

Ștefan FIRICĂ, *Autenticitatea, sensuri și nonsensuri. Teorii românești interbelice în contexte europene* [*Authenticity, Sense and Non-Sense. Interwar Romanian Theories in European Context*], Tracus Arte, 2019, ISBN: 978-606-023-099-1, 412 p.

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One of the engines that formed the basis of the Romanian novel’s morphology from the interwar period is, unquestionably, authenticity. A term of kaleidoscopic systematics, authenticity animates a fervid interest not only for aesthetic (classical) criticism but also for cultural studies. Ștefan Firică’s book, whose theoretical foundation resides in his doctoral dissertation, *Authenticity, Senses and Nonsenses. Romanian Interwar Theories in European Contexts* is meant to re-read the authenticity theories of the interwar period in the European semantic/historical context. The author’s starting point, in a more or less poetic manner, is represented by the self-interrogation from the beginning of André Breton’s novel *Nadja*: “Qui suis je?” – specifically, the problem of identity. The identity of the Romanian novel in a pan-European context, as well as the Romanian spiritual and ethical background, will be put under a diligent microscope in this consistent volume, which seeks to achieve a permanent dialogue with the (meta)text.

Consisting of three evenly distributed parts which have been documented in detail, this book follows the phenomenon of authenticity through a quasi-inductive approach on three important parameters: meta-literary, extra-literary and finally, intra-literary. The first part proposes the synoptic depiction of the “local” theories with the use of which authors such as Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian, Camil Petrescu, Eugen Ionescu, etc. were formed. Undoubtedly, the analytical discourse evokes the generation’s mentor Eugen Lovinescu and his theoretical projects from *Sburătorul*. The “high” modernism promoted in prose was equivalent to the transition from subjectivity to objectivity and from the rural to the urban. Nevertheless, the autonomy of the aesthetic remains (following the “legacy” of Titu Maiorescu) the nucleus of the critic’s considerations. The theoretical restitutions

have the object of systematizing the vector of authenticity in the sphere of the anti-aesthetic concept. Whilst the novel is a textual way of assembling horizontally the situations of narration, the authenticist narrative techniques (autoscopy, inner monologue, autodiegetic narration, intimate diary, etc.) propose a vertical magnifying into the human's soul, through the stream of consciousness (beyond of an authorial "manoeuvre"). An important point on the author's list of interests turns out to be the neo-modernist criticism, with its brand-new jargon of narratology. The prominent figure is represented by Nicolae Manolescu and his essay, *Arca lui Noe*. Using the concept of "ionic", Nicolae Manolescu postulates a subjective *Weltanschauung*, that implies the relativisation of reality. Yet, in the subtext of his theories, Ștefan Fircă identifies the well-known "death of the author". But this model creates only a sterile laboratory for text exploration. Reaching the present-days criticism, Ștefan Fircă notices the theoreticians' propensity (such as Eugen Simion and Ion Bogdan Lefter) for the phenomenon of author's resurrection, by superimposing textual instances of author-narrator-character. The new paradigm of hermeneutics is in quasi-perfect symphony with the Romanian-publishing theoretical texts and also with the method of cultural studies. Autobiography is preferred to the disbenefit of the aseptic impersonalizing of the text, and the authentic novel would illustrate the paradox of writers that desire to crystallize into a rigid corpus the fluidity of the human soul.

In an attempt to highlight the identity of the Romanian novel by confronting it with the European otherness, *Authenticity, Senses and Nonsense. The Romanian Interwar Theories in European Contexts* proposes in the second part a correlation between Romanian "authenticity" and other terms such as *sincérité, authenticité, Eigentum, Echtheit, Wahrhaftigkeit, Individualität, Eigentlichkeit, casticismo, espontaneidad, heroicidad, autenticidad, ensimismamiento, sincerità, maschilità, teppismo, propria natura*. The analytical approach begins with revisiting the recent studies of well-known authors such as Lionel Trilling, Charles Taylor, Jacob Golomb, Alessandro Ferrara, Charles Guignon, Somogy Varga. Henceforth, theories such as Bakhtin's dialogism, Taylor's constructivism or Jacob Golomb's "sincerity" and "authenticity" grading are emphasized. The main purpose would be to underscore the idea that "authentic" texts also contain ethical/moral issues or political derailment. However, the poststructuralist critical discourses based on the author's demise could not bring to light "the identity games triggered by the alibi of fiction"

(139). Thus, the authenticity is projected on the social dimension of the text and the “screen” of common values for both writers and readers. Later, Ștefan Firică’s focal area of interest had seen a new addition, the grammaticalization’s forms of the concept, trying to depict its significance, but also its nonsense in French, German, Hispanic and Italian culture, because “[a]uthenticity (or substantialism, using Camil [Petrescu]’s term) is also a multicausal, multidisciplinary construct, impossible to reduce to the literary field” (179). Consequently, the panorama of authenticity passes through that sincerity of Rousseau, through the metafictional post-romanticism of André Gide and the radicalism of Marcel Arland. From the Germanic space, the Stirner theories are highlighted, some anti-Semitic slips of Otto Weininger, the magnitude of Husserl and Heidegger’s phenomenology (which will echo in the discourse of Camil Petrescu or Mircea Vulcănescu), theories that collaborated to the coagulation of the local meaning. Moving into Hispanic “geography”, the book explores the controversy between Unamuno and Ortega Y Gasset, *id est* between “purism” and “heroism”, both of the terms converging toward a self-reflexive and purely subjective connotation. The last cultural and spiritual dimension evoked is the Italian one, from which we note the generation of the Florentine avant-garde, represented by Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini, who discouraged the aesthetics of the *fin de siècle* and saw in “authenticity” cumulative terms such as “antipositivism, antimaterialism, anti-parliamentarism, anti-mechanization” (237). The fragmentary conclusions of this part underline the fact that the authenticist discourse in the Romanian space has its origin in the European one. Consequently, the term “benefits”, voluntarily or not, from some slips towards a politicizing sense (fascist, legionary, etc.). It is needless to say that Ștefan Firică makes an exhaustive incursion in the history of the term, giving it a high academic meticulousity. The desire to show all the “faces” of authenticity is welcomed in the Romanian research field, given the fact that in the synopsis he makes to Romanian studies dedicated to authenticity, the author often castigates the lack of interdisciplinarity and links it to the plurality of texts across Romania.

The concentric circles tighten even more, and in the third part of the volume, an attempt is made to sketch out the “specificity” of interwar authenticity in its wide range of meanings and definitions. The affinities and differences, as well as the isotopy of the word, will be explained in the “expression” of the press of Nae Ionescu, Mircea Vulcănescu, Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian, Eugen Ionescu, Emil Cioran,

just to highlight the previous section: “But the journalism between the two wars proves that the meanings of the notion often escape to various neighbouring fields and, eventually, to politics” (253). The head of the series that falls under the criticism of Ștefan Firică is Nae Ionescu, this guru of the “new generation”, professor of philosophy and logic at the University of Bucharest. Important for the economy of the discourse about Romanian authenticity are Nae Ionescu’s courses on metaphysics, which “shaped” the young interwar people under the sign of “being yourself”. Containing the most diverse ideas and sometimes juggling an obvious political intention, the roots of authenticity derive their core from terms such as “experience”, “adventure”, “orthodoxy”, “living”, etc. which do not hesitate to acquire (non)senses analogous to nationalism and autochthonism in some texts of Mircea Vulcănescu and Mircea Eliade. For the former, the assumption of authenticity occurs not only by deepening itself (by bracketing one self’s exteriority) but also by immersing in the national problem. The “authentic” ethos presents a melange between individual philosophy and common psychology. For Mircea Eliade, one of the greatest supporters of the concept, authenticity is synonymous with the existential “experiment” of pushing the human being to the heights of living: the individual’s goal would be to exhaust all kinds of circumstances and trigger them if they do not occur “on their own”. This gnoseological avatar proposed by Eliade would be meant to transform the individual into a “New Man”. Though almost the same thing was postulated by Emil Cioran in his texts such as *The Transfiguration of Romania*, where he proposes in a lyrical style and far from a philosophical jargon, the qualitative “leap” of small cultures to change, to transfigure themselves in order to save them from fading into oblivion. The author points out and even amends the fact that the “authentic” vocabulary comes close to cliché towards the end of the fourth decade of the 20th century, when the journalistic discourse acquires a right-wing political implication. The atypical essayist of the “young generation”, Eugen Ionescu, fiercely denounces the ideological errors detectable in the texts of his colleagues. The promoter of the absurd theatre will discredit authenticity as being “inauthentic” when it “infects” itself with fascist and legionary ideology.

During his analytical and critical approach, Ștefan Firică reveals to the specialized reader the multifaceted nature of authenticity. Its political, literary, philosophical, psychological, sociological, ethnological facets are inextricably intertwined with the techniques of the modern novel (acquired from Gide, Proust,

Joyce or Woolf). From this angle, the book should penetrate rapidly into local and extraterritorial university bibliographies, as it meets the demands of a comprehensive, well-documented study (as evidenced by the heterogeneity of the bibliography and annotated texts). Beyond the effort to contribute – significantly! – in the studies on the morphology of the Romanian novel, Ștefan Firică's book should also open new perspectives towards transdisciplinarity and cultural dialogue which Romanian academy needs. Finally, the value of the book *Authenticity, Senses and Nonsense. The Romanian Interwar Theories in European Contexts* is to offer a quasi-complete panorama of the literary phenomenon (and not only) in the Romanian space, opening at the same time a wide range of questions and proposals for future research projects.