of our Motherland)*, *Santinelele lumii (The Sentinels of the World)*, *Constructorii vieții noi (The Builders of New Life)* etc. (see Selejan 331-335).

Communist nature: the ideological goods

The exploitation of nature for commercial and identitarian means is a common tendency among European totalitarian states. Nature is the most facile vehicle for mass cultural mobilization and helps its establishment in maintaining a national identity:

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the key elements of the so-called identitarian *check-list* are already clearly established, which makes the "tardiness" of newly-appeared nations easier to recover. For most of the European nations, the great forefathers are identified, the national language is fixed, the history written and illustrated, the national landscape described and painted, the folklore inventoried, and the national anthems composed. The rest is but a matter of reproduction and vulgarisation: from now on, the process of identitarian construction enters the age of mass culture³. (Thiesse 163)

³ „În zorii secolului XX, principalele elemente ale «check-list»-ului identitar sunt deja clar precizate, ceea ce face ca națiunile nou apărute să-și poată recupera cu rapiditate «întârzierea». Pentru majoritatea națiunilor europene, marii strămoși sunt identificați, limba națională fixată, istoria scrisă și ilustrată, peisajul național descris și pictat, folclorul inventariat, iar imnurile naționale compuse. Restul nu mai este decât o chestiune de reproducere și vulgarizare: de acum înainte, procesul de construire identitară intră în era culturii de masă” (Translation mine. All references are translated from Romanian by me).

According to Anne-Marie Thiesse, mass culture helps prevent the slow death of a nation, be it through exacerbated nationalist sentiment or through the rejuvenation of the nation, made possible only through a return to the origins. Following these aspects, manifestations of the “nation as a background” begin to occur in twentieth century Europe through phenomena such as nationalisation of education by organising patriotic corps or through the invention of sports. Among the extreme examples so-called “identitarian consumption” can be identified. Shipyards, power and metallurgical plants become tourist attractions that must be ritualistically visited by a nation’s citizen, while “national art” must be purchased with each visit:

Every tourist returns home brimming with souvenirs. National art – presented in a luxurious manner during the great exhibitions – provides the basis for the mass production of items at a modest price and of lesser quality. (...) Alongside tourism, a decorative and portable version of identitarian patrimony is, in fact, born, composed of miniatures of historic monuments, reproductions of landscapes, “local articles” that are not actually used by the local populations and dolls wearing folk costumes⁴. (Thiesse 187)

Folklore, historic monuments, and national vestiges become instruments of totalitarian repression in Communist and fascist countries. The Nazi slogan “Kraft durch Freude” (“force through joy”), which was later transformed into an organisation, “sends German workers in field trips to discover their own country in an orderly and disciplinary fashion, reminding them relentlessly of the great Nazi slogans”⁵ (Thiesse 195). While in the case of Nazis folklore and the afferent discourse is saturated by racial references and apologetic diatribes of Arian supremacy, in National Communist States folklore is completely abolished of any content or reference to the bourgeoisie/monarchy: “The past is exposed as archaic alienation that needs to be eliminated in the new Communist society”⁶ (Thiesse 200). In its stead, a new “State folklore” emerges, through which identitarian patrimony is

⁴ „Orice turist se întoarce acasă încărcat cu suveniruri. Arta națională – prezentată într-o versiune de lux cu ocazia marilor expoziții – furnizează bazele unei producții de masă, mai puțin îngrijită și la prețuri modice. (...) O dată cu turismul se naște de fapt o versiune decorativă și portabilă a patrimoniului identitar, alcătuită din miniaturi ale monumentelor istorice, reproduceri de peisaje, «articole locale» neîntrebuințate de autohtoni și păpuși în costume tradiționale”.

⁵ „[T]rimite lucrătorii germani în excursie pentru a-și descoperi țara în ordine și disciplină, reamintindu-le neîncetat marile sloganuri naziste”.

⁶ „Trecutul este demascat ca arhaism alienant care trebuie să dispară în noua societate comunistă”.

excessively exploited in order to legitimise the link between the glorious past and the singular party. In regard to nature in Communist ideological discourse, the same method of enrolling the work force towards the great socialist struggle can be observed:

Organised, guarded and controlled by the Centre, recreation has a fortifying and educative role for the purpose of an enthusiastic return of the individual to the production process. Striding through the pathways of a nature powered by the agricultural, geological and hydrographical miracles of socialism (...), the tourist crosses the “living plant” of Communism, which offers him both the didactics of workplace and the community centre⁷. (Manolescu 316)

The image of a nature empowered by industrialisation is a staple of Communist ideological discourse. This is how, for instance, the “new world” was pictured in an early collection of pseudo-utopian testimonies (edited by Ion Biberi in 1945):

Cities of tomorrow will be more closely connected to landscape and nature, and more friendly to the people. The factories and the plants, more inviting. Living in the country, more urbanised, through increased communication and the same access to superior education. There will be a more harmonious balance between nature and workshop, between pastime and worktime, between man and society, between work and its rewards⁸. (Comarnescu 290)

Ion Manolescu identifies three main features of Communist discourse of nature, through which the central power enrolls the people towards the socialist struggle: the *pragmatic* aspect, employed with the purpose of describing nature in economic terms, starting from the idea that

⁷ „Organizată, tutelată și controlată de la Centru, recreerea individului are rol fortifiant și educativ, în vederea unei reîntoarceri cât mai entuziaste la procesul de producție. Pășind pe cărările unei naturi potențate de miracolele agricole, geologice și hidrografice ale socialismului (...), turistul străbate «uzina vie» a comunismului, care îi oferă deopotrivă didactica halei de lucru și pe cea a căminului cultural”.

⁸ „Orașele de mâine vor fi mai legate de peisaj și natură, și mai prietene oamenilor. Fabricile și uzinele, mai ademenitoare. Traiul la țară, mai urbanizat, prin tot felul de comunicații și prin aceleași posibilități de educație superioară. Se va realiza un echilibru armonios între natură și atelier, între orele de răgaz și cele de muncă, între om și societate, între muncă și răsplata ei”.

[N]ature is nothing but a massive fuel tank, hostile to the foreign visitor, plundered by the bourgeois establishment and “scientifically” certified later in socialism and Communism. The thematic cliché of *green patriotism* (geography as a passive, yet efficient, weapon against the mischievous and covetous outside “invaders”) is merged with the one of *social molestation* (the generous nature, yet abused by the despotic guardian) and the more ostentatious one of the *safeguarded homeland* (nature, forced by both the imperialist invader and the bourgeois exploiter, finds refuge in the protecting arms of the salt-of-the-earth worker⁹. (Manolescu 315)

This aspect is intensified by a *mythological* aspect of the glorious present, through which nature attains an obligatory educational value: “Landing from the woodlands straight into the community centre, the tourist comes in ideological contact with both the achievements of socialist labour and its exemplary figures: the miner, the foreman, the collectivist peasant, the engineer, the communal activist”¹⁰ (Manolescu 321), and a *lyrical* one, by which “the ideological *kitsch* merges with the natural one in the form of the cliché of inexhaustible Communist resources and of the humanised nature”¹¹ (Manolescu 321).

The limits of this nature scenery also extend to the Communist schoolbooks, the educational pamphlets and historical literature destined for children. The cliché of the forest as “the Romanian’s brother” (“codrul, frate cu românul”) frequently appears in the form of the martyr which sacrifices its vegetal life to protect the national cradle of civilization, but the underlying reason of this man-to-nature link has to do with the way in which the Romantic principles regarding nature are reversed in order to serve the idea of socialist becoming, for “man’s fight with the forces of nature, which implies transforming the latter and domesticising it, has to do

⁹ „[N]atura nu reprezintă altceva decât un uriaș rezervor de combustibil, ostil vizitatorului străin, devalizat de orânduirea trecutului burghezo-moșieresc și valorificat «științific» în socialism și comunism. Clișeu tematic al *patriotismului vegetal* (geografia ca armă pasivă, dar eficientă, împotriva «invadatorilor» externi, vicleni și cupizi) se îmbină aici cu cel al *violului social* (natura generoasă, dar abuzată de un administrator samavolnic) și cu acela, încă mai tezig, al *patriei salvardate* (natura, siluită deopotrivă de invadatorul imperialist și exploataatorul burghez, se refugiază în brațele protectoare ale muncitorului neaș)” (translation mine).

¹⁰ „Coborât din codru direct în căminul cultural, turistul intră în contact ideologic deopotrivă cu realizările travaliului socialist și cu figurile sale exemplare: muncitorul minier, maistrul, țăranul cooperatist, inginerul de hidrocentrală, activistul comunal”.

¹¹ „[K]itsch-ul ideologic se îmbină cu cel natural, în clișeu resurselor comuniste inepuizabile și cel al naturii umanizate

with a pattern of Communist imaginary and of modernisation itself”¹² (Mitchievici 356).

In 1954 a most peculiar poetic micro-current developed in Romania: botanism. This ephemeral trend disappeared in the same year it occurred because of its inherent and therefore “dangerous” apoliticism. Nonetheless, it remains quite an interesting and isolated case study for quasi-eco literature due to its tendency to utilise the green space as a medium of “invention and discovery” (Buell 30). Beyond its precarious aesthetical value, the botanist current is more interesting for its critical reception and for its detractors, reflecting the clear and uncompromising ideology of the literary critics of the period. Robert Cincu’s analysis of its critical reception is more than pertinent:

Considered apolitical (despite its numerous concessions made to the Communist Party), appearing in a confusing period (right after the death of Stalin, in the political context of a country that was extremely careful at ideological shifts), “botanism” remained in the cultural memory for the critiques that addressed it (...). One of the most interesting aspect of this current is actually its power as a counter-example: far from remaining unchecked, despite a very simple aesthetic formula, the impact left by botanism is best mirrored in the diversity of the critiques that condemned it¹³. (Cincu 54)

Lack of ideological engagement and the use of static green imagery, doubled by the lack of class conscience in its discourse are the elements that condemned this poetic current to dissolution. This is however an extreme example, as one must look at a well-regarded author like Geo Bogza to see that even the most valued writers were prone to the critique of the political power. One of the most influential writers of literary reportage at the time, Geo Bogza is accused in the local magazines that his pieces have no connection to the populace and are too descriptive, and therefore, may be suspected of “escapism”. His case is illustrative of the way in which the political

¹² „[L]upta Omului/oamenilor cu stihiiile naturii, implicând transformarea celei din urmă și domesticirea naturalului incontrolabil, ține de un pattern al imaginarului comunist și al modernizării înseși”.

¹³ „Considerat apolitic (în ciuda numeroaselor concesi vizibile făcute Partidului), apărut într-un an confuz (imediat după moartea lui Stalin, în contextul politic al unei țări extrem de atente la alunecările ideologice), «botanismul» a rămas în memoria culturală mai ales pentru criticile care i-au fost aduse (...). Iar unul dintre lucrurile cele mai interesante legate de acest curent este tocmai forța sa de contra-exemplu: departe de a trece nevăzut, în ciuda unor opțiuni estetice simple, impactul realizat de poezii botaniști se oglindește cel mai bine în diversitatea criticilor care îl condamnă”.

power promptly corrected any deviations from the main ideological directives. In one such case, the “principled” corrections appeared to be signed by workers:

I did not recognise Cape Midia (...) according to the author’s description. The subject interests me as I am a worker finding myself right at Cape Midia. (...) The writer is not concerned with speaking about work and about man in his piece (...). He is only interested in scenery and nature and especially that scenery and that nature where no man can be seen¹⁴. (qtd in Selejan 327)

With such interventions in mind, it is almost self-evident that if Geo Bogza’s works of literary reportage from the interwar period were to be compared with those written after the establishment of the Communist apparatus, there was a very important concessive side to his “opportunism”. Nonetheless, Geo Bogza has systematically “revised” his writing according to the ideological directives, and consequently his critical reception has blown out of proportion in the 50s, having been considered in numerous occasions a “literary genius”.

Perhaps the most important (and earliest, for that matter) occurrence of the newly established ideology in regard to the way in which “the new man” sees nature can be found in a conference held by the same Geo Bogza in 1949. In the same year, Aldo Leopold launched his theory of “the land ethic” in *A Sand County Almanac*, a work universally considered by Anglo-American ecocriticism as fundamental for the later developed ecocentrism¹⁵. However, where Aldo Leopold’s discourse came as a plea towards extending the domain of ethics to include the environment (all for the purpose of combating the destructive force of anthropocentrism), Geo Bogza takes a

¹⁴ „N-am recunoscut Capul Midia (...) după descrierea autorului. Subiectul mă interesează deosebit fiind muncitor și în prezent găsim-mă chiar la Capul Midia. (...) Scriitorul nu se îngrijește să vorbească despre muncă și de om în reportaj (...). Îl interesează doar decorul și natura și anume acel decor și acea natură în care nu se vede prea mult omul”.

¹⁵ Aldo Leopold’s exhortation on ecocentrism is quite revealing in the following passage, which I choose to include for illustrative purposes: “All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for). The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land. This sounds simple: do we not already sing our love for and obligation to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skelter down river. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage. Certainly not the plants, of which we exterminate whole communities without batting an eye. Certainly not the animals, of which we have already extirpated many of the largest and most beautiful species. A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these ‘resources’, but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state” (Leopold 231).

different stance. The rhetorical mechanism of his discourse has an almost paranoid tone to it, the motif of nature being threatened by the recurrent annihilating practices of the bourgeoisie. The exploitation of this cliché (“the fragile nature”) stands in close connection to the idea of identitarian patrimony, as Anne-Marie Thiesse puts it: “National nature is eternal: it will, however, disappear, defiled by vandals – industrialists, dam builders, modernist architects and avid hotel managers”¹⁶ (Thiesse 182). In his lecture, a type of foreshadowing of the future forced industrialisation of Communist Romania can be found. His paper is filled with the clichés of magnification and grandiose rhetoric, a staple of the propagandistic discourse of the period:

[M]an dares yet another leap in a domain in which he, as opposed to his other conquests, has found himself behind, in the same dependent and fearful stance from the very beginning: the atmospheric manifestations of nature; phenomena to which all life, in its varied and efflorescent development, across the entire vastness of the land, is linked. Mankind, relieved of its superstitions, knowing the laws by which these manifestations unfold, can now intervene in their ordering, moulding them to its needs¹⁷. (Bogza 1-2)

According to Bogza, it is bourgeois exploitation that caused environmental crises such as mass deforestation, the lowering of the sea level, the intensification of drought periods etc. Thus, “the new man”

is one that, in order to ensure the rewards for his own work, takes the offensive against the earthly forces, averting the spread of wilderness and enclose it in its geographical space. (...) The socialist order represents the form of living that makes man powerful enough to take this offensive¹⁸. (Bogza 3-4)

¹⁶ „Natura națională este eternă; ea va dispărea însă, pângărită de vandali – industriași, constructori de baraje, arhitecți moderniști sau hotelieri avizi de câștig”.

¹⁷ „[O]mul îndrăznește încă un salt, într-un domeniu în care, față de celelalte cuceriri ale sale, rămăsese mult în urmă, aproape în aceeași situație dependentă și înfricoșată de la început: manifestările atmosferice ale naturii; fenomene de care e legată, pe întreaga întindere a uscatului, desfășurarea atât de variată și eflorescentă a vieții. E vorba acum că omul, eliberat de superstiții, cunoscând legile după care aceste manifestări se produc, să intervină el însuși în ordinea lor, determinându-le după necesitățile sale”.

¹⁸ „[E] acela care, pentru a-și asigura răsplata muncii sale, ia ofensiva împotriva forțelor telurice, pornind în întâmpinarea pustiului, îngrădindu-l în spațiul lui geografic (...). Orânduirea socialistă e forma de viață care pune omul în măsură să dezlanțuie această ofensivă”.

The new socialist man must prepare for the great Stalinistic plan for the transformation of nature. The numbers invoked are astronomical: “Eighty thousand kolkhozes are enrolled in the battle; their people, helped by machines, will plant over thirty billion trees in the next five years, most of them oaks”¹⁹ (Bogza 4). In this battle millions of combatants will take part, “men and trees alike, human forests and vegetal forests rising – sprightly, rustling – against the devastating wind”²⁰ (Bogza 8).

Bogza’s exhortation is far from being singular in his age. This type of agitational propagandistic speech is a Stalinist era Romanian staple of literary discourse. However, being employed in writings of/on nature, this discourse becomes apocalyptic²¹. The rhetorical mechanisms used by writers such as Geo Bogza are more than symptomatic of the phenomenon explained at the beginning of the present paper (“reverse ecocriticism”). By ideologising nature itself, environmental discourses of mindful engagement reverse the intentionality of eco-writing.

Post-Communist nature: the ruins

The years immediately following the fall of Communism in Romania have not provided a definite metamorphosis of environmental conscience. There were, however, a series of environmentalist movements in the nineties that were quickly assimilated by the more powerful political parties: MER (The Romanian Environmentalist Movement), PER (The Romanian Environmentalist Party) and FER (The Romanian Environmentalist Federation)²². These movements lacked any definite environmentalist programmes and were started for political reasons. It is, however, interesting to note the more recent exporting strategies that employ the Romanian landscape for touristic purposes. Catherine Juler’s travel guide, *Romania*,

¹⁹ „Un număr de optzeci de mii de colhozuri sunt angajate în bătălie; oamenii lor, ajutați de mașini, vor planta în următorii cinci ani peste treizeci de miliarde de arbori, cei mai mulți dintre ei stejari”.

²⁰ „oameni și arbori, păduri umane și păduri vegetale, ridicându-se – însuflețite, foșnitoare – împotriva vântului pustiitor”.

²¹ Lawrence Buell sees, for example, the apocalyptic imaginary as one of the most powerful discursive tools in environmental discourse: “Apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal. Of no other dimension of contemporary environmentalism, furthermore, can it be so unequivocally said that the role of the imagination is central to the project; for the rhetoric of apocalypticism implies that the fate of the world hinges on the arousal of the imagination to a sense of crisis” (Buell, *Environmental Imagination* 285).

²² See for instance Andrei Oișteanu’s article on the environmentalist movements in Romania. The writer’s attitude on these movements is mainly satirical, stating that environmentalist movements are a luxury belonging to rich, educated societies (“It would seem that for centuries the Romanian people were thinking and acting in ecological manner and were waiting for the right moment to organise politically in this direction”): <http://revista22online.ro/1100/.html> (Last accessed in 28.10.2017).

is one such example²³. Another example is the highly publicised case of Prince Charles, who frequently visits Romania, regarding it as the last country in Europe with a quasi-untainted nature that projects an almost premodern pastoral image. Autochthonous nature has become a capitalist endeavour, succeeding the Communist one.

Literature remains one of the most reliable sources regarding the perception of nature after the fall of Communism, but not in a demonstrative or programmatic manner that indicates a rise of environmental conscience. As a result of the traumatic memory of Communism, environmental conscience in general and nature writing in particular are occulted by the underlying anti-Communist present in post-1989 prose. Instead, this literature uses what Foucault calls heterotopias²⁴ to illustrate the apocalyptic dystopian effects of the Communist vestiges (post-industrial ruins). Moreover, the fragments discussed will follow, from an ecocritical standpoint, a pattern of “ecological apocalypticism” (in Buell’s use of the phrase) that has not yet been analysed from this perspective. In this respect, Lawrence Buell paints a relevant picture:

These are the bases of late twentieth-century environmental dystopianism: (1) the vision of exploitation leading to “overshoot” (excessive demands on the land) or interference producing irreversible degradation, (2) the vision of a tampered-with nature recoiling against humankind in a kind of return of the repressed, and (3) the loss of all escape routes. (Buell, *Environmental Imagination* 308)

A different, yet efficient demarche was proposed by Doris Mironescu in his 2016 book on Romanian communitarianism in nineteenth century literature. In his

²³ “With its historic cities, rolling mountains, villages, and rejuvenating spas, Romania is realizing its appeal as a travel destination. National Geographic’s all-new Traveler guide explores every region of this intriguing country, from Bucharest to Oltenia and its painted monasteries to the Apuseni Mountains, celebrated for their limestone formations and underground rivers, to Transylvania’s medieval towns”. See Juler 10.

²⁴ I am making use of Foucault’s definition of heterotopias in order to illustrate the spaces described in Romanian post-1989 novels: “Because they are utterly different from all the emplacements that they reflect or refer to, I shall call these places “heterotopias,” as opposed to utopias; and I think that between utopias and these utterly different emplacements, these heterotopias, there must be a kind of mixed, intermediate experience, that would be the mirror. The mirror is a utopia after all, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up virtually behind the surface; I am over there where I am not, a kind of shadow that gives me my own visibility, that enables me to look at myself there where I am absent—a mirror utopia. But it is also a heterotopia in that the mirror really exists, in that it has a sort of return effect on the place that I occupy” (Foucault 178-179).

study, he draws a parallel between the nineteenth century Romantic perspective on ruins and that of contemporary literature, employing a canonical-postcanonical dichotomy in order to explain them. According to Doris Mironescu, there are two types of ruins, “domestic” (pertaining to historical vestiges that were used by Romantic poets as spaces of recollecting history) and “feral” (the post-industrial ruins that reflect a heterotopic, postcanonical view belonging to contemporary writers).

Even if today’s Romania has yet to go through a ravaging event such as a civil war or an enemy attack on its own soil, it still has its own post-cataclysmic specificity. Our ruins are the disaffected factories from our Communist past, condemned to the difficult, and sometimes unpredictable processes of transition to a market economy; the buildings that were left unfinished due to lack of funds or because of the dissolution of the institutions that had to manage them; the poorly maintained edifices that were left to degradation because they reminded of the world before²⁵. (Mironescu 297)

As a result of their “uncomfortable” nature, these ruins no longer retain their function of offering a reassuring discourse about the nation and automatically gain a critical function which is most defining to a postcanonical memory (Mironescu 287).

Such is the case of many contemporary novels that deal with Romanian post-Communism, either in a nostalgic manner or *via* a critical stance: Dan Lungu’s *Sunt o babă comunistă! (I’m an Old Commie!)*, Bogdan Suceavă’s *Venea din timpul diez (Coming from an Off-Key Time)*, Ioana Bradea’s *Scotch*, Filip Florian’s *Degete mici (Little Fingers)*, Petre Barbu’s *Blazare (Indifference)*, Ionuț Chiva’s *69* or Radu Pavel Gheo’s *Noapte bună, copii! (Good Night, Children!)*, followed by its pseudo-sequel *Disco Titanic* all include one manner of dealing with Communist heritage or another. They also mirror the transitional Romanian society by either devaluing the symbolic nature of Communist constructions or reactualizing them. Dan Lungu’s *I’m an Old Commie!*, for instance, makes use of the latter, as can be seen in the following example:

²⁵ „Chiar dacă România de astăzi n-a trecut printr-un eveniment răvășitor, precum un război civil sau o lovitură inamică pe teritoriul propriu, ea are propriul specific postcataclismic. Ruinele noastre sunt fabricile eșuate din timpul regimului comunist, condamnate în procesul dificil, cu cotituri uneori nefirești, de tranziție către o economie de piață; clădirile neterminate și care au fost părăsite din lipsă de fonduri și din cauza dezagregării instituțiilor care trebuiau să le gestioneze; edificiile neîntreținute și lăsate să se degradeze pentru că aminteau prea puternic de lumea dinainte”.

One hell of a factory in but a few years has become a ruin in which weeds grow relentlessly and dogs seek comfort. Even the windows were stolen, even the power outlets were plucked. When I pass by it, I turn my head away. It burns my soul, I swear it. I have the feeling that there, in the assembly line, our skeletons remained in working position, ready to start in a moment's notice. (Lungu 5)

However, what is of interest here is not the nostalgic approach, as it only lightly touches on what could be seen as ecological apocalypticism. The critical anti-Communist stance is more symptomatic of the effects of Communist industrialism and anti-naturalism on the environmental consciousness (or lack thereof) of post-Communist writers. The discourses of nature employed in this literature are not unlike what Cynthia Deitering observed when analysing the American novel of the 80s²⁶. The transition from the Communist anti-naturalist discourse to the "postnatural" writings of the 2000s is perhaps the only literary phenomenon with which the dynamics of Romanian nature writing can be explained. I will only refer to two of the most symptomatic novels in this respect, as they are essential to understanding the complex relationship between ideology, postideology and nature in Romanian contemporary literature.

Ioana Bradea's *Scotch* is more ostentatious in its stance on post-industrial ruins. The novel is mainly lyrical, invoking rural imagery in the desolate post-industrial landscape of a provincial city. The minute description of an old disaffected wheat processing factory mirrors a contemporary conscience of emptiness and a lack of sense of purpose. Not unlike the autochthonous nature scenery itself, the postcanonical space that can be found in Bradea's novel is revealed as a cataclysmic reality brought upon by the Communist heritage. Therefore, both nature and man become victims of industry. The people in the novel literally blend into the post-industrial scenery. What is most striking about this relationship is the complete lack of agency of the two entities (humanity and nature) in their rapport with the relentless onslaught of Communist industrialism. The overall descriptions are filled with anti-Communist ideological connotations, in spite of the relative sterile

²⁶ Discussing the American novel of the 80s, Catherine Deitering observed that: "Nature is no longer a central presence in the world of the novel, no longer the «live-sustaining air» that Mary McCarthy claimed the nineteenth-century novel breathed. Rather, the novel of the 1980s reflects a world in which the air is in fact no longer necessarily life-sustaining. Nature in these novels is usually extraneous to the Real, though often it evokes nostalgia and a sense of exile, for the planet itself no longer feels like home to a number of characters: the private experiences which formed their metaphysical definitions of home are no longer available in the 1980s" (Deitering 201).

discourse of the entire novel (an experimental writing, lacking plot or characters, with passages that are mainly poetic). In *Scotch*, the post-industrial becomes post-ideology, as seen in the following excerpt:

And in the middle of the production hall, the only – the last – machinery that couldn't be torn apart from the empty concrete building: a white cube with an orange metal waistband.

A Turkish machine of tens of tons.

They suspended it in the metal chassis with four steel wires.

It lays silent, hanging at fifteen centimetres from the floor.

The eyes blink dumbfoundedly: the machine has four thick doors, two meters tall – dreadfully and painfully orange coloured.

From under the cube-machine hang six dirty linen hoses, each strapped at the mouth with a metal circle. Flour probably poured through those tubes: right underneath them, the cement splits into two squared holes.

The tubes flutter dirtily and they'd clash if the wind blew. And they'd rattle *their history of white Communist flour*. Like Oriental wind chimes that give birth to that frolicsome jingly music²⁷. (Bradea 112-113, emphasis mine)

A different and more allegorical approach can be found in Petre Barbu's *Indifference (Blazare)*, where an old Communist marketplace is privatised in the years following the Revolution which took place in 1989 and is transformed into a supermarket. The novel grotesquely depicts the alienation of the individual following the 1989 revolution. The narrator, Tache Enoiu, takes upon himself the defence of the marketplace from the foreign investors. The marketplace is itself a character, employed in the novel as the main catalyst (and depository) of collective memory in the early years after the fall of Communism. What starts in the beginning as a local feud for the protection and preservation of the local cultural heritage ends up as a

²⁷ „Iar în centrul halei de producție singurul – ultimul – utilaj care nu a putut fi smuls din clădirea de beton gol: un cub alb cu un brâu de fier portocaliu.

Un utilaj turcesc de câteva zeci de tone.

L-au agățat în scheletul metalic din tavan cu patru fire de oțel.

Tace suspendat la vreo cincisprezece centimetri de podea.

Ochii clipeșc buimăciți: mașina are patru uși groase și înalte de aproape doi metri – colorate înfiorător și dureros de portocaliu.

De sub mașina-cub atârână șase tuburi murdare de pânză, care și-au legat la gură un cerc de metal. Prin tuburile astea curgea probabil făina dedesubt: chiar sub ele, cimentul se despică în alte două găuri pătrate.

Tuburile flutură murdar și s-ar ciocni între ele dacă ar bate vântul. Și-ar zdrăngăni istoria de făină albă și comunistă. Ca bețișoarele de lemn orientale care nasc muzica aceea de clinchete zgłobii”.

struggle to abolish the traumatic past. In the end, the marketplace morphs into an ark heading towards Europe, symbolising the hybrid nature of the transition from Communism to a market economy. The crude allegory of an old Communist marketplace, a “feral ruin” par excellence, that travels towards Europe mirrors the ideological fantasies of the plethora of characters present in the novel who dream of a better future: a rush towards the European Union:

The building sweeps through the same fields of wheat and hemp under the raw June sun, pulling together, like a magnet, the tents and the cars of foreign tourists, the meddling peasants from the surrounding villages, the flocks of scandal-mongering journalists, the enthusiasm of third-rate bands that played *house & dance* every night, the four water tanks, the trailers in which Coca-Cola, Tuborg, McDonald’s and their competitors were selling their beverages, beers and their patties, the gross, unwashed parasites (...), the haberdashers, the failed artists in search of inspiration, the gypsies that were trying to pickpocket the foreigners and a few scientists that stubbornly trying to find the mystery behind these walls moving²⁸. (Barbu 279)

In conclusion, the novels that tackle post-Communist heritage can also be read from an ecocritical perspective only in relation with the underlying anti-Communist (post)ideology. By being inherently “postnatural”, these contemporary works deal with the problems of canon (as in canonical memory) and ideology in a postcanonical and postideological manner. I attempted to identify a historical progression of Romanian discourses on nature, from the forced industrialisation that led to the inherent representational artificiality of nature in the 50s to its political instrumentalisation in the following decades and culminating with the rewriting of power structures in the years following the 1989 revolution and the effects of post-industrialism on literature in order to illustrate the dynamics between the Communist ideology and the ideological alternatives that emerged after 1989, as seen in writings that approach the subject of nature. Whether or not an environmental conscience can be traced to the authors discussed in this paper is less relevant than

²⁸ „Clădirea străbătea aceleași întinderi de grâu și cânepă sub soarele crud al lunii iunie, trăgând ca un magnet corturile și mașinile turiștilor străini, curiozitatea țăranilor din satele apropiate, căldurile de ziariști care căutau știri de senzație, entuziasmul trupelor de mâna a treia care concertau *house & dance* în fiecare seară, cele patru cisterne cu apă potabilă, rulotele în care Coca-Cola, Tuborg, McDonald’s și concurenții lor își comercializau sucurile, berile și chiftelele, paraziții nespălați și scârboși, (de parcă eu și Maria aveam vreo ocupație!), negustorii de mărunțișuri, artiștii ratați în căutarea inspirației, țiganii care urmăreau să-i facă pe străini la buzunare și câțiva savanți care se încăpățâneau să afle misterul înaintării acestor ziduri”.

the fact that their literary works could indeed answer a number of questions regarding the hypothesis of an ecocritical mode of reading Romanian post-Communist literature.

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