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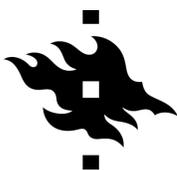
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## FOREWORD

The Lectureship in Romanian Language and Culture at the University of Helsinki (the Faculty of Arts, the Department of Languages), in collaboration with the University of Helsinki Library, and the Romanian Language Institute in Bucharest, is honored to present the inaugural issue of *HEROS Journal (Helsinki Romanian Studies Journal)*. This publication is dedicated to fostering Romanian Studies and aims to establish a dynamic platform for scholarly dialogue. It seeks to engage both experienced academics and emerging researchers, while continuing the editorial legacy of the *Finnish Journal for Romanian Studies* (2015–2018), previously published by the University of Turku.

As a young and ambitious academic journal, *HEROS* aspires to promote rigorous intellectual exchange across a broad spectrum of topics within Romanian Studies. Emphasizing interdisciplinarity and inclusivity, the journal welcomes research articles that go beyond traditional fields such as Romanian language, literature, and cultural studies, and embrace diverse disciplines and methodologies.

The current issue features a rich selection of articles addressing topics ranging from Romanian philosophy, history, and society, to language, culture, literature, and cinema. These contributions offer fresh, thought-provoking perspectives and foster dialogue between Romanian and other linguistic and cultural contexts.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the contributors for their valuable insights and original research, and to the peer reviewers for their meticulous evaluations and critical contributions to the quality of this issue. Their dedication not only ensures the journal's academic rigor but also plays a vital role in building and strengthening the *HEROS* community of researchers committed to advancing the field of Romanian Studies.

*The Editors*

## La tentation de comprendre. Les réflexions de Cioran sur la Russie

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### THE TEMPTATION TO UNDERSTAND. CIORAN'S REFLECTIONS ON RUSSIA

#### Abstract

*The present article discusses Emil Cioran's attitude and perception of Russia as highlighted on the one hand, in his work Transfiguration de la Roumanie, where Cioran manifested fascination for expansionism, where his models for messianism were Germany and Russia. On the other hand, in his later, more skeptical and moderate one, Histoire et utopie, Cioran changed his perception, and regarded Russia in a way that was to seem rather prophetic for Russia's destiny in Europe, that of 'an empire of evil'. This radical change in his understanding of the world meant that his interest in Russia no longer mounted to a fascination with naked force, whether political, military or ideological. A fully mature thinker free of all illusions, Cioran renounced the collectivist interpretation of the human universe and accepted the idea that every nation, even the Russian nation, is first and foremost a plurality of individuals. From this perspective, Russia no longer has the character of a historical inevitability that will inevitably dominate the world.*

**Keywords:** Cioran, Russia, Romania, pan-slavism, despotism

Le monde contemporain, du moins sa partie euro-atlantique, éprouve de nouveau de grandes difficultés à comprendre la politique de l'État russe et le phénomène russe en tant que tel. Depuis cinq siècles, quel que soit son régime, la Russie entre régulièrement en conflit avec d'autres pays européens (la Pologne, la Suède, la Turquie, la France, l'Allemagne, la Finlande ou la Roumanie), souvent poussée par une ambition expansionniste effrénée, qu'elle justifie par son droit historique à « rassembler les terres russes ». Parallèlement, les intellectuels européens tentent (au moins depuis le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle) de percer « le secret russe » jalonné par l'absolutisme du pouvoir politique (rus. *samoderjavie*), le passivisme civique et un messianisme quasi-mystique. Il existe une bibliographie énorme sur ce sujet, d'Astolphe de Custine à Isaiah Berlin, pour ne citer que ces deux grands noms, ce qui témoigne d'une sorte de fascination de l'Europe pour la Russie. Emil Cioran a également été attiré par la question de la spécificité russe, en y faisant souvent référence. Toutefois, il convient de noter que son intérêt pour le sujet et le ton adopté changent au fil du temps : des déclarations passionnées de quasi-admiration dans *Transfiguration de la Roumanie* au jugement modéré et lucide exprimé dans *Histoire et utopie*.

Nous nous rendons compte de la diversité des interprétations qui peuvent être formulées à propos de l'essai écrit par le jeune Cioran dans les années 1935-1936. Donnant son accord à la réédition du texte en 1990, l'auteur déclare cependant qu'« il ne s'y retrouve pas » et celui-là lui est

« complètement étranger » (Cioran, 1990: 5). En revanche, nous ne nous intéressons pas tant à l'« hystérie juvénile » de l'essayiste qu'à la façon de penser (de la Russie, en l'occurrence), propre non seulement à lui, mais aussi à de nombreux membres de sa génération<sup>1</sup>, voire propre à une grande partie des intellectuels européens de son époque.

Il est évident que la Russie ne constitue pas le principal sujet de discussion dans l'essai de Cioran, consacré presque exclusivement à la Roumanie. La Russie, comme les autres nations et pays mentionnés dans le texte, n'est qu'un point de repère dans la démarche comparative de nature historique et idéologique qui est censée mettre en évidence les carences de la Roumanie, son pays d'origine dont le sort déplait profondément, voire jusqu'à la haine, au jeune essayiste. Visible à chaque étape, l'influence de Spengler est le deuxième aspect de la structure de base du texte à relever. Publié immédiatement après la Première Guerre mondiale, l'ouvrage *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* de ce dernier s'inscrit à bien des égards dans la continuité des débats que les penseurs russes, adeptes du « pluralisme culturel » et des « cycles historiques », ont menés au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle (Nikolaï Danilevski, Constantin Léontiev, Nikolaï Troubetskoï etc.). Tout en admettant l'existence de nombreuses civilisations distinctes, dont chacune est autonome et vit son destin à la manière des êtres vivants – jeunes, adultes et enfin accablés par l'âge –, les auteurs russes notent également l'imperméabilité de ces sociétés aux influences étrangères ; Sperber poussera ce concept à l'extrême et attribuera aux cultures le statut de monades enfermées (Mazurek, 2023: 109). Sans en citer directement la source, Cioran reprend le même raisonnement : « Grâce à leur rythme rapide et à leur ample respiration, les

grandes cultures répondent à cette soif [démurgique]. (...) Elles sont des mondes ; leur existence justifie la monadologie. Mais ces monades ne vivent pas en harmonie, elles ont besoin d'une fenêtre pour se voir les unes les autres, et se haïr » (Cioran, 2009: 109).

Rien ne peut exclure que Cioran ait découvert la pensée de Danilevski, le principal théoricien du panslavisme, dont l'étude *La Russie et l'Europe (Россия и Европа, 1871)* existe en traduction allemande depuis 1920. Le livre de Spengler n'a fait qu'accroître l'intérêt pour Danilevski et a révélé que les deux penseurs partageaient de nombreux points de convergence et vues similaires ; quoi qu'il en soit, Cioran l'évoque parmi Khomiakov, Tchaadaïev, Herzen, Dostoïevski et Aksakov, tous unis dans leurs efforts pour définir « la mission de la Russie » au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle. La théorie du panslaviste russe selon laquelle les civilisations sont capables de communiquer entre elles, mais uniquement autour des valeurs secondaires, et non pas autour de celles relatives à leur identité, peut avoir un intérêt pour le raisonnement de Cioran : c'est parce que cette idée a été adoptée après modification non seulement par Spengler (le concept de pseudomorphose<sup>2</sup>), mais aussi par Arnold Toynbee (le concept de civilisations sœurs<sup>3</sup>).

Cioran fait une lecture sélective des auteurs russes (il fait aussi référence à quelques reprises à Vladimir Soloviov) ; il s'approprie leurs théories sur le développement des civilisations, ignorant en fait les aspects politiques de l'impérialisme panslave (à savoir, celui basé sur l'idée de la

<sup>2</sup> La *pseudomorphose* spenglerienne implique un état dans lequel la culture – temporairement ou définitivement incapable de reproduire son propre contenu sous forme originale – s'exprime à travers des formes empruntées à d'autres cultures.

<sup>3</sup> *Sister civilisations* ont selon Toynbee un ancêtre commun. Dans le cas de l'Europe et de la Russie, il s'agit de la civilisation gréco-romaine. Le même héritage ancestral n'implique pourtant pas nécessairement des ressemblances identitaires, mais il permet tout au plus d'établir des relations de communication.

<sup>1</sup> Voir, à cet égard, par exemple, le texte de la communication tenue par C. Noica à Berlin en 1943 (*Ce e etern și ce e istoric în cultura românească*), publié dans le volume *Pagini despre sufletul românesc* (Noica, 1992).

supériorité du monde slave dirigé par la Russie), promu par Danilevski et d'autres. Cependant, ce ne sont pas tant les auteurs qui intéressent Cioran que le cas particulier de l'État russe, dans lequel il voit un exemple à suivre pour la Roumanie, si elle veut sortir de l'anonymat historique :

Si la Roumanie veut véritablement se frayer un chemin dans l'histoire, le pays dont elle peut apprendre le plus est la Russie. Durant tout le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, les Russes n'ont eu d'autre obsession que de se pencher sur leur destin. Et, à la faveur de ce tourment théorique, la Russie s'est effectivement engagée dans l'histoire, pour s'y placer au centre grâce à la révolution (Cioran, 2009: 94-95).

Conscient des disproportions engendrées par une telle comparaison, Cioran justifie ainsi son approche : « La différence entre une grande culture et une petite ne réside pas dans le chiffre de leur population ni dans la fréquence des événements extraordinaires, elle est fondée sur le destin spirituel et politique [...] » (Cioran, 2009: 115). Son argumentation devient ainsi anhistorique ; il néglige les différences structurelles et celles liées au contexte géographique et historique entre les deux pays parce qu'il considère (du moins il l'affirme) que le fondement de tout pouvoir absolu est de nature volitive et spirituelle. Nous avons donc affaire à un texte qui se veut à la fois une étude historiosophique et un manifeste politique, avec toutes les conséquences qui en découlent.

L'une de ces conséquences est, bien évidemment, la prédominance de l'interprétation sur l'analyse proprement dite du matériel factuel. Cioran trouve ainsi chez les Russes et les Roumains un élément commun de leur évolution dans l'Histoire, à savoir leur dépendance à l'égard de l'univers byzantin : « La pire plaie de la Russie – comme celle de la Roumanie –, ce fut la tradition byzantine, le souffle de la spiritualité byzantine, qui, greffé sur une culture différente, devient paralysie, schématisation abstraite et, sur les plans politique et culturel, mainmise

réactionnaire » (Cioran, 2009: 95). Il est donc suggéré que la Russie se soit débarrassée de son héritage byzantin suite à la révolution bolchévique. Bien que cette idée ne soit pas formulée explicitement, elle va de soi. La généralisation de l'influence néfaste du byzantinisme sur sa propre culture nationale, que Cioran partage avec tant d'intellectuels roumains depuis Maiorescu, souffre d'un manque de précision lorsqu'il s'agit de la Russie. L'essayiste semble ignorer que la « spiritualité byzantine » n'a pas empêché l'État russe de se transformer en empire ; au contraire, soutenu par l'hypostase et le gnosticisme, ainsi qu'associé à un « humanisme sans homme » (Staniszki, 2016: 41) et à la croyance dans les lois impersonnelles de l'Histoire, le nominalisme byzantin a permis l'instauration d'un pouvoir politique dominant sur une société asservie<sup>4</sup>. Par ailleurs, les Bolchéviques ont récupéré la conception gnostique de la hiérarchie des savoirs qui approuve le pouvoir et qui a autorisé leur parti à prétendre être le seul sujet historique. Dans le même ordre d'idées, la ritualisation de l'Église russe qui remonte au règne de Pierre I<sup>er</sup> et de Catherine II, et son image essentiellement institutionnelle ont été en grande partie transposées au parti bolchévique, devenu dès le départ une sorte d'église laïque. La spiritualité byzantine a donc survécu à la révolution bolchévique, absorbée discrètement mais efficacement, non pas, bien sûr, sur le plan idéologique, mais au niveau des pratiques sociales.

Bien que Cioran envisage le byzantinisme russe sous l'angle de l'expérience roumaine, ce qui ne l'aide pas dans son exégèse de l'euro-

<sup>4</sup> Jadwiga Staniszki parle de « société de service » (pol. « społeczeństwo służby »), un concept qui systématisé et immobilise la société réelle en imposant des restrictions de statut aux individus et des règles d'activités (au nom d'un savoir supérieur détenu par le pouvoir). De cette manière, l'écart entre les élites et les couches inférieures disparaît visiblement, puisqu'elles deviennent en quelque sorte égales en servant l'État (Staniszki, 2016 :40).

asiatisme politico-culturel, il ne se fait pas d'illusions sur la nature du phénomène qui, dans sa version tsariste ou bolchévique, a irrévérablement affecté l'histoire mondiale : « La Russie s'est tellement insinuée dans le monde que, désormais, sans que tous les chemins mènent à Moscou, Moscou se dressera devant nous sur tous les chemins » (Cioran, 2009: 99). La lucidité avec laquelle il juge l'« esprit russe poisseux » l'amène à formuler une sorte de règle de conduite pour ceux qui sont exposés, d'une manière ou d'une autre, à cette irradiation : « Les peuples feront la preuve de leur degré de santé selon la façon dont ils sauront se protéger de la Russie » (Cioran, 2009: 99). Mais, à partir de là, le raisonnement de Cioran se rattache à la thèse spéculative (d'origine spenglerienne), qui revient comme un leitmotiv tout au long de l'essai, à savoir la division des peuples (civilisations) en « jeunes » et « vieux » : « Les jeunes nations sauront même exploiter la féconde « maladie » russe ; les vieilles seront contaminées et compromettront dans la décadence leurs dernières réserves de vitalité. Je ne parle pas seulement de la Russie bolchévique, je parle de la Russie en général, en tant que phénomène humain et que destin historique » (Cioran, 2009: 99).

L'histoire des décennies suivantes va douloureusement contredire le jeune essayiste : les « jeunes » peuples, dont la Roumanie, céderont à la force militaire et seront infectés (certes, pas volontairement) par la « maladie » venue de l'Est, tandis que la « vieille » civilisation britannique, alors si méprisée par lui, saura se mobiliser contre l'agression de l'État allemand nazi, et pourra bientôt rompre avec l'allié soviétique, qui incarne l'expansionnisme – la « maladie » russe éternelle.

Nombre des jugements portés sur la Russie témoignent d'un esprit critique lucide et d'une érudition remarquable. L'ensemble du raisonnement est cependant discutabile, soumis à une idée préconçue : pour entrer dans l'histoire, la Roumanie a besoin d'une révolution spirituelle teintée de messianisme, qui ne réussira pas sans assumer aussi un culte de la force (« Il n'existe pas

de messianisme abstrait, qui se satisfasse de formules sans viser à quelque chose de concret, de trop concret. L'impérialisme est l'implication pratique du messianisme » (Cioran, 2009: 89)). Les deux exemples à suivre pour la Roumanie sont donc la Russie et l'Allemagne. Dans sa tentative d'identifier des ressemblances dans l'évolution historique justifiant pourquoi la Roumanie pourrait opter pour une « voie russe », Cioran fait recours à des généralisations hasardeuses soumises, répétons-le, à une logique où les faits évoqués dans l'histoire russe devraient prouver leur pertinence dans le cas roumain :

Car tout le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle russe témoigne d'une conscience troublée et prophétique, d'une véritable hystérie messianique. Tout peuple qui entre dans l'histoire alors que les autres y sont déjà, et en pleine maturité, souffre d'un déséquilibre provoqué par les inégalités de niveau historique. La Russie s'éveillait à la vie après avoir dormi – exactement comme la Roumanie - pendant des siècles. Elle n'avait pas d'autre choix que de brûler les étapes (Cioran, 2009 : 95).

« Brûler les étapes » est encore un autre concept qui renvoie directement à l'histoire de la Roumanie moderne, mais qui ne vaut pas nécessairement pour la Russie. Les réformes d'inspiration européenne de Pierre le Grand ou les relations entre la cour de Catherine II et les intellectuels des Lumières ne visaient pas à moderniser l'autocratie russe sur le modèle européen, mais seulement à renforcer le pouvoir du tsar, identifié à la Russie elle-même, et à accroître la puissance militaire de l'État, qui devait garantir son prestige international, né de la peur de l'expansionnisme russe. En revanche, l'europanisation en trompe-l'œil a peu transformé l'espace socio-économique : jusqu'au début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, elle a uniquement consolidé le souverainisme russe qui repose sur la croyance en l'exceptionnalisme civilisationnel et sur l'hostilité au monde romano-germanique. Selon le jeune Cioran, « brûler les étapes » équivaut

probablement pour un pays au saut de l'objet au sujet de l'histoire, un saut réalisé *per fas et nefas*.

Le révolutionnaire Cioran, car c'est ainsi qu'il faut percevoir l'auteur de *Transformation de la Roumanie*, déplore l'absence de penseurs messianiques parmi les Roumains et évoque le cas d'Eminescu, « qui, au lieu de s'attacher à l'avenir de la Roumanie, a projeté la grandeur de la nation dans l'obscurité sinistre de notre passé » (Cioran, 2009: 102). Aussi choquant que puisse paraître ce diagnostic, l'essayiste a raison sur ce point, mais en louant l'avenir anticipé par une révolution, il semble ne pas remarquer à quel point il se rapproche de la logique bolchévique avec sa vision apriorique de l'avenir. C'est justement depuis la perspective de cet avenir que les disciples de Lénine et leurs successeurs staliniens légitimaient le présent empirique : l'avenir était leur seul point de repère pour juger de la contemporanéité imparfaite (Staniszki, 2016: 49).

Nous aurions tort de considérer le texte des années 1935-1936 comme une déclaration d'adhésion de Cioran à l'une ou l'autre des idéologies de son époque ; tout son essai, sa façon de penser et ses propos parfois choquants relèvent à mon avis d'un défi. La fureur juvénile avec laquelle il regarde le passé de son pays et l'incapacité de la Grande Roumanie à devenir vraiment grande le pousse à faire des comparaisons avec d'autres nations ou cultures, y compris la Russie, pour trouver une voie à suivre pour son pays natal. Sa démarche, qui s'appuie sur autant d'idées spéculatives et de jugements hâtifs (que Cioran désavouera par la suite) et s'inspire plutôt de la devise « se non è vero, è ben trovato », ne fournit pas une illustration convaincante du phénomène russe (dans ses diverses variantes : tsariste ou bolchévique). Il semble toutefois que cela ne soit même pas le but de l'essayiste, dont l'insatisfaction vis-à-vis de son propre statut ethnoculturel le mène à une véritable « hystérie » (« Être né dans un pays de second ordre n'a rien de réjouissant » (Cioran, 2009: 109)). Le jeune philosophe cherche désespérément des solutions

pour ne pas noyer son « âme [...] dans un océan de détresse » (*Ibid*) et finalement, ce ne sont pas les exemples invoqués mais le processus même de recherche qui devient essentiel, une fin en soi.

Publié environ 15 ans plus tard, *Histoire et utopie* de 1960 (le quatrième volume d'essais de Cioran publié en France) est l'œuvre d'un auteur d'âge mûr dont l'« hystérie » de jeunesse cède la place au calme résigné d'un homme sceptique et pessimiste. Néanmoins, le changement radical de style ne signifie pas l'abandon de ses sujets de jadis. Effectivement, la Russie y réapparaît également comme objet de réflexion ; la situation internationale est, bien sûr, différente, mais les grandes caractéristiques du problème russe restent les mêmes.

Dans le chapitre *Sur deux types de société*, sous-titré « Lettre à un ami lointain » (l'ami étant N. Noica), Cioran fait directement référence à son activité d'essayiste à l'entre-deux-guerres et à son état d'esprit de cette époque-là, qui, après des années, n'était plus celui d'un « hystérique », mais d'un « fanatique [...], jusqu'au ridicule » (Cioran, 1960: 5). La radicalisation du regard autocritique ne le pousse pas à changer son opinion sur la Russie, qui demeure globalement la même :

Plus j'y songe, plus je trouve qu'elle s'est formée, à travers les siècles, non pas comme se forme une nation, mais un univers, les moments de son évolution participant moins de l'histoire que d'une cosmogonie sombre, terrifiante. [...] Une telle nation, requise et dans ses pensées et dans ses actes par les confins du globe, ne se mesure pas avec des étalons courants, ni ne s'explique en termes ordinaires, en langage intelligible (...). Sans doute est-elle, ainsi que nous en assure Rilke, limitrophe de Dieu ; elle l'est malheureusement aussi de notre pays, et le sera encore, dans un avenir plus ou moins proche, de beaucoup d'autres [...]. Où que nous soyons, elle nous touche déjà, sinon géographiquement, à coup sûr intérieurement (Cioran, 1960 : 13-14).

Plus encore que jamais, le philosophe exprime catégoriquement sa reconnaissance aux auteurs

russes et à la culture russe, inspirant son « penchant [...] à émettre un jugement impartial sur elle et à lui témoigner ma gratitude » (Cioran, 1960 : 14).

Ces propos servent en quelque sorte d'introduction au chapitre *La Russie et le virus de la liberté* qui, contrairement à l'essai de l'entre-deux-guerres, n'aborde pas le « problème russe » de manière instrumentale, comme un miroir dans lequel les dilemmes roumains se reflètent à l'envers. En revanche, il contient une analyse brève mais pénétrante, voire parfois prophétique, de la présence de l'Empire soviétique dans le monde contemporain. Cela témoigne aussi, je crois, de la maturité intellectuelle de l'auteur qui, s'étant débarrassé des obsessions roumaines de sa jeunesse, dissèque un phénomène qui lui est étranger sur le plan socio-politique, culturel et religieux ; il s'agit d'une démarche dans laquelle il fait preuve non seulement du génie d'un historiosophe, mais aussi du talent d'un philosophe politique.

Bien qu'écrit dans un registre complètement différent, l'essai de 1960 ne révisé pas de manière significative la façon dont Cioran comprend la Russie ; en effet, le nouveau contexte politique et militaire accentue en quelque sorte sa vision (l'Union soviétique gagne la Guerre mondiale et prend le contrôle de l'Europe de l'Est, désormais considérée comme sa sphère d'influence). La puissance de l'Empire russe résulte, rappelle l'auteur, des développements historiques spécifiques qui ont permis à cette entité ethnoculturelle de préserver son potentiel biologique et sa vitalité, ainsi que de surpasser à l'époque moderne la puissance d'expansion du monde occidental :

Cependant que les peuples occidentaux s'usaient dans leur lutte pour la liberté et, plus encore, dans la liberté acquise [...], le peuple russe souffrait sans se dépenser ; car on ne se dépense que dans l'histoire, et, comme il en fut évincé, force lui fut de subir les infaillibles systèmes de despotisme qu'on lui infligea : existence obscure,

végétative, qui lui permit de s'affermir, d'accroître son énergie, d'entasser des réserves, et de tirer de sa servitude le maximum de profit biologique (Cioran, 1960: 21).

On retrouve donc l'idée spenglerienne des phases d'évolution des civilisations, d'où découle, selon Cioran, l'inévitable confrontation de l'inertie de la culture occidentale avec le dynamisme biologique russe. Le philosophe roumain ne déroge pas à ses convictions exprimées dans *Transformation de la Roumanie* : historiquement épuisée et moralement désarmée (la faute à la démocratie et à l'absolutisation des libertés individuelles), l'Europe n'a pas d'arguments à opposer au collectivisme russe mis au service de l'État totalitaire.

C'est l'orthodoxie populaire russe, et non celle revêtant officiellement le byzantinisme, qui a favorisé le processus de marginalisation historique de la Russie (due à son refus du catholicisme romain) et lui a valu de préserver ses forces vives et de constituer sa spécificité identitaire. L'esprit religieux, considéré par Cioran comme une caractéristique durable des Russes, leur donnera un avantage décisif. Il reprend ici une idée ancienne, mais dans une formulation plus directe et dans une perspective généralisatrice : « En divinisant l'Histoire pour discréditer Dieu, le marxisme n'a réussi qu'à rendre Dieu plus étrange et plus obsédant. On peut tout étouffer chez l'homme, sauf le besoin d'absolu [...]. Le fond du peuple russe étant religieux, il prendra inévitablement le dessus » (Cioran, 1960 : 20). De plus, Cioran spéculé sur une « apocalypse frivole », comme il désigne un rejet possible de l'autorité papale suite au triomphe de l'orthodoxie russe. Il prédit également qu'« après une cure forcée d'universalisme, elle [la Russie] se rerussifiera, au profit de l'orthodoxie » (Cioran, 1960: 20).

Mon interrogation porte sur les raisons derrière cette conviction de Cioran qui frise la résignation face à l'inéluctable, c'est-à-dire face à la puissance invincible de la Russie soviétique.

Bien sûr, le philosophe garde son admiration pour la culture russe, mais il pose à la fois un regard lucide sur la politique russe, fondée sur la violence, le non-respect des obligations ou des conventions et l'absence de scrupules. Il rédige cet essai à un moment où, malgré la mort de Staline qui a créé beaucoup d'espoirs, le monde fait face à une Union soviétique qui relève avec succès les défis de la course aux armements et de la compétition technologique avec les États-Unis, et qui mène une politique brutale d'agression sur le plan international (voir la répression sanglante de l'insurrection de Budapest). Le risque de perdre la paix, retrouvée seulement quelques années plus tôt, et surtout la richesse matérielle, qui nourrit cette peur occidentale, rend le philosophe encore plus pessimiste, voire fataliste, quant aux perspectives de coexistence avec la Russie :

Elle [la Russie] s'aplatira sur l'Europe par fatalité physique, par l'automatisme de sa masse, par sa vitalité surabondante et morbide si propice à la génération d'un empire (dans lequel se matérialise toujours la mégalomanie d'une nation), par cette santé qui est sienne, pleine d'imprévu, d'horreur et d'énigmes, affectée au service d'une idée messianique, rudiment et préfiguration de conquêtes (Cioran, 1960: 23).

Le fragment cité, qui est d'une grande beauté et propose un diagnostic crédible ou du moins fondé sur des prémisses vraies, a le don d'irriter le lecteur. Le fatalisme cioranien par rapport à la suprématie inévitable de la Russie rejoint la fascination presque malade que les intellectuels européens ont éprouvée pour la culture russe tout au long du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Je ne me réfère pas ici à l'admiration, tout à fait justifiée, pour la littérature (Gogol, Tchekhov, Dostoïevski) ou la musique classique russe (Tchaïkovski, Stravinsky, Moussorgski). Il s'agit de la spéculation philosophique du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, qui ne fait preuve d'aucune originalité, à la fois redevable à l'idéalisme romantique allemand et mis au service de l'idéologie d'État pour motiver l'exceptionnalisme russe (le *ruski mir*), le

despotisme (le *samoderjavie*) et l'expansionnisme politico-culturel (le panslavisme). Toute l'Europe, oserais-je dire, a succombé à cette fascination accompagnée de la peur d'un « empire du mal », même Cioran n'y a pas échappé. Il faut cependant tenir compte, dans son cas, de son scepticisme bien connu à l'égard de la démocratie, cette « merveille qui n'a rien à offrir, [qui est] tout ensemble le paradis et le tombeau d'un peuple [...], [un] bonheur immédiat, [un] désastre imminent » (Cioran, 1960: 22). Bien sûr, nous ne savons pas si cela explique l'attitude du philosophe face au danger russe, ou peut-être simplement son manque d'appétit pour les digressions politiques (nous avons quand même affaire à un philosophe, et non pas à un kremlinologue !). Chose certaine, Cioran a oublié que la Russie n'aurait pas gagné la guerre contre le Troisième Reich sans une aide matérielle substantielle des États-Unis, et que la situation de l'après-guerre n'a pas non plus prouvé la faiblesse de l'Occident face aux Soviétiques (encore une fois grâce à l'Amérique !).

Parmi les nombreuses prédictions sombres que Cioran fait dans *Histoire et utopie*, il évoque également une incertitude quant à la manière dont la Russie pourrait réagir à sa confrontation éventuelle avec l'idée libérale :

Pour que la Russie s'accommodât d'un régime libéral, il faudrait qu'elle s'affaiblît considérablement, que sa vigueur s'exténue ; mieux : qu'elle perdît son caractère spécifique et se dénationalisât en profondeur. Comment y réussirait-elle, avec ses ressources intérieures inentamées, et ses mille ans d'autocratie ? À supposer qu'elle y arrivât par un bond, elle se disloquerait sur-le-champ (Cioran, 1960: 22).

Bien qu'hypothétique, la réflexion du philosophe se révélera prophétique au cours de la dernière décennie du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Cette approche différente du problème russe dans chacun de ces deux textes tient évidemment au facteur biographique, car les convictions du jeune Cioran sont très éloignées de celles de sa

période parisienne. La principale différence réside à notre sens dans l'objet de la réflexion. Essayiste des années 1930, Emil Cioran est préoccupé, voire obsédé, par la nation en tant que forme d'organisation humaine, par l'esprit communautaire, par la métaphysique de ce phénomène socio-historique, et à cet égard, il ne diffère guère de tant d'autres intellectuels européens de son époque. Dans cette perspective communautaire, il examine également le cas russe : Cioran est fasciné par l'expansionnisme, le résultat de l'exercice d'un pouvoir politique arbitraire, tant dans sa version tsariste que dans sa version bolchévique. Dans *Histoire et utopie*, le sceptique Cioran s'intéresse avant tout à l'individu, en réfléchissant à la condition humaine même lorsqu'il décrit des phénomènes sociopolitiques globaux. Ce changement radical de sa façon de comprendre le monde fait que son intérêt pour la Russie ne se résume plus à une fascination pour la force nue, aussi bien politique que militaire ou idéologique. Penseur en pleine maturité et libre de toute illusion, Cioran renonce à l'interprétation collectiviste de l'univers humain et accepte l'idée que toute nation, même la nation russe, est en premier lieu une pluralité d'individus. Dans cette perspective, la Russie n'a plus le caractère d'une fatalité historique qui dominera inévitablement le monde.

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# The Legacy of *Decree 66/770* in Romania: Women's Collective Memory of a Transgenerational Trauma

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## Abstract

*The trauma Romanian women endured under Ceaușescu's pro-natalist policies, particularly Decree 770, persists long after 1989 as a form of collective memory. This memory is not only conveyed through literary and cinematic works, with critical reflections emerging only in the early 2000s, after a decade of societal silence. The legacy of forced motherhood and unsafe abortions has also resulted in widespread mistrust of medical institutions and poor sexual education, perpetuating a preference for abortion over contraception to this day. This transgenerational trauma continues to influence women's reproductive health, reviving taboos and reinforcing societal roles in contemporary Romania. In this paper, the legacy of such policies is explored through a combined perspective of biopolitics and memory studies considering three generations of Romanian women: socialist mothers, their Decreței daughters and their daughters in turn who outlived the abortion ban after 1989.*

**Keywords:** Decree 66/770, Communism, Ceaușescu, abortion, demographic policies, biopolitics, *Decreței*, transgenerational trauma

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The aggressive demographic policies imposed by Ceaușescu between 1966 and 1989 have been already approached in literature from several theoretical perspectives, specifically historical and political, medical and legal, analysing the repercussions of the abortion ban on pregnancy, motherhood, and fertility rate in Romania after 1989. However, research has proved that this dark page of Romanian history has been little talked about in Western countries that did not experience state socialism (including mine, Italy), or outside academic contexts regarding Romanian studies. What is even more worth mentioning is that, when researched, few are the studies analysing the topic from the victims' or survivors' viewpoint, showing a literature gap which this paper aims to fill.

A paper in this direction is "Haunting Impositions: Women and Reproductive Policies in Romania under Communism and After" (Arsene, 2017: 87-100); here the attention is massively focused on a double burden: the state propaganda on women as dedicated mothers and socialist workers and, nonetheless, the economic considerations Romanian women make today (either of delaying or renouncing motherhood at all). The economics of motherhood is indeed an essential aspect of socialist states between the 1960s and the 1980s, given the shortage of goods and the burden of work on a mother's shoulders. In other words, Romanian women thought twice before having another child for economic reasons. This is central to "Becoming a Mother in Hungary

and Poland during State Socialism” (Oláh; Fraczak, 2004: 213–244.), underlying a shared trend of economic scarcity and decreased childbearing across the entire Eastern bloc. Another work, this time by Pop (2017), focused on three specific city-factories case studies in Romania, namely Someșul, Clujana, and Carbochim, delves into women workers and the facilities created by the regime to encourage motherhood around those factories, however failing from a welfare perspective. While all papers consulted touched upon essential information about the history of *Decree 770* in Romania, very few approached the matter from the viewpoint of generations of women and their trauma.

Therefore, two theories are employed in the present study to offer a new perspective. An unavoidable theory to provide a sociological nuance to this topic is Michael Foucault’s *biopolitics*, which investigates how the state’s control reflects broader strategies to govern life and bodies. *Decree no. 770*, signed in 1966, did not come overnight but resonated with the specifics of Ceaușescu’s goal of increasing the Romanian population to a staggering 20 million citizens. Out of the extensive work on biopolitics conducted by Foucault, sexuality and reproduction hold centrality. In particular, they form and perpetuate forms of power relations, while at the same time continuing the “life” of the state through reproduction (Kristensen, 2013). Biopolitics i.e. exercising politics over people’s bodies, has different nuances, and Foucault mainly focused on the German and French settings, while little attention was given to socialist states formed already by the time he was an active researcher, in the 1970s. In spite of that, a recent work that approaches biopolitics in Soviet socialism (Prozorov; Rentea, 2017: 94-111) reveals the relevance of Foucault’s theory to socialist societies like the Soviet Union, referring for instance to the myth of the “New Soviet Person” creation. This can be applied to Socialist Romania,

where Nicolae Ceaușescu aimed to nurture a “New Man” (Omul Nou), born and raised at the expenses of women’s reproductive health that we adhere to nowadays.<sup>1</sup>

A memory-based approach is blended with a biopolitical one. Memory theory, deriving from a multidisciplinary field such as sociology, psychology, and neuroscience, was introduced by sociologists’ and historians’ contributions in the first half of last century. Some of the precursors are such as Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) and Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945). Contemporary scholars continue investigating the relationship between memory and history, or memory and identity: they are respectively the British historian Peter Burke and the Canadian historian Allan Megill. Memory understood as collective or individual elaborates this trauma from one generation of women to another. The generations I will be focusing on are that of Romanian socialist mothers, their *decreteii* daughters (born as a consequence of the decree banning abortion, who most likely would not have been born otherwise), and their daughters in turn, the ones whose fertile years stretched to post-1989, after the decree was deleted.

Of high importance for the topic of my research is Mannheim’s identification of generations as “similar ‘located’ contemporaries [who] participate in a common destiny and in the ideas and concepts which are in some way bound up with its unfolding” (Mannheim, in Olick et al., 2011: 98), or in other words, units of people that do not just share historical events but move alike in elaborating a response. It may be the case of a sub-generational unit, such as women sharing their

<sup>1</sup> Reproductive health is quite a recent concept, defined by the World Health Organization as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so.” [Reproductive health \(who.int\)](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/)

illegal abortion experiences after 1966, in response to *Decree 770* which would have criminalized them. Mead, on the other hand, firstly underlined that the past was malleable and representational and, secondly stated that memory worked through images of our present, then overlapping with someone else's present (Mead, in Olick et al., 2011: 127-128). Memory, for Mead, flows through continuity of experience, hence could be moulded from individual to individual. To this regard, even if it does not apply specifically on anti-abortion policies, I am making reference to Bopp-Filimonov's (2021) research on "Bad Communism". This is an example of how different memory images shaped in people's present influence the classification of the Communist experience in Romania.<sup>2</sup> French sociologist and founding father of memory studies, Halbwachs, discussed the relevance of subjectivity in collectivity by arguing that, despite memory being built on a collective base (e.g. a generational unit), it changes according to an individual's single relationships and experiences. According to him, history differs from collective memory because it considers periods as a "whole", a persistent strand of time. Collective memory, on the other hand, keeps track of the differences and boundaries within a given period. This frames the variety of memories and experiences we can collect on those years in Romania.

Additionally, collective memory exists as long as a remembering group exists (Halbwachs, in Olick et al., 2011: 139-144). Today we can still engage with the people living in Communist Romania, especially those Romanian women whose bodies endured the Communist-driven pro-natalist choices, and outlived them. Since many of

their contemporaries perished while getting an abortion, punished by the Securitate,<sup>3</sup> or of maternal mortality at birth, I consider the former reasons valid to engage in similar research. The aims are to embrace a three-generation collection of women to understand how their trauma for unwanted pregnancy, forced motherhood and criminalization of reproductive rights affected their choices through the narration and revival of collective memory of the *Decree 66/770*, and the consequences it had had on women after 35 years after Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime fall.

## 2. METHODS

This paper employs a qualitative analysis of documents, including personal recollections and artistic products (particularly cinema and novels), presented as collective accounts. The focus is on the experiences of trauma related to abortion and forced motherhood, two interconnected aspects of reproductive health under the pro-natalist policies of Communist Romania.

Demographic policies in Romania, often referred to as anti-abortion legislation, are more accurately described as population policies designed to address the size and composition of the country's population. Nicolae Ceaușescu's political agenda aimed to increase the population to 20 million by the end of the 1980s, and to 30 million by 2000. There are two main types of population policies: pro-natalist policies, which aim to increase the birth and fertility rates in slowly growing countries, and anti-natalist policies, which aim to reduce fertility rates in fast-developing countries. Notable examples of anti-natalist policies include the "one-child policy" in Communist China, in force from 1979 until the early 2000s, and the forced sterilizations in India during the 1960s and 1970s. Both countries are now amongst the most populous in the world. In contrast, Eastern European countries behind the

<sup>2</sup> See more: Bopp-Filimonov, jIV. (2021). 'Shaping, Questioning, Contradicting "Bad Communism:" Aspects of Generational Memory in Romania after 1989', vol. 3, no. 1, *Journal of Romanian Studies*, available at <https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/doi/10.3828/jrms.2021.3.1.05>

<sup>3</sup> Romanian secret police, short for *Departamentul Securității Statului* (Department of State Security).

Iron Curtain, including Romania, Poland, and the Soviet Union, implemented pro-natalist policies to grow their workforce, economic power, and industrialize agrarian communities. Key-terms used in the study include fertility rate, birth rate, and live birth, which are common in demographic statistics. To mention the most important ones, birth rate (BR) is the total number of births per 1,000 inhabitants in a specific period and is useful for understanding population trends. Fertility rate (FR) is more specific, calculated as the number of live births per 1,000 women of childbearing age. A live birth is defined as a birth where the foetus shows any sign of life (Carmichael, 2016). Abortion on request (hereinafter simply abortion) is the intentional interruption of pregnancy, as opposed to miscarriage. Examining Romania's birth and fertility rates from 1950 to the present reveals significant trends. Between 1953 and 1966, the total fertility rate dropped drastically, only to increase sharply in 1966 and 1967 following Ceaușescu's abortion ban. Despite fluctuations, a consistent downtrend in the fertility rate emerged by 1973-1975. After 1989, with abortion again legal, a negative trend consolidated. The Romanian population is expected to further decrease by 2100.<sup>4</sup>

The collective memory built between 1966 and 1989, as revived in this study, predominantly centres on the experiences of white ethnic Romanians. This narrow focus underscores the limitations and exclusivity of such memory, effectively marginalizing the experiences of other groups of women, particularly Roma women. Despite being the country's largest minority, their experiences under the natalist policies have been significantly underexplored. Unlike their Romanian peers, who were often denied access to abortion, many Roma women were allowed to terminate pregnancies, although as part of a

broader eugenic strategy aimed at reducing the Roma population (Adam, Mitroiu, 2016). This stark disparity in treatment reflects the broader racial ideologies of the regime and suggests the need for a more diverse approach to the subject within the unexplored cohort of Roma women.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Demographic policies in Communist Europe: socialist motherhood in socialist families

Communism in Eastern Europe not only marked a political shift on the post-war continent but also introduced a new socio-economic approach to the state and its citizens, aiming to build prosperous economies under a socialist society. Achieving a communist state required the contribution of every citizen, including women, who were active in all economic sectors. In Romania, for example, the first twenty years of Communism (1945-1965) saw a strong emphasis on birth rates as a social foundation supporting Communism. Families, particularly those with numerous children, were supported through subsidies, gratuities, and economic resource transfers (Lataianu, 2002). However, state support for birth rates could not prevent a decline on account of the core ideals of a Communist society: modernization and urbanization progressed rapidly, with a significant part of the population migrating from rural areas to cities. Despite the increased participation of women in the labour force, life standards did not grow accordingly. Encouraged by socialist ideas of gender equality, women faced a double burden: working alongside men while also managing housework and children's education.

After 1955, abortion in Romania was liberalized again and became the most common

<sup>4</sup> Real-time fertility rate predictions in Romania can be tracked here: [Total Fertility Rate of Romania 1950-2024 & Future Projections \(database.earth\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> An interesting contribution in this regard is Bogdan, I.M. (2022), 'Gender, State Policies and Lived Experience(s) Among Roma in Romania During the Communist Regime', Perspectives on Gender in Romania.

form of birth control in both urban and rural areas.<sup>6</sup> This trend was influenced not only by women's private decisions but also by the emergence of a new family model in the socialist-oriented society. Lataianu (2002) highlights that the period of compulsory education was extended, access to higher education increased, and the age at which individuals could live autonomously was delayed. "The child – considered a source of income in traditional society – became only a consumer in the modern one, based on a salary economy" (p. 4). That prompted families, particularly women, to have fewer children. A new family model emerged, transitioning from single-waged to dual-earner households. The liberalization of abortion supported this model, encouraging a declining birth rate. However, after 1965, Ceaușescu imposed a new demographic model overnight to pursue the "perfect" Romanian family: dual-earner working parents with at least four children.

Similar demographic trends occurred in other Eastern European countries between 1945 and 1965, such as Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Research by Oláh and Fraczak (2004) identified variables influencing fertility patterns in Hungary and Poland from the 1950s to the 1980s. They noted that highly educated women postponed childbearing, especially for their first child; employment status influenced fertility; marital status, particularly marriage, helped with housing availability and childbearing. In both countries, state-supported policies balanced women's employment and family formation. However, as the family institution evolved and birth rates generally declined across socialist states, the outcomes varied. Pro-abortion policies remained stable until 1989, after which they were reversed in Poland, now one of the most restrictive countries regarding abortion (Angelova,

2018). Hungary maintained similar policies until the 2010s. Hence Romania, with its rapid shift between 1966 and 1989, stands out as a unique example of anti-abortion legislation in state socialism, followed by a return to liberalized abortion policies in the 1990s, contrasting with the trajectories of Hungary and Poland.

### 3.2. *Sexual education under Ceaușescu's regime*

Under Ceaușescu's regime, childbearing was considered the ultimate contribution a woman could make to socialism, yet this did not come with an open, taboo-free discourse on sexuality. With the emphasis on society over the individual, communist-imposed sexual norms prioritized reproduction over pleasure, in contrast to the Western (particularly American) trend of the 1960s. These norms strongly influenced abortion and demographic policies by promoting the idea that reproduction was vital for socialism and a counter to individualism and capitalism. Men and women were encouraged to view sexual intercourse not as a source of personal enjoyment but as a patriotic duty to produce new citizens for Romania, a similar approach to the one imposed by the Orthodox Church's dogmas. Following Ceaușescu's appointment as general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, the building of socialism involved not only an almost total abortion ban and the criminalization of women's reproductive health but also party-approved "sex education." Two major sex manuals circulated in Romania between 1966 and 1989, setting norms for sexual intercourse and married life and contributing to the concept of "communist sexuality" (a term coined by Biebuyck, 2010). These manuals, *De vorbă cu tinerii: probleme de educație a sexelor* (Talking with the Youth: Problems of Sex Education) and *Viața sexuală și căsătoria* (Sexual Life and Marriage), published in 1968 by Radu Dimitriu and Maria Alecu-Ungureanu respectively, were widely distributed

<sup>6</sup> A short history of abortion laws and decrees in Romania is provided in the paragraph 3.3. Abortion-related policies in Romania (1955-1989).

to diverse segments of Romanian society. The first manual targeted teens and adults encountering sex for the first time, while the second was designed for newlyweds. Both manuals were intended for men and women, and aimed at citizens born in the 1940s and 1950s.

The manuals emphasized that sexual instinct was associated with masculinity and that femininity involved subjecthood and submission, considered positively. Heterosexuality was deemed normal, while non-reproductive sex and homosexuality abnormal. Dimitriu reinforced heterosexual normativity through his use of gender-specific pronouns and terms for partners (*el partener* and *ea parteneră*). The idea that women's greatest fulfilment came from reproductive sex was also prevalent among Romanian doctors. The emphasis on reproductive sex as the only correct form, the subordination of individual pleasure (often the woman's), and the promotion of feminine passivity were key elements of Ceaușescu's pro-natalist socialism. Any form of individualism was condemned, and socialist mothers were expected to adhere strictly to these norms. The socialist ideology of femininity was synonymous with forced motherhood, supported by draconian laws banning abortion and coercing women into having children. As summarized in *The Decree Chronicles*, "The post-Decree sexual era was marked by an obsessive concern: not to get pregnant. Sex education and contraceptives did not exist, and abortion was completely forbidden. [...] The obsession of our youth was not to get pregnant. I think that was even more important than finishing college" (Oncioiu & Meseșan, 2021).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *The Party State Tasked Women with Having Children. The Repercussions Are Still Felt.* By Diana Oncioiu, Diana Meseșan, November 4, 2021. [The Party State Tasked Women with Having Children. The Repercussions Are Still Felt - Decree Chronicles](#)

### 3.3. Abortion-related policies in Romania (1955-1989)

Within a decade, Romania's stance on abortion dramatically shifted. Initially punished as a criminal act under the 1948 Criminal Code, abortion was liberalized with Decree 55/456, published on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1955, in *Buletinul Oficial al Marii Adunări Naționale a Republicii Populare România*<sup>8</sup>. This decree allowed abortions to be performed by doctors or other qualified personnel in cases where the pregnancy posed life-threatening risks to the woman. Two years later, Decree 57/463 made abortion legal in any case (Sala, 2018). State support and allowances were introduced for families with children, aligning with the policies of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the first General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, who led Romania from 1955 to 1965. When Nicolae Ceaușescu succeeded Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965, he implemented coercive pro-natalist policies, the most infamous being *Decree 66/770*, which severely restricted access to abortion. Under this decree, abortion on request was prohibited except under specific conditions:

1. When the woman's life was endangered by the pregnancy, as judged by a special commission.
2. If the future child was at risk of hereditary diseases or congenital deformities.
3. In cases where the woman was physically, psychologically, or emotionally incapacitated.
4. For women over 45 years of age.
5. For women already supporting four or more children.
6. If the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest. (Anton, 2011)

In preparation for hosting the United Nations Third World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974, Romania had to adjust the stringent

<sup>8</sup> The Official Gazette of the Grand National Assembly of the Romanian People's Republic.

*Decree 66/770* to align with international standards. Consequently, *Decree 53/1972* lowered the age at which a woman could request an abortion from 45 to 40. However, in 1985, another decree reinstated the threshold at 45 years (Anton, 2011). Overall, it was ironic that Romania hosted a conference promoting the right to freely and responsibly determine family size and access to family planning services, given that these rights were severely restricted within its own borders.

The state's interference in personal life extended beyond abortion policies. Between 1967 and 1977, additional decrees were enacted to strengthen family institutions, limit divorces (*Decree 66/779*), increase state child allowances, and introduce other forms of assistance for large families (*Decree 77/246*). Anton (2011) also mentions a celibacy tax imposed on childless men and women over 25. The aggressive pro-natalist policies drove women to seek underground abortions, risking arrest or death. By the 1980s, particularly in 1984, the regime observed a decline in fertility rates and reinforced anti-abortion measures. Health personnel were tasked with monitoring women's compliance with the law. In 1986, three years before his demise and assassination, Ceaușescu publicly declared: "The foetus is the socialist property of the whole society. Giving birth is a patriotic duty. Those who refuse to have children are deserters, escaping the law of natural continuity" (David & Băban, 1996). The *Decree 66/770* remained in force until 1989.

### 3.4. Stories of Underground Abortions in Romania

Between 1967 and 1969, Romania's birth rate doubled due to *Decree 66/770*, which heavily restricted abortions. However, women soon began circumventing this law by seeking illegal and often unsafe abortions. This subject drew my interest due to the dreadful accounts from women in Communist Romania collected in the documentary "Decreții: Children and Women of

the Decree" (2005). Indeed, today numerous stories of these experiences have emerged, particularly through literature, and cinema. Their narratives not only reveal a long-hidden history but also highlight the lasting traumatic effects on modern-day Romanian society and women's perspectives on motherhood and abortion – which are to be explored further in the next section.

Florian Iepan's "Decreții: Children and Women of the Decree" provides a harrowing testimonial of women's experiences during Ceaușescu's regime until 1989. A shadow industry of clandestine abortions emerged, often performed by doctors, midwives, nurses, or even individuals with no medical training, motivated solely by money. The goal was to induce bleeding so the woman could go to the hospital and receive a curettage, masquerading the procedure as a miscarriage, which was legally permissible. Adrian Singeorzan, a gynaecologist during Communist Romania, explains that common methods included inserting substances like mustard, tea, antibiotics, plant leaves, or even lemon juice into the uterus.<sup>9</sup> These substances, according to Romanian folklore, were believed to have abortive properties but were also toxic and infectious. Even celebrities of the time were not spared from these dangerous measures. Delia Budeanu, a popular TV presenter in the 1970s, recounts how she resorted to desperate measures, including throwing herself into a pool of cold water, nearly causing a heart attack, to induce an abortion. In another documentary, "The Unforgettable Tragedy: Confessions from the Decree Era,"<sup>10</sup> from *The Decree Chronicles*, three women recall their experiences: a nurse working in abortion hospital sectors, a woman who sought an abortion herself, and Irina, the daughter of a woman who died due to the decree. Elena Copaciu, the nurse, recalls the pale, green-tinged

<sup>9</sup> From "Decreții: Children and Women of the Decree". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgZJ-IV8Et0&t=2383s>

<sup>10</sup> "The Unforgettable Tragedy: Confessions from the Decree Era". <https://youtu.be/WTMImVNWrIc>

faces and dark-circled eyes of women queuing up to complete their abortions, often initiated at home. After the curettage, these women would rise from the table like shadows, profoundly weakened by their ordeal, with the fear of death ever-present. Ioana Coja, who sought an illegal abortion during her third pregnancy, recounts her terrifying near-death experience: at four months pregnant, a midwife inserted a saline solution mixed with hot water into her uterus, intending to detach the embryo from the placenta and cause the curettage. The method failed, leading to septicaemia, and Ioana was driven to the hospital where doctors treated her severe infection without notifying the authorities as they were supposed to. Reflecting on her experience, Ioana initially appears detached, but when recalling the moments after the curettage, she breaks down in sobbing and covers her eyes. Irina Chelba's account tells the tragedy of her mother, who developed a severe infection after undergoing a clandestine abortion. Unlike in Ioana's case, when doctors discovered the abortion, the police intervened, demanding to know the identity of the person who performed the procedure. Irina's mother, refusing to divulge the information, was left to die from septicaemia.

These documentaries intertwine the lives and experiences of two generations of women: those becoming mothers in the late 1960s because of the ban (they were referred to as socialist mothers), and those in the 1980s due to the tightening of it (their daughters). They share the same destiny of forced motherhood and abortion taboo. Numerous literary novels published after 1989 recount abortion stories, though none are available in English. Marinescu (2022) provides access to their major themes and main characters. These novels depict fictional personal stories of missed motherhood, reflecting on the construction of gender roles in the 1970s and 1980s. However, the narratives primarily focus on white, ethnic Romanian, middle-class, and educated women, with little attention given to women of different economic statuses or ethnicities. Striking

examples include *Fontana di Trevi* by Gabriela Adameșteanu (2018), *Și se auzeau greierii*<sup>11</sup> by Corina Sabău (2019), and *Complezență. Înălțarea la ortopedie. Musafir pe viață*<sup>12</sup> by Simona Sora (2020). Although the novels were published recently, these authors draw on their youthful experiences, shaping their cross-generational memory and that of their children.

In *Complezență*, metaphoric terms used to refer to the unborn child include "o păpușă însângerață" (a bloody doll), "mogâldeța proaspăt lepădată" (the freshly dropped piece), "boțul de om" (the human piece), and "corpul delict" (the criminal evidence) (Sora, 2020:33). The first three expressions highlight the foetus's dehumanization, while the last one refers to the criminal act of obtaining an abortion. The novel describes a scene where an aborted baby is retrieved, and a criminal investigation starts. The post-abortion death rate was high, often due to extended and unhealed bleeding. *Și se auzeau greierii* depicts a similar scene, and *Fontana di Trevi* includes positive characters like a nurse who takes pity on a woman seeking an abortion and tells her the name of a good doctor.

The 2007 film *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile*<sup>13</sup>, directed by Cristian Mungiu, revisits the abortion theme in 2007. Set in the 1980s, it tells the story of two friends, Otilia and Găbița. Găbița becomes unwantedly pregnant and struggles to obtain an abortion because the pregnancy is advanced. The abortion is eventually performed in a hotel room, unsafely and illegally by a shadowy and deceitful man, Mr Bebe. The foetus is thrown away in a trash bag, and the two friends promise never to speak of it again. This tale contrasts with a Communist propaganda film, *Ilustrate cu flori de*

<sup>11</sup> In English, *And one could hear the crickets*, translation by Marinescu.

<sup>12</sup> In English, *Complaisance/Complacency. Raising in Orthopedics*, translation by Marinescu.

<sup>13</sup> In English, *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, official translation at Cannes Film Festival.

*câmp*<sup>14</sup> (1975), which aimed to teach “disobedient” women a lesson. Set in early 1970s Bucharest, it follows Irina and Laura, the latter becoming pregnant after engaging with a married man and seeking an abortion. Laura insists on getting an abortion but questions her decision when it is too late and dies of complications, while Irina kills herself, feeling responsible for her friend’s death. The film served a propagandistic purpose, instilling fear and regret in women considering abortion and underscoring the dangers of illegal procedures. In conclusion, novels and visual productions such as films and documentaries like these which narrate a collective past, intertangle different personal stories, evoke a dreadful atmosphere and resonate with younger generations and with those who have no direct experience of the Communist regime, keeping alive a not-too-far past (Adam & Mitrou, 2016).

### 3.5. Processing the Trauma from Generation to Generation

At the dawn of post-communist democracy, at Giulești Maternity Hospital, Marinescu recounts that there were 50 to 60 hospitalized women who wanted to terminate their pregnancies. Some of the women were seven months’ pregnant. (The Decree Chronicles)<sup>15</sup>

In Romania, evidence shows that during the Communist years working women were forced to undergo gynaecological examinations on a monthly basis in order to detect early pregnancies, and monitor them until birth. “The mentality that developed is that screening is a check-up on pregnancy and not a screening for diseases such as cervical cancer.” (Ungurean in Oncioiu & Mesean:

2021). The figure of the medical practitioner was usually negative, linked to lack of interest and automatic work rather than interest in the patient’s wellbeing, the imperative being to give birth to new citizens. This, as widely talked about, creates the collective memory of women enduring on their bodies such aggressive laws. What is in turn surprising is what happened after 1989 in the third analysed generation, the one outliving the demise of anti-abortion policies.

In December 1989, after the overthrow of Ceaușescu’s regime, abortion was re-legalized in Romania. The Romanian population saw a significant decrease between 1991 and 2001, with a birth-to-mortality rate ratio of 9.8:11.6 per 1000 inhabitants in 2001, indicating more deaths than births. The fertility rate among young women aged 15 to 24 also dropped significantly. In 2014 the right to abortion was regulated by Article 201 of the Romanian Penal Code, which penalized abortions in the following cases: 1) if performed by unqualified personnel or outside medical institutions, 2) if the pregnancy exceeds 14 weeks (except for therapeutic purposes up to 24 weeks), or 3) if the woman unwillingly undergoes the procedure. Moreover, the Article made self-induced abortion unpunishable, unlike under Communist laws<sup>16</sup> With the regime change in 1989, contraceptives were allowed for import, sale, and use by women in order to manage their reproductive health. Despite the availability of contraception, abortion remained a commonly used method of birth control.

To understand why abortion continues to be widely relied upon as a birth control method, memory theory, and particularly body memory, offers valuable insights. Memory functions as a process rather than a fixed entity. Amongst the four dimensions of memory identified by Craps and Vermeulen (2016), transgenerationality

<sup>14</sup> In English, Postcards with Wild Flowers, translation by IMDb. <https://m.imdb.com/title/tt0071651/releaseinfo/>

<sup>15</sup> *The Party State Tasked Women with Having Children. The Repercussions Are Still Felt.* By Diana Oncioiu, Diana Meseșan, November 4, 2021. [The Party State Tasked Women with Having Children. The Repercussions Are Still Felt - Decree Chronicles](https://www.the-party-state-tasked-women-with-having-children-the-repercussions-are-still-felt-decree-chronicles/)

<sup>16</sup> For more information, see Codul Penal, Lege nr. 286 din 17 iulie 2009, Articolul 201. <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/provision/romania-abortion-provisions/>

explains how the violence experienced by one generation is transmitted to the next, even if they did not experience it directly but lived through its memory images. This transmission reshapes and remoulds the memory, whether within families or publicly. The descendants of Holocaust survivors, for example, adopt their ancestors' trauma as part of their identity, despite not having experienced the genocide themselves (Craps & Vermeulen, 2016).

Based on the WHO assessment in 1999<sup>17</sup>, some factors made abortion more accessible than contraception: firstly, in 1999 the cost of a legal abortion ranged between 60,000 and 92,000 lei (approximately \$2 to \$3); secondly, legal abortions typically involve a one-day hospital or clinic stay, meaning a quick procedure. Moreover, it was women aged 25 to 29 who most frequently sought abortions, often due to low income, unemployment, partner-related issues, and overall lack of information on contraceptive use. The assessment revealed that the overall contraceptive prevalence rate among women was 63.8%, with 29.5% using modern contraception and 34.3% using traditional and highly ineffective methods like withdrawal and rhythm (WHO report, 2004)<sup>18</sup>. Modern contraceptives such as condoms, oral contraceptives, and IUDs, which have the lowest failure rates, were often avoided due to their cost and the need for a prescription. Contraception was also believed to cause serious side effects and more health problems than abortion. Thus, abortion remained seen as an accessible, cheap, and quick procedure. Another reason emerging from the report is the reluctance to undergo gynaecological examinations and regular checks for Romanian women, with serious repercussions not only on their reproductive health, but also on their medical state. For instance, cervical cancer, the second leading cause

of female death in Europe, counts the highest mortality rate in Romania. Despite a screening program by the Ministry of Health between 2012 and 2017, only a few women, mostly those educated and living in urban areas, regularly see a doctor and undergo periodic checks like the Pap smear test (Todor et al., 2021).

In conclusion, transgenerationality of trauma defines interesting, apparently contradictory behaviours. Those women fertile in the 1990s and 2000s, despite not undergoing the abortion ban on their bodies, recollected the tremendous experiences of those women before them but still preferred abortion over contraception in fear of an inadequate healthcare system. Hence, the repercussions on post-1989 Romanian women also manifest infant and maternal mortality issues, and inadequate reproductive health care and cancer prevention such as cervical cancer screenings. The main, still present legacy printed in women's collective memory is that abortion, in contrast to medical checks and contraception, is the only way to exercise control over their own bodies (Anton, 2011).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In the Romanian context, the memory and trauma of pro-natalist policies persist among Romanian women born after 1989, in the form of a collective past, even though their bodies did not endure such atrocities. Literary and cinematic works from the previous section indicate how transgenerational memory is processed, with the critical works on the abortion ban emerging in the early 2000s, when awareness of past events reached a maturity point. The Romanian pro-natalist past remained a taboo for at least a decade after 1989, until the early 2000s. The absence of a scapegoat to punish (Ceașescu and his wife Elena were executed after a brief trial, without being held accountable for Decree 770) contributed to this silence. The release of the documentary "Decreteii: Children of the Decree" was a pivotal moment. Additionally, post-1989 Romania saw a

<sup>17</sup> Abortion and contraception in Romania. A strategic assessment of policy, programme and research issues. Report issued in 2004.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

return to traditional gender roles, reinforced by the Orthodox Church, which expected women to be mothers, albeit not socialist mothers. Consequently, abortion was widely practiced but remained a woman-only matter, surrounded by shame, painful memories, and a sense of privacy (Anton, 2009).

The first generation affected by the ban *i.e.* women born in the 1940s and 1950s, was still influenced by state socialism, while their daughters lived through it and witnessed its demise. A new generation has emerged since the overthrow of the Romanian communist regime in December 1989, allowing for greater reflection on that past (Bopp-Filimonov, 2024). Oral narratives and later cinematic productions revealed how the generation of socialist mothers developed a collective memory based on abortion language and places of remembrance. This language included anecdotes about unreliable contraception methods (e.g., ‘And how exactly can one use aspirin as contraception?’ ‘By keeping it between the knees – that’s how!’, a folklore joke goes)<sup>19</sup> and verbs gaining new meanings, such as "a sonda" (to probe), redefined as getting an abortion. The unwanted foetus was often described as a "problem," reflecting the specific vulnerability of women targeted by *the Decree* and the detachment towards the child in societies with a history of abortion liberalization, like pre-1966 Romania. Hospitals and police headquarters became significant memory spaces, as women often initiated abortions at home and then sought medical help, pretending it was a miscarriage. If suspected, they could be reported to the police, arrested, and incriminated for attempting an abortion (Anton, 2009).

After 1989, abortion became a woman's individual choice rather than a state imposition.

<sup>19</sup> This line, in its simplicity, draws attention to the popular belief that aspirin could prevent unwanted pregnancy if inserted vaginally before intercourse, and to abstinence as the only contraception method.

However, the transition from a socialist to a free-market state led to worsening economic conditions, causing women to delay or suspend motherhood plans to participate in the workforce. Motherhood became an obstacle to work fulfilment and hiring possibilities, with women being questioned about their family plans during job interviews. Arsene argues that the ideological imposition to multiply for the state's benefit was replaced by an economic imposition not to multiply, benefiting business owners and institutional profit (Arsene, 2017). This shift indicates that control over women's bodies has transitioned from the state to the economy and profitability. To this day, many Romanian women, especially those over 40, fear regular gynaecological check-ups and mistrust doctors and medical interventions. This mistrust and lack of sexual education contribute to the continued preference for abortion over modern contraceptives and preventive health measures. The generation of socialist mothers experienced oblivion, fear of death, and mistrust, being deprived of the right to safe abortions. Their trauma was passed on to subsequent generations, impacting women's general and reproductive health. Unwillingly, they raised a generation with little knowledge of sexuality and reproductive health (Anton, 2011) with its remnants in today's one. The present study contributes thus contributes to the exploration of Romanian women's transgenerational collective memory in relation to abortion and forced motherhood. Through the lens of political and historical vicissitudes, three generations of women living in Romania during and after Communism were put under scrutiny and showed how the Decree 66/770 repercussions remain perceivable to this day. This memory revives not only through cinematic works, but on women's actual bodily experiences, resuscitating discomfiting feelings of fear and distrust towards medical examinations and state's interference in their intimate life.

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# Branding with Language: Romanian as a Foreign Language on Instagram

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## Abstract

*In the era of social media platforms, the Romanian language, considered a ‘minor’ language, is experiencing a resurgence due to the online activity of young content creators who engage audiences by creating impactful narratives in Romanian. These young content creators choose to use Romanian in their posts to gain virality and attract followers. This does not only illustrate a trend that puts the language in motion but also leads to the emergence of a new linguistic variety which is evolving and adapting to new contexts, reflecting the dynamic nature of the online space where users come across various communities and narratives. This study highlights the transformative power of social media on ‘minor’ languages, presenting the case of Romanian used as a foreign language by Instagram influencers who construct an L2 identity, build and maintain an online reputation and a brand by creating engaging content on topics like cuisine and culture, fun facts and clichés, humour and (self-)irony, lifestyle and professional life, travel experiences.*

**Keywords:** prestige language, ‘minor’ language, social media, branding strategy, language variety

## INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms have reconfigured society both online and offline on all levels, and the digital landscape creates the groundwork for interactions involving a mixture of prestige languages and ‘minor’ languages. By ‘minor’ languages we refer to Less Widely Used Less Taught (LWULT) Languages, and we use this label intentionally throughout the paper to expropriate the Anglocentric hegemonic language as a means of highlighting the power dynamics inherent in the discourse being examined.

In this context, we examine Romanian as a foreign language or as a second language used by foreign users in reels on Instagram with the intention of self-branding, while also placing a focus on the comments posted to these reels. The time span under focus is June-September 2024. In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the Romanian discourse produced online by non-native content creators and native speakers’ attitudes, we begin by presenting the overall

situation of online participation and sites of engagement. We present theoretical concepts and ideas, then we proceed to qualitatively analyse and discuss a selection of examples. The examples selected are in Romanian, we reproduce all of them *verbatim*, and we also provide an English translation of these examples.

### ONLINE PARTICIPATION AND SITES OF ENGAGEMENT

Online, we witness ‘a bedlam of blip culture’ (Toffler, quoted in Lindgren, 2017: 22) and languages because sociocultural attitudes towards language use might shift: prestige languages may lose status when Romanians speak them online, while ‘minor’ languages may experience a boost in status when foreigners speak Romanian online. This is due to the fact that Romanian users value the linguistic competencies and adaptability of these foreign influencers. In this context, we witness the overall impact of the digital on society in which ‘narrowcasting’ (*Ibidem*) and niche audiences replace broadcasting and mass audiences of earlier media landscapes. Lindgren also mentions the example of Toffler, who, in the early 1980s, imagined what the functioning of digital media would be today. Toffler proposed the concept of ‘bedlam of blip culture’ and he predicted that ‘the myriad small pieces of content offered through electronic media over time will make people more active in navigating and piecing things together by themselves’ (*Ibidem*). In this way, new forms of participation and engagement, change of language status, power relations, and solidarity are inherent to digitally networked media. Moreover, we also witness the production and consumption of content in the form of ‘prosumerism’, understood as the use of social networking sites as information resources for the sharing and consumption of product and brand information (Silver, 2009) and also as commodification of identity and self-branding construction in the online sphere. The divide

between private and public information is blurred, and netizens on social media sometimes gain the status of micro-celebrities exactly because of this clash between a public context and private content, this also leading to ‘the emerging new rhetoric about democratisation and participation’ (Lindgren, 2017: 34). Netizens no longer consume media passively, but they participate actively, creating power that emerges from digital platforms and creates a ‘participatory mindset’ (Lindgren, 2017: 74). As Lindgren states, society is ‘affected by digitally networked communication tools and platforms’ (Lindgren, 2017: 12), and our daily lives are influenced and reconfigured.

### INSTAGRAM AND RFL – ‘A NEW SOCIAL VALUE’

In the local milieu of the digital space, which encapsulates both the local Romanian context and the global context in which individuals learn the language due to contingent factors (e.g. having a Romanian girlfriend/boyfriend/Romanian friends, interacting in Romanian in professional contexts, learning the language out of pure curiosity, etc.), Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) is reimagined as a linguistic resource that provides popularity to its speakers and also functions as a self-branding online tool. In conjunction with the online affordances that facilitate easy access to Romanian resources of all types, RFL has achieved high status among niche audiences, which establish micro-societies with specific interests and needs.

The status of English as the world’s major language, lingua franca and ‘the language of science, technology and international diplomacy’ (Parianou, 2010: 5) has been reconfigured in some spaces of the online environment, which has facilitated a change of trends and discursive strategies, expressing ‘collective cultural capital and identity’ (*Ibidem*) as represented by niche audiences. These audiences, with their unique interests and perspectives, can appreciate and

assign meaning to online content. In the online context, the use of a ‘minor’ language like Romanian also brings about integration in the national or diasporic communities, and it expresses globalisation not as ‘the homogenisation of world culture or from a homogeneity position’ (*Ibidem*), but rather from a heterogenous position in which major and ‘minor’ languages intertwine in order to create an online performance. This turn brought about by the digital context has led to a more diverse and inclusive landscape, where different voices can be heard and valued, entitling us to state that social media has completely transformed the manner in which we share information, express ourselves, and relate to others, leading to significant shifts in status and roles.

When used online as a foreign language, Romanian is perceived as a high-status language by niche audiences that have particular language attitudes, but it is important to note that ‘language attitudes should not restrict themselves to attitudes towards language alone but should open themselves up to speakers of whatever language and society they live in’ (Parianou, 2010: 2). This is especially applicable to foreigners who use Romanian in reels on Instagram and who try to gain popularity through a ‘minor’ foreign language that brings forth their openness to multiculturalism, diversity, and interest in contributing to the change of linguistic trends online. These language attitudes are new to the ‘minor’ languages, contrary to the popular belief ‘that the status of certain languages has fallen in comparison to the world language English’ (Parianou, 2010: 2). However, we concur with Parianou (2010: 4) when she states that ‘the same changing language attitude goes for the choice of a foreign language where the “niche” and the “needs” determine the language status’.

Online, we witness a constant change in the content that is being created and consumed because the niche audiences and the needs and interests of content creators are dynamic. This

dynamism is not just about the topics and themes, but also the specific language and style chosen by the content creators. Defining style in Bourdieu’s terms (1993: 39), we consider that the online content sometimes shows individual deviations from the linguistic norm, constituting an elaboration that tends to give discourse its distinctive properties, which play a crucial role in attracting and retaining specific audiences. We can thus speak about specific styles of content creators that create a linguistic habitus understood as ‘a set of dispositions to speak in a certain manner, to say certain things, and a learned capacity to properly use linguistic resources in certain situations’ (Bourdieu, 1993: 37-38), perceived not merely as a reflection of the style, but also as a product of their social constellation (social status, background, relations, norms, values, preferences, expectations, etc.). Moreover, ‘there are socially constructed dispositions of the linguistic habitus, which imply a certain propensity to speak and to say determinate things (the expressive interest)’ (*Ibidem*). This expressive interest is both shaped by and shapes the online content landscape, where the focus is again on the linguistic habitus, and Romanian spoken by non-native speakers appears catchy and garners appreciation from the native speakers, who are impressed both by the language skills of these content creators and by the fact that they embrace and promote Romanian culture. These language attitudes are expressed in the comments section of reels, as can be seen by a small selection of screenshots rendered in *Figure 1* below:

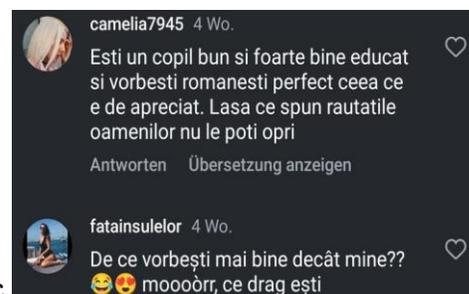
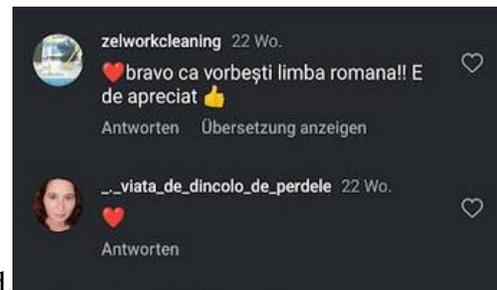




Figure 1. Perception of RFL in reels on Instagram

Based on the language attitudes displayed in the screenshots above, it is clear that users associate prestige with individuals who speak RFL rather than English or their mother tongue.

We thus notice attitudes like: excitement/delight/amusement instead of correction for language mistakes (a. *Un covrig cu floare de soare – ce frumos sună [A pretzel with sunflower – it sounds so nice]* – here the content creator uses *un covrig cu floare de soare* instead of *un covrig cu semințe de floarea-soarelui [a pretzel with sunflower seeds]*), admiration and positive evaluation of language skills (a. *Your Romanian skills are impressive; a. You're a very good Romanian speaker*), surprise triggered by the high language skills (b. *Dude, you call that “very little Romanian”?* *Even your accent is almost Romanian*), admiration by comparison with native speakers of Romanian (b. *true. I was confused for a second. Is he Romanian speaking English or English speaker knowing Romanian so well?*; e. *He speaks better Romanian than me.*), admiration for overall intelligence (e. *Cât de inteligent ești.*

*Vorbești foarte bine româna wow [You are so intelligent. You speak very good Romanian]),* reverence towards the Romanian language and culture (g. *Omul are mai mult respect de România decât 90% din români [The man has more respect for Romania than 90% of Romanians]; i. Someone give this man the citizenship already; c. Ești un copil bun și foarte bine educat. Vorbești românește perfect ceea ce e de apreciat [...] [You are a good kid and very well educated. You speak Romanian perfectly, which I really appreciate]),* welcoming (h. *Nu mă interesează ce naționalitate ai avut până acum, dar de acum încolo ești 100% român [It does not matter what nationality you had so far, but from now on you are 100% Romanian]).* All these attitudes are pragmatically reinforced by the emoticons that accompany the written text (smiley, laughing out loud, surprise, applause, hearts, etc.).

These attitudes and reflections show that there is an interplay between online discourse and RFL which produces ‘a new social value’ (Bourdieu 1995: 52-53) because content creators engage audiences and create impactful narratives in their reels. Through these narratives, content creators create a ‘third space’ understood as situations in which people come across a new language and culture (Block, 2007) and participate in L2 identity development and self-branding narratives to attract more followers and become recognised members of online communities. Thus, the use of Romanian online shows evidence of plurilingualism, which

differs from multilingualism (the simple addition of languages in societies and/or individuals) in that it focuses on the relationships between the languages an individual speaks, the underlying linguistic mechanisms and cultural connotations, the personal linguistic and cultural trajectory as well as the persons’ attitude toward language diversity, stressing openness, curiosity, and flexibility (Piccardo, 2017: 2).

In addition to configuring a plurilingual environment in which narratives and identities develop with the purposes of gaining popularity, the use of Romanian in reels on Instagram shows that plurilingualism can trigger positive change towards a diverse and inclusive society. Providing individuals the tool to connect different language systems and uncovering their complete range of linguistic abilities leads to a fusion and interrelationship of languages and cultures and a better understanding of diversity, but it also enhances deeper self-awareness of one's own culture and identity via the lens of otherness. Hence,

embracing plurilingualism can initiate change from the tiniest to the broadest scale, from helping individuals see the interconnections between language systems and discover their full repertoire, thus liberating their plurilingual self, to empowering them in perception, awareness and active exploration of linguistic and cultural diversity, hybridity and interconnections (Piccardo, 2017: 11).

### **PERSONAL AND PROFILE BRANDING THROUGH RFL**

The digitally networked communication on Instagram reels provides the space for content creators to realise personal and profile branding, which we consider a sign of creativity, understood as 'a capacity to realize a product that is both novel and appropriate/useful to the context where it appears, as judged by a suitably knowledgeable social group' (Piccardo, 2017: 2). As such, novelty, or at least novel elements, are a prerequisite of this environment as bringing something new or different content determines the number of followers and positive reactions. In this sense, the use of RFL is a linguistic strategy that ensures novelty and attracts attention, while targeting specific audiences who will recognise

and evaluate the content as being appropriate or useful for them.

The audiences of Instagram reels are also engaged in the content creation by the comments and the reactions to the content they consume, thus becoming prosumers and steering the creation of the content creators towards the type of content that they want to see online. This content becomes a 'Brand Me' mode of online self-presentation, which also involves this constant interaction and dialogue with the prosumers and which constructs not only a dialogical self that is always updated, but also 'an entrepreneurial self, a self that's packaged to be sold' (Deresiewicz, 2011: 7). In this line of thought, Smith and Watson (2013: 79) see the self as a commodity constructed to show 'a desirable brand "Me" — digitally hip, successful, fully sociable, intriguing'. This personal and profile brand focuses on what is unique or special, and the use of Romanian plays precisely this function in the Instagram reels under focus. The content creators of these reels can also 'turn themselves into a kind of "logo", which will consistently deliver a product and up-to-date status reports', while also creating 'a multimedia CV that marks "you" as a brand' (Smith; Watson, 2013: 79) through the dialogical process of self-curation performed under the guidance of the prosumers.

These content creators engage in short narratives that mostly focus on the ordinary and tell stories that embed the Romanian culture and language in a novel and surprising way because they are foreign speakers whose identity is not connected to Romania by any default factor, but rather a matter of choice and taste, making the online content a performance that continually shapes and conveys a branded self. As a consequence, the content creators' narratives, profiles, images are linked and communicate aspects of their offline experiences and also of their interest, all of them being built into a coherent presentation and a brand that is consolidated and marketed.

The personal and profile branding emerged from the content of the Instagram reels makes us address three questions taken from Smith and Watson (2013: 80):

Is the creator branding herself or himself on the site? How is the brand linked to autobiographical stories about experiences, character features, achievements? And how convincing is the assertion of brand coherence?'

We will try to answer these questions by illustrating the typologies of content creators who are foreigners and use RFL, but also by identifying some prevalent elements of the discourses that they reveal online and by which they construct and maintain an online reputation.

### CASE STUDY: PREVALENT TYPOLOGIES

Using a previous study on Romglish (Radu; Cotoc, 2023: 211-232), we can draw a parallel between the reasons for using Romglish and the reasons for using RFL because we consider that the use of these two varieties brings forth the personal and professional branding construction dimension. Exactly like Romglish, which is a linguistic blend used by Romanian speakers incorporating English elements to contribute 'to the performative construction of a desired up-to-date prestigious individual and group identity' (*Idem*, 214), RFL is often used by non-native speakers with the same purpose, while also signalling their connection to and interest in the Romanian culture and society. In both cases, the language used is not just a tool for communication, but also a means of expressing identity, navigating social relations, and negotiating cultural belonging. This highlights the complex and multifaceted role of new linguistic contacts in our lives, both use of Romglish and RFL show 'a clear link between language and identity, articulating identities and stories which

activate the current Romanian collective imaginary and revealing collective imagination which is encoded in linguistic facts' (*Idem*, 214). Moreover, both language varieties entail 'power relations and inclusion-exclusion dynamics in terms of group identification and membership' (*Idem*, 215). In this way, RFL also 'becomes a social and cultural construction specific to and adopted in different manners by various individuals, groups and communities with the desire to mark group membership through linguistic resources and attitudes towards language and linguistic codes' (*Ibidem*).

For the purpose of this study, we selected eight Instagram accounts. We will present their nationality, where they live, the connection to Romanian culture/language/the country, the overall content of their videos, and their evolving online identities:

- *Southy*: English singer and songwriter; he is in a relationship with a Romanian woman; he speaks some Romanian; his videos are a blend of Romanian and English. He started by creating videos that follow a particular pattern: 'If you have a Romanian girlfriend... (you have to be prepared against the *făcăleț* treatment and to gain *papuci immunity*)'; 'In Romania they don't say *You are crazy*, they say *Ești dus cu pluta* and I like that'. In the most recent videos, he tries Romanian food and products and starts launching songs in Romglish.
- *lifeofisiah19*: An African photographer living in Romania. He calls himself 'Copil al Ardealului' [Child of Transylvania]. Most of his reels contain long narratives and explanations regarding different cultural and culinary differences between the African and Romanian traditions. He speaks Romanian as a foreign language; having lived in Romania since 2006, he masters Romanian and his reels are usually elaborate; he rarely uses code-switching.

His first Instagram reels are all in English, but then he switches to Romanian.

- *primal\_gourmet*: His real name is Ronny Lvovski; he is a self-taught cook, food photographer and stylist, recipe blogger, and coffee enthusiast living in Canada<sup>1</sup>. He is married to a Romanian woman and often visits his in-laws. His reels contain recipes and little stories he creates while going to the market in Braşov or while taking walks with his wife. He speaks some Romanian, but his reels are usually a mix between English and Romanian.
- *rikito.watanabe*: Japanese chef/Ramen ambassador living in Romania. He speaks Romanian fluently, with Japanese inflection. His reels feature recipes and document food experiences in a humorous and relaxed style. His approach is not curated to the level of producing perfect Romanian language; he creates a brand by being very authentic.
- *zm95m*: an Iraqi barber residing in Romania; he shares reels showcasing mundane activities and fun facts. His content often includes (self-)irony and sarcasm and can come across as sexist or mean-spirited. He posts content both in Arabic and in Romanian; he speaks fluent Romanian, nevertheless with a specific accent, and does not use code-switching.
- *ruthie\_kuszai*: Filipino digital creator, married to a Romanian man and living in Romania. Most of her reels contain narratives and explanations regarding different cultural and culinary aspects, travels, and everyday activities; most of her videos are in Romanian and very few in English.
- *bantodossantos*: Brazilian artist, married to a Romanian woman and having three

children; they are currently living in Romania; his focus is on fashion and styling, events, parties, weddings, and other types of shows that he is invited to. Most of the content is in Romanian, and he even sings Romanian folklore.

- *edsta*: American photographer and cameraman, living in New York. Romanian is his L1, as he was born in Romania but left the country as a child. Despite having acquired Romanian as L1, we included him in our corpus because he uses Romanian to brand himself. However, his discourse is in English and he only includes short structures in Romanian with the purpose of introducing his nonnative followers to the Romanian language while walking on the streets of New York. In his videos, he sometimes blends English with Romanian and renders clichés and expressions by providing word-for-word translations in English and then saying the Romanian expression. For example: ‘A Romanian will not tell you to stop wasting your time, he’ll tell you to *stop rubbing the mint* [*Nu mai freca menta*]’; he tastes Romanian food and different products and evaluates them; and, in his more recent reels, he interacts with the people from the Romanian diaspora living in New York.

All the Instagram accounts selected for the purpose of this study focus on the ordinary and the mundane, appealing to the emotion of the audience by offering a unique window into the everyday life of foreigners who speak Romanian. They manage to create content that resonates with their audience formed both by foreigners who speak Romanian and by native speakers of Romanian. They skilfully utilise Romanian artefacts and language to promote their professions, a particular lifestyle or product, covering a great variety of topics ranging from traditional Romanian cuisine and humour to fun

<sup>1</sup> For more details, see also his website: <https://cookprimalgourmet.com/my-paleo-story/>

facts and linguistic peculiarities, such as idiomatic Romanian phrases and expressions.

These accounts provide a platform for cultural exchange, featuring content that draws comparisons between cultures, promoting their own culture, and even reaching out to Romanians who do not speak English. They are aware of the fact that for followers it is quite special to see foreigners speaking their language, and they cognitively activate various dimensions related to life in general (e.g., going to work, wishes, travel experiences), creating a space that is both informative and entertaining. This blend of content promotes a sense of community among followers, and contributes to the construction of a shared hybrid cultural identity, bridging the gap between cultures.

### RFL ONLINE: SELECTION OF EXAMPLES

Through RFL, Instagram influencers build an online reputation and they create engaging content that spans a variety of topics: cuisine and culture; fun facts and clichés; humour and (self-)irony; lifestyle and professional life; travel experiences. These content creators carefully select topics that enable a lasting connection with their audience, as can be seen by the growing number of followers. Even if the Instagram influencers have a preference for particular topics, the topics that we identified as prevalent are tackled by all the Instagram influencers because they all fall under the umbrella of Romanian curiosities and culturally relevant aspects, which are meant to entertain and create a positive atmosphere without criticising or judging them.

#### *Cuisine and culture*

The Instagram influencers *primal\_gourmet* and *rikoto.watanabe* frequently produce engaging reels in Romanian, with a primary focus on Romanian, Canadian or Japanese cuisine and recipes. Their content showcases a rich blend of

traditional and modern culinary practices, highlighting the diverse flavours of their original cultures and those of Romanian heritage. Through their visually appealing and informative reels, they celebrate gastronomy, but also promote cultural appreciation among their followers.

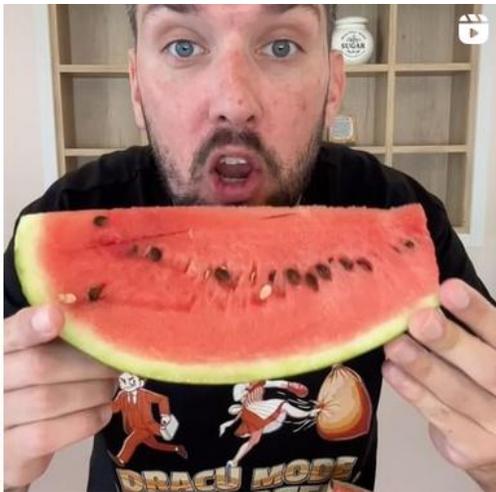
*Southy* and *edsta* frequently produce entertaining reels in Romanian, centring on tasting a variety of Romanian products and foods. The selection of examples below (*Figure 2*) shows that their content is not only a delightful exploration of local cuisine but also a humorous take on Romanian expressions, behaviours, and even clichés. Through their playful and witty approach, they celebrate and poke fun at the unique aspects of Romanian culture: example a. shows *edsta* on the streets during the Romania Festival in New York. The picture is a collage of the actual street footage to which *edsta* added two of the most typical Romanian dishes, also adding the question ‘*Mici or Sarmale?*’; example b. shows *edsta* holding the most typical Romanian bar of chocolate; examples c. and d. show *Southy* indulging in the local cuisine (eating Romanian watermelon, respectively a typical dish based on cabbage, meat, rice, polenta).



a.



b.



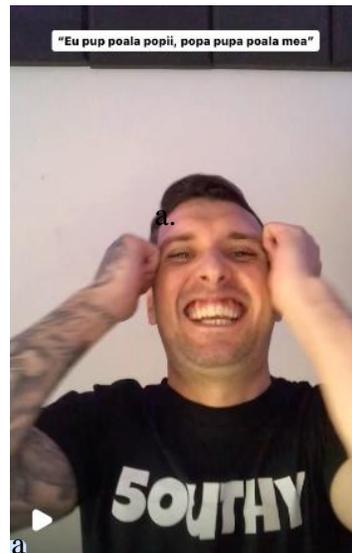
c.



d.

Figure 2. *Cuisine and culture  
Fun facts and clichés*

Romanian culture is rich in unique expressions and fun facts that often make their way into social media content, especially among influencers and Instagrammers like *Southy*, *edsta* and *rikito.watanabe*. These influencers share interesting tidbits and expressions that are very catchy and could be used in everyday life. *Edsta*'s focus on linguistic features and Romanian lessons makes his content particularly valuable for those interested in learning the language and understanding its nuances; he has several reels teaching his followers expressions and words in Romanian. *Figure 3* below illustrates a Romanian tongue twister (example a.), the fact the Romanian idiomatic expressions are notable (example b.), typical Romanian greetings, especially among the elderly (example c.).



a.



b.

Figure 3. *Fun facts and clichés*

*Humour and (Self-)Irony*

*Southy*, *ruthie\_kuszai*, *rikito\_watanabe*, *edsta* and *zm95m* often use humour and (self-)irony in

their reels to highlight Romanian temperament, cuisine, and habits, as well as their personal lives. They share exaggerated reactions, cooking mishaps, cultural quirks, and relatable stories, all in Romanian, making their content entertaining and engaging. Some examples include: image a. is one of the amusing examples in which *Southy* creates humorous content where he pokes fun at the strict and severe nature of his Romanian partner. As such, he is seen desperately reciting a prayer that children typically say when they need help and protection. This playful exaggeration adds a lighthearted touch to his content, making it relatable and entertaining for his audience. Image b. shows *rikito\_watanabe* making funny facial expressions and closing his eyes when trying Romanian food, emphasising how much he enjoys it. *Zm95m* is always self-ironic about his weight and appetite, and, in example c., we can see him asking the question: *How does the stomach know if it is day or night?* – suggesting that he is always hungry. Example d. shows *zm95m* inviting the viewers to follow him: *Dă-mi și urmărire, nu te uita de pomană*. This Romanian sentence has two interesting aspects: he uses the noun *urmărire*, which is the Romanian version of ‘follow’, indicating that he is fully immersed in the Romanian language, as opposed to other Romanian Instagrammers who use the English version. Moreover, we consider this to be an interesting case because Romanian native speakers use code-switching (*dă-mi follow*), but he does not. To this, he adds that the viewers should not just watch his funny content without giving something in return, namely clicking the *follow* button. We note that the expression *de pomană* constitutes a very subtle phrase that only proficient speakers master, and he uses it in the right context with the right meaning, and the outcome is a real delight for the Romanian audience.



a.



b.



c.



d.

humorous), b. *ruthie\_kuszai* picking fresh fruit from her garden and captioning the video in Romanian (*Fructe proaspete din curtea noastra*), c. *zm95m* in his hair salon with a client, d. *lifeofisiah19* talking about his parents and explaining in Romanian how come they have a loving marriage even after more than 27 years, e. *primal\_gourmet* with his wife visiting Brașov and his in-laws, f. *bantodossantos* with his daughter recording a clip.

38



a.



b.

Figure 4. *Humour and (Self-)Irony*

#### *Lifestyle and professional life*

Balancing personal and professional content on Instagram can be delicate, but the influencers we selected manage it effectively by posting, from time to time, reels with their spouses/partners, parents, in-laws, sons and daughters, clients, etc., making sure it aligns with their overall brand. In this respect, the examples selected in *Figure 5* below show: a. *rikito\_watanabe* drinking a beer and saying ‘Sărbătorească’ (*Let them celebrate!* – making a confusion between *Let us celebrate*, first person plural, and 3rd person, and the result is



c.



d.



e.



f.

Figure 5. Lifestyle and professional life

### Travel experiences

Both the professional and personal content exposed on social media include travel experiences as a relevant dimension that contributes to the configuration of the overall picture of the online identity and brand construction targeted by the influencers. Whether they are exploring the picturesque landscapes of Romania or venturing into other destinations, their content is a blend of nicely curated visuals, cultural insights and personal experiences, often captioned in Romanian and/or mentioning Romanian experiences as can be seen in Figure 5 below: a. *rikito* is inviting his followers to accompany him in discovering the Japanese experience of going to the market by speaking Romanian, writing a Romanian description to the video and by adding captions to his video: *Haideți cu mine la ...* [Come with me to ...]; b. *ruthie\_kuszai* is visiting a village in Romania and promoting Romanian tourism: *Am vizitat Sebeșu de Jos* [I have visited Sebeșu de Jos]; c. *Southy* is trying to find Romanian food in Malta.



Figure 6. *Travel experiences*

The travel experiences illustrated in the three images above depict three typologies: the foreigners in their own country speaking Romanian, acting as cultural ambassadors, fostering a sense of connection and bringing their unique heritage closer to their followers; the foreigners exploring towns and villages in Romania, speaking Romanian and expressing admiration, often comparing its beauty to other countries (e.g., Switzerland); the influencers visiting a foreign country (other than Romania or their own) and often referencing Romania and Romanian cuisine as a point of comparison, praising its complexity.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

As seen by the five categories above, branding strategies that leverage the uniqueness of Romanian as a foreign language and the presentation of Romanian cultural elements through the eyes of foreigners can create a compelling narrative. Influencers like *Southy*, *ruthie\_kuszai*, *bantodossantos*, *rikito\_watanabe*, *primal\_goromet* and *edsta* effectively incorporate these strategies into their content. They produce reels that blend their professional insights with personal anecdotes, making their content both relatable and appealing to a diverse audience. By presenting Romanian places, restaurants, customs, or telling stories and anecdotes from their own cultures, they highlight the richness of Romanian culture in an engaging manner. This approach not only resonates with Romanians who appreciate the humour and self-irony but also attracts foreigners who are curious about the language and culture. The combination of professional and personal life elements in their reels ensures that their content remains authentic and relatable, fostering a deeper connection with their audience.

These non-native speakers effectively use Romanian in their Instagram reels to create a unique and engaging self-brand. This highlights

their linguistic skills and their appreciation and understanding of Romanian culture. The reels often feature humorous and self-ironic content related to Romanian temperament, cuisine, and customs. This not only entertains but also educates their audience about Romanian culture, while stimulating cultural exchanges. The comments on these reels reveal a mix of admiration and constructive feedback from native speakers. Non-native speakers are often praised for their efforts, and native speakers provide additional cultural insights, creating a collaborative learning environment.

By blending professional insights with personal anecdotes, the influencers make their content relatable and authentic. This approach resonates well with Romanian and international audiences, enhancing their online presence and engagement. The discourses produced by these users highlight the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and social media, demonstrating how Romanian is used creatively for self-branding and cultural exchange in the digital space.

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# The Eastern Romance Languages as Members of the Balkan *Sprachbund*

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## Abstract

*The purpose of the present article is to compare four Eastern Romance languages, namely Daco-Romanian, Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian, and Istro-Romanian, in terms of their morphological and syntactical features typical for the Balkan Sprachbund. The twelve features listed in the work by Jouko Lindstedt (2000) are examined. First, the languages are assessed using Lindstedt's methodology. Afterwards, more sensitive quotients are given depending on the frequency of the phenomena in question. The study has found that the most Balkanized Eastern Romance language is Aromanian, followed by Daco-Romanian and Megleno-Romanian. Istro-Romanian contains the least Balkan innovations.*

**Keywords:** Eastern Romance languages, Balkan *Sprachbund*, Balkanisms, Lindstedt

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Balkan *Sprachbund* is a group of languages spoken in the Balkans that have been in contact for many centuries, which allowed them to develop common phonological, lexical, and morphosyntactic features. The *Sprachbund*

includes Albanian, Greek, Balkan Slavic, and Balkan Romance. Other languages, such as Romani, Serbian (particularly, the Torlak dialect), and Turkish are sometimes considered peripheral members of the *Sprachbund* (Asenova, 1989: 12; Lindstedt, 2000: 287; Lindstedt, 2015). The term Balkan Romance encompasses four Eastern Romance languages, namely Daco-Romanian, Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian, and Istro-Romanian. The same branch is sometimes called Daco-Romance (Maiden, 2016: 91). In certain contexts (Luht; Narumov, 2001: 576), the four varieties are called dialects of Proto-Romanian, which emphasizes that they share a common ancestor. In this article, I opt for the term Eastern Romance *languages* to highlight the differences between the four varieties as well as to avoid confusion with local varieties, e.g. the Fărsherot dialect of Aromanian or *žeĵanski* in the case of Istro-Romanian.

The Daco-Romanian language (*limba română, românește*) is widely known as Romanian. The term Daco-Romanian is usually used to emphasize that the other three languages are not its dialects. The Daco-Romanian language is the only official language of Romania and Moldova, one of the official languages of the European Union and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina in Serbia. The language is spoken by about 28 million people, including 24 million native speakers (Unilat, 2024).

The Aromanian language (*limba armânească, armâneashti*) is spoken all over the Balkan Peninsula (Kahl, 2002). However, the only place where the language has an official status is the municipality of Kruševo in North Macedonia (Bliznakovski, 2014: 24-25). Aromanian speakers usually do not live in compact groups. According to the 2021 census, there were 3151 native speakers of Aromanian in North Macedonia, which corresponds to 0.17% of the country's population (Makstat, 2021). According to the 2011 census in Albania, there were 3848 native speakers of Aromanian in the country. They comprise 0.14% of the total population (Instat, 2011a). The 2023 census does not provide the number of Aromanian speakers in the country. However, the number of ethnic Aromanians in Albania amounted to 2459 people (Instat, 2023), which is more than thrice less than 8256 people in 2011 (Instat, 2011b). Estimates about the total amount of native speakers range from 15 thousand active speakers (Narumov, 2001a: 638) to more than 500 thousand (Nevaci, 2013: 18). According to the most recent data available in Ethnologue (2024), the number of native speakers of Aromanian amounts to 210 thousand.

The Megleno-Romanian language (*vlășește*) is spoken by several thousand people in North Macedonia and Greece as well as by their descendants in Turkey, Romania, and Serbia. There were about five thousand native speakers of Megleno-Romanian in 1989 (Salminen, 2007: 258).

The Istro-Romanian language is an Eastern Romance language spoken by several hundred of people living in Istria, a peninsula in North-Western Croatia. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of speakers because many people do not have a strong ethnic or linguistic identity often calling themselves Croatians, Vlachs (Kovačec, 1998: 241-242), or Italians (Lozovanu, 2008: 45). The endonym for the southern varieties of the language is *vlășkë limbë* or *vlășkë limbë*, literally Vlach language, which is an umbrella term for

Eastern Romance languages other than Daco-Romanian, i.e. Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian, and Istro-Romanian. Speakers of the northern varieties of Istro-Romanian call the language according to the names of the villages they live in, e.g. *žejãnski* for the dwellers of Žejane (Kovačec, 1998: 239). According to a 2010 estimation, the number of native speakers of Istro-Romanian is around 150 (Zegrean, 2012: 1).

Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian, and Istro-Romanian are often treated as dialects of Daco-Romanian in works on the Balkan *Sprachbund*. For instance, Asenova (1989: 12) argues that Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian are 'the most Balkanized dialects' of Romanian. Among other Balkanized dialects she mentions Tosk Albanian, South Western Bulgarian dialects (i.e. Macedonian, which is not considered a separate language by many Bulgarian scholars), and Northern Greek dialects. In other works, the Eastern Romance languages are considered a group of languages but are treated as one entity, namely Balkan Romance (Lindstedt, 2000).

Lindstedt (2000: 288) presents a table with twelve shared morphological and syntactical innovations in the following language groups of the *Sprachbund*: Greek, Albanian, Balkan Slavic, Balkan Romance, and Balkan Romani. Balkan Romance shares the following features: enclitic particles, object reduplication, dative/possessive merger, goal/location merger, *relativum generale*, *volo* future, and analytic comparison. The other five features are marked as a tendency only or occurring in some contact varieties: prepositions instead of cases, loss of infinitive, past future as conditional, *habeo* perfect, and evidentials.

I will first contrast the twelve morphological and syntactical features in four Eastern Romance languages utilizing Lindstedt's approach. Afterward, I will implement a more sensitive method for the same task to distinguish different degrees of the phenomena use in the languages. In other words, I will show whether a tendency

occurs more or less frequently in different languages.

## 2. MORPHOLOGICAL AND SYNTACTICAL INNOVATIONS OF THE BALKAN *SPRACHBUND*

### 2.1. Enclitic articles

In all four Eastern Romance languages, enclitic articles are placed at the end of a noun (see Table 1).

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Indefinite form	<i>o casă</i> 'a house'	<i>una casă</i>	<i>ună casă</i>	<i>o cășe</i>
Definite form	<i>casa</i> 'the house'	<i>căsa</i> (Narumov, 2001a: 645)	<i>casa</i> (Narumov, 2001c: 676)	<i>câsa</i> (Kovačec, 1998: 271)

Table 1. Enclitic articles in the Eastern Romance languages

It should be noted that in Istro-Romanian no definite articles are used for neuter nouns, e.g. *srebro* '(the) silver' (Kovačec, 1998: 272). However, the lack of a definite article can be reinterpreted as a zero morpheme placed at the end of the noun.

### 2.2. Object reduplication

In Daco-Romanian, definite direct object is reduplicated with a definite article, e.g. *L-am întâlnit pe Ion* 'I have met Ion' (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 129). The situation is similar in Aromanian with the exception that direct human objects are not additionally marked by a preposition, e.g. *Lu viduj Bendul* 'I saw Bend' (Narumov, 2001a: 646). In Megleno-Romanian, a definite direct object is also reduplicated with a definite article without a preposition (Narumov, 2001c: 680). In Istro-Romanian, subject and direct object are not differentiated morphologically (Narumov, 2001b: 669), e.g. *ĭé s-a firút târd za né spúre fila-s* 'He

tried hard not to reveal his daughter' (Kovačec, 1998: 338).

### 2.3. Prepositions instead of cases

The Eastern Romance languages are the only Romance languages that have preserved nominal case marking. Daco-Romanian has three cases: Nominative-Accusative, Genitive-Dative, and Vocative, which is twice less than in Latin. Relations between words are more often marked with prepositions rather than cases. For instance, *pe* is the accusative marker for human direct objects (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 130). Aromanian has the same cases as Daco-Romanian (Narumov, 2001a: 645).

Nominal cases have almost disappeared from most dialects of Megleno-Romanian. In most dialects, the Genitive meaning is expressed with the particle *lu*, e.g. *lu feata* 'the girl's'. The Dative meaning is expressed with the particle *la*, e.g. *la un fičór* 'to a guy' (Narumov, 2001c: 676-77).

There are no separate case forms for Nominative-Accusative and Genitive-Dative in southern Istro-Romanian nouns and adjectives. Genitive-Dative is expressed by the particle *lu* which is placed before a noun, e.g. *lu ómu* 'the man's/to the man'. That is not the case in the northern dialect, where the cases have been preserved (Kovačec, 1998: 274-75).

### 2.4. Dative/possessive merger

In Daco-Romanian, Genitive and Dative have merged into one grammatical case (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 263), e.g. *A spus prietenului său* 'S/he told his/her friend', *mașina prietenului* 'the car of the friend'. In Aromanian, Genitive and Dative are both preceded by the particle *a*, e.g. *căsa a frátelui* 'the brother's house', *đișu a frátelui* 'I told the brother' (Narumov, 2001a: 645). In Megleno-Romanian, Genitive and Dative meanings have distinct markers, *lu* and *la* particles respectively (Narumov, 2001c: 676-77). In the

southern dialect of Istro-Romanian, Genitive-Dative is expressed with the particle *lu*. In the northern dialect, Genitive-Dative is formed either with the particle *lu/la* or in a way similar to Daco-Romanian, e.g. *lu ómu/ómuluj* ‘the man’s/to the man’, *le žénske/žénskel’ej* ‘the woman’s/to the woman’. Sometimes the Genitive meaning is distinguished with the particle *a*, e.g. *a lu ómu* ‘the man’s’ (Kovačec, 1998: 274-76).

### 2.5. Goal/location merger

In all four Eastern Romance languages, goal and location meanings are expressed in the same way, normally with a preposition (see Table 2).

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Example with goal meaning	<i>Mergeam la teatru numai la piesele jucate mult</i> ‘We went to the theatre only to those plays that were played for long’	<i>shi dzua di Sămbăta trăoară intrară tu sinagogă shi nvitsa oaminjli</i> ‘and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach’ (Mark 1:21)	<i>chinisi să si ducă</i> ‘to depart to a village’ (Capidan, 1925: 181)	<i>L-a dús</i> ‘She brought him to the house where she was born’ (Kovačec, 1998: 338)
Example with location meaning	<i>Ne-am întâlnit într-o zi la teatru</i> ‘We met one day in the theatre’ (Petrescu, 1930)	<i>Atumtsea tu sinagoga-a lor eara un om putut cu un duh nicurat, tsi ahurhi s-aurlă</i> ‘Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out’ (Mark 1:23)	<i>Coti ari</i> ‘how much s/he has in (her/his) belly button’ – an idiom about an intelligent and hypocritical person (Capidan, 1928: 169)	<i>E iă fóst-a nascute</i> ‘She was born in a straw house’ (Kovačec, 1998: 338)

Table 2. Goal/location merger in the Eastern Romance languages

### 2.6. *Relativum generale*

In all four Eastern Romance languages, there is a similar pronoun introducing general clauses. Its inflection by gender, number, and case differs across the languages (see Table 3).

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Relative pronoun	<i>care</i>	<i>căre/cări /a cări</i>	<i>cări</i>	<i>carle/cârle</i>
Inflection	By case; additionally, by gender and number in Genitive-Dative (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 536)	By number and case (Narumov, 2001a: 649)	By case in singular (Narumov, 2001c: 677)	By gender, number and case (Kovačec, 1998: 283)

Table 3. *Relativum generale* in the Eastern Romance languages

### 2.7. Loss of infinitive

In Daco-Romanian, the short infinitive is used in analytical forms of future and conditional as well as in modal constructions with the verb *a putea*, e.g. *Nu pot face asta* ‘I cannot do this’. In the last case, the infinitive can be replaced with a subjunctive. Long infinitive forms are used as part of some set expressions as well as in inverted conditionals, e.g. *cântare-aş* ‘I would sing’ (Luht; Narumov, 2001: 613).

In Aromanian, long infinitive forms are used in several modal constructions denoting obligation, e.g. *Nélu va mîcări* ‘The honey must be eaten’. Short infinitive has completely disappeared (Narumov, 2001a: 647).

There are two forms of infinitive in Megleno-Romanian, long and short. Both forms can be used in periphrases denoting curses, e.g. *Lúpu s-ti máncă di nu vă ti máncă/măncări* ‘Let the wolf eat you but it won’t’. The long infinitive is mostly

used after modal verbs, e.g. *Ti poț duțiri* ‘You can go’ (Narumov, 2001c: 679).

There is no loss of infinitive in Istro-Romanian. The functions of infinitive are the same as in the Chakavian dialects of Croatian (Kovačec, 1998: 288), i.e. an infinitive cannot be replaced with a subjunctive, even in rare cases (Narumov, 2001b: 664) where a verb has subjunctive forms.

### 2.8. *Volo* future

There are several ways of forming future in Daco-Romanian. In the first one, the auxiliary *vrea* is followed by the truncated infinitive of the main verb, e.g. *voi face* ‘I will do’. A colloquial future is formed by the unchanged auxiliary *o* followed by the present subjunctive, e.g. *o să fac*. Alternatively, the conjugated auxiliary derived from the verb *avea* can be used, e.g. *am să fac* (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 38).

In Aromanian, the future tense is formed with the auxiliary *va(i)* plus *s(i)* plus the main verb in the present subjunctive (Narumov, 2001a: 647), e.g. *va si cântu* ‘I will sing’. A different model exists, with the auxiliary *va(i)* plus the main verb in the present indicative (*Ibidem*).

There is no future tense in Megleno-Romanian. To express future meaning, present subjunctive is used, e.g. *si/să cont* ‘I will sing’. One can also utilize the structure with the periphrasis *veări* plus subjunctive, e.g. *am si ved* ‘I will see’ (Narumov, 2001c: 678).

In Istro-Romanian, the future is formed with the auxiliary verb *vrę* in present and the infinitive of the main verb, e.g. e.g. *jó voj žucă* ‘I will dance’ (Kovačec, 1998: 293-294).

### 2.9. *Past future as conditional*

In Daco-Romanian, the present conditional consists of the auxiliary verb *avea* followed by a short infinitive of the main verb, e.g. *Dacă ar fi târziu, am merge la culcare* ‘If it were late, we would go to bed’. Conditional is used both in the

antecedent and the consequent (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 50).

In Aromanian, several conditional structures are possible. In the first one, past and future are both marked in the auxiliary as in Bulgarian and English, e.g. *vręa (s) cântu* ‘I would sing’. In the second structure, future is marked in the auxiliary, whereas past is marked in the main verb as in Albanian, Greek, and Macedonian, e.g. *va cântam* (Lindstedt, 2015). Various mixed structures and structures with the main verb in the present subjunctive are also possible, e.g. *vręa/va s’cîntărim* (Narumov, 2001a: 647).

There is no conditional in Megleno-Romanian. To express the meaning of the present conditional in the antecedent, one can use either present indicative or present subjunctive, e.g. *(a)cu cõnt/túcu si cõnt* ‘if I sang’ (Narumov, 2001c: 678). In the consequent, the conditional has the following structure: the unchanged auxiliary *vręa* plus present or past subjunctive, e.g. *Acu-ń zițéáj, vręa si vin* ‘If you had told me, I would come’ (*Idem*, 679).

In Istro-Romanian, the present conditional is formed with a form of the auxiliary verb *vrę* and the infinitive of the main verb, e.g. *jó ręș žucă* ‘I would dance’ (*Idem*, 295). Note that conditional is used both in the antecedent and the consequent, e.g. *Se nu rę fi bóra, rę fi túdeț maj musăt* ‘If there were no storm, it would be better’ (*Idem*, 305). However, it is not clear whether the auxiliary in conditional clauses is any kind of past tense.

### 2.10. *Habeo* perfect

*Habeo* perfect is present in all four Eastern Romance languages (see Table 4).

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Example of <i>habeo</i> perfect	<i>am jucat</i> ‘I have played’	<i>am<sup>u</sup> cădúță</i> ‘I have fallen’	<i>am mănćát(ă)</i> ‘I have eaten’	<i>am žucăt</i> ‘I have danced’
Other	simple	simple	<i>sum</i>	N/A

perfect structures	perfect	perfect	perfect	(Kovačec, 1998: 294)
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Table 4. Perfect constructions in the Eastern Romance languages

In Daco-Romanian, the simple perfect is mostly being replaced with *habeo* perfect, the former being mostly used as a narrative tense in literary fiction and southern regional varieties (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 58). In Aromanian, on the other hand, simple perfect is the tense used the most frequently to describe a completed action in the past, whereas the compound (i.e. *habeo*) perfect is rare (Narumov, 2001a: 647). In Megleno-Romanian, the *iri*-auxiliary can be utilized instead of *habeo*, i.e. *săm măncăt(ă)*. However, the *sum* verb is not used as an auxiliary for other tenses, such as pluperfect (Narumov, 2001c: 678).

### 2.11. Evidentials

While in Daco-Romanian evidentiality is an extremely limited category, it is present in some dialects of Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian (Makartsev, 2014: 21). There is no evidentiality as a separate grammaticalized category in Istro-Romanian (Zegrean, 2012: 43).

In Daco-Romanian, evidentiality is limited to presumptive. In the present, presumptive can be formed with an *oi*-auxiliary and the main verb's infinitive or the same auxiliary plus the infinitive of the verb *fi* plus the main verb's gerund, e.g. *o veni/o fi venind/va fi venind* all three meaning '(s)he may/might be coming'. Still, evidentiality has not been granted the status of a mood (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 41).

In the Fărsherot dialect of Aromanian spoken in Albania and the southwestern part of North Macedonia, evidentiality has developed as a result of contact with other Balkan languages, particularly Albanian. The evidential constructions can be used to express various meanings, such as surprise or doubt, e.g. *Tini fuskă/avuskă dus*

*Bitol'i* 'You have been/have gone to Bitola' (Friedman, 1994: 81).

In the Megleno-Romanian variety spoken near Gevgelija at both sides of the North Macedonian-Greek border, there are grammaticalized constructions that can have a reported, admirative and dubitative use, e.g. *Ier fost-ăi ăn cătún* 'J'ai entendu parler (on m'a dit) que hier tu étais (as été) au village/à la campagne' (Atanasov, 1990: 220), i.e. 'I heard (I was told) that yesterday you were in the village/in the country'.

### 2.12. Analytic comparison

In all four languages, the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives are analytical (see Table 5).

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Comparative	<i>mai</i> + adjective	<i>ma/căma</i> + adjective	<i>mai</i> + adjective	<i>măi</i> + adjective
Superlative	linking article + <i>mai</i> + adjective	<i>ma/cama</i> + adjective with postpositive definite article	Daco-Romanian or Aromanian model	<i>măi</i> + adjective or Daco-Romanian model

Table 5. Comparative and superlative in the Eastern Romance languages

In Daco-Romanian, the linking article *cel* agrees with the head noun in gender, number, and case (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 315), e.g. *cele mai frumoase case* 'the most beautiful houses'. In Aromanian, the postpositive definite article agrees with the head noun in gender, number and case, e.g. *cama marle frate* 'the eldest brother' (Narumov, 2001a: 648). In Megleno-Romanian, either the structure with a linking article or that with a postpositive definite article can be used. In the former model, the adjective can be definite or indefinite, e.g. *țela mai mări/marli* 'the biggest' (Narumov, 2001c: 677). In Istro-Romanian, the difference between comparative and superlative forms is that the analytic element is non-stressed in the former and stressed in the latter (Kovačec,

1998: 279). In rare instances, the Daco-Romanian model can also be used (Zegrean, 2012: 96).

3. Comparison of the languages

The obtained results can be summarized in the following table:

	Linstedt's marking	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Enclitic articles	+	+	+	+	+
Object reduplication	+	+	+	+	-
Prepositions instead of cases	(+)	(+)	(+)	+	(+)
Dative/possessive merger	+	+	+	-	+
Goal/location merger	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Relativum generale</i>	+	+	(+)	+	-
Loss of infinitive	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-
<i>Volo</i> future	+	+	+	-	+
Past future as conditional	(+)	-	+	-	?
<i>Habeo</i> perfect	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	+
Evidentials	(+)	-	(+)	(+)	-
Analytic comparison	+	+	+	+	+
<b>Total index</b>	9.5	8.5	9.5	7.5	6.5+

Table 6. Balkanisms in the Eastern Romance languages by Lindstedt's approach

The disadvantage of the approach is that it does not take into account different frequencies of the morphological and syntactical innovations in the four languages. For instance, *habeo* perfect is the only perfect form in Istro-Romanian. It also exists in the other three languages but it is rarely used in Aromanian and predominantly used in Daco-Romanian and Megleno-Romanian. Therefore, the markings in brackets are given different quotients according to the frequency of the morphological and syntactical phenomena.

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Enclitic articles	1	1	1	1
Object reduplication	1	1	1	0
Prepositions instead of cases	0.5	0.5	0.75	0.75
Dative / possessive merger	1	1	0	0.75
Goal / location merger	1	1	1	1
<i>Relativum generale</i>	1	0.5	1	0
Loss of infinitive	0.5	0.75	0.75	0
<i>Volo</i> future	0.75	1	0	1
Past future as conditional	0	0.75	0	?
<i>Habeo</i> perfect	0.75	0.25	0.75	1
Evidentials	0.25	0.5	0.5	0
Analytic comparison	1	1	1	1
<b>Total index</b>	8.75	9.25	7.75	6.5+

Table 7. Balkanisms in the Eastern Romance languages by new approach

The quotients are distributed in the following way: 1 – the feature is omnipresent in the language; 0.75 – the feature is very frequent and generally preferred; 0.5 – the feature is neither very frequent nor rare; 0.25 – the feature is rare; 0 – the feature is not present in the language.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In terms of morphological and syntactical features, the most Balkanized Eastern Romance language is Aromanian with a total index of 9.25. It contains all 12 features listed in Lindstedt's work. Aromanian is followed by Daco-Romanian (total index of 8.75 and 11 features) and Megleno-Romanian (total index of 7.75 and 9 features). Istro-Romanian is the least Balkanized language

of the group. Its total index is between 6.5 and 7.5 depending on whether the auxiliary verb in conditional clauses represents a past form or not. Therefore, Istro-Romanian contains 7 or 8 features from Lindstedt's list.

The conclusion does not contradict the claim about the high Balkanization of Megleno-Romanian because phonological (e.g. the schwa sound, reduction of vowels) and lexical features (e.g. common vocabulary, phraseology, and word formation models) of the languages have not been taken into account. Furthermore, the frequency quotients can be recalculated and the total indices readjusted if/when corpora of all four languages are created.

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## Relevanța analizei erorilor în achiziția articolului în RLS.

### Studiu de caz asupra vorbitorilor de armeană

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#### THE RELEVANCE OF ANALYSING ITEM ACQUISITION ERRORS IN RLS. A CASE STUDY ON ARMENIAN SPEAKERS

##### Abstract

*This study aims to highlight linguistic and didactic reference points in teaching the article to Armenian language speakers. The acquisition of the article in a foreign language presents a challenge for many learners due to structural differences between languages regarding its use and placement. Additionally, identifying the correct contexts for the use of definite, indefinite, or zero articles complicates the learning process, requiring constant exposure to correct linguistic patterns. Based on empirical data analysis through the error analysis method, the study illustrates, with concrete examples, a series of structural differences and similarities in the use of the article in Romanian and Armenian, drawn from a case study conducted over three years of teaching Romanian at “Valeri Brusov” University in Yerevan, Armenia. The selected corpus consists of 70 written texts, including free compositions and guided essays, produced by students with competence levels ranging from intermediate to advanced. The paper will first summarize the theoretical procedures of error analysis, then focus on identifying, describing, examining, and classifying the main sources of errors in the use of*

*the article by Armenian students. Additionally, the study will explore the impact of negative transfer in the acquisition of the article, considering, as much as possible, how the learners’ proficiency level influences the degree of interference with their native language. The findings demonstrate that, in the case of Armenian speakers, error analysis is an effective, and sometimes essential, tool in identifying recurring mistakes, allowing for the adaptation of teaching strategies to clarify the structural differences between the native language and the target language and to optimize the learning process.*

**Keywords:** Romanian as a foreign language, error analysis, negative transfer, Armenian, article, SLA

#### 1. CONSIDERAȚII PRELIMINARE. ANALIZA ERORILOR – SCURT ISTORIC, ACTUALITATE ȘI PERSPECTIVĂ

Eroarea în achiziția unei limbi străine este o certitudine care uneori descurajează, alteori motivează, o temă mereu actuală, care de secole a constituit punctul de plecare în analiza procesului de învățare a unei limbi străine, având totodată un rol esențial în sistemul de feedback al predării și învățării.

O definiție simplă, dar totodată clară, a analizei erorilor a fost propusă de lingvistul Ellis, care, în studiul său din 2008, afirma: „Error analysis is a technique for identifying, describing and systematically explaining the errors made by a

learner using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics” (Ellis, 2008: 123).

Sintetizând, la baza acestui studiu au stat următoarele repere ale analizei erorilor:

- delimitarea unor zone problematice în funcție de specificul limbii sursă și al limbii țintă facilitează diagnosticarea și clarificarea celor mai frecvente tipuri de erori, implicând descrierea, explicarea și analiza acestora pe baza contextului de învățare, a cauzelor lingvistice și psihologice, a tipului de transfer identificat sau a nivelului de competență al cursanților.

- analiza erorilor și analiza contrastivă sunt două metode complementare în studiul achiziției limbilor străine, oferind, în ciuda limitărilor pe care le vom detalia ulterior, predicții, diagnoza și soluționarea dificultăților întâlnite în procesul de învățare a unei limbi secundare.

- analiza erorilor funcționează ca un indicator al măsurii în care obiectivele pedagogice au fost îndeplinite, deoarece furnizează informațiile necesare pentru ajustarea tehnicilor de predare și a materialelor didactice și auxiliare, adaptate cerințelor specifice contextului educațional.

- analiza erorilor oferă bazele unei învățări ancorate în realitatea practică, fiind esențială pentru ghidarea treptată a procesului de instruire. Aceasta constituie un proces bidirecțional ce permite profesorului să își ajusteze continuu strategiile didactice și să implementeze module suplimentare de remediere ori de câte ori este necesar.

Deși termenul de analiză a erorilor apare la începutul anilor 1970 în cercetările lingviștilor Hanzeli (1975) și Jain (1974), ipoteza analizei contrastive nu este complet abandonată în această perioadă. Interferențele cu limba maternă în procesul de achiziție a unei limbi străine (SLA) au fost mereu recunoscute, dar prin noile metode de analiză a erorilor, importanța lor a fost redusă, în special datorită incapacității analizei contrastive de a face predicții precise și relevante.

În anii 1980, asistăm la o „revitalizare semnificativă” a încrederii în analiza contrastivă

(James, 1980), iar cele două metode coexistă. Studii precum cele ale lui Jung (2004), Okata (2004), Laufer și Girsai (2008) sau Collins (2007) confirmă că transferul negativ continuă să fie o sursă majoră a erorilor în SLA. Ironia face ca unele definiții ale analizei erorilor să includă concepte din analiza contrastivă, devenită astfel o componentă marginalizată în lingvistica aplicată.

De exemplu, Dragut și Laufer (1985) afirmă că scopul principal al analizei erorilor este identificarea surselor dificultăților cursanților, esențial pentru depășirea acestora, iar Valdman (1975) subliniază importanța observării și analizei erorilor în selectarea și ordonarea trăsăturilor gramaticale. Astfel, se observă o transformare a ierarhizării dificultăților, aceasta având acum o valență mai practică, bazată pe date empirice și nu pe prezumții teoretice. Totuși, aceasta nu implică faptul că analiza erorilor este infailibilă sau că a menținut intacte standardele metodologice inițiale fără compromisuri.

În 1972, H.Y. George publică studiul *Common Errors in Language Learning. Insights from English*, unde explorează factorii psihologici și cognitivi care, alături de cei lingvistici, contribuie la apariția erorilor în achiziția limbilor străine (SLA). Lingvistul oferă explicații detaliate asupra diverselor tipuri de erori întâlnite la cei care învață limba engleză ca limbă străină sau secundară. Totuși, relevanța concluziilor sale poate fi contestată, deoarece doar o mică parte din analize se bazează pe un corpus de date concret, iar erorile descrise provin mai degrabă din observații didactice decât din date empirice riguroase.

Studiul lui Carl James, *Errors in Language Learning and Use: Exploring Error Analysis*, reprezintă un reper esențial în definirea analizei erorilor ca domeniu distinct în lingvistica aplicată. În primele capitole, James subliniază că, în fazele inițiale ale învățării, studenții tind să utilizeze soluții lingvistice alternative și originale, deseori ignorând regulile limbii țintă, pentru a se exprima mai ușor și a fi înțeleși. Acest fenomen, cunoscut drept limbaj de substituție, este ceea ce definește

analiza erorilor (James, 1998: 63). Aceasta nu presupune doar identificarea erorilor, ci mai ales descrierea și explicarea tipului și a originii acestora (James, 1998: 237). Mai departe, James diferențiază clar între diagnoza clasică și un alt tip de diagnosticare, care constă în analiza modului în care interlimba fiecărui student, o formă deviantă, se distanțează de norma limbii țintă: „Let us be clear about what explanation means here. What it does not mean is diagnosis: it is not a question of making clear to the learners why they have produced a wrong form, but in what way their IL version different (or deviant) from the target form. Explanation is, in effect, comparative description: quite simply EA” (James, 1998: 263).

Printre lucrările mai recente, se remarcă volumul lui Ellis și Barkhuizen din 2005, *Analyzing Learner Language*, în care analiza erorilor este definită și detaliată printr-o delimitare semantică și procedurală a ipotezei analizei contrastive față de analiza erorilor: „[contrastive analysis] provided an explanation for why learners make errors, and (...) served as a source of information for indentifying which structural areas of the target language teachers need to teach; [error analysis] is a set of procedures for identifying, describing and expalining learner error” (Ellis; Barkhuizen, 2005: 51).

## 2. PRINCIPIILE ANALIZEI ERORILOR

Primul pas esențial în analiza erorilor este selecția riguroasă a unui corpus, care trebuie să respecte criteriile precise pentru a asigura relevanța și potențialul de generalizare a rezultatelor. În această speță, am avut în vedere nivelul de competență al studenților conform CEFR, A2 plus și B2. Am ținut cont de tipurile de transfer din L1 în L2, de contextul exolingvistic, cadrul instituțional, tipologia comunicării și specificul textelor (compuneri libere sau ghidate), redactate ca teme sau în cadrul evaluărilor formative și sumative.

Următorul pas este identificarea erorilor, care nu înseamnă doar marcarea unor structuri lingvistice ca fiind greșite. Așa cum subliniază P. Corder: „(...) we compare the learner’s erroneous utterance with what a native speaker would have said to express the meaning (...) we compare the original utterances having the meaning included by the learner” (Corder, 1981: 37). Cu alte cuvinte, o analiză corectă ar trebui să ia în considerare intenția de comunicare a studentului în limba țintă, ideal fiind ca studentul să poată furniza această informație. Totuși, când intenția nu poate fi verificată, Corder sugerează urmarea unor pași care, cu ajutorul analizei contrastive, pot clarifica natura și sursa erorilor: analiza gramaticală a formei, pentru a determina corectitudinea structurală a enunțului, și analiza semantică în contextul comunicării.

De-a lungul timpului, au fost propuse numeroase modele de clasificare a erorilor în lingvistica aplicată, însă vom menționa doar câteva considerate relevante, care sintetizează în mare măsură taxonomiile utilizate în studiul limbilor străine ca limbi secundare. Multe clasificări urmează o abordare tradițională, inventariind erori de gramatică, vocabular, ortografie sau discursiv. Esențială nu este doar identificarea erorilor, ci și analiza pe multiple niveluri a cauzelor, incluzând transferul negativ, dar și contextul de învățare, backgroundul educațional, eterogenitatea grupelor, relevanța și adaptarea programei la realitatea învățării și metodele de predare. Brown propune o clasificare a erorilor în funcție de impactul lor asupra comunicării: erori globale, care afectează structura enunțurilor și împiedică comunicarea și erori locale, minore, care nu alterează sensul mesajului (Brown, 2007: 59).

Dacă ar fi să sintetizăm, adaptând taxonomiile propuse de Brown, Dulay și Corder, principalele cauze ale erorilor în SLA sunt adăugarea, omiterea, generalizarea, substituția și topica eronată, manifestate la nivel fonetic-fonologic, lexical sau morfo-sintactic. Aceste erori se produc

de cele mai multe ori simultan și vizează atât structura de suprafață, cât și cea de adâncime a limbii țintă. Odată identificate, marcate, descrise și analizate, profesorul poate trece la următorii pași: diagnoza și, consecutiv, soluțiile propuse pentru remedierea erorilor.

### 3. TIPURI DE ERORI

*Erorile interlingvistice* apar, conform definiției oferite de Ellis, „ca rezultat al utilizării unei trăsături din L1 – fonologice, lexicale, gramaticale sau pragmatice – în locul celor specifice limbii țintă” (Ellis, 2008: 59). În acest context, trebuie menționată ipoteza analizei contrastive, care atribuie transferului negativ din limba maternă rolul de principală sursă a erorilor în procesul de achiziție a unei limbi străine. Spre deosebire de perspectiva behavioristă, noua abordare în analiza erorilor consideră eroarea dintr-o dublă perspectivă: pe de o parte, ca indicator al unei probleme ce necesită corectare și analiză, iar, pe de altă parte, ca un semn că studentul explorează, internalizează și încearcă să înțeleagă sistemul limbii țintă. Astfel, greșelile nu sunt doar simple fosilizări ale reflexelor lingvistice din limba maternă.

Așa cum subliniază și Corder (1991: 82), procesul de apariție a erorilor este unul absolut natural și universal: studentul încearcă să exprime oral sau în scris o idee, dar nu găsește structurile adecvate în interlimba pe care se bazează la acel moment și recurge astfel la structuri din limba maternă, pe care le transferă și le folosește incorect sau neadecvat în limba străină. În cazul acestor tipuri de erori, rolul analizei contrastive este esențial, deoarece mediază procesul de cuantificare și calificare a erorilor interlingvistice, stabilind totodată și o delimitare, deși nu întotdeauna clară, față de erorile intralingvistice.

Unele erori care apar în procesul de învățare a unei limbi străine nu sunt rezultatul interferențelor cu limba maternă, ci pot avea o gamă variată de alte cauze, de la confuziile dintre structuri ale

limbii țintă, insuficient înțelese sau parțial asimilate, până la strategiile de predare sau învățare utilizate de profesori și studenți. Aceste erori, de natură *intralingvistică*, reprezintă un barometru al progresului în procesul de învățare și sunt, în mare parte, localizate în interlimbă (Dulay; Burt, 1974: 206).

Richards numește acest tip de erori „developmental errors which reflect the learner’s competence at a particular stage and illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition” (Richards, 1971: 207), ele fiind cauzate de aplicarea eronată sau incompletă a unor reguli sistemice din limba țintă sau se datorează unor concepții false pe care studenții și le construiesc în încercarea de a stăpâni cât mai repede limba străină pe care o învață. Astfel, aceste erori se conturează independent de limba maternă a celui ce învață și, cum spuneam, nu reflectă neapărat conexiuni cu limba maternă, fiind generalizări pe care studenții le fac în urma unui contact limitat cu limba țintă. Erorile intralingvistice sunt determinate, în cea mai mare parte, fie de asimilarea greșită sau parțială a unor structuri lingvistice, fie de influența reciprocă a unor structuri din limba țintă.

*Generalizările*, „the negative counterpart of the intralingual transfer” (Brown, 2007: 264), apar atunci când studenții care învață o regulă nouă în limba țintă au tendința să generalizeze noile reguli și să le aplice nediferențiat altor structuri lingvistice, evident în mod greșit. Aceste tipuri de erori sunt extrem de comune în etapa de familiarizare cu limba țintă, așa cum remarcă Littlewood: „Transfer and overgeneralization belong to the same underlying strategy of using previous knowledge to understand the concept” (Littlewood, 1984: 121).

*Simplificările* sunt frecvent întâlnite la nivelurile începător și intermediar și apar atunci când studentul folosește structuri mai simple în încercarea de a comunica, deși nu stăpânește complet sau aplică incorect regulile limbii țintă. Aceste erori apar atât prin omisiune, cât și prin

adăugare, manifestându-se mai ales când studentul întâlnește excepții de la reguli. Rezultatul poate fi fie aplicarea incorectă a unei reguli corecte, fie utilizarea unor reguli simplificate greșit.

O altă categorie asupra căreia trebuie insistat o reprezintă erorile ce vizează *strategiile de comunicare individuale*. Aceste erori sunt de cele mai multe ori o combinație între generalizare și simplificare și apar în interlimbă. Astfel, studentul care nu cunoaște sau nu stăpânește o anumită regulă gramaticală, are lacune de vocabular, de topică sau nu înțelege anumite structuri sintactice complexe, dar care intenționează cu toate acestea să comunice, va folosi „soluții” alternative, parafraze, împrumuturi din L1, va aproxima, va calchia, va evita unele structuri sau, dimpotrivă, va folosi în exces altele, ba chiar va construi structuri proprii. Rezultatul constituie, de cele mai multe ori, erori, care, în funcție de gravitatea lor, pot afecta sau nu comunicarea.

*Erorile generate de contextul învățării* se referă, în principal, la condițiile specifice în care are loc procesul de achiziție a limbii: condiții organizaționale, ambianța socială, contextul exo-/endolingvistic, aspecte culturale, strategii și metode de predare nepotrivite sau incorecte pentru nivelul studenților, explicații incomplete sau confuze din partea profesorului, lipsa feedbackului, precum și manuale cu informații greșite sau depășite. Pe lângă acestea, astfel de erori pot fi influențate de factori cronobiologici, gradul de efort, oboseala, anxietatea sau trăsăturile de personalitate ale studenților.

#### 4. OBIECTIVELE CERCETĂRII

Acest studiu are ca scop principal evidențierea, descrierea, explicarea și clasificarea greșelilor de utilizare a articolului, prin analiza unui corpus de texte alcătuit din eseuri de nivel intermediar și avansat, scrise în perioada 2016-2019 de către studenții din cadrul lectoratului de limba română de la Universitatea ”Valeri Brusov” din Erevan, Republica Armenia.

Patru sunt obiectivele principale pe care le-am avut în vedere în acest studiu:

- În ce măsură diagnoza, în forma ei tradițională, fundamentată teoretic, constituie încă un reper important pentru profesor, dar și pentru student, acesta din urmă fiind ajutat să înțeleagă de ce a greșit și în ce mod structurile proprii care se găsesc în interlimbă sunt deviate de la sistemul de reguli al limbii pe care o învață?
- O descriere minimală, concentrică, a categoriei determinării prin articol în cele două limbi, având ca ax central funcția comunicativă, adaptată la nivelurile de competență A2-B2, prin intermediul unor analize pe multiple direcții (verticale și orizontale), cu accent pe identificarea variabilelor și constantelor în cadrul grupului de studiu.
- Care sunt principalele categorii, respectiv tipuri de erori cauzate de interferențe în contextul pe care l-am propus spre analiză?
- Elaborarea unui set de trăsături distinctive ale interlimbii vorbitorilor de limbă armeană, cu privire la erorile de utilizare a articolului, având la bază ipoteza conform căreia inputul în limba țintă permite identificarea unor descriptori specifici. Acești descriptori pot fi clasificați, explicați și analizați ca manifestări caracteristice ale interlimbii.

#### 5. METODOLOGIA

Corpusul utilizat a cuprins 70 de eseuri, fie structurate, fie libere, parte din teme de casă sau teste sumative, ale studenților armeni de la Universitatea de Stat din Erevan. Cei 25 de participanți, filologi, sunt fluenți în limbile armeană și rusă, majoritatea fiind bilingvi. Menționez că, în predarea limbii române, am folosit alternativ armeană și engleza ca limbă suport, însă analiza contrastivă, acolo unde a fost necesară, a fost realizată exclusiv între limba maternă și limba țintă. Corpusul pe care l-am analizat a cuprins 30 de eseuri realizate de studenți din anul II, nivel intermediar (A2), și 40 de texte și compuneri scrise de studenți avansați, nivel (B2).

Textele au fost scrise fie în clasă, sub formă de teste de evaluare, supravegheate de profesor și într-un timp limitat, fie ca teme de casă sau proiecte comune, sub forma unor eseuri structurate, ghidate sau compunerii libere. Am considerat relevantă această alternanță a contextelor de producere a textelor, deoarece oferă un spectru mai larg de analiză, având ca scop identificarea greșelilor gramaticale frecvente, dincolo de limitările vocabularului, și concentrarea pe erorile cauzate în principal de transferul negativ. Precizăm, de asemenea, că toate exemplele date sunt transcrise exact cum apar în compunerile studenților, însă, pentru a nu încălca textul, am ales să marcăm cu litere cursive doar erorile referitoare la articol.

În cadrul analizei corpusului de 14.630 de cuvinte, s-a constatat că erorile legate de utilizarea articolului au fost predominante la ambele niveluri de competență. La nivelul B2, din totalul de 174 de greșeli identificate, 51 (aproximativ 29,31%) au fost legate de articol, în timp ce la nivelul A2, din cele 154 de greșeli înregistrate, 32 (20,78%) au vizat aceeași categorie gramaticală. Per total, 25,30% dintre erorile studenților armeni au fost asociate cu utilizarea incorectă a articolului în limba română, având în vedere, în principal, diferențele semnificative dintre structura gramaticală a celor două limbi. De exemplu, studenții de nivel A2 au prezentat o rată de eroare de 3,15% în utilizarea articolului, în timp ce studenții de nivel B1 au avut o rată mai scăzută, de 1,78%, ceea ce indică o îmbunătățire progresivă a competenței în funcție de nivelul de stăpânire a limbii române.

## 6. UN SCURT DEMERS CONTRASTIV

În limba armeană, categoria determinării și regulile de utilizare a articolului sunt, în mare parte, diferite față de limba română și alte limbi europene. Articolul definit, bunăoară, este enclitic ca în limba română și are două forme principale: *-n* (transliterat ca *-ə*) și *-l̄* (*-n*). Alegerea între

aceste două forme depinde de sunetul cu care se termină cuvântul. Dacă substantivul se termină cu o consoană, se utilizează articolul *-n*, iar dacă se termină cu o vocală, se adaugă *-l̄*. Această regulă simplificată este un punct de plecare pentru învățarea regulilor de utilizare a articolului definit în armeană. De exemplu, pentru cuvântul *մարդ* (*mard*) ‘om’, forma definită devine *մարդը* (*mardə*) ‘omul’. În cazul substantivului *երեկիս* (*yerekha*) ‘copil’, forma definită ar fi *երեկիսը* (*yerekhan*) ‘copilul’.

Un alt aspect interesant este că limba armeană nu are doar un articol nedefinit formal, similar cu *un* sau *o* în română sau *a* în engleză, nedefinirea putând fi sugerată și implicit în contextul propoziției. Astfel, un substantiv fără articol în propoziție poate fi interpretat ca fiind nedefinit. De exemplu, propoziția *Ես գիրք եմ կարդում* (*Yes girk em kardum*) înseamnă ‘Eu citesc o carte’, unde *գիրք* (*girk*) este nedefinit, deși nu este necesară folosirea unui articol nedefinit specific care să marcheze acest lucru.

Pentru străinii care învață limba armeană, utilizarea articolului definit poate fi un obstacol major. În mod special, cei care vorbesc nativ limbi care nu folosesc articole enclitice (cum ar fi engleza, unde articolul precedă substantivul) întâmpină dificultăți în a înțelege și a aplica această regulă corect. Mai mult, absența unui articol nedefinit explicit poate crea confuzie pentru vorbitorii de limbi în care această distincție este clar marcată, cum ar fi limbile romanice.

Pe lângă aceste aspecte, problematice sunt și tipurile de acord. În enunțuri complexe, forma substantivului poate suferi modificări în funcție de caz și funcția sintactică (subiect, complement etc.), ceea ce poate crea dificultăți suplimentare pentru studenți. Articolul, fiind atașat substantivului, se supune de asemenea acestor schimbări. Un alt aspect demn de menționat este că în limba armeană, articolul definit nu este întotdeauna obligatoriu și utilizarea sa poate depinde de context. În unele cazuri, substantivul poate apărea fără articol atunci când nu este

necesară specificarea clară a definitului sau nedefinitului. Acest lucru poate crea (determina, pentru a evita repetiția) ambiguitate pentru vorbitorii de alte limbi care se bazează pe utilizarea constantă a articolelor pentru a clarifica sensul.

Comparând cele două limbi, observăm că în limba română categoria gramaticală a determinării cuprinde trei forme principale: articolul zero (absența articolului), articolul nehotărât și articolul hotărât enclitic. Astfel, în funcție de gradul de cunoaștere și specificitate a obiectului, se disting trei valori: nedeterminat (*carte, pom*), determinat nedefinit (*o carte, un pom*) și determinat definit (*pomul, cartea*). Conținutul semantic al acestor articole este foarte abstract, deoarece nu adaugă nicio informație lexicală suplimentară sau nu modifică în mod semnificativ sensul cuvântului pe care îl însoțesc. În acest sistem, articolele joacă un rol esențial în individualizarea substantivului: când substantivul denotă un obiect mai puțin cunoscut sau neindividualizat, se folosește articolul nehotărât (de ex. *un măr*); când obiectul este clar definit și cunoscut, se utilizează articolul hotărât enclitic (de ex. *geamul*).

În contrast, în limba armeană, nedeterminarea definită poate fi exprimată fie prin articolul zero (absența totală a articolului), fie prin postpunerea numeralului *mi* înaintea substantivului. Diferența majoră față de limba română constă în faptul că folosirea articolului în armeană este opțională în anumite contexte, cum ar fi *Mi girk tur indz* ‘Dă-mi o carte’ sau *Girk tur indz* ‘Dă-mi cartea’ – fără articol definit, deși cu sens definit, dat de context. Această flexibilitate a sistemului armean poate genera erori recurente în limba română, în care utilizarea articolelor este strict reglementată și obligatorie pentru a marca clar definirea sau nedefinirea.

Astfel, deși cele două sisteme gramaticale împărtășesc concepte similare legate de determinare și nedeterminare, utilizarea articolelor diferă semnificativ. În timp ce în română articolul definit este enclitic și obligatoriu pentru

clarificarea determinării, în armeană acesta poate fi opțional, iar nedeterminarea poate fi marcată atât prin articol zero, cât și prin alte elemente gramaticale, cum ar fi numeralul *mek*. Orice prognoză bazată pe comparația celor două limbi va evidenția că această variabilitate dublată de versatilitatea articolului în ambele idiomuri va fi sursa unor confuzii și erori, care trebuie analizate, explicate și remediate.

## 7. ANALIZA ERORILOR

Am ales să nu utilizăm extensiv exemple din corpus în această lucrare din cauza limitărilor de spațiu, care nu ne permit să prezentăm în detaliu tipologia erorilor urmată de inventarierea exemplilor din eseurile studenților. Deși corpusul analizat oferă numeroase exemple relevante pentru a ilustra tipurile de greșeli frecvente în ceea ce privește utilizarea articolului în limba română de către studenții armeni, obiectivul principal a fost acela de a oferi o perspectivă generală asupra fenomenelor lingvistice observate, mai degrabă decât de a explora în detaliu fiecare caz în parte. Astfel, am preferat să evidențiem tipologiile generale și tendințele majore identificate în analiza erorilor, lăsând exemplele specifice pentru discuții ulterioare sau studii mai aprofundate. Această abordare ne permite să ne concentrăm pe concluziile esențiale, fără a fragmenta expunerea prin includerea unui număr prea mare de exemple.

Conceptul de „articol” a fost analizat de-a lungul timpului de majoritatea lingviștilor consacrați ai limbii române. Deși nu toți s-au pus de acord în privința indicilor formali specifici – unii lingviști îl consideră încă parte de vorbire – cei mai mulți au considerat că acesta posedă trăsături care conturează/stabilesc categoria gramaticală a determinării.

Studenții armeni, atât cei de nivel intermediar, cât și avansat, fac foarte des erori care vizează principalele tipuri de opoziții întâlnite în limba română: nedeterminat/determinat nehotărât; determinat nehotărât/determinat hotărât. Iată

câteva exemple din corpusul analizat: ”Băiat pleacă în excursie cu *părinți*” / „Am văzut *casă* mare” / „a cumpărat *o floarea*” / „Are un *câinele* mare” / „Eu am văzut pe *profesorul*” / „*profesor* nu am ascultat” / „spune *o ambasadoarea*” / „Max e *câine* meu”.

Spre deosebire de limba armeană unde există cel puțin patru modalități de marcarea a opoziției de determinare, limba română are doar două: pentru genul masculin – *-ul și un*, așa cum se arată în LRC, volumul coordonat de Ion Coteanu (LRC, 1974: 133). În ceea ce privește așa numitul „articol zero”, în limba română lingviștii îl definesc prin raportare la lipsa oricărei determinări, referință generică sau neexplicită, referent general, lipsa specificității sau a individualizării etc. În armeană, substantivul nearticulat, adică varianta de bază sau neutră a unui substantiv, indică sensul general al unui substantiv fără a-l preciza în detaliu sau fără a-i limita semnificația și se utilizează, fără a insista pe multitudinea de excepții de la regulă, atunci când vorbitorul face referire pentru prima dată la o persoană/obiect, adică acesta este complet necunoscut și nespecific atât pentru vorbitor, cât și pentru ascultător, dar și în enumerări, liste etc.

Este dificil pentru studenții armeni să surprindă exact dihotomia familiar/nefamiliar în diferitele ocurențe din română, aspect care constituie, în mare parte, esența articulării. Analiza corpusului, dar și experiența predării, au evidențiat, o dată în plus, faptul că armenii înțeleg mai ușor opoziția nedeterminare-determinare definită (*elev – elevul*). Cele mai multe greșeli apar atunci când se impune alegerea între determinarea nehotărâtă și nedeterminare, respectiv determinarea hotărâtă și cea nehotărâtă. Iată câteva exemple care vizează utilizarea incorectă a articolului nehotărât de către studenții armeni, a cărei cauză o reprezintă, de cele mai multe ori, interferențele cu limba maternă: „El lucrează în *fîrmă* mare.” – omitere / „Eu nu cunosc pe Narek mai bine, dar este *persoană* interesantă.” – omitere / „România este *țară* cu douăzeci de

milioane *locuitorii*.” – omitere + articulare greșită cu articol hotărât / „Am cumpărat *un zahăr* și *o făină*.” – adăugare. Frecvența acestui tip de erori influențate de transferul negativ din limba maternă arată că studenții armeni disting greu ideea de generalizare (articolul zero și uneori articolul nehotărât) și gradul redus de individualizare pe care le presupun utilizarea determinării nehotărâte în limba română. O altă cauză s-ar putea datora faptului că, în limba armeană, gramaticalizarea articolului izolat din demonstrative a avut un caracter aparte față de alte limbi indo-europene (Harris, 1985; Vaux, 1994). Nehotărârea nu este atât de clar marcată ca în limba română, iar articolele nehotărâte pot funcționa, în anumite contexte, ca simpli indicatori ai categoriei morfologice a substantivului sau ai cazului.

Cum spuneam mai sus, în limba română, funcția articolului nehotărât este reglementată mai strict: „Articolul nehotărât are rolul de a prezenta obiectul desemnat de substantivul pe care îl însoțește ca fiind distinct și individualizat în raport cu categoria din care face parte, dar totodată necunoscut pentru vorbitori; de exemplu, *o casă* este mai definit decât *casă*, dar mai puțin definit decât *casa* (aceea pe care o cunoaștem)” (GLR, 1966: 87). În contrast cu limba armeană, în română articolul nehotărât acompaniază exclusiv substantivul și, foarte important, „separă un obiect din clasa sa, permițând referințe ulterioare la el ca și cum ar fi cunoscut” (GLR, 1966: 87). Studenții armeni întâmpină dificultăți în a percepe această nuanță, fiind influențați de regulile limbii lor materne. Iată un exemplu dintr-un eseu scris de un student de nivel B2, care descrie comportamentul turiștilor în Erevan: „La Erevan vin mulți turiști. *Turiști* poate să vadă *piață* mare și *fântână* de luminuri care cântă singură.”

Mai mult decât atât, în limba armeană un substantiv la singular poate avea, cu puține excepții, orice rol într-un enunț. De exemplu, următoarele două propoziții sunt ambele corecte și folosite nediferențiat: *Hima na mi girk e kardum.* ‘El citește acum o carte.’ / *Hima na girk e kardum.*

‘El citește carte acum’. În limba română, însă, spre deosebire de regimul substantivelor la plural, un substantiv la singular cu funcția sintactică de subiect sau complement direct este obligatoriu însoțit de articolul hotărât sau nehotărât: *un turist poate vedea... / turiștii pot vedea...*

În limba armeană, articolul hotărât indică faptul că obiectul sau persoana despre care se vorbește este cunoscută sau specifică pentru vorbitori, similar cu funcția articolului hotărât din limba română. De exemplu, *կրկիսու* (*yerekha*) ‘copil’ devine *կրկիսուի* (*yerekhan*) ‘copilul’, iar *դուր* (*durr*) ‘ușă’ devine *դուրը* (*durrə*) ‘ușa’. Această structură gramaticală este esențială în armeană pentru a diferenția între un obiect generic și unul specific, și se aplică tuturor substantivelor, indiferent de genul sau numărul lor (cf. Dum-Tragut, 2009).

Greșelile din exemplele de mai jos reflectă interferențele între limba maternă a vorbitorilor și limba română, observabile în special în utilizarea articolelor hotărâte și în acordul gramatical, domenii în care structurile celor două limbi diferă semnificativ: „Arthur este cel mai inteligent băiatul din clasa mea.” (nivel intermediar); „Primul cursul de limba română cu profesorul a fost interesantă.” (nivel intermediar); „Limba română este destul de greu pentru mine. Al doilea semestrul a fost și mult bine, am învățat lucruri multe.” (nivel avansat); „Citind această cartea lui Eminescu, am visat cum pot să întâlnesc pe iubirea perfectă.” (nivel avansat). Transferul negativ – modul de formare a superlativului în armeană – este, considerăm noi, cauza principală pentru frecvența ridicată cu care apare folosirea redundantă a formelor articolului hotărât în structurile specifice superlativului relativ din română. Utilizarea simultană a articolului hotărât când nu se impune este, de cele mai multe ori, dublată de greșeli de acord (de exemplu, în armeană adjectivul nu este întotdeauna acordat cu substantivul în funcție de gen și număr), de topică (româna are reguli mai „rigide” în ceea ce privește ordinea cuvintelor, colocațiile), utilizarea

prepozițiilor (de exemplu, confuzia dintre folosirea obligatorie a prepoziției *pe* pentru obiectul direct animat și obiectele inanimate, unde *pe* nu este necesar).

Un alt aspect care trebuie discutat este dificultatea cu care studenții armeni disting gradul de cunoaștere și specificitate a obiectului în diferite contexte și ocurențe obligatorii în română. În exemplele: „Mergem la o piață pentru a cumpăra legume.” / „Profesor a dat teme de acasă pentru săptămână viitoare.” / „Am văzut filmul interesant aseară.” / „Măine mergem la o mare.” / „Student este foarte interesat de cursul.” o posibilă sursă a erorilor o constituie gradul ridicat de abstractizare al conținutului semantic al acestor articole, deoarece nu adaugă nicio informație lexicală suplimentară sau nu modifică în mod semnificativ sensul cuvântului pe care îl însoțesc. Analiza erorilor și o diagnoză corectă ajută la alcătuirea unor exerciții care să accentueze tipurile de opoziții din limba română și importanța aplicării lor: când substantivul denotă un obiect mai puțin cunoscut sau neindividualizat, se folosește articolul nehotărât (de ex. *un măr*); când obiectul este clar definit și cunoscut, se utilizează articolul hotărât enclitic (de ex. *geamul*).

În exemplele: „Am cumpărat acest mașina mea pe second hand.” / „Acest prietenul meu locuiește nu în oraș, vine să viziteze.” (nivel B2) sursa erorilor o constituie contaminarea și neaprofundarea regulilor privitoare la articol și utilizarea/topica demonstrativelor în limba română (*prietenul meu / un prieten al/de-al meu/de ai mei / acest prieten al meu / prietenul acesta al meu* etc.). În limba armeană, adjectivele demonstrative: *ays* (aproape de vorbitor), *ayd* (aproape de ascultător, de asemenea folosit frecvent anaforic), *ayn* (distant, folosit și cataforic cu capetele propozițiilor relative) necesită prezența articolului definit atașat substantivului pe care îl modifică: *այս / այդ / այն մարդը* (*ays / ayd / ayn mardə*) – dem. 1 / dem. 2 / dem. 3 persoană + art. hot.

Articolul *i*, marcă a genitiv-dativului, cu rol de individualizare, actualizare, desinență specifică s-a

dovedit extrem de greu de înțeles și utilizat corect de către studenții avansați, tocmai pentru că, sub influența limbii materne, aceștia disting mai greu între determinarea nehotărâtă și nedeterminare, respectiv determinarea hotărâtă și cea nehotărâtă. Iată câteva exemple: „*Mirosul flori* este mult și puternic și ne umplut întregă cameră.” / „*Deschidere de uși* l-a făcut sunet tare și m-am sperit.” / „*Cadoul la mătușă* este un lucru ce eu am dorit, eu zic despre telefonul.” (nivel B1).

Cu o frecvență ridicată apar erorile cauzate de neînțelegerea situațiilor în care articularea este obligatorie, fiind cerută de ocurența unui element din enunț sau context. Există diferențe clare între cele două limbi în ceea ce privește ocurența obligatorie, respectiv interdicția sau posibilitatea de a nu folosi articolul. Pe de altă parte, studenții recurg foarte des în diferitele etape ale interlimbii la generalizarea unor reguli din limba țintă, riscul fosilizării crescând în astfel de situații, cum se poate observa în exemplele: „*Toți prietenii* au venit să-mi celebreze ziua de naștere.” / „La ora opt suc nu este, invitați băut *tot suc* cu plăcut mult.” / „Bunică a luat caise de la magazin. *Caise* sunt *fructe* meu preferat.” / „Tu nu cunoști pe *locul* la *facultate* mea. Este lângă metrou.” (nivel A2). Necesită clarificări suplimentare și utilizarea articolului zero, respectiv nehotărât în limba română prin comparație contrastivă cu armeană, pentru a înțelege mai bine funcția de actualizare a substantivului pe care articolul o are în această speță. În română vorbim despre articol zero doar atunci când un substantiv nearticulat poate apărea în același context și articulat hotărât.

## 8. CONCLUZII

Învățarea utilizării corecte a articolului în limba română poate reprezenta o provocare semnificativă pentru vorbitorii de armeană, iar această dificultate este ușor observabilă empiric prin analiza, clasificarea și explicarea erorilor. Principalele surse ale erorilor pe care le-am observat în acest studiu de caz au fost:

interferențele, suprageneralizarea, confuzia determinat/nedeterminat, dificultăți în înțelegerea contextului și a ocurențelor obligatorii ale articolului, confuzia dintre singular și plural, versatilitatea articolului în armeană față de reglementarea mult mai strictă din limba română, omiterea acestuia în structurile fixe.

Studiul scoate în evidență dificultățile întâmpinate de studenții armeni în utilizarea corectă a articolului în limba română și oferă concluzii punctuale bazate pe analiza unui corpus de eseuri scrise între 2016 și 2019 la Universitatea „Valeri Brusov” din Erevan. Greșelile de utilizare a articolului, care constituie aproximativ 25,30% din totalul erorilor identificate, subliniază dificultatea specifică pe care o întâmpină acești studenți în a naviga între regulile mai stricte ale limbii române și flexibilitatea sistemului armean de articole.

Un aspect important pe care îl relevă analiza empirică a erorilor este că studenții armeni, deși reușesc să înțeleagă într-o anumită măsură opoziția dintre determinare și nedeterminare, fac frecvent greșeli atunci când trebuie să aleagă între utilizarea articolului nehotărât și cea a articolului zero, respectiv între determinarea nehotărâtă și cea hotărâtă. Astfel, mulți studenți omit articolul nehotărât sau îl utilizează greșit, neînțelegând opoziția internă graduală de tipul *elev / un elev / elevul*, sau încurcând, de cele mai multe ori, variantele bilaterale nedeterminare/determinare, respectiv determinare minimă/determinare maximă (Irimia, 1987: 57). Acest tip de erori se datorează adesea transferului negativ din limba maternă, unde, spre exemplu, determinarea poate fi indicată doar contextual fără un articol specific. În mod similar, confuzia dintre singular și plural, asocierea incompletă a gradului de cunoaștere și familiaritate cu specificitatea obiectului în diferite contexte gramaticale ori utilizarea redundantă a articolului definit, mai ales în superlative indică, o dată în plus, faptul că studenții au dificultăți în a înțelege și în a aplica corect regulile de folosire a articolului în limba română.

Frecvența cu care apar erorile de utilizare a articolului atât la nivel intermediar, cât și avansat, dar și riscul fosilizării necesită, considerăm noi, o atenție sporită și o abordare din mai multe perspective a predării articolului studenților străini, utilizarea analizei contrastive și a diagnozei pe baza datelor empirice pentru o analiză țintită și pentru configurarea strategiei de remediere, corectarea și clarificarea erorilor globale, fixarea conceptului de determinare în limba țintă prin comparații cu limba maternă sau o altă limbă suport, toate prin raportare la feedbackul permanent din partea cursanților.

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**Petru Aruștei,  
Pictorul-poet fulgerat de raze.  
Supraviețuitor într-o noapte cu îngeri**

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**PETRU ARUȘTEI, THE PAINTER-POET  
STRUCK BY RAYS. A SURVIVOR IN A  
NIGHT WITH ANGELS**

**Keywords:** Petru Aruștei, prose poems, graphic art pictures, confessional identity, catharsis, underground artist

**Abstract**

*This study explores the vibrant and intensely expressive artistic legacy of Petru Aruștei (1939–1984), whose work represents a fervent testimony to his idealistic convictions. Renowned for its lyricism and evocative imagery, Aruștei's oeuvre is characterized by a poignant exploration of existential themes, juxtaposing light and darkness, life and death. His creative output reflects a profound inner turmoil, manifesting as a continuous lament driven by a deeply introspective and tormented spirit. Through vivid metaphors and a boundless imagination, Aruștei interweaves elements of anguish, obsession, and transcendence, crafting a visual and poetic narrative reminiscent of Baudelairean motifs. This paper examines Aruștei's unique integration of synesthetic techniques, innovative tempo, and symbolic language, which culminates in a body of work deserving of greater scholarly recognition. The analysis underscores his role as a "Painter-Poet" and highlights his artistic contributions as a testament to the resilience of a conscience enduring the inferno of existential struggle.*

De sus, din Cereasca Învolburare, din focul pur și nestins, dintre flăcările ce veșnic schimbă Chipul Cerului tot mai transparent, tot mai viu, până urlă, s-a prăbușit asupra-mi cu spaimă – și câtă furie! – strigându-mi ca unui Surd, ca unui Surd, ca unui Surd: imaginația atroce cât o să-ți mai tortureze creierii? (*Îngerul negru*, Feed-Back, 2016:74)

Rostește aceste cuvinte Petru Aruștei, un glas „din adâncuri și din înălțimi” pentru care a trăi murind – a muri trăind și a crea se contopesc într-o magnetică invocare „înfiorând pustiurile fierbinți și nesfârșite” din Suflet. Un Suflet ce-și destăinuie Suferința „răstignită pentru hoarda nemiloasă a zilelor ce vor veni”, zdruncinatoare confesiune a unui „scriitor care trăiește în afara lumii, care nu privește nici în stânga nici în dreapta, ci numai spre cer sau abis.” (Stanca, 1994:2) *Rara avis* ce vine de foarte departe, mereu inspirând cu înfrigurare Eternitatea, „o picătură din ceea ce nu se mai întoarce niciodată îndărăt”, ideează



1939, Podu Iloaiei, Iași – 1984, Iași

acest artist moldav underground culmile intense și tragice ale unei literaturi:

„...care nu aparține nici unui timp sau aparține tuturor timpurilor, ne este și nu ne este contemporană. Nu se pot descoperi în ea rămășițe ale contextului social-politic, nu se pot identifica nici fragmente autobiografice, totul este o volbură, o negură, în cele din urmă o iluminare. Totul este vizionar, profetic, deslușind imagini ascunse acum, vizibile poate într-un alt veac.” (Stanca, 1994:2)

Întreaga operă aruștiană se dezvăluie, ca un filigran, printr-un limbaj definitoriu ce o individualizează. Prin descrierea și analiza hermeneutică a acestui limbaj (selecție lexicală, asocieri și inovații imagistice, registru stilistic și de expresie grafică) se vizează profilul și temele profunde ale unui univers artistic fixat într-un înveliș verbal și pictoric, acea structură de adâncime ce explică felul în care experiența Vieții-Morții devine pentru Petru Aruștei obiect al intuiției, al cunoașterii și al emoției estetice. Totul înfățișându-se cititorului și privitorului prin calitatea viziunii artistice și a procedurilor de stil ce în mod pregnant dau relief unui mesaj prin care Petru Aruștei își reprezintă arta ca adevăr emoțional. Substanța comunicării este încărcată până la refuz de un lirisim rar întâlnit, redat în toate detaliile ce conduc la problematica generală a ființării în creația acestui Suflet autentic, liber, neîntinat, „întrebându-se dacă există cu adevărat drumul cel căutat”. Este, ca atare, de interes în această lucrare inventarierea contextului lingvistic și stilistic implicând, pe de o parte, revelarea mijloacelor de expresie ale unei gândiri și ale unei conștiințe, iar pe de altă parte, urmărirea unui cod lăuntric prin care elemente statice sau abstracte prind viață și se subordonează unei misterioase transformări estetice și funcționale:

Când vântul albastru din cer își strecoară privirea-schelet printre frunzele înghețate din

pletele stelelor și-mi ucide viața de aici eu plec acolo unde sunt așteptat! Vino și mă călăuzește printre locurile noi, prin care încep să trec, mai târziu nu voi mai ști nimic! Coloane de flăcări negre îi luminează până Sus pletele tâmpelor răvășite de golul din jur, își recunoaște-amintește noul său Chip înălțându-se alb și prelung din ierburile de la marginile înnegurate.” (*Aurora în bătaia vântului*, Expres cultural, Zigurat, 2018:3)

Format la *Școala populară de artă Iași* (1957-1960, secția pictură), autodictat model, pasionat de literatură, desen, filozofie și muzică, un călător „cu ochii îngropați în țărâna rătăcitoare a Cerului”, Petru Aruștei scrutează mecanismele lingvistice și stilistice prin care unui receptor să i se declanșeze curiozitatea, avântul metafizic, gustul pentru rafinement și plasticitate, atitudini activate prin trăiri afective, cheile de deschidere spre înțelegerea și interiorizarea gestului creativ. Oglindind „vântul gândurilor”, cuvintele și imaginile, în perfectă armonie transpuse, uimesc și încântă, comunică și inspiră, generând într-un cerc filologic (Vianu, 1966) și hermeneutic (Gadamer, 1992; Coșeriu, 2007) o decodare-înțelegere personală și, implicit, o recreare proprie de sens și interpretare mereu, însă, în concordanță cu isoglosa imaginației nostalgice, ilimitată a lui Petru Aruștei.



Inconfundabil prin cutremurătoare tușe de plastică liricitate, Petru Aruștei învălurează textul și cartonul cu amprenta unor dureri născute din înflăcărâte gânduri și patimi, miezul concret din două volume de poeme în proză și un ciclu de artă grafică (*Chipurile nopții, Don Quijote, Isus în pustie*) reunite în mod salvator în



1994 la Editura Institutul European, colecția *Scriitori români*, ca o excepțională *opera omnia: Moarte și renaștere. Supraviețuire* (Premiul pentru literatură în același an acordat post-mortem de către Asociația Scriitorilor din Iași). Completată cu un *Memorial* de Cezar Ivănescu<sup>1</sup> și un *Eseu* de Ioan Constantinescu<sup>2</sup>, prin această antologie postumă se recuperează pentru a fi prețuită tulburătoarea expresie artistică a unui Pictor-Poet Supraviețuitor capabil să-și preschimbe disperarea existențială într-o aspirație: „să-mi zidesc timpul meu din care să nu mai pot fi izgonit!”, o stare și o condiție tematică prin poeme și gravuri expuse ca un ansamblu ritmic și vizual, dialogism măiestrit al unei voci ce-și concepe făurirea prin jocul infinitamente liric de imagini și contraste între real și ireal, material și fantastic, a trăi și a muri, adevăr și mister, negru și alb. Delir și tenebre, rugăciune și mânie, experiment și echivoc, gestul creativ, mai presus de un destin și o Viață ca o încleștare perpetuă sau un derizoriu calambur, îi permite poetului, pe un drum al izbăvirii, să își înțeleagă, din umbre și lumini, menirea:

Am plâns, m-am tânguit vieții să nu cunosc lumea cuvintelor, țărâna cea mai ușoară, și viața nu m-a ascultat, viața a râs sau a plâns, dar nu m-a ascultat, și eu, cu viața mea, pot să prelungesc dincolo de mine câteva șuvițe de lumină, câteva umbre, atât doar, numai atât. (*Omul cu lampa*, Feed-Back, 2016:74)

Căutat zi și noapte de viziuni întrupate din obsesii și angoase, în deznădejdea celui ce își simte sufletul devorat de un „tigrul albastru, tigrul al mahnirii”, râvnind lumina dezrobitoare a creației ca un vis învăluit de raze de sânge, Petru Aruștei își proiectează surd silueta poetică, „steaua mea plămădită din cele trei coaste ale lutului

<sup>1</sup> 1941-2008, poet, dramaturg, director de editură, candidat la Premiul Nobel pentru literatură în 2008.

<sup>2</sup> 1938-2002, profesor și autor de studii de literatură comparată și de eseuri despre literatura română.

numit Așteptare”, temător, dar și brav, când aude „cum se rup mormintele vii din mine cu morții lor de o sută de ori morți și rătăcesc fără odihnă ca niște făclii de marmură prin întinderile de dincolo de Sufletul meu!”. Astfel, înarmat cu forța ascunsă a unui demiurg ce „trece sunător arcuit sub povara pletelor cerești”, deslușește printr-un aprig tumult de trăiri și sentimente și:

...în tensionate străluminări, tâlcuri menite să dea vieții și morții un rost. Într-o vreme ale cărei fantasmе îl seduceau și îl respingeau deopotrivă, acest băiat avea și harul, dar purta și stigmatul, parcă, al unei stranii osânde. Și asta nu numai pentru marele, inconfortabilul său talent. El era, plămădă rară, numai singurătate și dăruire. Singurătate, sub hipnoza unui abis întunecat pe care numai ochii lui îl întrezăreau, Dăruire, într-o deposedare de sine mergând până la ultima renunțare. Umbre și lumini, o lumină absorbită de întunecimi, dar sfâșiind, în explozii dureros-extatice, pânza neagră ce înfășoară viul ca într-un giulgiu (...) într-o încordare de combustie existențialistă, (...) spre un tărâm unde realul se resoarbe în metafizic, iar prin întunericul alegoric scânteiază noime încă nedelegate. (Faifer, 2018:3)

*Țara lunii*



*Vizuire. Obsesia*



*Christos a murit**Focul*

Fete trasate în contururi spectrale, răvășite de Frigul din cer, sub respirația imaterială a Focului, în linii și variații metaforice ce duc cu gândul la percepțiile himerice revelate de William Blake, Ceri Richards sau Alfred Kubin, deconspiră acea conștiință tragică a unui artist hipersensibil pentru care atât Viața, „cu sânii găuriți de stele, îmbălsămată în sângele plin de beznă al șoaptelor lui Dumnezeu”, cât și Moartea pășind „cu picioare de umbră, prin iezerile negre din ochii nopții” se lichiefiază într-o luptă agonică de supraviețuire purtată printr-o învârstare de întuneric și lumină pentru a se da în vileag un adevăr sumbru: „tot ce are formă este supus disperării”, clipă de clipă cunoscându-se Spaima, Dezastrul, Moartea și o perenă reîntoarcere „la viața plină de inexistență” pe drumuri alungite ce se desfac „între crucile-păsări întunecate.”

Pictural și lingvistic, Petru Aruștei își extrage emoția din istovitoare reflecții și neliniști, întipărind-o cu doruri, sânge și lacrimi. Încărcate de enigmatic, poemele și pânzele sale cuprind nu numai esența propriului său suflet, dar și pe al celor ce se apropie de obrazul său și rămân tremurând, simțindu-i privirea și pașii „tunători, rătăcind pe cărările secetoase, crescute în Cer.” În *Nebgrohd*, *Rugăciune în pustiul roșu, noaptea*, *Cina*, *Îngerul negru*, *Omul cu lampa*, *Peretele*

*iubit de pictor*, *Fiul cel bun*, *Esențe tari*, *Transfigurare – chemări îndepărtate*, *Aurora în bătaia vântului*, *Supraviețuire umilă*, *Moarte și renaștere*, etc. (poeme) ca și în *Venirea primăverii*, *Spaima ca o lumină*, *Hohotul dimineții*, *Vocea*, *Focul*, *Chipurile Noptii*, etc. (grafică) se înmagazinează cu o amploare și o forță imagistică unice în sfera culturală românească o strajă de reprezentări suprarealiste ce, dincolo de măreția unei îndurerate identități, relevă ardoarea imuabilă a unui Fiu Risipitor în preajma căruia „simțea un fâlfâit de aripă. O aripă, poate, de geniu.” (Faifer, 2018:3)

Înfățișări dramatice în șuvoi incandescent, depășind forma exterioară a raționalului și penetrând natura imperceptibilă a unor reverii mistice se susțin printr-un registru lingvistic cu tonalități epice, plăsmuită o subtilă <monotonie a sublimului>, integral încadrată de o intimă și indispensabilă simbolistică, solemne și magice majuscule defilând pentru a individualiza cuvinte, motive și înțelesuri (*Neant*, *Suferință*, *Flacără*, *Munte*, *Înger*, *Sacrificiu*, *Desfințare*, *Pustiu*, *Templu*, *Peșteră*, *Văzduh*, *Extaz*, *Dincolo*, etc.), totul grupat pe un platou estetic reliefând forfota afectivă din inima lui Petru Aruștei, poet în clocot și frământări revărsate luciferic pe hârtie, durându-l „urmele cuielor” (Harea, 1994:28):

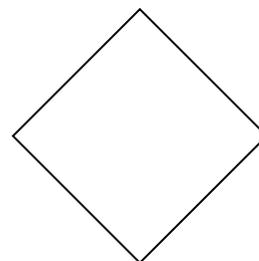
Ci tu, cel care vei pleca Acolo în căutarea realcătuirii din urmă a neființei și nemuririi tale, mai ascultă trompeta roșie a Cerului alungând caii negri ai nopții peste dinții Pământului; mai ascultă cum trec pașii Arhanghelului de foc îmbrăcat în haine arzând prin lumina de Sus, purtând între umeri sicriul-mormânt cu calul negru culcat între luminările aprinse. (*Rugăciune în pustiul roșu, noaptea*, Feed-Back, 2016:76)

*Spaima ca o lumină**Chipurile nopții**Vocea*

a unei năzuințe neostoite – „cine te poate visa, imaginându-te? Cine se cufundă în noaptea ta?” – cuvintele, „deșerturile albe din el”, îl poartă pe poet pe cărarea îngerească către ființă-neființă, meditație-elegie, renaștere-dăinuire. Astfel, între sacru și infernal, Petru Aruștei alungă discursul limitat și tern din cotidian și se lansează în voluptoasa abisalitate a <chemărilor îndepărtate>, asumată <transfigurare> tămăduitoare:

Un gând cu chipul luminos ca o fiară îi șopti cu emoție că fraza se va sfârși curând sau va trebui s-o sfârșească el însuși căci Acolo, la capăt, îl așteaptă Punctul, pândindu-l cu ochi galbeni și gura plină cu flăcările albe și reci ale caninilor; cel căruia nimeni nu i-a văzut vreodată adevăratul chip; Punctul pe care va trebui să-l pună el și numai el la sfârșitul cuvintelor, ferindu-se astfel de primejdia de a pleca înfrânt de pe câmpul de luptă, plin cu victimele albe, îndoliate de surâsul mort din gura Dimineții. Încăcios, fumul trandafirii acoperea chipul glasurilor neauzite... (*Transfigurare, chemări îndepărtate*, Expres cultural, Zigurat, 2018:1)

Amintind versurile blagiene despre un *Paradis în destrămare* („Arând fără îndemn/cu pluguri de lemn,/Arhanghelii se plâng/de greutatea aripelor./...păianjeni mulți au umplut apa vie,/odată vor putrezi și îngerii sub glie/țărâna va seca poveștile/din trupul trist”), poetul ieșean, cu același amar ce înfrânge margini și frontiere, este un mântuitor al cuvintelor, le extrage din orânduirea lor naturală și le conferă grația unui cântec neîntrerupt, teluric și vital, eliberat de strigătul sugrumat ce „renaște ucis în săgețile otrăvite ale Cuvântului uniform, nenăscut.” Matcă



*Chipurile morții*

În timp ce în tablouri, „însemnele nenorocirii și disperării mele”, domină palidele stafii împreunate în beznă până la o stare de adâncită dispersie, poemele în proză aruștience se îmbibă de scene într-o coloristică răvășitoare: umbra terorii sau a morții este *galbenă*, mahmureala creierului *sinilie*, speranța ia forma unor bărci *verzi*, stelele au dinți *roșii*, iar dorințele ochi *violeti*, casele ard „neîndurătoare între frunzele *albastre* de foc”, altare părăsite se fac scrum „pe catafalcul *portocaliu*, dăltuit în trupul vlăguit de pământ”, pielea eul-ui „flămând și înfrigorat” atât de *violetă*, *trandafiriu* scheletul captiv în brațe feminine atunci când se iubește, cu aripi de gheață un fluture *galben* acoperă ochii visători, ghirlande *roz-amărui* se aștern pe fruntea înserării, „răvășind coșmarurile-alcool din trupul în formă de cruce al Universului” poetul e însetat de *roșu*, Mama aprinde pe steaua ei *verde* un foc *albastru* și „strălucitor curge *albul* iradiant peste șoldurile zilei”, etc. Cromatică expresionistă încercând sinestezic și evocator sensurile:

nostalgie, neîmplinire teriană, descompunere, patima răscumpărării cerești. Se desprinde pe fundal, translucidă, flacăra „tremurătoare și plăpândă din gura Sufletului”, conturând zbuciumate încheștări și care „crucificată pe limbile clopotelor-rugăciune din aripile *roșii* ale îngerilor, murea încet, vărsându-și țipătul sângelui ei *alb* în toracele Noptii!”

În aceeași linie, desăvârșește călătoria poetică, răscolită de iluzii și deziluzii, o iconografie animalieră alegorizantă, fabricându-și Petru Aruștei o excentrică mitologie: *Marele Câine de Veghe* coboară „din copacul vopsit cu vopsea roșie” și interpelează blajin un sens, un *leu* înflăcărat devoră „trupul gândurilor”, *cocoși de ceară* rânduiesc o melodie „în trompetele vântului rătăcitor”, „*cai negri* reîncarnați străbat în galop pustiul fără hotare” (calul negru – „prelung, cu urechile înfipte în coapsele cerului, care-mi paște mahnit iarba vieții de pe trup este Sfârșitul meu” – întruchipând fatalitatea), un *tigru* „străjuiește porțile zăbrelete ale Speranței”, caninii lui mai imaculați decât „albul imaculat al Noptii noastre de pe pământ, etc. Convergențe simbolice, se înțeleg aceste secvențe ca o convocare intertextuală, *tigrul*, de exemplu, emblema duală a frumuseții simetrice fără cusur, tainică și intimidantă, în același timp, fiind o prezență culturală în poezia lumii: William Blake (*The Tyger*), Jorge Luis Borges („los tigres rigen los rumbos del espacio” – tigrii guvernează căile văzduhului în *Los tigres del Annam*), Julio Cortázar („el tigre es un jardín que juega” – tigrul este o grădină oscilantă în *Los Amantes*), Roque Dalton („Mi dolor tiene cara de rosa,/de primavera personal que ha venido cantando./Tras ella esconde su violento cuchillo./su desatado tigre que me rompió las venas desde antes de nacer/y que trazó los días/de lluvia y de ceniza que mantengo” – Durerea are chip de trandafir,/primăvara mea cântând./Înapoia ei ascunde cuțitul violent./un tigrul dezlănțuit sfâșiindu-mi venele de dinainte să mă nasc/trasându-mi zile/de ploaie și de cenușă în *Mi dolor*), Pablo Neruda („Soy el

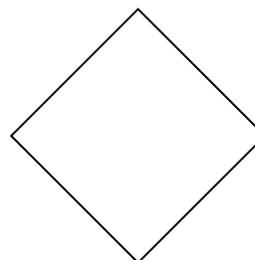
tigre.../desarmado en tu muerte,/cruzado por las lianas,/inmóvil en la lluvia,/centinela implacable/de mi amor asesino” – Sunt tigrul.../dezarmat în moartea ta,/traversat de liane,/încremenit în ploaie,/santinela implacabilă/a iubirii mele asesine în *El Tigre*), etc.

Cu aceeași magnifică ținută a poezilor menționați mai sus și fără măsuri paliative, Petru Aruștei își explorează inspirația artistică iscată din febrile și crude îngândurări, edificând un eșafodaj *Ars poetica* prin care privește, aude și vorbește, își modelează și își transformă propria realitate, fântâna de alean a imaginației oferindu-i acea tărie de a încinge și a stăpâni cu înțelepciune văpaia Sufletului înălțată de „ciolanele prelungi și torturate ale Magiei”, văpaia „cu trup de tămâie, biciuit de crucile unui sfârșit de cataclism mistuit de gurile flămânde și materne ale Morții.” Aceasta din urmă, materializată cu sentimentele unei mame, îi dă fiori Vieții, cutremurând „doar pentru câteva clipe coastele albe și negre ale soarelui transparent”, iar Pictorul-Poet, îmbrățișându-i Puterea, începe astfel „să zidească tronuri din pietrele vâscoase ale neantului”, încercând „să-și înțeleagă noile forme.” Și ca într-un eufonic cadru cinematografic cu actori și perspective filmate la o distanță milimetrică, descrie vârtejul unor curioase ritualuri memento mori (bătaia în poartă a unui om cu lampa înnegurată, cântecul lui, „fosta iubită în giulgiu o noapte”, luminând „cu sângele-i alb drumul către viața bogată ca o nenorocire”; o nefastă Cină „când peste tot era vineri seară”, supravegheată de o apariție îmbrăcată în rochie albă; sosirea îngerilor să se roage „mușcând din pâinea luminoasă a morții”; coborârea Îngerului cu Aripă Înnegurate, evocând sfârșitul lumii; chemarea Păsărilor „înfipte în stâlpii de foc din Cer” pentru a-l fereca pe poet într-un Templu „cu odgoanele sângelui vărsat din trup, ascunzând nodul greu de dezlegat în nisipurile de sub picioarele lui” etc.) și alunecă în halucinante dialoguri cu famelice închipuri (Omul cu lampa, Păsările nopții, Îngerul Negru, Nebgrohd – zeul cu dinții verzi „ca hoiturile ierburilor sugrumate de

el”, Mama – încleștătoare, inconsolabilă absență etc.), probând fantezia vivace a unui Pictor-Poet ce-și freamătă neliniștile cu o teribilă vigoare creatoare:

– Țara aceea despre care ți-am vorbit eu, Fiule, știi tu... – Dar cine sapă pe sub pământ case pentru noi, Mamă? Trezește-te, Fiule, îți spun, cât mai curând, altădată va fi prea târziu! Neîncrezător doarme Fiul mai mult, brațele moi îi mângâie fruntea culcată între flori de salcâm, însoțită de visuri aducătoare de moarte. – Tu care mă auzi atunci când te strig, trezește-te acum, crede-mă! Coboară Mama dintre coloanele verzi, de raze, ale Cerului, prăbușite – arse între rădăcinile Noptii, duioasă își ascunde brațele sub fruntea lui, cu buze de sfârșeală îi sărută gândurile-ceață. – Unde te duc eu n-ai fost tu niciodată... (*Aurora în bătaia vântului*, *Expres cultural*, Zigurat, 2018:4)

Dar între norii înnegurați a coborât Îngerul cu Aripă Înnegurate la mine, strigându-mi cu gura de ură că nu, dar nu, că nimic nu se mai poate face, că dacă Totul a fost viu, iată acum, nimic nu mai este viu, că o nouă pace va fi cum și un nou război aproape va fi. Salvarea este totul îi strig, îi șoptesc să mă audă cât poate de bine – și acea neliniștitoare căutare a ei, veșnică, înfloritoare purificare cum nu s-a mai văzut!” (*Îngerul Negru*, *Feed-Back*, 2016:74)



*Hohotul dimineții**Viziune. Chipurile nopții*

Primul și ultimul act de supraviețuire, centură de salvare în marea de întuneric „cu aripi și gura de lumină”, înfăptuirea unui portret imprimat-multiplicat în clarobscur este reacția rebelă exteriorizată de Petru Aruștei ca un țipăt din negurile creierilor „reînțorși triumfători în imnul trompetelor rituale din tainicul ținut nevăzut!”<sup>3</sup> În fiecare poem, în fiecare pictură se resimte dezvăluirea unui colț de gânduri și energii din care:

<sup>3</sup> este cunoscută cumplita împrejurare când poetul recurge la suicid după ce o parte din picturile ce urmau a fi expuse la Sala Dalles din București au fost aruncate focului prin intrigi și mâini infame.

...trebuie mereu căutat ceea ce se ascunde, ceea ce nu poate fi înstrăinat prin mecanismul cuvintelor, așa cum apar ele, cum se instaurează ele și cum se îndepărtează ele de obiect. Dar așa ceva este imposibil. Trebuie să faci efortul de a ajunge la sursa țipătului. (Mereuță, 2022:297)

Dovada obârșiei acestui stâncos țipăt vine din refuzul existențial de a accepta rolul de arlechin diform, strâmb, „șui” impus pe scena vieții-morții:

Nu putea primi Moartea între coastele sufletului său decât așa cum dorea el; era ultima iluzie, cu câteva clipe înainte de a păși în abisul de Dincolo, ale cărui legi nu le cunoștea încă. Pentru el însuși, pentru focul din trupul lui biciuit de limbile otrăvitoare ale Desființării, numai el putea să-și facă acest bine stingher: să-și officieze trecerea Dincolo cu iluzia unei cât mai depline Puteri! O punte plină de prăpăstii aruncate între viața șui și cea care va urma. (*Transfigurare, chemări îndepărtate*, Expres cultural, Zigurat, 2018:1)

Creația este Viața întru Moarte a unei voci poetice „însăimântător de frumoasă” (Dugneanu, 1995:4), iar judecății interogative cine învinge, <Pasărea cu clonț de rubin><sup>4</sup> sau ființa, Petru Aruștei răspunde cu emoția vie și crâncenă a trupului și a spiritului său în încercarea de a deturna ursita vrăjmașă ce-și întinde culoarea vânăată „peste adâncimile ochilor-răni din sertarele pline de umbră din Suflet.” O încercare urmată de împăcarea deplină și „bucuria atotcuceritoare” și aceasta pentru că „atâta timp cât mai există printre noi un strop de puritate, de credință, de soare, și câmpii verzi, încă nu e prea urât pe Pământ”,

<sup>4</sup> *Dicționar-antologie* (2022, Casa Cărții de știință) ce adună producția literară a poezilor români, Petru Aruștei printre ei, „striviți” de *Pasărea cu clonț de rubin* a lui Nicolae Labiș, metafora-simbol a morții premature.

„pletele clopotelor vântură laude între arcadele zidite de vânt”, iar Mama „vine cu daruri deosebite”:

Sub crucea înălțată sub aripile norilor se aud pașii fiului, tunători, rătăcind pe cărările secetoase, crescute în Cer. Ascultă clopoței argintii scânteind în pomul Noptii – Mamă îți aud cu multă curiozitate rochia de vară când foșnește printre daliile de ceară primăvăratecă, vară a florilor crescute între sânii tăi, mângâind cu poalele ei răcoroase frunțile capricioase ale crinilor. Nu am iubit eu totdeauna crinii sângerii ce creșteau de obicei în dreptul sânilor tăi? Dar iată cum sunt părăsit într-un câmp unde cresc flori necunoscute de mine și care nu mă cunosc! Aude Fiul-Mamei un glas nou, un glas nou: mai departe Fiul meu și nu te trezi prea devreme! (...) Frigul din cer îi îngheață sângele, el se despovărează în ceva nou, glasuri de copii zgomotoși răvășesc în șoaptă trupurile ierburilor în valea adâncă, în graba amurgului. Drumuri lungi se deschid între crucile-păsări întunecate, zâmbește și înțelege mult, un fiu bun pentru foc se naște din respirația lui. Așteaptă. Se dezvăluie șoptind, binevoitor își culcă fruntea arsă de soare între sânii umezi ai ierbii crescute sub coapsele stelelor de la marginea pământului, risipitor își înalță iarba suflării din bătaia vântului-Soare. – Mamă, frumos bate vântul! – Ajunge, Fiule, de acum se înserează, întoarce-te! Mama ta vine cu daruri deosebite, pletele clopotelor vântură laude între arcadele zidite de vânt, ridică-te în coate și zâmbește tandru celei ce înconjoară casa, căutându-te! Nu muri, nimeni nu moare într-o zi ca aceasta, zâmbește și nu muri! (*Fiul cel bun*, Expres cultural, Zigurat, 2018:4)



Unic prin viziune și discurs în panorama artistică a României din a doua jumătate a secolului XX, „uneori peste nivelul unora dintre noi care au făcut cariere universitare” (Ivănescu, 1992:1), Petru Aruștei scrie (poemele în proză nefiind destinate tiparului în timpul vieții sale) și desenează (lucrări rar publicate în reviste ieșene – *Dacia Literară* –, risipite prin colecții particulare sau prieteni) alcătuiind pe firul poetic moldav zidit și consolidat de Eminescu, Alecsandri, Bacovia și Labiș o dramatică producție dirijată către un fantastic cu rădăcini expresioniste și suprarealiste, ștanțat în tonuri morbide, „armă împotriva silurii condiției umane” (Harea, 1994:28). Cometă în stranii fulgerări, un geniu marginalizat aproape pierdut în toiul unor vremuri ce vin și se duc, Petru Aruștei potrivește contrastele din „această feerie infernală care este viața noastră” (Ivănescu, 1992:1), opera lui fiind o repetată și prelungă confesiune însuflețită de suferința neîmplinirii pe pământ și de visul ispășirii întru moarte, expresia inspirat seducătoare a unui eu poetic:

...înzestrat cu o excepțională vocație a ilimitării și a grimasei, a ironiei care desființează înființând și a morții ca un alt fel de existență. Dar eul poetic nu e străin, în cazul lui Petru Aruștei, de eul empiric. Motivată, în general, în poezia modernă, discriminarea dintre cele două euri nu funcționează când e vorba de autori care își scriu existența în același mod în care își trăiesc poezia. La poetul «Supraviețuitor», existența și poezia sunt fețele aceleiași file. (Sorescu, 1997:138)

Însușindu-și magia ritmică a cuvintelor ce răsar și se înșiră în profetice apostrofe „sub sprâncenele galbene ale lumânărilor ce tușesc prin întuneric, pe furiș”, instrunând prezicerile timpului de atunci-de acum-de mâine, Petru Aruștei dă frâu liber gândurilor „vopsite în roșu de amurgurile primăverilor”, visând și închipuind cu fiecare clipă așteptată mântuirea și trecerea Aurorii „voioasă pe

sub coamele cerului, purpurii, îngăduind celui descumpănit s-o sărute între ierburile pline de umbră”. Cuvântul (mai presus de tortura căutării lui) și pictura îi compun instrumentele de clădire a unui angrenaj expresiv marcat de anistoricitate-realitate, stabila dualitate a unui Artist în goana sa înnebunitoare pe urmele unei raze mici, cu aripi de fluture, „o lacrimă căzută din ochiul Bucuriei”:

Și viața, mult prea scurtă, și creația lui Petru Aruștei apar ca un preludiu, o presimțire, o prevestire, într-un scenariu cu marca apăsată a unei ciudate, revoltătoare, dar și halucinante preursite. Dacă, într-o eseistică mai mult sau mai puțin sofisticată, ni-l mai putem închipui pe Sisif fericit, nu izbutesc deloc să mi-l imaginez pe acest geniu lipsit de noroc atins de senescență, îmbătrânind adică. Petrică, să-i spun așa, era în fond un copil, având, cu extazierile și răzvrătirile lui, reactivitatea unei vârste peste care trecerea anilor nu reușea, n-ar fi reușit vreodată, să aștearnă nici un rid. Această esență incoruptibilă, însuflețind ființa lui aparte, era o sfidare a vremelniceii și, dacă există cumva în cer și pe pământ un echilibru între rău și bine, poate că ea, această esență, îi va hărăzi înfăptuirile unei supraviețuiri. Unei viețuiri în perpetuitate.” (Faifer, 2018:3)

### *Venirea primăverii*



(Petru Aruștea: grafica programelor-caiet, stagiune Teatrul Național)

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## *New Historicism in Romanian Fiction*

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### **Abstract**

*Our research is an inquiry into the validity of a theoretically constructed framework for the study of literature which emerged at the threshold between the eighth and ninth decades of the last century: New Historicism. This inquiry implies both a theoretical and an applied dimension, that is, an assessment of the epistemological tenability of new historicist premises, assumptions and line of argument completed by the successful application of this grid on texts, in the sense of securing an interpretation which sounds appropriate and edifying. The necessity of this approach seems to us to arise out of the paradoxical situation that, although the masterpieces of Romanian fiction published after the war are in the magic realist or meta-historiographic key, the Romanian critics who used the New Historicist grid in their interpretation are just a few, and not the most authoritative figures in shaping the canon. The new historicism is neither popularization nor schematization, it is the new breath that will allow us to keep a minimum relationship of the people we are with the ideas that were.*

*Our paper brings up proofs in this argument, some of them originating in a theoretical discussion of the premises of New Historicism in the context of other critical schools, of the present exegesis of literary history, theory and criticism. Other arguments are provided by the epistemology of the age which carries the traces of the linguistic*

*turn, that is, the reversal of the relationship between language and referent. History is no longer conceived of as the non-problematic and truthful record of past events; it has been deconstructed as an act of language, a narrative following no other rules than the generic ones. We were also pleased to draw attention to valuable Romanian contributions to the research and discourse on this subject.*

**Keywords:** *New Historicism*, counterfactual history, interdisciplinarity, historiography, metafiction

Our research is an inquiry into the validity of a theoretically constructed framework for the study of literature which emerged at the threshold between the eighth and ninth decades of the last century: New Historicism. This inquiry implies both a theoretical and an applied dimension, that is, an assessment of the epistemological tenability of new historicist premises, assumptions and line of argument completed by the successful application of this grid on texts, in the sense of securing an interpretation which sounds appropriate and edifying.

The necessity of this approach seems to us to arise out of the paradoxical situation that, although the masterpieces of Romanian fiction published after the war are in the magic realist or meta-historiographic key, the Romanian critics who used the New Historicist grid in their interpretation are just a few, and not the most authoritative figures in shaping the canon. Unlike pre-war criticism, characterized by a relative

uniformity of critical literary practice, such as the formalist school prevailing in the fourth and fifth decade, postwar criticism followed several tracks, the numerous schools sharing only the feature of interdisciplinarity.

Psychoanalytic, deconstructionist, feminist, materialist, etc. criticism was the outcome of a cross of literary studies and non-literary disciplines. The picture of the postwar schools of literary thought is, however, understood in different ways, the surveys listing them all but classifying them according to various taxonomic criteria. Before presenting our own view of the uses of New Historicism, we are going to take a critical look at two such taxonomies which can be set in polarity, illustrating the two divergent tendencies, that of reducing the new literary school that came into full bloom in the 1980s to the traditional historical approach, and that of forcing the implications of New Historicism as shaped by Michel Foucault, Louis Montrose, Stephen Greenblatt, Hillis Miller a.o. into a starburst of partial foci, such as studies of space, memory, trauma etc.: *An Introduction to Literary Studies* (2004) by Mario Klarer, and *Introducing Criticism at the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Julian Wolfreys, respectively.

Theoretical New Historicism has a fictional correlative, which Linda Hutcheon calls “historiographic metafiction”, and which we consider to be defining of major, canonical literary works of the later twentieth century. This term replaces that of “magical realism”, meaning an overlay of reality and imagination (actually, a superposition of these two contrary states), adding an essential element which is the metafictional or narrator plot: unlike the chronodiegesis, where the fictional universe is assumed to be real, the metanarrative is self-reflexive, giving the figural author (the author as figure in his book) the possibility to comment on his choices, on the character of the plot or characters etc.

Two theoretical contributions made by Romanian critics Dana Percec and Andreea Deciu

Ritivoi illustrate the local critical response to major signifying practices which carry the ‘magical realism’ tag, while actually being canonical examples of historiographical metafiction, as the self-reflexive element is present as well.

Niall Ferguson, a British historian specializing in economic history, whose prominent career included a position of Professor of History at Harvard University and Harvard Business School, Senior Research Fellow at Jesus College (Oxford University), Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution (Stanford University) and Professor of History and International Relations at the London School of Economics, plays a game of probabilities, trying to guess what would have happened in the absence of certain factors intervening in the history we know. He is the author of a book entitled *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* published by Basic Books in 1997. His work is meant to answer questions he himself and a number of contributors to this collection of essays are pondering on: What if there had been no American Revolution? What if Germany had invaded Britain in May 1940? What if John F. Kennedy had lived? etc.

This time again we can find a correlative in Romanian fiction rather than theory.

Ovidiu Pecican, the author of *Lumea care n-a fost. O odisee în scrisori și documente moldovenești din prima parte a secolului al XVII-lea* (Polirom, 2018), endorses Ferguson’s negative view of the East, speculating on the impoverished national literature whose beginning was the letter of an ex-convict and informant. In this way he agrees with philosopher Emil Cioran who also looked upon his people as a second best one. In his insightful review of the book published in the *Steaua* Journal, Doru Pop discusses the novel as a hybrid of counterfactual history and historiographic metafiction.

This kind of rewriting ‘History’, however, is not necessarily counterfactual, as Pecican’s novel was erroneously described. The events rewritten

by the prose writer-historian are not discordant with the factuality of the past time, on the contrary. The author contradicts another commonplace of Mioritic anistorism, that of the fact that we are an eminently popular, or peasant, culture. Here we have a novel of the Romanian medieval urbanity (absent by the way), populated by educated people, who know how to write and read. Pecican explores an insignificant history, a level of the infra-historic, in an ideational approach to the new historicism. History does not speak to us (in capital letters), but small stories.

New Historicism is a critical theory which studies the mediation of language in our approach to the past. The past is not retrieved as what actually happened, it is reinvented by the historian who has limited access to documents which, in themselves, are only acts of language. The logic of real-life events (event A is sure to have triggered event B) is replaced with the logic of narrative structure: If history is a matter of narrativity, then counterfactual histories are nothing but the evolving of plots which work out hypotheses about the nature of society and the condition of man, dystopic predictions, parallel narrative trajectories launching speculations about possibilities rather than actualities in the world around us.

Ferguson launches into speculations operating with concepts which are not commonly employed by classical historiography, such as mental space, the agency of desire, the war of civilizations, etc.

As we have seen, Niall Ferguson alleges that a historian is actually producing a narrative, while Hayden White published a persuasive argument (*Tropics of Discourse*, 1978) supportive of the rhetorical relevance of historiography. Ovidiu Pecican, a distinguished Professor of History, affiliated with the Babeş-Bolyai University, and a writer who got several awards from literary societies has managed to fuse history and fiction into a type of discourse which a reviewer unambiguously associates with New Historicism. Pecican feels that one cannot get a full picture of a

community's historical experience without appealing also to that community's imaginative processing of its existence. His book on *Legends of Cluj (Clujul în legende, 2010)* is the fruit of such an attempt of bridging documented reality and fiction.

Ovidiu Pecican is a historian of the relativist school, who sees his discipline as being permanently in the making, depending on the discovery of other historical traces, as he says in the Introduction to his alternative history, *Lumea care n-a fost (The World that Never Was, 2018)*. The statement is true in itself, but Pecican engages here in a playful, mock academic comment on the possibility of getting a more relevant picture of the past through insights into the private lives of the people who lived back then.

Pecican's textual trope for this emptiness at the heart of a text which is subject to many interpretations and rewriting (often of rewriting wrong) is the palimpsest. The texts sent down to us let us suspect the existence of others in the gaps among them –new ones might be discovered some day, and, besides, there is a layering of meanings attributed to them by successive generations. Being a professional in the field, Pecican reverses Ferguson's description of history as a narrative, rhetorically constructed. This time we are reading a novel written in the manner of a piece of historiography, with academic jargon and characteristic topoi (incomplete manuscripts, deteriorated manuscript, authored or anonymous, list of documents, author index, index of obsolete words, etc.)

New Historicism that emerged in the 80s of the last century, through the contribution of Stephen Greenblatt, the American critic who coined the name of the new school of critical theory and whose 1980 study, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, introduces the defining operational concepts of the theoretical and applied approach proposed by the movement.

As John Brannigan observes, “it is a constant feature of new historian approaches to tend to study a considerable number of texts belonging to the same historical epoch and to postulate, or argue, that each epoch establishes its own way of manifesting itself: power” (Brannigan 2001: 174).

In terms of text analysis, critics of the new historian orientation aspire to identify the way in which literature influences and is influenced by the social, cultural and ideological context in which it fits, either by correlating several texts of different invoices belonging to the same era or by focusing on a particular literary work, most often considered exemplary in that culture.

Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, another Romanian contributor, explains in *Romania literară*, no. 6 from 2001 that *Practicing New Historicism* is a book born of the astonishment that sometimes causes success. The first studies signed by Stephen Greenblatt, then a professor at Berkeley, appeared in the late 1980s. The subject of those contributions: medieval, renaissance, Shakespearean texts, but especially contexts reconstructed with the acuity of the anthropologist but also with the receptivity of the writer to detail. Catherine Gallagher, co-author of this volume, has published studies on feminism. The new historicism has begun, if we are to give credence to Greenblatt and Gallagher's confession, more as a type of literary sensibility than as a rigorous method.

Andreea Deciu Ritivoi has been teaching literary theory since 2000 at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, USA. Her book, *Identity Nostalgia*, published in the absence of the author from the country, is, according to the author's own confession:

As naive or unlikely as it may seem to someone still young, I am one of those very attached to the past the energies of the present in order to be able to adapt in this way, I realized that an almost morbid mirage of

yesterday, of his time and elsewhere is constantly pulling me back. (Rea: 2014)

The author studies her suffering, says the literary critic in the same publication, in order to get rid of it or at least to keep it under control. First of all, it makes a history of the problem (because, from the perspective of a lucid man, nostalgia is also a problem that must be solved).

According to Andreea Deciu, in 1688, in Basel, Johannes Hofer de Mulhause published a medical dissertation on homesickness, describing it as a disease of the imagination manifested by Swiss students studying abroad. [...] In 1720 another Swiss physician, Theodore Zwinger, proposed another hypothesis to explain nostalgia, which no longer invokes a disorder of the imagination, but rather of the associative mechanisms of memory. The former author is the one who invented the word nostalgia, combining two terms from the ancient Greek: nostos (return) and algia (pain).

Humorous (involuntary) is the opinion of a third Swiss physician, Jean Jacques Scheuchzer, who in 1719 hypothesized that the origin of the "disease" was the difference in atmospheric pressure between the mountainous areas where the students came from and the plain areas where they lived they were studying.

Andreea Deciu also analyzes the notion of identity in close connection with nostalgia, understood both from an existential perspective and from a narratological one. *Practicing New Historicism*, Andreea Deciu explains in *Romania literară*, no. 6 from 2001, is a book born of the astonishment that sometimes causes success. The first studies signed by Stephen Greenblatt, then a professor at Berkeley, appeared in the late 1980s. The subject of those contributions: medieval, renaissance, Shakespearean texts, but especially contexts reconstructed with the acuity of the anthropologist but also with the receptivity of the writer to detail. Catherine Gallagher, co-author of this volume, has published studies on feminism.

The new historicism has begun, if we are to give credence to Greenblatt and Gallagher's confession, more as a type of literary sensibility than as a rigorous method. As a way to ask questions, but in no case to propose answers". ("Practicing the New Historicism" in *Romania literară*, no. 6, 2001)

Professor Gallagher's overwhelming personality is evoked by Andreea Deciu in the pages of the same article mentioned:

The Romanian public had the opportunity to see and listen to Stephen Gallagher in the autumn of 1999, when he gave a lecture in the then too small building of the New Europe College, suffocatingly small for a large audience. But no huge building would have been really roomy for a character like Greenblatt. In the winter of 1997, I saw him in San Francisco, in an identical landscape, with people sitting directly on the floor, right in front of the speaker, huddled in the doorway, even though the host room was a huge ballroom in a large hotel. Greenblatt is a fascinating speaker, although his charisma is unusual for a speaker and his eloquence seems out of place in the context of oral communication: a gentle voice, almost weak, a calm figure but with such an accentuated expressiveness that every contour is clearly visible on his face of thoughts. Greenblatt speaks thoughtfully. You feel privileged to listen to him, as if you had entered directly into the inner universe of the speaker and witnessed the formation of his mental processes. And these mental processes are spectacular. (*Ibidem*)

In the author's opinion, these mental processes do not seem to be summarized or analyzed in the conventional sense of the term. "Practicing New Historicism", says Andreea Deciu, is the result of a bizarre effort: to show that the new historicism, categorically embodied by Greenblatt, rejects syntheses and analyzes alike. (*Ibidem*)

Originally, the New Historicism was the indulgence of American intellectuals disappointed by the rigidity of the New Criticism and both skeptical of Marxist ideology but especially disgusted with Marxist vocabulary (with its 'overproduction', 'base' and 'consumption'). The explanation offered by the author is that the New Historicism represents an effort to reconcile seemingly opposite tendencies, transcending the literary text and shifting the focus of analysis to the historical, cultural, social and political context, but immediately followed by a reading of the context as text.

This approach to literature is the result of a true disciplinary and methodological revelation, inspired by modern anthropology, and in particular by Clifford Geertz. In his famous 1973 volume, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz discovered literary criticism as a method of investigating the wider cultural space, especially a cultural space foreign to the performer. In their turn, the representatives of the new historicism discover the cultural analysis as a method of investigation of the narrower literary space. The influence of Geertz-type anthropology on the new historicism results in what Greenblatt calls ethnographic realism, by which he understands the alliance between literary and non-literary, a solidarity of context with text. In anthropology there is an important concept, known as "thick description", and it refers to the interpretation of cultural practices through their detailed description, but also the description of a whole network of intentions, premises, and purposes included in those practices. The new historicism is inspired by the in-depth descriptions of anthropologists, preserving a permanent dialectic between text and context, literary and non-literary. Each of the terms of these oppositions in turn becomes an in-depth description of the other. The context also explains the text and vice versa, without being a simplistic-causal explanation.

The conclusion reached by the author in an attempt to explain the new history brings again to

the center of the issue the personality of Professor Greenblatt.

Greenblatt's or Gallagher's scrupulousness as a historian, sociologist, political scientist, and anthropologist remains, after all, the only guarantee of the validity of their method. But above the authors' erudition is that unique quality of their critical discourse, which I observed listening to Stephen Greenblatt in Bucharest and San Francisco: a huge force to generate empathy through a totally uninhibited textual majesty. The new historicism recognizes and celebrates, in fact, the talent, the vocation of literary critic. (*Ibidem*)

Andreea Deciu Ritivoi's book, *Intimate Strangers*, published by Columbia University Press, New York in 2014, mainly analyzes the perspective of the so-called 'foreigners', i.e. intellectuals of foreign origin, in American political discourse. The term used by the author in her book, 'foreigners', clearly refers to the immigrant status of several famous personalities in American society, such as Hannah Arendt, Herbert Marcuse, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Edward Said.

The author describes how each of those mentioned above did nothing but outline the main directions in American political discourse in the aftermath of World War II. Arendt, Marcuse, Solzhenitsyn, and Said are considered the parents of true schools of thought in modern American culture. The status or quality of immigrant, 'foreigner', gives them the right to argue and think in a special way.

In their own attempt to persuade their audiences that they are "American enough," meaning that they can understand the new framework they are in, they have all used accurate rhetorical devices and sparked new policy approaches.

This approach breeds the theory of 'stranger ethos', which Andreea Deciu Ritivoi defines as the experience of a person who deliberately tries to alienate or alienate everything that is familiar to him, instead of accepting things naturally, so how they flow.

The author states in an academic lecture at the University of Pittsburgh that immigrants can teach us this without questioning, while politicians, teachers, parents and students should do, that is, think about these things. We all, says the author, can defamiliarize ourselves, by the simple fact of not accepting everything at once.

According to Deciu Ritivoi, immigrants teach us this because they practice it without thinking it, but politicians, teachers, parents and students should do it". Moreover, one can achieve defamiliarization through merely not accepting things for granted. A surprising aspect for Ritivoi was the fact that all these famous intellectuals were recognized by the entire academic community in their field of expertise, but their political views were often rejected for the simple fact that they were 'foreigners'. It was disturbing to find out that even educated people would reject a political view on the basis of their country of origin. That demonstrates how valuable the notion of 'native' can be and generates 'the myth of the native born'. In other words, just a native will truly know the needs of his country.

In an interview published by Columbia University Press, Andreea Deciu Ritivoi (2014) states that she is interested in foreigners who are intellectuals and who became interested and critical — however not dismissive — of American politics. Just as it happened in the case of Arendt, Marcuse, Solzhenitsyn and Said who all had a love-hate relationship with the American society; nevertheless, they wanted to make it better. One can notice a certain heroism in these writers as they were ready to take an enormous risk by bringing criticisms to their adoptive country.

Professor Vladimir Tismăneanu of the University of Maryland calls the book *Intimate*

*Strangers* a superb essay. According to him, this book represents not only a cornerstone in intellectual history but also a vibrant invitation to empathy, lucidity and moral clarity.

In conclusion, despite the huge success he still enjoys, this foreign ethos, 'stranger ethos' from Andreea Ritivoi's book, has alienated and alienates many readers, and many critics continue to marginalize these intellectuals, simply because they express points different views. On the other hand, however, the book does nothing but encourage readers to repress all that is xenophobia, and to support them in achieving the ideals of 'citizens' and 'non-citizens' alike.

The new historicism is neither popularization nor schematization, it is the new breath that will allow us to keep a minimum relationship of the people we are with the ideas that were.

Our paper brings up proofs in this argument, some of them originating in a theoretical discussion of the premises of New Historicism in the context of other critical schools, of the present exegesis of literary history, theory and criticism. Other arguments are provided by the epistemology of the age which carries the traces of the linguistic turn, that is, the reversal of the relationship between language and referent. History is no longer conceived of as the non-problematic and truthful record of past events; it has been deconstructed as an act of language, a narrative following no other rules than the generic ones. The purpose of our research was that of bringing in arguments supportive of a theorized and conceptualized approach to literature in the context of a growing distrust of theory and of talks about a crisis in the humanities. We were also pleased to draw attention to valuable Romanian contributions to the research and discourse on this subject.

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## ***MMXX* by Cristi Puiu – The 10th Muse and the Dismantling of Attractions**

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*"Nurturing detail, although it may fall into  
snobbery,  
is nevertheless the first evidence of the presence  
of an artistic sense"  
(Irzykowski, 1982: 36)*

### **Abstract**

*The article addresses the issue of stylistic and thematic coherence in the work of Romanian director Cristi Puiu, in particular the recurring elements of cinematic language that characterise the Romanian New Wave and the constant thematic motifs presented by Puiu in a philosophical and theological key. Based on the observations of Karol Irzykowski, a Polish precursor of theoretical thought on cinema as art, the article examines how the narrative strategy Irzykowski termed 'fermata', used by him especially to describe extensive film, functions in relation to Puiu's works. This phenomenon is considered as a characteristic feature of Puiu's full-length works, although particular attention is given to the analysis of his most recent picture, 2023's *MMXX*, which tackles the theme of functioning in conditions of social isolation. This film, due to its specific construction, also allows us to look at how the individual components of the film image (episodes) interact with each other*

*giving the film work additional meaning at the level of its structure. Whether Puiu continues or breaks with the themes taken up in his previous films, how to read the ascetic form and enigmatic content, constituting a kind of uncompromising 'dismantling of attractions', challenging the audience and potentially hindering the perception of the film – these are the questions the author poses and attempts to answer in this article.*

**Keywords:** The Tenth Muse, Romanian New Wave, aesthetics, cinema, film, art of moving picture, montage, fermata, Karol Irzykowski, Cristi Puiu

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cristi Puiu is a director to whose premiere of a new film critics react with liveliness and heightened curiosity, while most viewers often react with... indifference. Observing the reception of his latest film, 2023's *MMXX* may lead to such conclusions. The Romanian filmmaker, known for meeting high intellectual and artistic standards, this time left even his staunch supporters of the path set 20 years ago by himself and other precursors of the new wave revival with mixed feelings. We will look at the reasons for such observation by starting with the characteristics of the Romanian New Wave (RNW) film universe,

which has been both a fascinating phenomenon and a perceptual challenge from the beginning.

A consideration of the specific components of the Romanian New Wave (Romanian: *Noul Cinema Românesc*) would require a reference to the work of such directors as Cristi Puiu, Cristian Mungiu, Corneliu Porumboiu or Radu Muntean<sup>1</sup>, but for the purposes of this article I will make only an artistic analysis of the achievements of the first of them in particular. In view of the discussion on the vitality of New Wave aesthetics (and the sceptical voices on the subject), particular interest is paid to seeing stylistic coherence and thematic consistency in Puiu's work. The purpose is to reveal the constant motifs and themes and the presence of elements of cinematic language that characterise the aforementioned trend in his most recent works – in the case of Puiu's productions, which are additionally realised in the key of philosophical and theological contexts. This reflection will be accompanied by observations from the Polish perspective – starting with the views of Karol Irzykowski, one of the precursors of theoretical thinking about cinema as art. His findings from the early phase of cinema (at the turn of silent and sound cinema) can provide an interesting context for research into the actuality of visual and narrative minimalism and contemporary examples of the strategy of narrative retardation perceived by Irzykowski in some filmmakers, which he termed 'fermata'. We will consider this as a potential common feature of Puiu's works, with particular reference to the conclusions drawn from an analysis of his most recent picture entitled *MMXX*. This film, due to its ascetic form and enigmatic content, invites us to perceive manifestations of camouflaging the author's message through a kind of 'dismantling of attractions' that constitutes a perceptual challenge.

<sup>1</sup> The 'second generation' of the New Wave includes Adrian Sitaru, Bogdan Mustăța or especially Radu Jude from his early stage (Nasta, 2013: 140). It has undergone a significant transformation over time, while it now enjoys considerable recognition and the greatest festival successes among Romanian directors.

The specific construction of the film also allows us to look at how its individual components (episodes) interact with each other, which can give it additional meaning at the level of structure.

## RNW AND PUIU'S PLACE

The filmography of Cristi Puiu, the Romanian filmmaker, has so far been a string of festival successes and laudatory reviews which, starting with 2005's *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, have elevated Puiu to the title of 'Father' or 'Pope' of the Romanian New Wave (RNW), so every manifestation of his artistic activity arouses understandable interest. Shortly after the landmark year 2000 – the symbolic 'year zero', when not a single new film was made in Romania – the eyes of the film world began to be drawn to a new generation of talented filmmakers (Batori, 2018: 63). Puiu's feature-length debut *Stuff and Dough* of 2001 set the trend, and with it the work of a number of young directors developed dynamically, producing auteur cinema that was surprising in its freshness, simplicity but also intellectually deep with modest means. It is now believed that this trend, which is well recognised in the world of cinema, has reached its apogee, and even its decline, or that at least a certain exhaustion of the new-wave formula has been announced. Film critics have quite unanimously marked the symbolic twilight of its mature phase in 2016 – the year of two important premieres, Puiu's *Sieranevada* and Cristian Mungiu's *Examination*, yet these two names of New Wave pioneers are still to be found among the active and prolific auteurs.<sup>2</sup>

The aforementioned *Sieranevada* (2016) was almost unanimously proclaimed a masterpiece of

<sup>2</sup> Puiu and Mungiu are both winners of landmark awards for the resurgence of Romanian cinema in the 21st century - the new trend began with the 'Un Certain Regard' award at Cannes 2005 for *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, while the New Wave confirmed its existence with the success two years later of the 'Palme d'Or' for Cristian Mungiu for the moving *4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days*. For a list of other awards see Batori (Batori, 2018: 64).

cinema of the highest level, was appreciated both at festivals and in cinephile rankings (as was the previous *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*, 2005). Puiu's next work, *Malmkrog* (2020), on the other hand, proved a stylistic and thematic twist even for connoisseurs of the far-from-schematic artist. The reason is that he is primarily known for his (hyper)realistic style and aesthetics of radical minimalism adapted to depict the mundane, rather overwhelming Romanian reality. His films show the everyday life of contemporary Romania, a developing country (increasingly dynamically) with the ballast of the communist inheritance from the dictator Ceaușescu, but also with the legacy of the way in which the tyrant and communism were disposed of. Set in the interiors of cramped flats and cars, his films rely on naturalistically recorded scenes (in the spirit of *cinéma vérité* or *direct-cinema*), devoid of illustrative music and filled with ordinary, but also ambiguous, dialogue-rebuses. Meanwhile, in *Malmkrog*, Puiu turned his gaze away from the current concerns and challenges of his compatriots for a moment and directed his gaze to a stylised past, setting the film's action in the intimate spaces of a mysterious manor house in wintry Transylvania. Following the release of *Malmkrog*, taking place on the threshold of Pandemic in 2020, which severely limited its cinematic reach, visual beauty, aesthetic consistency, and discipline in the composition of the frames and the compelling charm of the play with space and characters were pointed out. In this costume and set feast for the eye, the hindering thematic and content sophistication, also manifested through narrative ambiguities, was judged as being more attractive. The plot was based on a novel-testament by Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov, completed in 1900, entitled *War, Progress, and the End of History: Three Conversations, Including a Short Tale of the Antichrist*. The Bucharest-based director examines the timeliness of the novel's almost visionary pronouncements in the context of the crisis Solovyov predicted for the turn of the

20th and 21st centuries, which was to affect an increasingly confused, nihilistic world. The Russian thinker's Antichrist is an exemplary pacifist, charming philanthropist and environmentalist, seducing humanity with the promise of peace and justice without God, within the framework of a new, pluralistic and syncretic religion without faith or dogma. The story of a certain philosophical and theological debate embedded in the characters' late 19th and early 20th century musings on morality, religion, politics and war, however, requires at least a basic knowledge of the context of the era and considerable intellectual skill. It also requires patience – the historical drama, which takes place in a Transylvanian manor house and features mostly difficult dialogue, lasts 201 minutes - but this feature of Puiu's work should no longer come as a surprise.

#### **PUIU'S CINEMA – CONTINUATION OR RUPTURE?**

The attempt to both associate Puiu's two recent films and to find commonalities in *Malmkrog* and *MMXX* is easily dismissed for a number of reasons, but it may prove to be rather hasty. And it is not just a matter of connecting the two – so stately written in classical Roman numerals – with the year 2020, the year Puiu won an award at the Berlinale for *Malmkrog*. Returning to contemporary costumes and space, the director seems to pick up similar themes to his previous work in *MMXX* – but he does so in a less overt and obvious way, hiding the timeless message in the camouflage of routine observed in the operating conditions of social isolation. The world depicted in *MMXX* is the landscape of the modern Covid-19 pandemic, a quarantine time, omnipresent Covid masks and virus testing. At the same time. it is a world permeated by fear of the other, the ubiquitous need to abide by the rules of isolation (perceived by some as a sign of care, by others as

a top-down restriction), but above all marked by a profound deficit in bonds and interpersonal relations. Nor were apocalyptic associations and scenarios dreamt up by 'false prophets' uncommon at the time. Today, however, although only a few years have passed since the pandemic, it seems like something very distant, an unreal dream. At the same time, we are still very familiar with the mechanisms and rules that the situation imposed, the reflexes and attitudes it provoked. Puiu's film is about, amongst other things, what that time has revealed and mercilessly exposed. However, knowing the potential of this author, we should try to find out more.

The art that Puiu has possessed to the highest degree is the ability to show on screen 'something more' than what is *explicitely* shown. True to the intuitions of the French film critic and theorist André Bazin, he radically advocates a 'cinema that believes in reality'. Exploring the deceptive ontology of film, Bazin believed that only through the natural ambiguity of reality can the intangible, the mysterious, the transcending be revealed (not shown). Hence, amongst other things, he was sceptical about the excessive use of the montage technique. In ambiguity and intertextuality, however, it is of no small importance that the author's intention is subjected to the viewer's attempt to read it (constantly actualising the three-part relationship between reality, its cinematic image and the viewer who watches this image). There are many indications that, in the case of *MMXX*, this test does not quite work out in the filmmakers' favour.

The sceptical voices of the audience, as well as a reading of the not very complimentary comments and reviews (not that many again), indicate that this is often also the case for the more informed part of the audience – experts and connoisseurs of cinema with refined tastes, as well as audiences already familiar with Puiu's demanding and engaging style. What is most often pointed out in these reviews is the indigestible form, the sketchiness and superficiality of the

story, the incomprehensibility of the message and the unclear reasons for the author's use of characteristic, extremely long takes (the first episode was shot in one take). Entire scenes filled with long, tedious and (seemingly?) banal dialogues did not facilitate the reception. Some reviewers – including those accustomed to the minimalist and naturalistic New Wave strategy in its pure form – simply pointed out the overwhelming boredom felt during the screening.<sup>3</sup>

It seems that *MMXX*, as a story, indeed lacks narrative colloquialism, 'nerve', but also a clear plot foundation – a central core in the story presented that would bind the individual episodes together. This was a virtue of *Sieranewada*, which, after all, also abounded in multi-minute sequences based on conversations 'about nothing important'. However, there, on the solid soil of the family *panichida* (religious commemoration) celebrations for the deceased ancestor, the numerous 'accompanying' stories – like branches or even creepers winding around this trunk – rested firmly. The viewer was able to get a clear sense of what the side plots referred to and, even if they did not all immediately form a clear whole, they allowed for reflection and the search for the key in intriguing ambiguities. This is not the case in *MMXX*, in which the first three episodes link the main characters; in the fourth and final parts, however, the sense of coherence is already lost, as various hypotheses are advanced about the connection between the stories (or, discouraged, we soon discover that there is none). The search for an interpretative key is not helped by a literal reading of some of the director's statements, often taken out of context, suggesting the idea of a dispassionate recording of a 'chronicle' of a time

<sup>3</sup> In Poland, one can cite, for example, Stanisław Sobczyk's – already quite favourable and balanced opinion about 'an exceptionally inaccessible film and a tiring experience' (Sobczyk 2023), or the not very favourable comments of film critics on the Filmweb internet portal (filmweb.pl), for example, Michał Oleszczyk, enthusiastic about Puiu's work so far. Not much better is the status of *MMXX* on IMDb internet service. Even on Rotten Tomatoes – although the film received a score of 86%, it has only seven reviews and ratings from critics, with not a single rating from viewers (rottentomatoes.com).

of global epidemics. The descriptions that advertise the 'wandering of souls at the crossroads of History' (a reference to Mircea Eliade's reflections?)<sup>4</sup> are also of little help. Puiu's image, firmly attached to the symbolic year 2020, the contemporary *annus horribilis*, and thus read mainly in the key of the 'year of the plague', seems, however, to lean well beyond the current horizon, not only in a geographical sense.

### ROMANIAN CINEMA AND POLISH FILM CRITICISM

Films from the Romanian New Wave, or more broadly – The New Romanian Cinema (NRC)<sup>5</sup>, for at least a decade have been considered in Poland as exemplary works that should be made by... Polish directors about Poland. One can hear voices – not always uttered in jest – that 'the best films about Poland are made by Romanians'. This statement has recently been particularly true of the cinema of Radu Jude, whose 'cinematic double' in the country on the Vistula River is currently being dreamt of by many Polish critics (including Michał Oleszczyk in his podcast 'Spoilermaster'), and viewers too are warmly receiving his fresh, feisty, though sometimes controversial pictures. Sobczyk, comparing the reception of recent Puiu and Jude premieres, confidently proclaims: 'It was definitely overshadowed by the success of another Romanian film – *Do Not Expect Too Much From the End of the World* by Radu Jude' (Sobczyk 2023). However, the paths to the hearts of Polish audiences were blazed by *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu* and then *Sieranevada* – Puiu's films were the first examples of admiration for how a story should be told about a society functioning in a phase of transition just after the transformation, still searching not only for its identity and place on

the geopolitical map, but also for this axiological one<sup>6</sup>. The huge and shocking impression made (among others on the author of the text) by Mungiu with his 2007 drama *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* cannot be overlooked. Nowadays, Romanian cinema, represented by an increasing number of creative authors, is for Polish cinephiles unquestionably synonymous with a solid brand and film quality.<sup>7</sup>

However, this was not always the case – one could say that in the previous century, it was Polish cinema, created by such recognisable filmmakers as Wajda, Zanussi and Kieślowski, that was the object of the sighs of their Romanian colleagues. Although the historical foundations of cinema are similar in both countries, the cinematographies of both countries went through the post-war period of communist rule diametrically differently. While in Poland the struggles of, for example, the above-mentioned directors against the realities of socialist realism and censorship within the framework of the nationalised art of filmmaking resulted in several internationally recognised masterpieces, in Romania the strict control of the state most often effectively limited the artistic and intellectual potential of its filmmakers. The filmmaking of Romania before the fall of Ceaușescu was associated in the artistic world with the Buftea label, which was attractive to Western directors and producers, rather than with the work of the few auteurs attempting to operate with a degree of independence from the regime, such as Liviu Ciulei (e.g. *Forest of the Hanged*, 1964) or Lucian Pintilie (e.g. *Reconstruction*, 1968). Those Romanian works that have managed to break through into the consciousness of the European

<sup>4</sup> 'Different portraits, four short stories, four moments in time capturing the wanderings of a few souls, stuck at the crossroads of History' - claims trailer of the film.

<sup>5</sup> The term 'The New Romanian Cinema' (NRC) that I invoke is broader than the 'Romanian New Wave' (RNW), characterised by more strictly defined themes and styles. The differences are insightfully explained by Anna Batori (Batori, 2018: 65).

<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that there are also voices sceptical of the numerous analogies being drawn between Romania and Poland, as a result of the fact that, unlike their Romanian colleagues, Polish filmmakers have not engaged in a similar process of coming to terms with the times of communism and transition in their stories (Walczak, 2021)

<sup>7</sup> An increasingly intensive promotion, e.g. through cyclical reviews of new and classic Romanian film pictures organised in cooperation with the Romanian Cultural Institute, has had an impact on sustaining this opinion.

spectator, however, have always required a certain amount of receptive effort and a readiness to unravel ambiguous content. Hence, the historical spectacles, the communist cinema of spectacle produced by Sergiu Nicolaescu (e.g. *Dacii*, 1966; *Michael the Brave*, 1971) were relatively the most popular, also in Poland. The scant interest in communist Poland in the ‘brotherly’ Romanian cinema is evidenced by the fact that the only major work devoted to this area's cinema was published in 1983 – a valuable, albeit modest, compendium of knowledge from the origins of Romanian cinema to the works of the early 1980s inclusive, by Oskar Sobański (Sobański, 1983).

While we remain in the key of anniversaries, symbolic numbers and round dates, it is worth recalling Karol Irzykowski (1873-1944), who counted amongst the narrow circle of pioneers of theoretical reflection on the new medium of film as a fully-fledged art, writing about ‘the Tenth Muse’ exactly one hundred years ago. His thoughts concerned both commercial and avant-garde cinema, Polish cinema as well as world cinema, which he followed as a regular consumer of films and reviewer<sup>8</sup>. In 1924, his *The Tenth Muse: Aesthetic Issues of Cinema* was published in Kraków – one of the first monographs in the world devoted entirely to the art of filmmaking, analysing its peculiarities and its specific language and aesthetics, which are separate from those of literature, theatre or painting<sup>9</sup>. The Polish writer, literary, theatre and film critic gave his famous definition of cinema as ‘the visibility of man's

dealing with the matter’ early in his book (Irzykowski, 1982: 7). Irzykowski wrote of the initially suspicious and at the same time socially hypocritical attitude towards cinema as a ‘fair show’: ‘The modern European uses cinema, but is ashamed of it’ (Irzykowski, 1982: 15). At the same time, he stood up for the new form of art, and elevated it above the shallow spectacle many considered it as such at the time, stating that ‘Cinema poses aesthetic and philosophical riddles’ (Irzykowski, 1982: 15). Putting forward the thesis that this was why the world did not appreciate the full possibilities of the new way of making art, because it was not yet ready to see the artistic potential of cinema (still silent cinema), Irzykowski asked the intriguingly topical question: ‘How many other unknown arts, then, can sleep in the womb of time?’<sup>10</sup>.

Paradoxically, Irzykowski saw the greatest danger for the emerging new art – especially in view of the emerging technical possibility of combining image and voice – in ‘too close connection with the art of the word’, which, in his view, was the domain of the theatre. He later admitted that his fears and predictions of the ‘death of cinema’ (Irzykowski, 1913), which would come with the appearance of its sound version, turned out to be exaggerated (he wrote with concern about the inventions of Thomas Edison and, working independently, Kazimierz Prószyński, who combined sound with film images). He devoted a lot of space to the notion of ‘movement’<sup>11</sup>, which constitutes the specificity and uniqueness of cinema, but he also noticed a primitive schematism, dictated by financial projections, in the deliberate selection by filmmakers of particularly attractive ‘movement

<sup>8</sup> Malgorzata Radkiewicz notes: ‘The issues he raised ran through the writings of early theorists, from Hugo Münsterberg and Jean Epstein (to whom, incidentally, he refers) to Dziga Vertov and Germaine Dulac’ (Radkiewicz, 2023: 258). Earlier, in 1903, Irzykowski published the novel *Paluba*, about which Paul Coates writes: ‘His *fin-de-siècle* anti-novel *Paluba* (*The Hag*) ironically bared the processes of its own making in a manner anticipating Proust and Gide, and was to be a powerful influence on Gombrowicz in particular’ (Coates, 1987: 113).

<sup>9</sup> Irzykowski wrote the first chapter of this book in 1913. According to Radkiewicz: ‘In the title of the first edition, the number ten was written in words on the title page and in Roman numerals on the cover (as X)’ (Radkiewicz, 2023: 242). Marek Hendrykowski writes about the reception of the book: ‘Irzykowski's elevation of cinematography to the elite class of the Muses constituted an intellectual provocation that many could by no means accept’ (Hendrykowski, 2022: 146).

<sup>10</sup> Weronika Szulik wrote about Irzykowski as a film screening enthusiast and frequent visitor to cinemas (Szulik 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Hendrykowski wrote: ‘The concept of Movement (montage and succession of shots, rhythm, construction, projection, transmission, optical pantomime, acting, etc.) occupies a particularly prominent place in the pages of Irzykowski's book’ (Hendrykowski, 2022: 150).

themes' (fights, races, catastrophes)<sup>12</sup>. In movement, corporeality, Irzykowski saw the undeniable potential and element of cinema, stating: 'The cinema has opened the Kingdom of Movement to us' (Irzykowski, 1982: 18). It can be assumed that today Irzykowski would rather be an admirer of Radu Jude-style cinema, this representing for some time a film strategy different from the New Wave one, which – referring to Eisenstein's idea, which is now a hundred years old – could be described as the 'neomontage of attractions'<sup>13</sup>.

In time, Irzykowski, exposing himself consciously to the accusation of inconsistency, began to notice the value of 'contemplative scenes', and to appreciate directors (he mentioned Paul Wegener) who placed passages in films that seemingly contributed little to the story – what he called 'endurable scenes'. He wrote: 'The director gives these scenes without haste, rounds them off where necessary – even with fermata<sup>14</sup>; it is evident that he enjoys them, that they are not just a piece of content that he needs to show for continuity as well' (Irzykowski, 1982: 36). It is this aspect that seems interesting in the context of Puiu's cinema, particularly his latest film. This anticipation and protracted tension, omnipresent in *MMXX*, Puiu portrays in his familiar style – presenting us with an insight into the most mundane, even uninteresting aspects of everyday

life, which he seems to affirm in such a celebration on digital film. He does this sometimes with a wink, a tinge of irony and other times quite seriously. His retardation, however, is often devoid of the anticipated fulfilment – rather, it is extreme *slow-motion* stripped of its aesthetic equivalent, a persistent and consistent 'dismantling of the attraction'. Despite our fears and preconceptions, let us return to this cinematic fermata and Puiu's collection of 'endure scenes'.

### **MMXX - FOUR LETTERS, FOUR EPISODES**

*MMXX* is made up of four novellas (episodes) introduced through short shots – inserts as if from outside the diegetic world – that have various subtitles and tie together the different parts of the film. Fragments of a few seconds structure the whole film, maintaining visual coherence as they gradually unfold, continuing with a panorama of increasingly less pristine greenery and returning to us in a longer shot in the finale. Before the proper face of the film is revealed to us, the filmmaker makes us contemplate the vegetation and the coils of tape entangled in it up close (as in Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, by the time we are ready to look up at the sky, our eyes are fixed on the surface of the earth increasingly scarred by the traces of human/non-human presence). Anyway, the focus on objects, devices and accessories (furniture – branded Poltrona Frau armchair, flowers, pens – necessarily BIC!, pieces of paper, mobile phones, inconvenient masks, virus tests, lost keys, sought-after kitchen device equipment, rum for a birthday cake, inappropriate clothes for a funeral, a cushion and, of course, a car, or rather its interior – to name just the most important roles manned by material artefacts) will, from time to time, divert our attention from the essence of the thing to the thing itself<sup>15</sup>.

For a while, it was objects and avatars that

<sup>12</sup> Irzykowski constructively but also sharply criticised his contemporary Polish film productions of mediocre quality. Kamila Kuc believes that his 1908 play *Man Before the Lens, or Sold Suicide* is 'a satire on the state of Polish cinema at the time' (Kuc, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> In the key of 'neomontage of attractions', Kamil Walczak analysed *Bad Luck Banging Or Loony Porn* of 2021 (a Radu Jude film about Pandemic time). He recalls that Eisenstein '(...) used the theory of montage of attractions, which he developed, to create images not constrained too strictly by plot contacts. He wanted to free art (referring initially to the theatre) from the strictures of representational narrative, which sought to represent reality but was only a disguised imitation of it. Eisenstein's approach - as well as that of other Soviet theorists - was ideological and avant-garde' (Walczak 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Fermata is a term from the world of music, an area to which Irzykowski often drew. Fermata is a pause of unspecified length on a note or rest - see more [https://www.m5music.hk/en/dictionary/fermata/?srsltid=AfmBOoqFK\\_S3bGG2hC8L94LoZ6MDqW\\_InKOWPvs9dBDZ3I35GLQQ634R](https://www.m5music.hk/en/dictionary/fermata/?srsltid=AfmBOoqFK_S3bGG2hC8L94LoZ6MDqW_InKOWPvs9dBDZ3I35GLQQ634R) [31.10.2024].

<sup>15</sup> A reference, whether intended or not, and perhaps a humorous *easter egg*, is the fish tank in the third episode, reminiscent of the opening scene of Mungiu's *4 months, 3 weeks, 2 days* (2007).

tried to replace the presence of another (living) human being for us during the pandemic. The names of more or less well-known production brands appear, as easily recognisable to the characters as to the audience. Perversely, contemporary globalism is revealed to us here – as a universalism not of values or ideas, but of markets, familiar brands and the 'necessary' objects we so readily surround ourselves with, and whose proximity gives us a false sense of security, comfort and status. At the same time, this still life representing the atypical world of used props decays as waste abandoned by unknown owners, somewhere in a meadow far from human gaze. The tape (film tape, cassette tape?), winding its way through the bushes like a snake, evokes associations with tape securing a construction site or a crime scene from the very first shots. In this simultaneously warning, protective and repulsive function, the prop appears in the final part as a yellow barrier hanging in the air, separating the authorised from the unauthorised, as if separating the called and the uncalled, the sick and the healthy, the living and the dead.

The motif of extreme experiences, of final matters, is constantly present in Puiu's work. It could be the personal apocalypse of the ailing Mr Lazarescu (*The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*), it could be the traumas of Lary, celebrating with his family the death of his father (*Sieranevada*). But it could also be Viorel, lost in his new reality, bringing about the deaths of more people close to him for unclear reasons (*Aurora*). The end of the known world, in social, political and spiritual terms, and in a surprising scene-vision also in the form of physical destruction, also pervades *Malmkrog*. Temporality, the end of the familiar, a radical breakthrough, the invisible but so strongly present opposition of life/death - these are favourite themes that Puiu approaches again and again, from a different angle. In *MMXX*, the subject appeared on an almost pandemic, or perhaps one should

even just say apocalyptic scale<sup>16</sup>. In the circumstances of a widespread epidemic, it is easy to trivialise or profane an intensely exploited theme and view of death, as Flawia Dima has written about (Dima 2023). Let us leave the views or opinions allegedly propounded by Puiu about the 'hidden' sources and aims of pandemic hysteria aside and stay with trying to read the content of his film works. And what emerges from them is a highly ambiguous picture, as only the potential of the Romanian reality shown without embellishment allows.

The very opening shot of *MMXX* brings to mind a world turned upside down: therapist Oana (Bianca Cuculici), waiting for her patient, is browsing the internet on her smartphone while lying upside down on a large armchair (is it just a coincidence that her legs, spread upwards, form the letter X?). This is the frame used to promote the film (Oana's legs are additionally wrapped there with yellow caution tape – one of Puiu's favourite props, known for example from *Sieranevada*). The situation also seems to be reversed in the relationship between Oana as psychologist and the client filling in the questionnaire with her. Oana loses her guard several times, and it is her interlocutor who has to pay attention to which question in the questionnaire they are discussing. The session takes place in a flat, although online meetings have become the norm. It is a bit of a world upside down, in which many obvious things have been challenged, questioned, taking us out of our sense of apparent equilibrium. Our weaknesses, distractions and inconsistencies were more clearly revealed, starting with the fact that masks imposed for mutual security were willingly taken off as soon as our interlocutor agreed to it. Social roles were shaken – for is the psychotherapist free from

<sup>16</sup> Emiliano Jiménez Hernández explains the images recorded in the *Apocalypse of St John* as follows: 'The rider riding the corpse-pale horse of the fourth seal has a name of his own: Death or Plague. It is a contagious disease bringing death to the multitude (Ez 14:21). Also for this fourth horseman a limit has been set that he cannot cross (...)' (Hernández 2021; 83).

the anxieties of lockdown time? In the phone conversation that takes place in the meantime, some tension is revealed due to misunderstandings between her and the man she is talking to (as we will find out further on, it is her husband, the self-centred and overworked doctor of the subsequent episodes). It is perhaps to Oana that the subtitle 'Sempre Libera' from the aria from Act I of Verdi's opera *La Traviata* that accompanies the first frames of the film refers, meaning 'stray' – a woman who has strayed from the right path.

In general, it seems that the silent protagonist of the whole film is a woman – in each part it is the woman who is the focus of the story, and even if men come to the fore (parts three and four), the female protagonist is ultimately the axis of events. More often than not, small-minded attitudes of men are exposed, treating women quite objectively, involving them in fulfilling their requests and expectations (Oana's brother, the concerned husband of a pregnant colleague), unwilling to help (the husband). At the same time, the woman is always portrayed as causal, strong, although clearly tired, because she is entangled in routine and left to her own devices. The physical attractiveness of women is also their burden when treated as an object of sexual attraction (the story in the third episode), they are exploited and forced to live in the slavish status of a prostitute and mother of children destined for despicable practices (Consuelo's 'story-confession'). The figure of the child is also strongly present in the film, although the child does not physically appear in any of the parts (except in the final shot, to which I will return). This is also a common feature of Puiu's cinematic world, which shows the value of their presence by deliberately marginalising it. Always, however, the child is in the background of events, whether as a memory of childhood – often a source of problems in adulthood, a child born and taken away from her mother in a Covid hospital, Oana's daughter in the care of her grandparents – whose reception requires the rearrangement of a busy daily schedule, or sold to

the shocking practices the child of Consuelo, a woman broken down by her life so far.

## THE RIGHT OF MOVEMENT –

### INTENSIVE VS EXTENSIVE FILM

In one of the last chapters of *The Tenth Muse*, Irzykowski distinguished between intensive and extensive film. 'Above all – he wrote, cinema satisfied the hunger of the eyes – it is sometimes an art, but it, which allows all the elements to pass through itself, has already become an element itself' (Irzykowski, 1982: 237)<sup>17</sup>. After all, the cinematograph – as Kwiatkowska states – 'corresponded to the habits and perceptual needs of the viewers of the time, who wanted to watch movement in the image in all its uniqueness, dynamism, multiplication and dispersion' (Kwiatkowska 2011: 52). Irzykowski, while being an enthusiast of the cinema as the 'art of movement', matter, pace, dynamics, at the same time notices that 'there are few profound artistic impressions to be gained from cinema today' (Irzykowski, 1982: 237). Intensive cinema is dominated by movement itself, whereas extensive cinema, he writes: 'In place of movement, it gives facts – almost the same thing, but seen and framed differently' (Irzykowski 1982: 239). Although, as he states, such cinema has been contemptuously called theatrical, he wrote:

(...) this enormous number of wholes (scenes from change to change), which an extensive film can produce, ultimately also falls under the laws of movement, but in a different way: it is no longer a question of the movement of arms, legs, faces, trees, carts in individual scenes, but of the invisible movement of scenes among themselves, the movement of the matter of events, of life, of fate. The analogy with musical rhythm does not give a sufficient idea of this 'movement', taking place in the

<sup>17</sup> 'Element' in the sense of an element, such as fire, wind and water.

fifth dimension of the imagination, according to the will of the author, who can shape this fluid mass for himself even against the regularities of reality. The author then makes the cinema an instrument of his subjectivity, and can give a fillip to the dynamism of his heart (Irzykowski, 1982: 239).

The Polish critic seemed to intuit the power of montage, which was about to dominate the language of cinema, or rather which contributed to 'the transformation of the cinematograph into cinema' (and sometimes the transformation into an efficient tool of propaganda). How the construction of the cinematic image influences its perception was written about in later years in the context of the French New Wave by Gilles Deleuze, commenting on Bazin's views on Italian neorealism, which the founder of *Cahiers du cinéma* opposed to other realist aesthetics – verism and naturalism (Kwiatkowska 2011: 55). Deleuze's reflections on the crisis of the image-movement or image-action are part of the reflection of his time on the crisis of film's relation to reality, permeated by the traumatic experience of the Second World War, undermining the certainties of the past. Meanwhile, Irzykowski (who himself would die from a wound during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944) was himself admitting his own inconsistency. He perceives and recognises a principle different from the movement going on inside the frames that fascinated him, as he himself notes in a rather unusual conclusion: 'I see this principle precisely in the movement of entire scenes between each other. I admit that it is strange' (Irzykowski, 1982: 243).

## TWO SPEEDS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Marek Hendrykowski saw some parallels between Irzykowski's and Marcel Duchamp's fascinations, if only in the concept of the

surrounding world as a provider of 'material'. He wrote: '(...) the idea of "ready-made" material – drawn from the reality (and mundanity) of the environment and from everyday life – which is common to both of them' he found in many pages of *The Tenth Muse* (Hendrykowski, 2022: 153). Puiu's predilection for the poetics of realism, but also for the arbitrary treatment of time, for the use of extended dramatic pause, for the fermata – as Irzykowski would say – has already been written about sufficiently in the context of his previous films<sup>18</sup>. In the work of the director of *MMXX*, a fixed strategy becomes apparent, only confirming the observations of his earlier achievements – for Puiu, it is an invariable canon of his stylistic craft, a distinctive trademark, his stamp of authorship. He himself decides how long a film, a shot, a scene or a character's dialogue will last – and it does not matter how much this is justified by the logic of economics, profit calculations or the cinematic expectations of the audience. Critics' and audiences' opinions seem to be the last thing Puiu intends to worry about<sup>19</sup>. Whether he does so consciously, or whether his work reveals something unplanned, one way or another one can perceive a certain rhythmic arrangement in it, bringing a sense of order. This manifests itself in the perspective of the entire work, in its structure and in the order of its components. This is all the more important because Puiu, in accordance with the rules of cinematic realism, makes sparing use of montage and avoids time ellipses. It is not only the order that matters, but also the rhythm, determined by the way the camera works (steady or in motion – often 'hand-held'), the

<sup>18</sup> In Poland, for example, Wojciech Tutaj in the context of *Malmkrog* (Tutaj, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> Puiu, in interview on the occasion of a festival organised to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Stockholm Institute of Culture in 2021, states: 'I used to teach for nine years in the film school in Bucharest and I told them the best way to express your respect to the spectator is not to take spectator into account while you making your film. Because it is an act of love, of expressing your love. You are going to put on the table what you are assuming the all risks, risk of being hated by the spectator. But this is you and this is the best way to express your respect to the spectator?' (Interview with Cristi Puiu, 2021).

predominance of further plans over close-ups, the use of the potential of natural light and colours<sup>20</sup>. We can see this quite easily from the structure of *MMXX* – the dynamics of the second episode is in stark contrast to the slow pace of events and the steady, almost motionless camera work in the first. From the perspective of the whole, the rhythmic cyclicity – as if alternating – with the visually extremely muted third episode (immobile vertical and horizontal positions of the framed figures), which in turn passes again into the most dynamic and compositionally open fourth episode, is more clearly revealed. This dichotomy – signalling a world divided in many ways – is 'stitched together' by these short, initially easy to disregard interludes.

This alternation also applies to space – after Oana is parted in the first episode, we meet her in the next one, entitled 'Baba au Rhum' (cupcake in rum), which focuses on the domestic chaos of Oana and her loved ones. The space of Oana's flat is diametrically opposed to the studied sterility of the premises in which she receives her patients. One might even associate it with Barbu Bălăsoiu's way of filming the micro-world of a Bucharest family inside a cramped flat in *Sieranevada*, and with the POV (point-of-view) perspective used for metaphysical references (POV as the perspective of a deceased family elder). Admittedly, here we are no longer in the world of the apartment blocks, moving among the well-to-do middle class, but the technique of observing family realities is similar. In this space, the aspect of almost slavish attachment to the objects, appliances, equipment and accessories embedded (lost) in it becomes most apparent. A mixer module misplaced somewhere can put the whole family on alert as effectively as a lack of parking space. The right kind of rum for a birthday cake can prove as important as helping a quarantined colleague giving birth in a Covid hospital.

The third episode, entitled 'Norma Jean

Mortenson' (which is Marilyn Monroe's proper name), is a turning a circle and alludes to the metaphor of therapy – we listen (for there is not much to see either) to the confessions, spun as if on a therapist's couch, of an erotic adventure and an ecstatic night spent with, it turns out, a mafia-connected beauty. The moment of passion is almost paid with man's life, and the story is patiently listened to by the doctor on duty (Oana's husband). The memories of the intoxicating night are still alive in the mind of the Moldovan ambulance driver (along with the question about the Nokia charger, Puiu's auto-thematic nod to the time of *The Death of Mr Lăzărescu*), and both of them spend their time in the Covid hospital on call, measured by the successive threads of the lengthy story and the virus tests. Until they are called out of their atmospheric room for an urgent trip to a patient in need of help. There is an interesting point of contact between this story and the next shot that immediately follows it - the dimming of the image at the scene of reading on the smartphone a promotional offer from one of Romania's electronics stores turns into a gradually brightening image of a meadow where a dilapidated radio and abandoned ampoules of medicine lie. The trap of consumerism and the illusion of wealth? – once useful objects now in a state of decay, dying alone in nature... If this is the message, it may be a bit banal, but at least it is quite readable.

### VOYAGE TOWARDS DEATH

In the final, fourth novella, plot-wise unconnected to the previous ones and the only one, according to Flavia Dima, for which the script was written by Puiu himself (Dima, 2023) and not by the private film school students mentioned in the credits, the action moves more briskly again. But it is not the fast pace or the interrupted and resumed threads of conversation that make it difficult for the viewer to connect the facts. Like in *Aurora* Puiu, here we are witnesses

<sup>20</sup> Cinematography in *MMXX* is by Ivan Grincenco and Silviu Staviã.

to events whose logical succession remains obscured to us; our natural need to perceive logic and cause-and-effect relationships will not be satisfied. Similarly, our capacity for perception and synthesis is challenged. This is another hallmark of this artist that stems from his personal convictions – in an interview from 2021 he stated: ‘If you think you understand what is going on around you, from a philosophical point of view, you are wrong’ (Interview with Cristi Puiu, 2021).

The final episode begins with a long scene of a journey and a hands-free conversation filmed from inside a car. This part of the film clearly picks up the pace of the action just by going beyond the previous space confined to four walls, somewhere in the Romanian capital hidden from our eyes. The change concerns not only the narrative style, but also the intensity of the plot – while for three of the four parts of the film we are locked up in a quarantined house or a Covid ward of a hospital, the final part of the film takes us on a journey into the unknown, in an episode reminiscent of a classic *road movie*. Perhaps it is just the protagonist's strenuous, routine business trip, but perhaps it is an opportunity for the protagonist to escape the cramped and Covid-paralysed lockdown of the city. In contrast to the climate of the naive exodus of the NRC protagonists twenty years ago, fleeing the reality of a crisis-ridden country and rushing *bona fide* to the West in the illusion of finding 'happiness' (Georgescu, in Gott, 2015: 153), it now becomes apparent that there is mostly evil lurking beyond the country's western border, trading women and children as if they were living things. This is a somewhat simplistic conclusion, anyway, the latest instalment of *MMXX* turns out to be a trip to meet death. The physical one, but also the moral or spiritual one – in a world that seems full of cynicism and nihilism<sup>21</sup>.

Death is, as we have said, Puiu's favourite subject, touching on its corporeal-spiritual dimension in his every work. In *MMXX*, the commissioner Narcis-Valentin (Dragoş Bucur) already carries the shadow of death with him under those circumstances, on the road, of the suicide of a colleague who, instead of a farewell letter, left behind a book with a poem by the poet Nichita Stănescu, ending with the words 'Hello. We die.'. He himself suffers from some kind of chronic illness (diabetes?) and, together with Giani (Dorian Boguţă), investigates an unspecified location, in an enigmatic case and unusual circumstances. Here, preparations are underway for the funeral of two deceased people and for a meal after the funeral in accordance with Orthodox customs. At the centre of the atmosphere of reverie and farewell prayers, there are tense conversations and an increasingly poignant interrogation of a pregnant woman (Consuelo) dressed in mourning clothes. We are given only the scraps of information needed to put together a coherent story – we only guess that an international human trafficking ring, also involved in female and child prostitution and the sale of organs, is being investigated. The interrogator turns out to be a victim of wanted criminals profiting from prostitution, but also a pimp and mother who sold her own child. The motif of the separation of mother and child corresponds intriguingly with the events of the previous parts of the film, but the vision of demonic traffickers in the mouth of a pregnant woman takes on an almost biblical tone, and evokes apocalyptic associations. Meanwhile, in the background, funeral preparations are being completed, the mourners gather, the priest arrives to conduct the service, and a voice from outside urges people to join in the funeral celebrations because 'God has been angered enough'. *The panichida* rites begin. The chanting of the celebrant, familiar to *Sieranevada* viewers, the prayers of the gathered people can be heard, which are also joined in by the woman being interrogated and the police

<sup>21</sup> In the aforementioned interview, Puiu candidly confesses that, due to a certain painful transition in 2020, he has 'become an incurable misanthrope' and that he would like to make his next film about a time when 'people were closer to the earth and nature' (Interview with Cristi Puiu, 2021).

commissioner.

Through the names of the deceased mentioned by the priest in the funeral rites – Fevronia and David Petru – Puiu evokes the figures of the saints of the Orthodox Church, mentioned in the liturgical calendar on 8 July (perhaps it is they who are depicted in the Orthodox icon hanging on one of the walls, not far from the wedding photograph and the picture of the Holy Family)<sup>22</sup>. This is also the date – written in Cyrillic – that forms the title of the latter part of the film<sup>23</sup>. According to a 16th-century legend from the apocryphal 'Story of Peter and Fevronia of Murom', both spouses prayed to God that they would die on the same day, which is what happened. The legend, characterised by long dialogues, combines the tale of a fiery serpent and a wise village girl<sup>24</sup>. The girl was supposed to heal a man wounded by the serpent – a dragon, a tempter to the sin of promiscuity – who, healed, was to marry her, so that at the end of their years, as David and Euphrosyne, they would live in separate monasteries, asking only that they be buried in a common tomb after death. They are well-known patrons of conjugal love and family in the Orthodox world. And it is in this perspective that the final shot of the film can be read – the camera finally rises from the ground towards which it has been gravitating and, slowly looking over the littered vegetation, shows a group of people heading towards the bright open sky<sup>25</sup>. In

them can be recognised the two men questioning the woman – now wandering slowly in the company of two women and children<sup>26</sup>. The second and final musical excerpt appears in the background – it is a song by 'Wishbone Ash' music band with the notable title *The King Will Come* (Argus album, 1972), the lyrics of which include such words:

'In the fire, the king will come  
Thunder rolls, piper and drum  
Evil sons, overrun  
Count their sins, judgment comes  
The checkerboard of nights and days  
Man will die, man be saved  
The sky will fall, the earth will pray  
When judgment comes to claim its day'

## CONCLUSIONS

The ambiguity and interpretative possibilities of both the content and structure of the film are the main strength of *MMXX*. Many names, surnames and pseudonyms are used – perhaps too many, however, to be remembered or easily related to. For we do not learn the details of the characters' histories, so that the protagonists often remain too anonymous for the viewer. If Puiu – as we are assured in the film's trailer – creates a contemporary human comedy, consisting of four (like the four letters that make up the title) parts of human stories ("4 life stories"), he does not overload us with information. Balzac, in his *The Human Comedy*, did not spare his readers descriptions of reality – he reached into the past of his characters in order to bring it effusively closer to us, allowing us to look deep into their psyches. What the 'father' of the realistic novel did two centuries ago with flair, Puiu, as the 'father' of the

<sup>22</sup> Some researchers identify Peter and Fevronia with the Murom prince David Yuryevich and his wife, known from the chronicles.

<sup>23</sup> It may be considered a subversive yet amusing association that *MMXX* begins with a shot of Oana relaxing in a head-down position - while 8 July is also known as National SCUD Day (*Savor the Comic, Unplug the Drama Day*). As we read "National SCUD Day's history can be traced back to 2007 when Stephanie West Allen founded the day. As an author and lawyer, Allen was also studying psychology and was keenly aware the many people were far too stressed out. Her hope in establishing National SCUD Day was to encourage folks around her to forget being so serious, relax a little bit and infuse some humour into their lives!" - (daysoftheyear.com; n.d.)

<sup>24</sup> The girl in the legend, a simple peasant woman called Fievronia, was supposed to weave linen at home - in Puiu's film, the woman interviewed sits on a sofa and holds a cushion in her lap, which she constantly plucks with her hands.

<sup>25</sup> Irzykowski saw in the avoidance of an obtrusively optimistic ending in films a sign of the superiority of European over American cinema: in the

case of *MMXX*, the director seems to strike a certain balance between the tragic nature of the characters' situation and the optimistic punchline.

<sup>26</sup> Actor Dragoș Bucur carries one of the children on his shoulders in a shot that is a kind of reverse cliché from another film starring him, *Boogie*, by Radu Muntean (2008).

new Romanian cinema, recording the next crossroads of history ('at the crossroads of history'), is more selective, pointillistic. This film questionnaire - a witness to a common condition - is only seemingly detailed. In fact, many of the questions are left unanswered, as is the dialogue with the client of the distracted Oana, through whom the meaning of the questionnaire sentence: 'I feel like I'm standing against the whole world' is reversed to read 'I would rather say that the world is against me'<sup>27</sup>. Could this be a statement of the director himself put into the protagonist's mouth? He presents his cinematic world to us in a way that is increasingly hermetic and thus inaccessible to many, risking persistence in post-pandemic isolation. Puiu's proposed radical 'dismantling of attractions' may serve as a warning sign to many (and too many?) not to cross the cinematically protected terrain of uncertainty, which seems at times unsupervised. Or, at the very least, to think carefully about whether we have – much more – than three hours for reconnaissance.

The analysis of film *MMXX*, although equally time-consuming, allows us to see a stylistic and thematic continuation rather than a break in Puiu's work. The Romanian director's latest work contains many recurring motifs, such as loneliness, the identity crisis of the individual and the community, the challenges of a family threatened by mutual incomprehension, the limitation of human cognition and the possibility to understand the surrounding reality. And ultimately the fragility of an existence permeated by the awareness of living in the shadow of death. Often, the dilemmas are presented in a deeply philosophical and religious key of oppositions: life – death, good – evil, grace – sin (and again grace), eternity – temporality, salvation – condemnation. Puiu does not shy away from touching on the meaning of religion and belief in God in the modern world, and often involves

Orthodox rituals in the plot. For Puiu, contemporary or historical costumes are just two sides of the same fabric, which man wears by reaching back through the centuries to the same questions and seeking a new answer to them again and again. It is also confirmed that the erudition affecting the ambiguity of Puiu's cinematic work is a double-edged sword – it can be read as both its advantage and its weakness.

In turn, the conclusions emerging from Irzykowski's former reflections today reveal his reflections on the element of movement and the dynamics of the image as a primary source of the cinema audience's viewing expectations that is difficult to ignore in all times. In the context of a study of *MMXX* as a work exemplifying visual and narrative minimalism, used alternately with episodes full of restless activity (both of the protagonists and of the manner in which the narrative is conducted), the need – also reported by Irzykowski – to associate with 'endurable' or 'contemplative' scenes proves surprisingly persistent. The Polish critic's association of unhurried scenes with the notion of the 'fermata' allows us to see the bright side of Puiu's strategy, even if it sometimes comes dangerously close to a conscious and radical 'dismantling of attractions'. The ability to compose a film by means of rhythm and changing dynamics visible in the structure of the fabric of the work as a whole can constitute an additional level of communication with the spectator, as well as allowing for the problematisation of the definition of cinema according to Irzykowski, expressed in the sentence that 'cinema is the visibility of man's dealing with the matter'.

In conclusion, if we were hoping to get an engaging and readable diagnosis of contemporary Romania from Puiu – be it the metropolitan environment or the Romanian province (or perhaps as *pars pro toto* of the whole of Europe, the global world, planet Earth?) – all the indications are that there is still nothing to it. But this is not necessarily bad news. If we wish, we

<sup>27</sup> The film is not (at least at present) widely available, so I also refer to the content of the film's trailer - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBVNiz6FvTk>.

can, along with the characters, independently and painstakingly answer questions from a questionnaire prepared by the director. And it may turn out to be a confusing puzzle, or it may happen that we do not understand the question, and conclude that it is their author's fault. Meanwhile, there is much to suggest that the viewer is being quizzed by Puiu over and over again on the same questions, repetitive as the Roman letters that play the digits in the title, so ancient and classical, yet contemporary and new in the next instalment of the continuing march of civilisation. *MMXX* as a symbol of the year 2020 is certainly a cinematic monument to everyday life constrained by the dictates of pandemics, rules that challenge our habits, taking away our hitherto seemingly obvious rights. However, it is also an enigmatic affirmation of the potential present in us, of the still unfulfilled dream of what another person, a loved one, a family, a child – our world – can be. And at the same time a testimony to human transience and impermanence, as common and necessary as knowledge of the Roman alphabet.

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