

**UNIVERSITATEA BABEȘ - BOLYAI CLUJ - NAPOCA
FACULTATEA DE LITERE**

**METAMORPHOSES OF THE POST-WAR ROMANIAN
CRITICISM**

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Coordonator științific:
Profesor univ. dr. Ion Pop

Doctorand:
Cliveț (Cernea) Nicoleta

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Key-words: *literary criticism, „New Criticism“, socialist realism, ideological pressure, metamorphosis, literary review, literary canon, polemic, aesthetic revival, Marxist back-ground, autonomy of the aesthetic, value judgement, interwar critical model, method, objectivity, structuralism, thematism.*

Together with the attempt to sketch some of the *Metamorphoses of the post-War Romanian Criticism*, the interest of the present work is to show that during the evolution of the critical discourse after the second World War, there cannot be talked about the existence of a clear-cut distinction between the principles of the “old criticism”, from the interwar period, and those of the post-War, “new criticism”, at least not before the 1990s, or about an inflecting point, respectively, such that of the polemic between R. Barthes and R. Picard, which is seen as the birth certificate of the “New Criticism” in the French literary space. Despite of the rugged terrain it stood on, with the socialist-realist syncope from 1948 to 1965, and then, with the clustering of the literary world after 1971 around the new ideology of the literary, the post-War criticism is built on the principle of continuity with the criticism of the interwar period, but permitting the entrance of the “new” methods of interpretation coming from the Occidental space. With no proper conceptual breaches, but with incontestable improvements of method, the criticism after 1965 can be placed under the sign of the *metamorphosis*, as it is understood by M. Martin in his volume *Criticism and profundity*: as “dynamic organicity”. In this case, the “organicity”, which grants the foundations and confers the unity of the post-Wars critical phenomenon, pertains to the constant resort to the model offered in the interwar period (as it was shaped by E. Lovinescu and “the Lovinescians”), while the “dynamics” is given by the receptiveness to the suggestions of the new interpreting techniques patented in the Occidental area. For the debutants of the years between 1965 and 1971, these suggestions came especially from the French “New Criticism”, which privilege the thematic and structuralist formulas.

There are two criteria of selection for the critics analysed here: firstly, that of the editorial debut, mandatorily placed in the interval between 1964 and 1971, the period of the “meltdown”, the “little liberalization”, when the return to the critical tradition from the interwar period and the opening towards the exegetic practices of the “New Criticism” happen simultaneously. Secondly, the calling to contribute to the shaping of these metamorphoses is addressed to those who had, or at least, started from an activity of literary review. Such a pertaining to the category of diagnosticians is relevant, because from the rubrics of the literary columns decisive battles for the shaping of the post-War canon have been fought, and because the same rubrics included the few but relevant polemics of that period.

The first chapter of this work – *From the interwar criticism towards the post-War criticism: continuity and syncope* – describes, in three stages, the aspects of the Romanian critical discourse starting with the interwar period and going through the socialist-realism syncope in order to get to the aesthetic revival registered in the 1960s. E. Lovinescu and “the Lovinescians”, (G. Călinescu, P. Constantinescu, T. Vianu, Vl. Streinu, Șb. Cioculescu and Perpessicius) are the focus of a group-portrait, of an analysis directed towards the specific notes (which determined the post-War critics to seek different critical models in them), as well as towards the common elements which offered the foundations for the post-War criticism: aesthetic relativism; the suspicious attitude towards any form of dogma; the progressive, liberal thinking, looking into the future and open to novelty; the interest and support for “those who come”; the understanding of criticism as a superior form of creation, capable of transposing the lively and the immediate with literary means, in an artistic style which does not leave aside the precision and clarity; the moral sense, which implies consistency, professionalism, honesty and the refuse of any intrusion in the critical act; the polemic spirit.

Lovinescu’s model is seen as a touchstone by the endorsers of the *Manifesto of the Literary Circle from Sibiu*, a letter-manifesto which is atypical from at least two points of view: on one hand, they postulate the crisis of the culture seen not as a global phenomenon, but only as a symptom of local deficiencies and disequilibrium; on the other hand, the stake is not the complete negation and rupture, but solutions of continuity inside modernism are proposed instead. Considered “retrograde” and “hostile”, the *Circle’s* enterprise was quickly amended: some of its members were imprisoned, others marginalized, and their comeback to the literary life was delayed until after 1965. Practically, they became known to the public at the same time as the generation of the 1960s, and the two decades between their debut and their visibility distinguished them significantly in terms of style and even of the assertion of different theoretical options: I. Negoïtescu remains a Lovinescian in conception, but having unquestionable stylistic influences from Călinescu, C Regman resembles Cioculescu, Ov. Cotruș proclaims himself Maiorescu’s follower, attempting to set the philosophical and aesthetic foundations of the literary criticism, while N. Balotă makes the step towards hermeneutics.

Starting with 1947, when the Marxist background was decreed as the only one valid, the discussions around the autonomy of the aesthetic or the “critical creation” were prohibited. Under the careful guidance of the Party, art became the modality to awake the fighting conscience. The writers, constrained to get in contact with “the masses” in order to express the ideals of the Party, are forced to replace their artistic creed with the creed of the Party and to contribute to the illustration of the Marxist theses by the means of “art with tendency”. This was the birth not only of a “manicheist” pseudo-literature, excessively typified and lacking aesthetic value, but also of a

criticism made to its measure. The socialist-realist criticism, in its aberrant forms, was represented by ideologists as I. Vitner, M. Novicov or L. Răutu. This doesn't mean that it lacked other spokesmen, from the lines of the aesthetic critics, not only among those who became known in the interwar period, and who survived by compromising more or less, but also among the critics who have come out on the wrong track after the second World War, becoming the supporters of the "new method in art". Among them are Paul Georgescu, Savin Bratu, Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, or Paul Cornea, critics who have returned, to some extent, to the proper study of literature after 1965.

The come-back to the model of the aesthetic criticism, practised in the interwar, period was not a natural process which could have been carried out by an explicit polemic or a sudden and violent delimitation from the socialist realism, but, on the contrary, it resembled a long slow death. Thus, the clichés of a poignantly ideological lecture are still to be found, even after the beginning of the un-sovietization, in most of the debuts happening after the 1960s. The restoration of the aesthetic criterion in the critical judgement is outlined more clearly after 1964-1965, obliquely, directing the attention towards those features which implicitly refuted the aberration of the socialist realism. The critical discourse regains, thus, the creative dimension. It returns to "critical creation", the critical model of Călinescu, which was twice more practical and beneficial: in the first place, because the authorities trusted it, and then because it provided the "criticism of creation" with the most generous formula, enabling it to return to the autonomy of the aesthetic, to get back to the literary past outside the boundaries of ideology and to revive the critical discourse after one and a half century of doctrinarian barbarism. The counteraction appeared immediately after this restoration: in the first line of those against Călinescu's method are the members of "The Literary Circle". Their intention was not to disavow Călinescu, the literary critic, but to refuse the hegemonic pretences of the "impressionist" formula, considered excessively relative and incoherent as a method because of its lack of philosophic and aesthetic grounds. Apart from these constantly imputed deficiencies, Călinescu's formula was suspected to be a construct and a vehicle for self-assertion. In essence, the dispute between the "Călinescians" and "anti-Călinescians" can be transposed in the terms of another opposition: that between an "impressionist", relativist criticism, open towards the new, west-European, methodologies and a new, "trend-setting" criticism, with solid aesthetic and philosophical foundations. In the end, the anti-Călinescians will renounce the polemic, especially after the first signs of literary reviving.

After the war, the Romanian literary criticism maintains a certain uniformity, due, first of all, to the constant need of solidarity against the threats of the political. The causes for this deficit in theorizing the concept of literary criticism after the second World Wars, as well as for the rarefied polemics can be attributed to the official background, the only one admitted: the Marxism. The

consequences were not delayed: every time they were accounted for their various “escapades” in the theoretically forbidden territories of the occidental methodologies, our post-Wars critics explain themselves by transforming the “Marxist spirit” into one of vast complexity and holding the latency of every creative valences. In this way, because of a pragmatic ambiguousness, the Marxism was turned into a large conceptual umbrella with a larger and larger spread, able to shelter the most diverse exegetic practices. But because, even laden with the ambiguity of its many “creative” significations, the Marxist spirit was lurking awake in the shadows, nobody was really interested in minutely defining their own critical conception, at least not at the extent it used to happen between the two World Wars. The theoretical statements are made curtly in forewords, afterwords, “literary enquiries” or interviews, the critics preferring the practice to theory. The only veritable polemic which divided the literary and cultural scene in two parts and involved all the important actors was the “proto-synchronism” – a new attempt of the politics, in the form of Ceaușescu’s nationalism, to control the aesthetic and to divert it again from its natural course.

While the innovators of the French criticism reacted, immediately after the second World War, against the biographic-documentarist positivism and the impressionism, our critics form the generation of the 1960s, at the beginning of their career, are forced to react to an aggressive sociologist positivism such the socialist realism and to search not as much for a change of the critical canon but, in a more modest and realistic approach, for the re-establishment of the autonomy of the aesthetic. The suggestions that came from the interwar period towards the “new criticism” are assumed on the run, in a soft manner most of the times, and from practical reasons, as the sanitation of the literary space. The echo of the Occidental talks about the status of the literary criticism is not directly reflected in the exegeses form our literary space; on the contrary, the adherence to one of the new methods is carefully made, sometimes only at the end of an intervention meant to make it ambiguous, so that the philosophy behind the methods should be as little visible as possible – all this because the “new criticism” has brought, together with a new language, a new philosophical conception about the human kind, fundamentally different from the Marxist philosophy. Directed, from a phenomenological and existentialist point of view, towards the individual and concrete, the new critical methods see the literary work as an expression of a subject and not of a “class” set to conquer “new peaks of civilisation and progress”.

Moreover, the renewal has impact over the critical style, and many discover the taste of stylistic, rhetorical or narratological approaches. The general conception did not change, in essence, but remains tributary to the interwar critical conception, by the constant interest for critical creativity and for axiology. Unlike the French “New Criticism” (which appeared in a cultural space where the experience of the infringement of the autonomy of the aesthetic was not

known), our interwar criticism is not at all content with the idea of depriving itself of the value judgement. The critical verdict remains among the permanent preoccupations of the critics, so the indifference to axiology of their western brethren is always corrected by the recourse to the interwar models. From the French new critics, G. Picon, J.-P. Richard, J. Starobinski and R. Barthes are those who had a visible modelling influence over the actions of the forth generation after Maiorescu.

Cornel Regman's activity as a literary chronicler reached its acme in the 70s and is characterized by constant denouncement of axiological phoniness and half of measure in the critical exercises of his fellows, and by the untiringly watch for the maintenance of the moral sanity in the literary space. Prone to talkativeness, the critic is an enemy of the "artistic" excesses in the literary studies and a reputable polemist. His eye is particularly keen on seeing the scantiness, the flaws of production or finishing, the "power failures" generated by the rarefied substance or the mannerism of conception. His humoristic fiber tinted with irony or even sarcasm pairs with his pedagogical-moralist predispositions and even becomes their necessary corrective, this resulting in a rather conservative critic formula. The "borrowed" interpretation methods are recognized and labelled only as decorative, the critic's attitude being at first rather contentious towards their utility and finally, of explicit rejection. The autochthonous critical tradition is seen as solid enough to provide the critical genre with an organic evolution. His style is similar to Cioculescu's style, combining the taste for chatting and colloquial expression with incisiveness and denouncement of any barter with the literary glory. He finds his style especially in "the chronicle of the literary review" he wrote between 1967 and 1969 at the "Tomis" literary magazine, where the majority of his sharp amendments were written on behalf of those who, unable to find objectiveness, had submitted to their "impressions".

Ion Negoïtescu combines Lovinescu's directing line with Călinescu's style; his criticism is one of quasi-erotic communion, not as much with the literary work in its whole as with those fragments which find spontaneous reverberance in his heart. The sensuality, the alexandrinist concreteness of his style and its narcotic metaphoricity have often determined the comparison of his style with Richard's thematism, although I. Negoïtescu does not practise the stated type of criticism as much as a "bewitched" criticism, in-love with or seduced by the passages that speak the language of his sensibility, and hence the natural reserve towards the verdicts he gives in this way. As a literary historian, he defends the aesthetic criterion, from a re-assumed Lovinescian position, as well as an ideological criterion, of socio-historic nature, connected to the way an author approaches history: does he set out to meet it, does he get involved or avoids the confrontation and prefers to conceptualize and to aesthetize? He prefers those writers who are open to Europeanization, to the

liberal values of the Occident and amends those who adopt a passive, predestinarian, “Oriental” attitude. Starting from the values of the “implicit”, from what has transforming potential, the critic puts forth his creative skills and, not completely without a theatrical and provocative pretence, he gets at interpretations of flummoxing originality. He does not write literary reviews and literary history for the general public, but for the few connoisseurs of the genre, for those who are capable of savouring the sensuality and the artistic qualities of this type of writing, but also of finding their way through its density and force of “insolitation”.

The critical activity of **Eugen Simion** answers, on one hand, to his vocation to institutionalize the literature and, on the other hand, to his early calling to what can be considered his “theme”: the author, the biography. The main issue of his writing was to find a form which is wide enough to meet his thirst for objectivity without giving up his personal taste, his meticulousity, spiced with confessional inclinations, his professional appearance and moralistic observation. Either he writes reviews, monographs or from a larger perspective, that of a literary historian, E. Simion wants to be subjective and objective, methodical and serendipitous, wise and agreeable. His exegeses are generally useful and correct, clarifying and consolidating, aiming to establish order in the literary space. From Lovinescu’s critical works, which he claims to be his model, the author of *Romanian Writers from Today* singles out and defends especially the autonomy of the aesthetic, the centripetal quality and militancy of the aesthetic, leaving in the back-ground the synchronicity, relativism and revisions. From Călinescu he selects the aspiration to monumentality, the description and summing up of a literary writing as a first form of establishing of a hierarchy of the significations and value judgement. As to his position towards the new critical methods, his availability goes from the “discourse in-love” of R. Barthes to the “gourmet discourse” of J.-P. Richard and has a distinct preference for a thematism which is interested in the constants of the contact with the matter and in the type of rhetoric born from this contact.

Lucian Raicu wants to be not only an authoritative critic, but also a trustful one, profoundly sympathetic, set out, with a “clear view”, in search of the moment of genesis of the literary work. Venturing to seize the creating spirit in the exact moment of his configuration in and through writing, Gogol’s monographer doesn’t work as Poulet, a critic who identifies, but as a Hermeneut, as an archaeologist of the creativity. Writing about the inconsistency of the “dead souls”, about the disarticulation of the Bacovian world or about Tolstoi’s fascination for the vitality of the nothingness, L. Raicu does, in fact, the archaeology of the creative spirits who were born at the same time with the revelation of the dissolution of the foundations of the existence. The “theme”, the question behind his criticism is that: what are the forms of literary resistance (through literature) against the consequences of “the death of God”? The “weak” states (of inconsistency, inadvertence

or boredom) are explored not in their passive, inert dimension, but in their fecund, reactive potential, susceptible to be valued through creation. The long intimacy with masterpieces restrains, in time, the critic's disposition to read everything, so that his encounters with literature start to be limited to the books which concern and prepare him for the more and more obsessing final journey. Only a journal of the critic is successful in delaying the limits of the literary exegesis, within an inch of silence.

Matei Călinescu is not a circumstantial disciple of T. Vianu, but one having the same "classical" structure, passionate of ideas and the systematic study of literature. His evolution itself is similar to that of his master. After a youth adventure with the literary criticism, he chooses a career (an international one) of comparative literature and literary theory. By placing the literary criticism between "science" (method, precision, objectivity) and "poetry" (in his case, especially one of rigor and clarity), M. Călinescu is from among those who contributed to the specific acclimation of the ideas of R. Barthes in our literary space. His lack of interest for both the axiological verdict and for the un-historicism of the structuralist method is a constant opportunity to define his perimeter, while the propensity of the literary criticism to become a form of creation is appreciated. By defending the specificity of the literary, the autonomy of the aesthetic and the axiological perspective, the critic places himself within the general standards of the 1960s and 1970s. Later on, writing about the literary avant-garde or about the modern concept of poetry, he will use the structuralist terminology, but with skill, within the limits of its functionality. As a matter of fact, the literary theory has had more to gain from his experience as a literary critic than the literary criticism from his experience as a theoretician; in fact, the field of literary ideas gains exactness with M. Călinescu by his concern for particular, context and adequateness.

Gheorghe Grigurcu is the head of his generation of "artist"-critics of the 1960s, the yielder of a literary language of such high standards that it almost doesn't give the impression of meta-language. His models are strictly autochthonous, and his opinion about the new methodologies is tolerant, but he is not inclined to allow them to contaminate his style. Among them, he accepts particularity those which do not depart alarmingly, by excessive formalism, from the analytically well-disciplined "impressionism". Gh. Grigurcu is a pure-breed feuilletonist, passionate about the "figures of the creative spirit", a subtle author of moral-temperamental portraits of the commented writers. Considering that, by definition, the critic is subjected to admiration and even devotion, he regards the objectivity suspiciously, but claims that morality and the polemic spirit are mandatory in the relationship with the literature. In time, his polemic (initially efficient, writing scenarios of refined torture) will break loose and will lead to prompt "executions" of a few writers who became his favourite victims, especially during the dispute between the "Lovinescians" and "anti-

Lovinescians” from the 1990s and during the theoretical beginning of the post-December revisions. His contribution to the canonization of the post-War lyricism (and of that of the 1960s especially) consists of the effort to assert the superiority of the “Ivănescu suite”, by accreditation (and exaggeration) of the idea that the insufficiencies are characteristic for N. Stănescu and his fellows, nourished by a damaging inter-generational mimesis.

The name of **Nicolae Manolescu** must be connected, first of all, with his activity of literary “chronicler”, completed by that of monographer, essayist and historic of the Romanian literature. Although the literary chronicle is a literary form invented by Lovinescu, N. Manolescu approaches it in the manner of G. Călinescu, transforming it into a scene, and the chronicler becomes the main actor of this spectacle of intelligence which lacks the haughtiness, mannerism, didacticism, where the improvisation, spontaneity, doubt come under a pragmatic direction with the purpose of gaining on and seducing the public. Essential for the span of two generations of writers, his activity stands between two tendencies: one that carries him towards the text analysis, and the other towards the idea of a system. There is no separation between those two tendencies, because synthetic formulations are present in almost every chronicle, in the same way the syntheses excel by application to their object. Especially visible is the effort to look over the analyzed opus, to place it among the other works of its author, to compare it with similar works by other writers as well as to the principles of its genre. There is a synthetic project which looms underneath the punctual analyses; the chronicler is interested in the inner coherence of the books he evaluates but he is also interested in the degree they contribute to the coherence of a generation and of an epoch. That is why his investigation becomes one of *understanding* and *placement*. The moment of placement is approached through twofold analyses, taking into account the *typological* and *axiological placement*. As a literary historian, he pays attention, in *A Critical History of the Romanian Literature*, especially to the inner timing of the genres, practically writing the first *metamorphoses of the Romanian literature from the beginning until the present times*.

Even if he declares himself to be the follower of a quasi-Pouletian critical formula, **Mircea Martin** defends, by his analyses, rather a more lax formula of a “criticism of conscience”, not of sensitive but of intellectual quality. After a few years of rigorous and careful “feuilleton” in search of the Idea and with the Idea, M. Martin becomes a theoretician whose exegeses follow the identification with the structuring thinking that lies at the origin of writing, this is why the unity he aspires to is always a reflexive one, given by the ideas. From the criticism understood at first as “identification”, through the intermediary phase of “adequacy”, as dialectics between geometry and finesse, reaching at the end the “detached living” and the “understanding”, M. Martin covers a route which resembles more and more clearly to Starobinsky’s standards of the “critical trajectory”. Not

for a moment is the separation of the content from the form of the literary criticism accepted, respectively the “dictation of ideas” is maximally understood, as *expressivity*, as handling of the language to obtain such precise formulation that the synonymy should be excluded and the amelioration or reformulation from outside impossible.

Every attempt to innovate the Romanian post-War critical language is carried out by the main representatives of the Romanian criticism under the influence of two elements which have remained lively in their memory. There is, on one hand, the remembrance of the interwar criticism as “the golden age” of the Romanian criticism (and the critics labour to preserve its principles, especially the autonomy of the aesthetic, the axiological perspective and the “critical creation”) and on the other hand, the memory of the aggressive-sociologist spectrum of the “obsessive decade”, from where the all-present suspicions regarding the idea of a “system” or of “rational” explanation, thoroughly articulated in the post-War criticism, came. The consequence of this double-conditioning is, somehow, predictable and natural: while the critics with “ideas”, less seduced by the “critical creation” and more fascinated by rigor and objectivity are discreetly driven away in the back-ground (for some of them the abandon of the literary review follows), the “artist”-critics (most of them are also “feuilletonist” critics) take the fore-ground and practically decide the configuration of the post-War literary canon. But, ironically, after they reached a considerably high quota on the local literary “market”, the artist-critics didn’t have international visibility, as this was exclusively the “share” of the critics with “ideas” and a “system”, as Adrian Marino, Matei Călinescu, Sorin Alexandrescu or Virgil Nemoianu. In the given circumstances, when the theoreticians preferred to export their “products”, the local “market” remained mainly in the care of the “diagnosticians”; compelled by the Party’s vigilance to make their principles implicit in the critical act, they concentrated all their resources of intelligence and creativity to express their non-Marxist creeds, to which they had no official right, in a *different* way. The diversity of the post-war Romanian criticism is given mainly by this *different* way, by the individual evasion from the politically prescribed conception and rhetoric.