

Mircea MARTIN, Christian MORARU, Andrei TERIAN, *Romanian Literature as World Literature*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, ISBN 978-1-5013-2791-9, 357 p.

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The result of a collective project initiated by editors Christian Moraru, Mircea Martin and Andrei Terian, *Romanian Literature as World Literature* resets the level of critical debates approached through the current theoretical paths. Part of a series edition, this volume integrates Romanian Literature in a transnational/universal circuit, in which subjects, hierarchies, writers, translations function at different parameters. Also, the quality of “national” (be that culture or literature) is significant as long as it involves intersections and dialogs. Precisely, this collection of studies sustained by Bloomsbury Academic proposes alternative methodologies to discuss literature (postcolonialism, translation studies, world-system analysis), but it proves, as well, the possibility of a change in the “making” of literary history. If Andrei Terian used to argue against one-handed history in *Critica de Export...*, irrelevant because of his increased rank of subjectivity, the present volume can be seen as a manifesto for a collaborative work proposed by David Damrosch and Franco Moretti’s team examples.

In fact, this volume sheds light on at least two aspects. Firstly, Romanian literature is not just *presented* to a foreign public, with some narrow national peculiarities selected by the writer (as in Basil Munteanu’s *Romanian Literature History*), but it is reintegrated in a larger context where it can make sense in relation with other literatures and it can explain some anomalies that appeared within the internal phenomenon (the expansion of Avant-gardism, the appearance of ‘80 Generation, the permanent dependency on imitation). Secondly, analysing the studies in this volume, make it obvious that lately, after 1989, we can talk about another generation of critics, who surpassed what Mircea Martin called “the peripheral complex” and arrived to theoretical maturity by assuming a position in the World Literature

system. In Pascale Casanova's terms, Romanian Literature begins to balance the market of goods and ideas, by exporting literary material and recalibrating the imports.

The present volume organizes the articles into three categories. The first part, *The Making and Remaking of a World Literature. Revisiting Romanian Literary and Cultural History*, suggests different theoretical and analytical approaches to premodern Romanian Literature, excepting the articles signed by Alex Goldiș and Carmen Mușat. Beyond this, all articles have in common the circulation of ideas in a large area, the relational cultural development, the literature made during the transition from national to universal.

In this sense, Andrei Terian reconsiders the mythology of “national poet”, Mihai Eminescu, related to another sense of the expression. Although he points out that literary history destabilizes that concept, as long as this “national” peculiarity involves a transnational experience:

All these authors gained legitimacy as national poets also through “at-distance” associations of various kinds with authors belonging to other cultures (...) The very status of national poet inevitably implies, then, a multiple if often elusive inscription into a global or, at least, transnational literary circuit. (36)

More interesting, after all, is not just Eminescu's attitude towards political ideology and historical figures, but what Terian defines as a second complex of inferiority, a double peripheral position: the cultural “delay” of Romanian Literature and the comparison with great writers of World Literature.

Bogdan Crețu revisits Nicolae Milescu, Dimitrie Cantemir and the “early” Romanian Literature to stress that their works are not isolated, but that they are the effect of many intersectional positions. Therefore, Crețu argues that they imagined a possible intersection with the Oriental space, re-established afterwards by many writers of twentieth century. Caius Dobrescu insists on the effects of influence and domination in Romanian's Literature evolution. It seems that the article turns over the obsolete minority by authority and it seeks to prove that Imperialism gave Romanian culture and literature some specificities that make it relevant in a World Literature context. To exemplify, the author identifies Cantemir's figure as a “interimperial subject” (gaining

Rothman's sense) and he talks about para imperialism (*Țiganiada*) and metaimperialism (*Românii subț Mihai Voievod-Viteazul*), transmetropolitanism (*Junimea*) as concepts that show the particular relationship Romanian literature has with Imperialism and with the bigger and better World, called Europe:

The history of modern Romanian literature and modern Romanian culture in general can thus be viewed as a complex, by no means teleological narrative whose basic plot may nonetheless be summarized as an incremental "thinning out" of this presence and of imperial authority overall in Romanian space as a correspondent "thickening" of a national literature and culture increasingly capable to authorize themselves as legitimate and independent actors on the world stage. (79)

Then, Alex Goldiș talks about the importance that national history and geopolitical changes have for the process of writing literary history. More exactly, he reconsiders the literary history politically engaged because of the national goals Romania has after the World Wars and the territorial losses:

Eugen Lovinescu's *Istoria literaturii române contemporane (History of Contemporary Romanian Literature 1926-1929)*, for example, was written right after Romania's 1918 political unification into Greater Romania, while G. Călinescu 1941 *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent (History of Romanian Literature from its Origins to the Present)* was published following a sizeable loss of Romanian territory as a result of the 1940 Vienna Agreement. The case can be made that, in response to the constant threat to national identity in the region, twentieth-century Romanian and East-European literary historiography more largely have remained markedly indebted to the nineteenth-century Herderian imperative that rendered the genre a reflection of and thus an argument for the national soul. (98)

Meanwhile, the mental geography is also significant for the construction of Romanian (as eastern) identity in relation with the European one. As he notices, "in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Romanians would refer to Western Europe as a place lying «inside» a larger yet familiar world" (99). The pressure of the Western model

came later, affecting the self-construction and remodelling the shape of Romanian literary history.

Alex Goldiș claims that even if critics try to explain literary “anomalies” as a result of an organic evolution or to transform minority complexes into superiority complexes (following G. Călinescu’s steps), there are some phenomena that cannot be clarified otherwise than in dependency of other literary movements: “To read Romanian literature in such transculturally intertextual terms means, and requires, to effectively relocate it and thus, at long last, stop reining in its in-built back-and-forth among and across the networks of other literatures and cultures” (110). As the author insists, Romanian Literature and literary history cannot be isolated from World Literature, as Măiorescu, Lovinescu and, at a certain moment, Garabet Ibrăileanu pointed out an interrelation system.

In the final article of this section, Carmen Mușat discusses “imitation” which gave birth to a “nodal and intersectional identity”, determined also by language, but especially by cultural geography coordinates. Paul Celan, Emil Cioran, Benjamin Fundoianu and Tristan Tzara, writers who belong to many languages and cultures, recall such an identity as relevant for their manner of expressing themselves: “There are nodal writers and artists who belong simultaneously to multiple literatures and can be found in almost every culture. Many world-acclaimed modernists fit into this category” (126). Consequently, Carmen Mușat describes how geographical movements, interchangeable ideas and geocultural crossroads lead to alternative perspectives in reading and writing (about) literature.

The second chapter of the volume, *Literature in the Plural*, brings together different articles discussing subjects that involve transnational dialog and connections between Romanian literature and some *loci* present in other literatures. No doubt, Avant-gardism is one of the most relevant literary movements in here and a significant part of the chapter is dedicated to its phenomenalizations. In his contribution, Mircea Diaconu intends to clarify and to select literatures that can be associated with our “national” literature, crossing the geographical borders. So, he dissociates between extraterritorialism and interterritorialism, defining also “microliterature” as unstable literatures, related to many cultures and spaces, but impossible to assume by one or another:

a literary culture that builds up its identity cross-stally and in conjunction with another or several other literatures within and without the host country (...) In their turn, national literatures have repeatedly failed to adequately co-opt extraterritorial writers into their historical narratives (...) Symptomatic of microliterature, the aesthetic of affect engendered by the expression of the feeling of being nowhere at home, of being displaced and disregarded or underappreciated runs the gamut from endemic dependency, provinciality and periphery complexes to assimilation anxieties, nostalgies for extraterritorial ethno-cultural origins and kinship, and, in some extreme situations, to opposite, anti-nostalgic if not utterly anti-ethnicist and overall anti-microcultural apprehensions. (137)

Imre Jozsef Balazs revises the Hungarian Literature written in Romania in accord with a theoretical assumption of minor literatures, transterritoriality and cross-culture. Further, Ovidiu Morar moves the Avant-gardism analysis to a certain point of interest, the Jewish Romanian writers and the relation they have with the national identity. His critical opinion concentrates on Tristan Tzara and Gherasim Luca's writings, in particular on semantics and on language in translation. The political involvements of Avant-gardist movements are discussed by Paul Cernat, who manages to revise the left political associations that the Avant-garde had with the system and the right policy of '27 Generation (or Criterion Generation).

The last chapter, *Over deep time, across long distance*, proposes a significant change of viewpoint. If the first two chapters assess the relations that Romanian literature has with World Literature (as an extension of "regard"), the present one follows those "national products" successfully integrated in a larger literature, in a transnational context. Related to that, Mihai Iovanel is interested in Mircea Eliade, Cioran and Ionescu's evolution in Romania and abroad. He wants to explain the success they have in France despite their "peripheric" origins. In addition to this, he notices that each of them keeps in touch with many more literatures and cultures beyond their "national" one. Also, "each of the three writers manages, therefore, to become competitive by forging a nonmimetic relationship with the adoptive culture" (223).

In his article, Mircea Martin defines “geoliterary ecumene” starting from the similar dependency URSS exerted on its “satellite states”: “Though short-lived, Socialist Realism brutally interrupted local cultural narratives across vast geographies. Its ecumene can thus be viewed as a topological wrinkle in world literary time, as it were” (253). The socialist experience explains, eventually, the cultural delays between Romania and Western Europe, which has a completely different political background.

In spite of all the disagreements that Romanian critical reception has had with postcolonialism, the methodology proposed through this theoretic direction justifies some alternative views of texts and literatures. As a matter of fact, Bogdan Ștefănescu analyses the representations of void in postcolonial literature. In Asia or America, those images survive as *topoi* of periphery and margin. Equally, in other spaces, the representations are very similar even though they have nothing in common but the postcolonial experience. Romania and ex-soviet countries explore this void not only in literature, but also in critical discourse:

The transhistorical and transregional nature of postcolonial trauma connects world cultures on the basis of generic, structural and relational similarities constructed discursively. This is because traumatic post coloniality does not possess an inherent, geohistorical circumscribed ideology, and so its situatedness exceeds the bounds of certain spatial and temporal localizations. (265)

Following I. Wallerstein world-system analysis and the World Literature theories, Teodora Dumitru links the '80 poetry to American literature and explains this phenomenon in accord with the Romania socio-political situation. Teodora Dumitru considers that imports from Western World are replies (“double discourses”) to a relocated periphery and to Soviet microsystems:

Hardly international as far as their readership went, they were transnational in their writing praxis. As such, they exemplified a situation exactly opposite to what Moretti has in mind when he refers to the “difficulty” of saying in a European language experiences which are European no longer, for the poets couched fundamentally East European experiences in the language of radical American poetry. (284)

Additionally, Doris Mironescu discusses the exile and the literature revoked as reterritorialization. Likewise, Mihaela Ursa proves that translations “make” a literature. As Damrosch explained, reading in translation is as relevant as reading the original text. In fact, Ursa reviews those works that gain in translation, by analysing translations in Romania before 1989. As a matter of fact, she demonstrates that editions like Univers define an entire generation and contribute to a literary movement (the '80 Generation). Like Aihwa Ong, the author speaks about a very specific result of translation, “the flexible citizen, born in translation and speaker of translates”. Mihaela Ursa’s paper shows changes in theoretical approaches, because in Romania the theory of translation is still dysfunctional and almost absent.

*Romanian Literature as World Literature* is, definitely, one of the most relevant projects proposed lately. This volume shows that Romanian literature surpassed its complexes to become a part of World Literature. To sum up, national literature is being revised as a response to many transnational directions and movements. Once more, the Romanian critics consolidate a new age of theory and literature, a universal one, over-national and dialogical.