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TRANSCULTURAL MIRRORS. LITERARY AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

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Anca-Teodora ŞERBAN-OPRESCU¹

Transcultural Mirrors. Literary and Cultural Perspectives (I) is a volume reuniting a total of 31 single-authored chapters meant to capture and display diverse aspects and facets of literary and cultural studies, whose common thread line is the attempt of the editor, Marius Miheţ, to offer a comprehensive reflection of literary phenomena in present context(s).

In *Romanian Literary Exile and The Identity of Memory* Iulian Boldea writes about how the memory of the Romanian exile reveals itself to be, especially through its two exponential representatives, Monica Lovinescu and Virgil Ierunca, a space of literature and experience in which the trauma of identity intersects with the need for confession, for the necessary and authentic ethical deposition. Polemic disposition, satirical nerve, the dynamics of sarcasm and irony are the hallmarks of Monica Lovinescu's critical discourse, articulated above all in terms of a rhetoric of truth, however difficult it may be to accept. It can also be observed that Virgil Ierunca perceives the word in its double intention and in its double realization; the word saves through the sliver of transcendence that it puts into play, that it inevitably contains, but it also engages the being in an almost tragic game of limits and revolt, of openness and closure.

Rodica Ilie, in *Le manifeste littéraire et la légitimation avant-gardiste – du national au transnational, du théorique au littéraire*, aims to delineate various structural, rhetorical, poetic, and pragmatic characteristics of manifestos as discourses that exist outside their contemporary context, yet still hold a legitimizing influence within the realm of cultural prestige. To conduct a comprehensive analysis, combining both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, Ilie employs a methodology that delves into the strategies and means used to promote innovative and experimental artistic codes in the first half of the twentieth century through literary manifestos. For this purpose, she adopts the hermeneutic model proposed by Paul Ricoeur, in addition to perspectives rooted in the analysis of the history of ideas and taste.

¹ Anca-Teodora Şerban-Opreescu, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, teodora.oprescu@rei.ase.ro.

In *The Romanian Mythology of Death*, Marina Cap-Bun highlights some of the essential components of the Romanian mythology of death, from ritual songs and social practices associated with funeral rites, to the preparation of the "wanderer's coffin" for the great journey to the afterlife, while also tracing the recent cultural remodeling of burial customs. The case study chosen to illustrate them is the Merry Cemetery from Săpânța. It is the most spectacular illustration of the way in which successive cultural layers overlapped and merged, more precisely, the ritual joy of the Thracian-Getian people (documented by Herodotus) and the obligatory externalization of suffering, also ritualistic, that the Roman layer added, with the conquest and Romanization of Dacia.

In *Literary Influence: Old Methods for New Interpretations*, Iulia Micu draws an itinerary analysis of the notion of influence and to do that, she considers the fact that such a methodological approach has to focus, firstly, on the discussion upon the work of art's genesis and secondly on its understanding and interpretation.

Antonio Patraș talks about Alexandru A. Macedonski, as a classic of Romanian poetry and national Romanian culture and captures in his study the most significant moments of the life and work of Alexandru Macedonski, the most important representative of modernism in the Romanian literature until the First World War, with the intention of re-evaluating his literary and cultural activity, most of the times interpreted tendentiously by commentators, as an expression of resentment towards Eminescu, the national poet of Romanians. In reality, Macedonski was, like Eminescu, a "classic" of the national culture.

George Neagoe sets to highlight a few observations regarding the concept of Romanticism. The author emphasizes the ambiguities, the controversies and the idiosyncrasies which prolonged in the general debate. One of the most relevant topics deals with the symbiosis between Western European influences and national ideas in the Romanian culture during the 19th century.

In *As in a Labyrinth of Mirrors".... Reflections of Crisis Identity in Women's Cancer Writings*, Emanuela Ilie analyzes a (meta) confessional territory almost unknown, represented by a limited series of cancer narratives, i.e. auto-biographical texts, written during radical identity crisis, caused by receiving a diagnosis perceived as lethal. Although the pages of each of these crisis confessions seem to mirror only the image of cancer, the authors show that the identity (not so much the physical one as the spiritual one) has, in fact, a key role in such shaken autobiographies. E. Ilie analyses coping strategies, be those religious, familial, or literary, that the writers diagnosed with cancer use to soften or to defeat torment.

Reading the diary of the Romanian king Carol II, in *The King Is Playing: Royal Rhetoric and Stylistics*, Îsemnări zilnice (Daily Notes), Felix Nicolau notices that they may seem sketchy, but they are loaded with significant deeds and details.

Additionally, it is stylistically marked from the point of view of omissions, allusions, and dissimulations. The epoch was one of complex historical background and the author made use of various rhetoric figures. Rhetoric, oratory, and stylistics play many roles in the autobiographical narrative. One identifies a macro rhetoric intended to delineate, on the one hand, a sophisticated royal portrait and to decipher and characterize people belonging to the high society, on the other hand, a strategy to cope with a tumultuous decade.

In her contribution, *"All Quiet on the Western Front" by Erich Maria Remarque. A Contextual Exploration of Perceptions, Attitudes, and Emotional States*, Cristina Balinte follows the reception in the Romanian literary world of the international success achieved by Erich Maria Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929). She observes the reactions in the press (newspapers, literary magazines), focusing on the interventions, opinions, and comments of some representative Romanian writers of the time (F. Aderca, M. Sebastian, Cezar Petrescu, N. Crainic, R. Dianu etc.). The scope is to highlight the mechanism, in many cases ideological, through which the process of receiving the book and its translation into Romanian influences psychologies, noticeable in perceptions, attitudes, emotions.

Simona Preda takes the reader into an interesting journey, tracing the *Concept of "New Man" in Children's Literature During Romanian Communism*. In the form that emerged in Romania in the 1950s, the concept of New Man represented a product a product imported through the Soviet channel and was closely supervised by the authorities enslaved by Moscow. The New Man is, in essence, a syntagma with a multiple signification, continuously nuanced throughout a century, displaying regional variations, and not exclusive to communism; it originates from integralist and millenarian religious doctrines. Preda did not intend to analyze its origin, but the concept of the New Man was also circulated by fascism and Nazism – all totalitarianisms basically predicting the transformation of the old man into a new one.

Three authors in the volume are preoccupied with the writings Matei Vişniec, namely Marius Miheţ, Nicoleta Minciu and Mihaela Doga. Marius Miheţ bestows a comprehensive look at *The New Soteriology. The Prose of Matei Vişniec* and concludes that Vişniec's works emphasize that one cannot remain a passive witness to the spiritual decline of the modern world. Any effort to engage with this reality carries the inherent risk of marginalization. His prose unfolds through dystopian landscapes, intimate and sweeping apocalypses, absurdist narratives, and speculative visions grounded in current realities—all revolving around the unsettling idea that humanity is becoming a danger to itself.

Along the same writings, Simona Nicoleta Minciu analyses a series of representations of the bestiary in Matei Vişniec's work, referring to dramatic texts and prose. In *Matei Vişniec and the Controversial Realm of the Absurd*, Mirela

Mihaela Doga reiterates the main points that frame the dramaturgy of the contemporary Romanian writer in the aesthetics of the absurd literature, mainly absurd drama. However, delving into the array of significant critical references and the author's own testimonies does not allow for a definitive conclusion regarding his association with the absurd.

In *Obsessive Odysseic Nature. An Alephic Reading of Space in Homer, Dante, Joyce and Moravia's Works*, Oana Ursache studies the odysseic quest and its narrative, as one of the most enduring and versatile myths and therefore literary motifs, with a particular resonance in the idea of the 'obsessive odysseic characters', as the author of the study describes them. The author conducts a comprehensive interdisciplinary analysis of this theme in a selection of European authors, spanning ancient to modern times: from Homer to Virgil, Dante Alighieri, Cervantes, Joyce, and Alberto Moravia, but also mentioning Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Flaubert, Beckett, Kafka, and Thomas Mann, with a special attention to the Romanian author, Panait Istrati.

In *Counter-ideological utopia in Yan Lianke's "Lenin's Kisses"*, Răzvan Mitu looks at configurations of heterotopia and heterochrony articulated in Chinese writer Yan Lianke's novel *Shouhuo* (*Lenin's Kisses*) and how these concepts determine a counter-ideological discourse in the narrative.

The study *The Earth's Most Beloved Son" or the Ultimate Confession. The Subversive Discourse and its Stylistic Masks* attempts to re-assess the legacy of a famous novel (*Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni*/ *The Earth's Most Beloved Son*) as far as the subversive discourse is concerned, but also emphasizes its criticism towards the Communist regime and the social system it produced. The author, Andrei Simuț concludes with a brief comparison with the cinematographic adaptation of Preda's novel.

Starting from the premise that contemporary literature and cultural practices, as well as the entire artistic language are still adjusting and restoring themselves, at least in East-European countries, after the damages and wounds that communism and the dominant narratives or discourses have generated, in *Adaptation as A Survival Mechanism: Women Writers Facing Social Change*, Anastasia Gavrilovici explores the various ways in which the images of woman and gender have been created, or reconstructed throughout time in a patriarchal system responsible for a cultural establishment rather masculine than gender-balanced. Central to this study is the analysis of works of poetry written by women-authors from Romania, who address the distinction between feminine and female, politics of representations and the ideological insertions of literature.

Simona Gabriela Noapteș takes us on journey discovering *Heterotopias in the Novels of Bohumil Hrabal. "Harlequin's Millions" and "I Served the King of England"*, while in *Literature and Transculturality. Andrei Ungureanu's "Nașterea Eroului"*:

A Poetics of Redemption Elena-Luiza Negură makes a case for the poetics of Andrei Ungureanu representing the world in a shell, offering to the reader a display of most intimate vibrations of what humanity has become throughout history.

In *Crises, Limitations and Vulnerability in the History of Chinese Diaspora in Romania from 1990 to 2022* Șerban Toader presents a series of critical events and conflicts in the history of the Chinese Diaspora in Romania, a history that spans from 1990 up to present, 33 years of ongoing dramas, both familial and societal, centered around two primary groups: merchants and workers.

The volume offers of kaleidoscope of studies, both Romanian and from abroad. Furthermore, a strong common denominator that runs through the volume *Transcultural Mirrors. Literary and Cultural Perspectives (I)* is the exploration of identity in all its forms: personal, cultural, national, and literary, contextualized in transformation, crisis, or transgression. Across the diversity of themes, authors, and methodologies used in the studies, the volume reflects a shared concern with how people, through literature reflect and respond to: historical traumas (exile, communism, war), ideological and political structures (totalitarian regime), cultural and literary forms of expression (modernism, romanticism, avant-garde manifestos), transcultural and transnational influences (Western, European, East-European influences, reception of foreign authors, diasporic perspective), existential and artistic crises (cancer narratives, dystopian fiction, absurdism).

One might argue that the volume is too diverse to make for one unifying element, but I would argue that strength lies in diversity, as, each chapter, in its own way, contributes to a multifaceted inquiry into how literature and cultural practices mirror and respond to shifting paradigms of meaning, representation, and identity in both national and global frameworks.

This thematic coherence allows the volume to function not only as a collection of individual studies, but also as a composite reflection on the human condition in contemporary and historical contexts.

The author

Anca-Teodora Șerban-Opreșcu is an Associate Professor of English, Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication, School of International Business and Economics, Bucharest University of Economic Studies. She teaches Business Communication, Intercultural and Organizational Communication, Research Methodology. With a PhD in Cultural Studies and postdoctoral studies in Economics, Dr. Șerban-Opreșcu is interested in ways to integrate Social Sciences and Humanities in original pieces of research.