

Călin TEUTIȘAN, *Scenarii ale criticii. Protagonisti, metode, interpretări*, [“Scenarios of Critique: Protagonists, Methods, Interpretations”], Școala Ardeleană, 2021, ISBN 978-606-797-680-9, 276 p.

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In domestic literary criticism and historiography, a pronounced predilection – even an obsession – for individualism has long persisted, where the primacy of the “I” overshadows the collective “we.” This tendency promotes a theoretical framework that is ostensibly monadic rather than catalytic, driven by an enduring pursuit of innovation that often necessitates a deliberate severance from earlier paradigms deemed obsolete or incongruent with emerging intellectual currents.

This proclivity for fragmentation, particularly when isolating specific authorial figures – even within the same critical school – can be insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the transitions and paradigm shifts between critical epochs. Against this backdrop, Călin Teuțișan's 2021 volume, *Scenarii ale criticii. Protagonisti, metode, interpretări* [“Scenarios of Critique: Protagonists, Methods, Interpretations”], stands as a timely and significant contribution. Teuțișan seeks to address these inherent deficiencies in communitarian approaches by invoking Maurice Blanchot's concept of the *communauté inavouable*. He illustrates how the Cluj School of literary criticism coalesces into a unified analytical lens, effectively integrating an array of “protagonists” into a collective “critical scenario.” This scenario gains significance both when each critic is analysed independently and when considered in relation to their peers.

Teuțișan's critical framework concerning the “Cluj School” unfolds across a tripartite structure, which he meticulously develops throughout the book's seven chapters. Firstly, he examines the local or regional dimension, exploring both homologies and divergences within this critical community. Secondly, he prioritises a transnational perspective, framing it as a peripheral syndrome paradoxically counterbalanced by what he terms “Central-European egos” (7). Lastly, he identifies

specific characteristics of the Cluj literary sphere, canonised across generations according to the theoretical and methodological acuity of the critics studied—ranging from D. Popovici, Ioana Em. Petrescu, Ion Pop, Liviu Petrescu, Mircea Muthu, Corin Braga, to the post-2000 generation, including Alex Goldiș, Emanuel Modoc, Cosmin Borza, Adriana Stan, Daiana Gârdan, Ștefan Baghiu, among others.

Teuțișan skilfully incorporates these figures into the envisioned “critical scenario,” demonstrating how each generation either perpetuates or challenges the preceding critical discourse. This analysis is executed with meticulous precision, seamlessly transitioning from international critical-philosophical influences – thoroughly researched and contextualised by Teuțișan – to their specific adaptations within the local milieu. This approach captures both the strengths and vulnerabilities inherent in the process, exemplified through detailed examinations of each literary critic or historian who engages with these influences.

In this analytical panorama, D. Popovici, who inaugurates Teuțișan's series of critiques, aligns with the French critical tradition – most notably Paul Hazard and Mario Roques – and “adopts a method characterised by scientific determinism of a historicist nature” (13). Operating within an eminently formalist register – marked by post-Lansonian cadences and tracing a lineage to Roland Barthes and Patrizia Lombardo – Popovici distinguishes himself through his ability to harmonise historical and literary dimensions. As Teuțișan specifies, “post-Lansonism in Popovici's version would be based on historical analysis to which is added the rhetoric of literary discourse” (19). Popovici thus offers a form of criticism that positions the social sphere as a seismograph of cultural development, while concurrently presenting a sociology of culture that reconciles local characteristics with universal ones, notably acknowledging the significance of Slavonic influence in the region.

However, Teuțișan, maintaining the subtlety of his discourse throughout the volume, does not shy away from highlighting the shortcomings of Popovici's post-Lansonian framework. The absolutisation of political and historical criteria leads to a distortion of the axiological order in establishing a literary canon – as evidenced in the case of Rebreanu, whose significance is overshadowed by an exaggerated focus on Latinism, with his rehabilitation occurring only implicitly. This approach also alters the structures of the imaginary, exemplified by Eminescu, whose work is inscribed within a

theory of genius, thereby evading a "more theoretical" definition of Romanian Romanticism.

The rhetorical dimension of Teuțișan's volume thus becomes self-legitimising, addressing gaps within critical discourse by offering a panoramic view of subsequent critics, such as Ioana Em. Petrescu. Petrescu employs "an unusual formula of revelatory criticism, yet grounded in rationalist tools"¹ (34). Specifically, she disentangles the complexities constraining poetic discourse, presenting it in an essentialised form that enables the identification of key axiological layers. While remaining within the scientific vein characteristic of her predecessor, she enriches it with a metaphysical dimension, particularly manifested in language. Her critical approach facilitates the organisation of the imaginary by incorporating theoretical developments from the cosmological model, defined as "the drawing of the world in the consciousness of the subject and the sum of the relations between the two"² (40). This is particularly significant in her analysis of Eminescu, whose poetry she polarises tripartitely according to the stages of its creation: (1) the Pythagorean model – a harmonious vision of the universe featuring the child and the bard; (2) the Schopenhauerian model – the deconstruction of the previous order embodied by the genius/demon; and (3) the Kantian model – the proclamation of the death or absence of divinity, leading to the disintegration of both subject and surrounding world, represented by Caesar (40–41).

Regarding Liviu Petrescu's critical methodology, which traces its lineage to the New French Criticism, Teuțișan underscores the employment of the ethical – aesthetic binomial. Within this framework, the aesthetic dimension predominates, framed by a form of impressionism that Ioana Em. Petrescu describes as the "much more expressive phrase *pure intuition of form*"³ (54), capable of resolving ethical crises. By invoking influences such as Fredric Jameson, Alvin Toffler, and Jean-François Lyotard – whose ideas are tied to the evolution of knowledge in relation to stages shaped by the consolidation of capitalist society – Teuțișan identifies two epistemological models in Liviu Petrescu's work: the scientific and the mythical. These models are expressed

¹ "o formulă insolită de critică revelatorie, dar bazată pe instrumente raționaliste" (My translation).

² "desenul lumii în conștiința subiectului și suma relațiilor dintre acestea două" (My translation).

³ "cu mult mai expresiva sintagmă *intuiție pură a formei*" (My translation).

through “meta-narratives” (65) and operationalised via the configuration of a hero and a process.

The first model represents a positivist strand, focusing on humanity as the protagonist evolving through knowledge – “a ‘logical’ model”⁴ (65). The second reveals a pronounced interest in philosophy as a discipline capable of synthesising multiple discourses – “a ‘meta-logical’ model”⁵ (65). According to Petrescu, the interplay between these models facilitates a theorisation—articulated through Anglo-Saxon terminology – of two distinct phases of modernism: early and high (65). This framework enables an understanding of Romanian postmodernism as an outcome of these phases’ transformation, contextualised by the absence of a (post)industrial society in Romania.

Ion Pop introduces a critical procedure influenced by figures such as Jean Rousset, Gaston Bachelard, G. R. Hocke, Georges Poulet, Jean-Pierre Richard, Hugo Friedrich, Hans Robert Jauss, and Henri Bergson. In his approach, synthesis becomes a pivotal tool – not as dilution but as the critic-poet’s ability to adapt his discursive apparatus to encompass broader areas of discourse, both globally and individually. The “idea of interdependence between existence and writing”⁶ (75), along with critical mediation in the tradition of Durand and Bachelard, is expressed in both Pop’s critical works and his poetry. This dual articulation “paves the way for a later analysis such as that of Corin Braga [...] based on psychoanalytic criticism”⁷ (82). While Ion Pop suggests an osmosis between the critical and poetic acts (101-102), this interplay becomes even more pronounced in Corin Braga’s work.

Teuțișan notes a seamless blend of scientific rigour and discursive narrativity in Braga’s writings, where fictional imperatives reinforce his theoretical positions. Braga engages in both critical and literary polemics with the surrealism and oneirism of the 1960s, highlighting a distinctive integration of these approaches (192-193). Through his focus on psychoanalysis, psychohistory, psychogeography, and psychobiography, Braga theoretically challenges and deconstructs several stereotypes of earlier literary criticism by employing concepts such as archetype, anarchetype, and eschatype. For instance, he

⁴ “un model «logic»” (My translation).

⁵ “un model «meta-logic»” (My translation).

⁶ “ideea de interdependență între existență și scriitură” (My translation).

⁷ “netezind calea către o analiză ulterioară cum va fi cea a lui Corin Braga [...] bazată pe critica psihanalitică” (My translation).

reinterprets the thesis of absurdity in the works of Urmuz, providing a fresh analytical perspective. On a fictional level, Braga introduces a new form of oneirism influenced by the allure of neuroscience, elucidating the mechanisms behind dream functioning. Teuțișan contextualises these elements in a detailed and innovative manner, demonstrating an intimate engagement with both Braga's critical and fictional texts, thereby showcasing his skill at bridging these two realms.

A nuanced portrayal of Mircea Muthu's critical discourse emerges, characterised by two primary focal points: “aesthetics and Balkanology”⁸ (117). Teuțișan highlights Muthu's innovation at the morphological level, evident in his constant self-questioning of his critical approach and his deliberate avoidance of absolutising any conclusions. This reflective quality imbues Muthu's work with a dynamic, ever-evolving nature that resists fixed interpretations.

Regarding content innovations, Muthu transcends Edward Said's perspective on Orientalism – as a fetishisation imposed by the West, more fictional than real – and moves beyond Maria Todorova's approach, which tends to absolutise Ottoman influence in the Balkans. Instead, Muthu offers “a Byzantine working hypothesis, which he supports with arguments drawn from both theoretical and aesthetic, particularly literary, fields”⁹ (129). This approach maintains a dual perspective: preserving the social dimension of the Orient while acknowledging its fictional aspects, thereby enhancing its accessibility and comprehension by the West. Muthu's method bridges cultural and critical interpretations, providing a multidimensional view that integrates both the tangible and imagined Orient.

The final chapter of the volume is dedicated to the generation of the 2000s, within which Teuțișan identifies three distinct directions: (1) “critical monographism with theoretical détente”¹⁰ (211); (2) “critical and literary-historical synthesis”¹¹ with a focus on “extra-aesthetic, ideological criteria”¹² (212); and (3) “quantitative studies”¹³ (212), inspired by a Morettian lineage. These studies employ new tools such as *distant*

⁸ “estetica și balcanologia” (My translation).

⁹ “ofere o ipoteză bizantină de lucru, pe care o instrumentează cu argumente din câmpul teoretic, dar și estetic, în speță literară” (My translation).

¹⁰ “monografismul critic cu detentă teoretică” (My translation).

¹¹ “sinteza critică și istorico-literară” (My translation).

¹² “criterii extraestetice, ideologice” (My translation).

¹³ “studiile cantitative” (My translation).

reading and explore centre-periphery dichotomies, aligning with methodologies of *World Literature*. This perspective highlights economic inequalities between different literary fields, drawing on Immanuel Wallerstein's theories.

Despite the *digital turn*, the young researchers mentioned by Teuțișan – Alex Goldiș, Emanuel Modoc, Daiana Gârdan, Ștefan Baghiu, Cosmin Borza, Adriana Stan, Ovio Olaru, among others – while operating with new methodological tools, remain integral to the Cluj literary school. Their shared focus lies in analysing how extra-literary phenomena influence deviations and turning points in the literary realm. For example, Modoc examines the international circulation of peripheral literatures, while Goldiș explores the relationship between aesthetic and political ideology in post-war Romanian literary criticism.

A key challenge this generation seeks to address is the backdrop of a critical tradition characterised by the chronicling of impressionist criticism, which tends to absolutise the autonomy of aesthetics. Consequently, as Teuțișan notes, there is a necessity to pursue “ideological platforms, social, economic, and cultural anthropological phenomena”¹⁴ (219), reflecting a move towards integrating broader contextual factors into literary analysis.

Through this comprehensive examination, Teuțișan not only catalogues the critical trajectories shaped by each individual author but also presents them dialectically, highlighting areas of rupture and convergence. He encapsulates a dialogic structure between the international literary landscape and the resemanticisation of its trajectories within the local context of the Cluj School. This dual focus allows him to map the dynamics between global influences and their local adaptations, offering a nuanced understanding of the evolution of literary criticism within this tradition.

Moreover, the anticipation of a continuing communal spirit in the evolutionary trajectory of Romanian criticism, as projected by Teuțișan in 2021, has already materialised. This is evidenced by large-scale collective projects such as *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (2019), *Theory in the “Post” Era* (2021), and *Pentru o nouă cultură critică românească* [*For a New Romanian Critical Culture*, 2024]. These initiatives not only demonstrate the naturalisation of such interests in contemporary

¹⁴ “platforme ideologice, fenomene sociale, economice și de antropologie culturală” (My translation).

research fields but also underscore the growing necessity for a collective approach within the broader landscape of literary studies.

In conclusion, Călin Teuțișan's *Scenarii ale criticii* stands as a seminal work that bridges individual critical endeavours with a collective scholarly narrative. By meticulously tracing the evolution of the Cluj School and situating it within both local and international contexts, Teuțișan contributes profoundly to our understanding of the dynamics shaping modern literary criticism. His dialectical approach, rich in analytical depth and theoretical insight, not only honours the legacy of his predecessors but also paves the way for future scholarly explorations in the field.