

## HOW DO WE HAPPILY MARRY STATISTICS AND LITERATURE?

- a round table of the *Metacritic Circle* on some Moretti themes -

**Disclaimer:** *The Metacritic Circle is a project of cultural debate initiated by Mihaela Ursa and Alex Goldiș, professors at Faculty of Letters within Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj, Romania. The participants are established scholars, early career academics, Ph.D. candidates, graduates and undergraduates brought together by their common interest in cultural poetics and critical thinking. The meetings of the Metacritic Circle are informal and the participants are generally consequent, knowing each other very well. The discussions are serious and the criticism is severe, but the members are frequently laughing, ironizing each other and making jokes, a great part of this atmosphere getting lost in transcription. This is why, in the following text, we maintained between brackets these marks of humor and irony, in order for the readers not to take for granted what was said in a comical or in a sarcastic manner. The transcription that follows is part of a meeting that took place on the 25th of June 2015, starting from some texts of Franco Moretti and from a quantitative analysis on Romanian literature, the topic being suggested by Mara Semenescu, Renata Orban and Lavinia Sabou, Ph.D. students.*

**Adrian Tudurachi:** Good evening, I am glad to see you again. I do not want to waste time with the introduction. The aim of today's meeting is represented by the possibility of approaching the theoretical proposals of Franco Moretti, based on some preliminary experiences relevant for literature. Our three colleagues, Mara Semenescu, Lavinia Sabou, Renata Orban, were part of a team which worked with quantitative methods on a material from Romanian literature, a team with which we attempted to examine the field of Romanian literature so as to see exactly if and what functions from Moretti's theories on the material that we have. This is also the reason, and, if you want, the advantage of our discussion: when we frame theoretical proposals or when we get involved in abstract debates, we can appeal to a

verification in the field, to the success or to the failure that was registered in the different attempts of practical application, done in the last two years.

**Mara Semenescu:** I do not know if it is by all means necessary to see the materials that we worked on and the charts that resulted from them, because this time we have prepared for a more practical discussion on Moretti's texts than on our analyses. Of course, we can infer and let you know things from our experience. Likewise, people here who did quantitative researches in the previous years can intervene. I would say let's start from the question if we should be afraid of quantitative research. In my opinion, there is a reticence among us, among everybody, among all the people educated within the Faculty of Letters, to approach literature in this manner, because we are accustomed with quite different working instruments. Undoubtedly, we are not naturally settled to work with Excel tables, to get akin to numbers and to increasingly leave behind a qualitative research. You start to ask yourself: "How far can I get so as to reach conclusions that are relevant for the field of literary studies?" Well, I believe that if we look for a moment at Moretti's texts, we have a first answer to our questions. I noticed that if we read them in a chronological order, Moretti's doubts regarding the quantitative research resonate with the things that we said. For instance, he says many times that within *digital humanities* we can appeal to some data bases to whom we did not have access until now. But what does this mean? Every time when Moretti introduces an interpretation of quantitative data that he brings to discussion, he does this by referring to other areas of research. In *Planet Hollywood*, you know it very well, he does not succeed in explaining, for example, why action movies are so popular all around the world, without intruding into language analysis or into the absence of language in those movies. On the other side, Hollywood's comedies are very popular on a global scale. The reason is the same – language. Moreover, when he studies the novel, he appeals very much to the concept of gender, that he redefines. He splits it in smaller and smaller categories. For instance, the imperial gothic novel, the naturalist novel, the decadent novel etc. Moretti gets to some interpretations of quantitative researches and succeeds in identifying those ecosystems in terms of a complementarity of the literary study. He never says that we have to do only quantitative research. The quantitative research does not come to replace the methods that we have already used, this is more than obvious, but it could complete them. Now, one of our questions which was raised by Alex Goldiș in the article that

all of us read for today is “Which are the questions that we answer?” We have a great quantity of information, but what do we want to do with it, where do we want to lead it? In this area the things are more ambiguous. Here I would like you to intervene in the discussion.

**Lavinia Sabou:** Moretti starts from the point that it is necessary to have a more rational history of literature. Until I read Moretti, I was not in need of a higher degree of rationality regarding the history of literature, because I was accustomed, by graduating Letters, to apply hermeneutics, text interpretation, and not to find anything incomplete in this approach. And probably, for this reason, at least for me, the idea of a quantitative research was more revolutionary, as a rational addition. Why does the history of literature requires a more rational approach? This is also a point to debate.

**Renata Orban:** But, reading his texts, we can also notice some “problems” of the quantitative research. For instance, the information that we have is not always complete. Sometimes, we have doubts. The information, most of the times, is not enough. For example, I can describe different aspects from different countries, but I cannot cover all the countries. But in our research about the Romanian Revolution’s novel from December 1989, we had access just to a part of the period that we had to analyze. We could cover only one decade. On the other hand, the research must end in an interpretation of data. The interpretation cannot be 100 % objective, even if we deal with numbers or data. So, my question would be: “How accurate are the results or the answers of the quantitative researches? How objective the data and the answers can be?”

**Adrian Tudurachi:** I believe that we cannot answer Renata’s last question. I would go back to Mara’s premise, who started from a chronological order of Moretti’s texts that we all had our hands-on these days. She attempted to underline Moretti's move for fifteen years, a journey of review, or of doubt, or of skepticism, considering different solutions of approaching quantities and abandoning most of them. Maybe this is the easiest critical angle to adopt with regard to Moretti: seeing his flaws from his own perspective.

**Mara Semenescu:** Yes, he admits to them. For instance, when he studied the distribution of the characters and of space so as to reveal the manner in which Hamlet's storyline is built. Moretti calculates accurately which character interacts with how many other characters, he notices that the marginal characters are those that are not present in the moments of the action, then he even counts the words that the characters say in certain situations so as to highlight certain chart lines or to reduce others. As he adds more and more, more and more data, at the end of his study he reaches the conclusion that the image or the graphical representation that he produces after the quantitative research should illustrate something very clearly, should make something visible. Instead, something of such a concentration of details, as in the study about Hamlet, produces the contrary. This would be a limitation that he assumes, for instance.

**Renata Orban:** That text was, at least for me, more persuasive. The quantitative research underlines how the conflict in a work can be understood. We know that the quantitative research can be applied in the history of literature, but this text revealed that it can be applied even in the theory of literature.

**Adrian Tudurachi:** I agree, it seems to me that at present this is one of the key-issues for Moretti. The text from 2013 represents his attempt, after twenty years of quantitative exercises and of statistics, to change direction from literary history to literary theory. It is a manner of saying that quantities not only do they feed the imaginary of the literary concrete, but they also give us the possibility of repositioning in a theoretical area, of giving a second thought to the relations with what is possible in literature. I do not know if the study is for sure persuasive, it seemed to me that it is rather a disclosure of quantitative practices to a new field, a hypothesis.

**Mihaela Ursa:** I would like to open another reflexive line and to play a bit the devil's advocate part: aren't – I wonder – these types of researches, as well as Moretti's fame at present, the signs of an attempt to say that: "humanistic sciences are, in fact, hard sciences"? I would be curious to know if you have ever meditated on the symbolical motivation of this new obsession for quantitative research in literary studies, on what is situated behind the pertinent observation that these researches should have been reintroduced for a long time in the field of literature.

In the context of the much debated crisis of the humanistic sciences, of the accusations of humanities being “useless”, does it not seem to you that – therefore – within literary studies, within classical studies, there is this effort to make them theoretical so as to convert them into exact sciences? I wonder if this manner of bringing the problem of analysis to the table is not at all related to our anxiety and to our general restlessness as humanists, born from the fact that humanistic studies have a terrible time in the system of actual sciences, that they have a terrible time in the academic and university system, that they are destroyed by the determinism, utilitarianism and by the urgencies of the labor market. Because mixing the study of literature with sociology, maybe even with statistics, to a larger extent or to a lesser one, is not new, but now I perceive it as an effort of an entirely different type. And I ask you if we have to take this into consideration as well or not. Then I would underline a thing that Renata said, bringing the argument of objectivity. I am suspicious when the term of objectivity intervenes in the humanistic sciences’ discourse of any type, even helped by statistics. And I would remind you a thing that was recently mentioned here, in Cluj, by Susan Schreibman, who is one of the most important names in digital humanities today: in fact, every data visualization is already an interpretation. There is already a selection, which started from a thesis, with a project. There is no innocent data visualization, an objective visualization of data, and least of all do I believe that there is objectivity in the humanistic sciences. Even if we rest on a great quantity of data, on as much data as could be collected about a certain aspect, I doubt that the result will be a higher objectivity.

**Renata Orban:** This was my question. Can the answers be accurate?

**Alex Goldiș:** You hope that they are, but you cannot be sure that they are.

**Renata Orban:** Yes, and therefore I consider that this methods cannot compete with reading, with the hermeneutic interpretation. This is a version, a possible answer. It can offer additional information.

**Alex Goldiș:** But there is a competition. There is an institutional competition. There is a strictly institutional exclusion. We have an auto-destructive prejudice: it seems to us that we will not be capable of figuring out those very complicated

statistic evaluations. However, we could reach the conclusion that they are not so difficult.

**Daniel Matis:** Yes, it is possible, but I believe that we – humanities researchers – might have an inferiority complex towards exact sciences and we try to transform our subject, which is not objective, but subjective, according to their pattern, to implement their methods, their strategies. And we try to transform it, to modify it etc. because we have this feeling of inferiority towards physics, mathematics, engineering etc.

**Alex Goldiș:** Yeah, but this complex easily turns upside-down in a complex of superiority... when you least expect it (*roars of laughter in the room*).

**Mihaela Ursa:** In the common imaginary, people of letters are exclusively poets.

**Mara Semenescu:** Yes. And many times I try to explain to my friends, which are not people of letters that we do not only write poetry, that inspiration does not hit us, giving birth to a text, that we are not necessarily more visionary than them. In our work there is also an effort, an endeavor, there are differences between good texts and bad ones that we create, interpretive or analytical, which have somewhat methodic bases, maybe not precisely scientific as in physics...

**Călina Părău:** There are various types of scientificity and, at the same time, I do not think that this urge to go to statistics for help comes from inside the humanities, being motivated by some of our anxieties and complexes of inferiority, but I think that it rather comes from outside, from other fields, from the sphere of the technological. All these are part of an ideology that aims to reduce the number of possibilities of getting to truth, of offering a single pattern, which is that of exact sciences. This thing is very dangerous, because it transforms all the endeavors into something countable. A single truth is postulated and we postulate a single method through which we can get to them: the scientific one, in the hard sense of the word. And of course that catching things in some clear structures is part of an interest to transform the ways to truth into some things easy to deal with. Yes, I am afraid of this. Daniel, we should confront our fears more frequently, because they are the same.

**Daniel Matis:** I agree with only half of what you just said. That is, I believe that the danger comes from inside, not only from the outside.

**Mihaela Ursa:** Historically speaking, things were not like this in the case of *digital humanities* – if I understand correctly that we are speaking about digital humanities now, not necessarily about quantitative analysis anymore. Historically speaking, at one moment there were some humanities projects which have attached some technological components that were, at the time, purely auxiliary. In a project of humanistic sciences, the “computer guys” were required to create some softs, some algorithms. As the projects developed and as the contribution of those who came from cybernetics proved superior to the demand, this field began to gain some autonomy until, at present, digital humanities is yet a discipline on its own way, and in its own rights, as it tends to develop not only another pattern of scientificity and another discourse, I believe, but another place in this field which was until now dualistic, divided into exact sciences and the classical ones. Now it seems that it is possible to find something in between, in which the digital part is not restricted to the intervention of the computer guys, and the humanities part does not mean some poets writing inspirational stuff. Ideally, in this middle format, we deal with a team of people who have somehow intermediary capacities, or with a team of computer guys and humanists whose roles are of similar importance. So it was not really like you make it sound, some sort of conspiracy from outside to generalize the model of exact sciences. But maybe this generalization might have been a by-product, under the pressure of institutional and economical policies.

**Alex Goldis:** I also agree with Mihaela on this issue, yet, on the other hand, we should turn our attention to the origin of digital humanities and to why such a need came to be in the first place. If we are to take a look at literary studies from the past 20-30 years, we will notice a pattern, namely that post-colonial studies, as well as new historicism studies have always attempted to broaden the canon, to bridge the gap to peripheral literature. Franco Moretti thought this to be one of the central premises. Why should one broaden the sphere of application of analysis? Because such a broadening of the canon is necessary and, according to him, it is in no way possible to operate with a less narrow understanding of the canon just by reading more extensively, like the comparatists of the previous generations hoped: we won't read 10 books, we'll go read 100, even 1000, 100 000. Indeed, it was an absolute

temptation, completely lacking realism: the solution, according to Franco Moretti, is not reading more, but using these technological “supports”, so to say, to be able to see more – he even argues in his texts against the classical, 20<sup>th</sup> century worldview used to construct the canon in the first place. How was the literary canon built then? You’d take 10-20 fundamental books, those upon which you would found your theory, and then you would generalize several literary patterns starting from them while, as Moretti points out, if more authors or texts had been taken into account from the get-go, maybe these very patterns, these paradigms we tend to think of as fundamental for the history of Western culture and not only would have looked very different, indeed. The initial intention behind digital humanities would be to enrich the canon and to improve our capacity for analysis. This is what I believe we should take as our starting point for this debate. What exactly is it about digital humanities that allows it to do this or where do history and literary criticism face a crisis that can only be adequately answered by digital humanities? Where do the human eye or mind cease working as they should and where can the computer at least partly take it from there?

**Ştefan Baghiu:** I would like to take it up from here. Every time we discuss epoch, post-colonialism and the like, there is a question regarding a sort of social reflex of reading. I think this is where we should draw the line. One of Bourdieu’s books opens with a quote that goes something like this: “How are we, those who sacrifice our lives for literature, supposed to transform it into Sociology, into a sterile science?” Interestingly enough, once, during a Stanford workshop, Moretti said something along the lines of “Do not ask me how much I’ve read on the plane, it doesn’t matter. What I am about to explain to you is *knowledge*, literary knowledge, what I read is just that, reading, it’s connected to personal habits and behavior.” He’s trying to find patterns, a *short time plan*, a type of behavior stretching over 20 years, for example. This means that at a given moment in time society can be scrutinized even with its reading habits and, as such, we can tell why one novel disappears off the market or why one cultural trend replaces another, why in Japan we have one type of novel and so on. For Moretti, everything is close to the political, so he keeps noticing, for instance, a political action or another such event at the center of the time period during which a cultural trend manifests itself. My question for you all is a bit more targeted: what exactly has interested you about the novel of the 1989 Revolution? Because I always assume you start out with a hypothesis in



mind. I don't know, something like assuming that novels about the Revolution are not popular reads or, on the contrary, that they are widely-read. All kinds of assumptions to be tested. After this, what did you investigate, how did you do it and, basically, what did you find out? I mean, you must have started from somewhere and ended up somewhere totally different or, perhaps, even found multiple possible answers?

**Renata Orban:** One of our questions was concerned with Bogdan Suceavă's novel, *Noaptea când cineva a murit pentru tine* (*The Night Someone Died for You*), which, according to literary critics, was the very first novel of the Revolution and we have identified those books that also speak of it. In total, we have found 56 novels that go on about this event, even if for just a few pages at a time. We've tried to identify what was new to the table or how the narrative structure of the text about the Revolution came to be crystallized. The main of it is that we've tried to see which are the genres associated with exploring the theme of the Revolution in novels. For this, we've combined the quantitative research method with a reading of Bogdan Suceavă's text and we have noticed that it has an ethical dimension much better highlighted than the novels before it, as those strived to offer an objective perspective, being novels of the Realist type, written from the third person point of view. Their aim was, first and foremost, to present the political aspect of the Revolution.

**Ștefan Baghiu:** And would the conclusion you've reached suffer in any way if you'd discover, for example, that Bogdan Suceavă's novel benefitted from a better distribution than the others? Have you calculated this, as well as other variables? I don't mean just the distribution in bookshops, but also how well literary critics or the general public know Bogdan Suceavă in the first place.

**Alex Goldiș:** This would have meant three more researches. (*laughs*)

**Ștefan Baghiu:** I know this would have meant three more, but they were a whole team, so their conclusion should have come after also taking into account these factors. From what you've mentioned, I'm not quite convinced that this is what makes him famous or spoken about. I believe you've narrowed your quantitative

research to one criterion or one explication only, while the quantitative research should have also included these aspects, right?

**Adrian Tudurachi:** The question is: how much is needed so that we can have such a research? What is the minimal list of critical instruments to be able to ask questions like Moretti does and, obviously, to be also able to give answers? Do we already have such instruments in Romanian Literature? The answer given in 2014 by Alex Goldiș in his article in *Cultura* was that we are not quite able enough ourselves. We lack the instruments to ask such questions. In this research, the issue was one of positioning a “genre of the Revolution” in the 1990s-2000s decade from a sociological point of view. The success of Bogdan Suceavă’s novel rather acted as a catalyst, a sort of incipient question. Once again: rather than a debate over this particular case, I’m very much interested in the possible foundations for future Morettian questions in Romania literature.

**Alex Goldiș:** This is the central issue not just for Romanian Literature, but also for digital humanities in general. What sort of questions to put forward, as there is a gap between input and output – and I would have asked you directly whether the conclusions you’ve reached contradict your initial premises and if it hadn’t been possible to reach them with a more “classic” type of research. I don’t think it’s so demanding to realize that Bogdan Suceavă is a better writer than other authors looking into the Revolution. Here lays, I’d say, the issue of digital humanities: it’s important that the questions don’t already contain the conclusions. Franco Moretti discusses at one point, in his extremely expressive and blunt style, the importance of there being *several years of analysis, one day of synthesis*. This would suggest that our initial question was not quite right. This is the danger of digital humanities: not knowing what questions to ask or how to start off one’s project.

**Cristina Diamant:** Indeed, I would also like to say something about this anxiety caused by the stakes of digital humanities. I don’t necessarily see digital humanities as something to bring humanities or, well, literature and computers together or even closer to the hard sciences in a sort of third area as it was previously mentioned. I agree it’s rather a re-assimilation into fields such as Sociology, and while I’m glad to see how ambitious Moretti is in his endeavor, I’m a bit skeptical and would rather see an actual sociological research as a relevant means of

discussing this reception and of justifying it. On the other hand, I have my doubts about this field because I've only ever seen this type of graphs and statistics a few years ago in discussions about pop culture. Indeed, each time someone wants to "properly" discuss pop culture and legitimize it through discourse, this sort of presentation is made, not only as a visual manner of organizing data, but there is the same concern with graphs, quantifying the interactions between characters and their specificity, the number of nodal points in such a map, the frequency of certain verbs and so on. I used to find it really amusing how that sort of imaginary world was broken down into algorithms, how its very artificiality was exposed, even brought to the foreground. To see that very approach transferred in the field of what most would call the "major culture" raises a few questions in my mind. By this, I don't mean there is something inherently wrong about this method or in it having been used for the "lesser culture", but that I'm afraid it's used mostly to make the canon popular rather than actually broaden it as professed, as a way of saying "look, there's something for everyone in literature". That's my issue with digital humanities, I hope it's not just masquerading as something innovative, as if saying "Let's all pretend now that this is a different type of discourse meant for others outside our field, so that our friends who don't read literature day in, day out accept it, too", using numbers to add an air of scientificity and nothing else. I truly wish digital humanities was a synthesis between what's been available so far in terms of methods and something new, capable of refining our image about the reception of literature, of making literary history and the theory of literature be better grounded in reality.

**Adrian Tudurachi:** I have this feeling that our discussion is heading towards creating some kind of "monstruous" representation of the difficulties faced during a quantitative research. Let us not forget one aspect. Moretti began the construction of this "method" with *Atlante del romanzo europeo*, a research that extended between 1993 and 1996, printed around 1998, where he also discusses the case of Romania. This is, I believe, quite significant in itself: Moretti presents us a quantitative analysis of the Romanian literary landscape with the instruments available to him. He does, indeed, mention that for "the third Europe", which is also the case of Romanian culture, the instruments are rather scarce. However, this doesn't mean that the data cannot be analyzed. Mind you, this was possible with the level of documentation of the year 1996. What I mean to say is that we're clinging

to a discourse of “insufficiency” and, by continuously referring to the absence of sociological or bibliographical instruments, what we’re actively doing is conditioning our own passivity. We are not doing what a foreign researcher was already capable of achieving in our own culture. I think we just have to work on this because we have the material, we have the books. I’ll also point out something else: from the very beginning, our discussion was heavily relying on scientism and I doubt this sort of development was Moretti’s intention. Naturally, *digital humanities* includes this aspect, as well, but not necessarily in its Morettian hypotheses. We can understand this by returning to *Atlante del romanzo europeo*, which is actually an attempt to do minor cultures justice, to place them once again on the map of world literature. This is the origin of quantitative research: a question of how we can integrate the peripheral in world literature, not scientism.

**Alex Goldiş:** But Moretti is trying to build more and more complicated softwares to ask certain questions. I find it difficult to understand why texts of this kind talk about a *cluster* of meanings. Here, I believe, we should also address the issue of the researcher in *digital humanities*, who will simply need a different kind of education than the one we received. I’m afraid we can’t pick it up as we go along if we intend to have *digital humanities* of the highest quality and this would be the question: is this what we want, to switch careers? I think it’s pretty obviously a switch to another one.

**Alex Ciorogar:** I’d have liked to say something earlier. Firstly, I’m glad to see the enthusiasm surrounding this issue. I feel that the problem doesn’t concern the one who’s in charge with the research, because the researcher is always being accused: what are these instruments good for? Why couldn’t you achieve the same results using “classic” instruments? Still, I’d like to point out that this is the “classic” question in the case of every new beginning. It’s asked again and again each time there’s a new acquisition. Another issue, for me, is the distinction between *digital humanities* and quantitative research, which are two very different things, they are not one and the same. What Moretti offers us, at any rate, is a new possibility of studying literature. After all, it’s about new possibilities, new techniques. I wouldn’t necessarily present digital humanities as a third area between soft sciences and hard sciences because this would raise the question of digital exact sciences. I also think

that the basic principles of digital humanities matter: firstly, it's about collaborative research.

**Alex Goldis:** Yet in Romania we still live in a culture of geniuses, don't we? (*bursts of laughter*) Of dualities and singularities.

**Alex Ciorogar:** It's very important to keep in mind that in digital humanities it's all about one's relationship with computers and the digital medium, it's not just about sociology and statistics, that's what I mean.

**Laura Pavel:** I'd like to add something, trying to see if we can look at the other side of things, leaving behind this "trial" where we're tempted to speculate about Moretti's intention and even the general aims of quantitative research. Just as you've aptly pointed out, Alex, there is a distinction to be made between digital humanities, quantitative research and, I would venture to add, what he terms operationalizing – to make an analysis into an act, to make a literary concept, otherwise an apparently inert thing, something you can work with. Why should we move beyond this trial of intention? There are 2 parties: one that is "conservative" and very much against this digitalizing craze, using algorithms and statistical frequencies in literary research, and another party, the "progressive" one which, on the contrary, enthusiastically welcomes this method. What would be the arguments against digital text analysis and what would be those in favor of it? Besides all the shortcomings of quantitative research, one idea that strikes me as well grounded is that it takes texts out of their "material" context. Practically speaking, we have these digital ghosts, because these graphs, however fascinating as forms of a visual language, could be said to betray literarity, turning it into something visual and objectifying it, treating it like an object in an insectarium. Paradoxically, what would be necessary next is a re-narrativization, to breathe a new life into what we have as maps, formulas of visualizing the novel, so we would have to turn back into discourse all these patterns when we make the interpretation proper. Here, I say, is a very interesting node of discussion, between the visual and the literary, between the visual mode and literarity. How to negotiate the amount of "scientificity", yet also the amount of almost artistic creativity of this approach that borrows codes from other fields and combines different discursive codes? Returning to the reluctance that I was formulating: literary texts, let's call them *alive*, pulsating in

their textuality, in their textual flow, are seen as some graphics, as some shadows, specters, they can hardly be otherwise seen and this can be somehow saddening because it can lead us to apocalyptic conclusions about what we thought the identity of literary studies was. Beyond these reproaches (as for example, the one regarding the increasingly fragile connection between text and context), to me Moretti himself seems fascinating. And I think that a beautiful paradox is the one that he deserves a *close reading*. For example, in a text from 2013, Moretti (other followers or just epigones make this method less inspired) returned to his own theses in order to amend them. After a fascinating analysis of Hegel's reading of *Antigona* as a paradigmatic text for the category of tragedy, well, he asks himself: "If applied too loosely and widely, wouldn't operationalizing lose the strict falsifying potential that had made it so valuable in the first place?"

Therefore, he senses a falsifying potential of these instruments of textual analysis and, somehow, one does not know if he should be wholly trusted, but it is worth discussing, he says, the falsifying dose contained by the "instruments" that he works with. Indeed, this is a connecting point with the theory of literature rather than with literary history. One should discuss in this sense – why not – some other categories of literary theory, other perspectives of literary studies, which can themselves be suspected as well of a falsifying potential. Afterwards, he makes this distinction between operationalizing and what would be merely quantitative research, which would be, says he, *ideally* remote from interpretations. And, afterwards, on the other hand, the *operationalization*. And I confess that his radically polemic tone is fascinating, provocative, of course, because you cannot take him quite seriously many times, he seems droll, playful, but, see, he is able to make us ask ourselves such destabilizing questions, after all, connected to the identity of the literary structures of today. And to the categories of literary theory. How can they be refunctionalized? On the other hand, beyond what a close reading may bring to his texts, there appears an ethical perspective on research. A more important ethic accent would be precisely this of the collaborative research, about which there had been talk before. This seems to me very attuned to what is happening, for example, in the theory of visual and performative arts, where I know that there is given increasing importance to a *social turn*, or a *collaborative turn*, a turning point/collaborative mutation (the art critic Calire Bishop, among others, supports it), which would presuppose that we can say goodbye to the "auctorialcentric" epoch. So, a stress, let's say, ethic and highly commendable would

be that of the collaborative research and I would salute all the more what the authors of today's proposal did... Because it is, surely, a pioneering act, but others should emerge as well in order to take over certain aspects and knots for analyzing, presented by their graphics. Then, another ethical perspective is that of the enlarging of the canon. Here, other blames that can be brought to Moretti's distant reading are surprising, and even though a few minutes ago there was formulated a certain reluctance, a blame which is, in fact, the same that is brought to the thesis of multiculturalism. Because, in fact, as in the case of multiculturalism, there would be talk of the imposition of a cultural, ideological dominant, through the canon only apparently opened towards the literature of the "third world". It's like in that famous fable from our own literature: "justice", yes, but not for "doggies". Although I don't know whether the blames that are brought to the canon's cultural domination are formulated from precisely innocent positions. Some of the poststructuralist perspectives, anticanonic, although they seem emancipator, presuppose "lenses" of another type and they come to be intellectual "terrorisms". That is, to impose to our perception of literature a certain ideological conformism, a certain hegemony of ideology over the aesthetic. Recently, there took place the launching of the book translated by Adrian Tudurachi, Jean Paulhan's essay, *The Flowers from Tarbes or Terror in Letters (Florile din Tarbes sau Teroarea în Litere)*, not accidentally this book has only now been translated. So, somehow, if the quantitative research is another formula susceptible of "terrorism", so can be certain poststructuralist directions (as compared to, let's say, philological neoclassical studies), therefore we can suspect that anyway, we have many types of ideologizing lenses of interpretation.

At least one of Moretti's merits is that he becomes autocritic, he exposes a process in the making, a dynamic of the analysis somewhat more "realist" and more rational. Other things worth discussing seem to me, if we were still talking about the fears that we would have if we betrayed the literarity of the literary, well... o have been betraying it for some time and it is symptomatic that, in some way, now we felt the need, after Moretti's perspective, to talk again about such "betrayals". Here, the extrapolation through the excessive visualization of the literary – this is as well a betrayal. Even though, on the other hand, in the contemporary studies over visuality there exist very many rhetorical things and approaches borrowed from subjects based on text. Visuality is today suspected of being ideologically impregnated, as a power "discourse" and textuality as well. I would have referred to several details

from Moretti's text, but there is not enough time now. It seems to me, however, that we can forsake the too many suspicions and apocalyptic theses which still haunt us when we read him.

**Alex Goldiș:** Here I would like again to make a remark, a mean one, as Adrian would say, about what Laura said: I think she is right, probably this is Moretti's paradox, the fact that he pleads for literary statistics, but he is at the same time a critic and an extraordinary theoretician, isn't he? One who interprets very well even in the older style and Adrian was right saying that he claims his lineage from the Russian formalists. And again, someone here recalled the fact that digital humanities will be, I will keep this in mind as I hadn't thought about it until now, the new semiotics or the new structuralism of the years to come. If we could follow this parallel until the end, I would say that, if Barthes was an extraordinary critic and he managed to sell structuralism to some researches who had no idea what to do with it, I'm afraid that the same thing will happen in the next decades with digital humanities. We will assist at the proliferation of a jargon which will enter literary theory from this area, but only few will manage to bring fundamental books into the area. This is the same trap that Barthes laid within structuralism or within semiotics. Now it is Moretti who lays it in front of the future specialists in digital humanities.

**Laura Pavel:** Who could be less inspired.

**Alex Goldiș:** Exactly. Or who could be not educated by critics, by theoreticians. And then, to count some dates without relevance, exactly like others did stylistic inventories, didn't they? This stifling kind of semiotics and of structuralism was experimented in the '70-80. A paralyzing fashion. The same thing could happen now.

**Mihela Ursa:** I believe that quantitative analysis and digital humanities come not as much as a *turn* (as Laura mentioned in *collaborative turn*), but rather as a *return* to all sorts of cultural and research habits that, in fact, Europe used to have. The new collaborative method that digital humanities imagine is not, as a phenomenon, anything else but a recycling of the way in which one worked in the Middle Ages, the team work of that time. The auctorial reorganization of collaborative type is thus



a *return* to this auctoriality dispersed from past ages, towards the authority and auctoriality of small communities, in which the project is not possible without different competence partners, let's say. The result is no longer attributed to a genius or to an auctorial individuality. And thus we eventually get to the problem of a not only cultural reformation, but even epistemic one. We will be positioned differently.

**Laura Pavel:** Bogdan Suceavă, at a certain moment, while speaking this time as a mathematician (and this could easily scare us), said that he would have interpreted many more tension points in those graphics and parables that our speakers today have presented in our last meeting. So, see, one could also need people who work with set theory. In case we deepen the layers of this analysis. He saw or read in the graphics some things we did not see. We're returning to who is collaborating, how does one set the stakes, the method for research work.

**Adrian Tudurachi:** It is indeed interesting because it was about a graphic of reception and Bogdan Suceavă's idea was that a specialist in probabilistic, following the logic of data variation and the loops that these produce, could anticipate the next loop.

**Mihaela Ursa:** In fact this is precisely the stake. The stake of the digital humanities is not to measure some things and to make some graphics with which to show us how we are, the stake is predictive. It is the predictability of some behavior, it is in fact the re-sketching of the loops that are to come.

**Adrian Tudurachi:** I think that we should accept that this is a discipline with very many types of objectives and that they intersect more agendas, with more projects that lead in different directions and which enter under the same umbrella at this moment, probably owing to institutional needs. A predictive stake probably exists at some of them, but it is not necessarily involved in the morettian stylistics of digital humanities.

**Mihaela Ursa:** Not in his explicit stylistics, but I think in the implicit one. The description "here and now" through the quantitative analysis is just the first step of some predictive analyses. I believe that there is enough convergence on this theme through the theoreticians from this area. Somehow, it seems plausible, especially

because of the profound sociological element of the projects of the digital humanities: if the contribution of sociology is so big, the gain of predictability is just as big. Otherwise, which would be the motivation of the sociologist's involvement in a collaborative project as such? If you limit yourself only at measuring some things and at saying "see the behavior of the reader of detective stories" in the X moment, you haven't really intruded upon the social. But if you intervene in the moment in which you say "if this was the behavior until now, let's see the next loop, which is the behavior that comes next" and then, as a holder of this information I can imagine some editorial policies which can have social impact starting from here. This, let's say, is the research regarding the detective story, but, for instance, I would like very much to have the technical capacity and the methodical abilities to study the relationship that preoccupies me in my own research between what we read and how we imagine domesticity and the structure of private life in an emotional manner. Romania has a big problem with associating the areas of domesticity and violence, or, I am sure that if we studied enough "romance novels" that are in fashion here, we would discover some patterns and we could prevent more effectively the violence against women, children, domestic violence etc... Thus, we may make punctual observations without quantitative analysis... For example, Camil Petrescu's amorous constructs are already infamous. But one should study novels that are in fashion, translations etc., this is the type of predictable configuration that I am talking about. One could lay them at the service of those who think the social policies or of those that have the possibility of influencing such a type of data in order to alter something in the social plan. And later on to alter something in the mental of the woman who lets herself abused because jealousy is supposedly a proof of love or who thinks that it is normal to be beaten by her husband from time to time. Thus, intervening in the studying of the predictability of some cultural behaviors or other sort, literary interpretation has a very visible "social impact".

**Ștefan Baghiu:** Part of the difficulties that Moretti comes with are given by the fact that we don't understand yet why forms intermingle at a certain point, why they intrude one upon the other. In Romania, specialists in Letters don't know, practically speaking, what one reads in our country, what one consumes and which is the relation between the so-called "consumerist" literature and "valuable" literature, who are those that decide etc. Or, I think that these should be tested at a

certain moment. For example, what can quantitative research do for Romanian literature before and after '89 is to clarify some things. How come some stereotypes have been imposed, some preconceptions, which is the real consumption of literature, if one can talk about such a thing and why we read what we read. Or, this implies at a social, political, economical level the relation between marginal and central, so, practically, all the relations that we have remembered today. In a simple question – ‘why do we read?’, ‘who are we?’.

**Mihaela Ursa:** I believe that these questions form up an incredibly good conclusion to our meeting marking the end of this season of Metacritic Circle debates. I am grateful to the students who have proposed the theme and who have accepted to come here today and have created probably the most lively Metacritic since the emergence of this circle. Thank you for this beautiful and productive evening, both at a qualitative and at a quantitative level. (*laughter*)

**Speakers:**

Adrian Tudurachi is a researcher at the Romanian Academy, Mara Semenescu, Renata Orban, Lavinia Sabou and Alex Ciorogar are Ph.D. students, Mihaela Ursa and Laura Pavel are associate professors at Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj, Alex Goldiș is assistant professor at the same university. Ștefan Baghiu, Călina Parău and Daniel Mătiș are M.A.-s and B.A.-s, also at the Faculty of Letters.

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