

WHO'S AFRAID OF MIHAI IOVĂNEL? REGIMES OF RELEVANCE AND NEW LITERARY HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Abstract: The present article addresses Mihai Iovănel's recently published *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020* while pursuing a series of similarities with other contributions to postcommunist national literatures in the Central and Eastern European cultural space, on the one hand, and with previous ways of understanding the concept of literary history, on the other. The article argues that Iovănel's History is one of the first to assess the importance of the social in the production, study, and national, as well as transnational dissemination of Romanian literature, an emphasis without which the study of literary phenomena risks falling into the blindness of aesthetic autonomy, whose shortcomings are well documented in the book. Lastly, I will argue that Iovănel unwillingly describes several of the most notable shifts in the “regimes of relevance” (Galin Tihanov) that literature has undergone from the communist period to contemporary times.

Keywords: regimes of relevance, literary history, Romanian literature, literary historiography, Mihai Iovănel.

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Alan Bloom and Harold Bloom would have liked us to believe that literature exists only in itself, in an ethereal space from which it merely fishes out themes, topics, and characters as it pleases and as it suits it. On the other hand, Marxist critics would argue that literature, like all other facts of life, is submitted to the various down-to-earth determinants that construct reality. The major points addressed in the present article while discussing Mihai Iovănel's recent *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature (1990-2020)*¹ revolve around the methodology employed in portraying the evolution of literature from the starting point of literary *production*, with all things entailed in the materialistic mechanisms at play in shaping the canon against the undefined mass of the “great unread.”²

Of course, Franco Moretti's concept and methodology are useful in determining the subterraneous shifts underpinning a seemingly predictable official literary history by revealing entire masses of otherwise unknown literary productions that have not had the fortune of being part of the established canon and elements of which subvert it or help reformulate

its premises. My use of the concept, besides referring to the massive, nearly unfathomable literary output of the postcommunist period, is broadened to include a very literal “great unread” as well. What I mean by this is that the post-1989 Romanian literary development becomes much clearer when we take into account the actors which henceforth *cease to participate* in literary production, regardless of whether we are talking about producers of literature, members of the administrative body mediating access to cultural goods (such as librarians, bookshop clerks, and so on), or readers themselves.

But before we talk about absences, lacks, and shortcomings, i.e., about the invariably negative connotations of postcommunist cultural shifts, we have to attempt to define the concepts involved in writing literary history by addressing at least two seemingly basic, yet exceedingly complex questions. First, what does it mean to be *contemporary*? Second, what is a *history*? The answers to these questions will lay out the structure and internal organization of Iovănel's *History*, therefore even outlining the possible model for a literary



history capable of exceeding the confines of the literary and becoming a tool for multi-layered cultural analysis. The first question is addressed in the very first page of Iovănel's *History*, starting from an observation made by Ștefan Baghiu. The latter argues that "contemporary literature" has come to designate the entire literary production of the nearly "70-year-long (post-war) period," a stretch of time equally long as the one between the birth of Romanian literary criticism and socialist realism³. Needless to say, the shifts that have taken place during this period are too complex and manifold to be included under the conceptual umbrella of "contemporary literature."⁴ Beyond this terminological predicament, the underpinnings of the "contemporary" relate to the socio-political, economic, and cultural contexts making up *contemporary* life: the materialistic component, together with various events participating in shaping historical actuality – anything from corruption scandals to the stock market to what any affluent agent of the cultural field has said or done. Contemporary is consequently both "actual" and "relevant" in the sense of exerting a powerful influence on the face of public life. Which brings us to the second question: what is *history* and, more especially, what is literary historiography? Derived from these two questions: how can one describe traditional Romanian literary historiography? As Iovănel himself shows, Romanian literary historiography has generally been concerned with the abstract metanarrative of self-sufficient literary evolution, with the teleology of a peripheral national culture bound to make its breakthrough on the Western market, or, in historical terms, with the *longue durée* laid out by significant, i.e., canonical works.

The clear-cut distinction outlined by these questions is that between traditional historical writing and sociologically engaged research that takes heed to shifts in the livelihoods of regular historical subjects constituting the masses. In terms of literary history, this refers, on the one hand, to the "great unread" emerging from the privatization of the Romanian book market and the upsurge in translations, and to alternative authors/genres constituting "that vast historical 'other' which is not represented,"⁵ embodied by Damrosch's "shadow canon,"⁶ but which, due to the diminishing institutional support for emerging authors and voices, has broadened to include the "countercanonical" literary productions as well, leading to their further estrangement from its potential readership.⁷ While G. Călinescu's or Nicolae Manolescu's literary histories, the ones enjoying the most prominence in Romanian literary historiography, are notoriously preoccupied with maintaining their critical impartiality, presenting and through this strengthening the canonical position of established and widely acknowledged authors, no recent literary history has ever focused on the literary landscape as field wherein the different political, economic, and social changes are reflected. Iovănel's *History* has the merit of mending this gap by making use of something that in traditional historiography has been coined *Alltagsgeschichte*: history of ordinary life, which in postrevolutionary Romania has once again inevitably become the space of conflict and struggle. Much like Eric

Hobsbawm reconstructs vast expanses of time by retracing the small-scale, seemingly irrelevant events leading up to important historical landmarks, Iovănel discusses the socio-political changes that have led to literature's status in the new Romanian society: the privatization of public services and companies,⁸ the infamous Caritas Ponzi scheme that left many people destitute during the early 1990s, inflation, unnuanced anticommunism, conservatory upheavals, and so on. Without proposing a direct materialist analysis – without going so deep as to discuss, for instance, the evolution of cultural spending per capita or the increasing price of books in correlation to income growth during the period –, Iovănel carefully presents how it reflected on the large-scale changes in the functioning of the postcommunist cultural mainstream in one of the book's most compelling chapters, "Institutions."

Regarding how these changes become almost mandatory backdrop for understanding the basic principles of Iovănel's project, and in order to summarize his main points, I am tempted to cite Zizek's famous metaphor:

"The people wanted to have their cake and eat it: they wanted capitalist-democratic freedom and material abundance but without paying the full price of life in a 'risk society'; that is, without losing the security and stability once (more or less) guaranteed by the Communist regimes. As sarcastic Western commentators duly noted, the noble struggle for freedom and justice turned out to be little more than a craving for bananas and pornography."⁹

That "noble struggle for freedom and justice" became manifest, in the cultural sphere, in the elite's struggle to keep alive a literature-centric tradition against a diminishing literary market; this struggle, however, was shared both by reactionary voices aspiring to revive a romanticized version of cosmopolitan, francophone 1930s Romanian cultural life and by the former communist bourgeoisie. Doctors, lawyers, engineers, members of higher bureaucracy, as well as apolitical idealists which were to become "The Boyars of the Mind":¹⁰ they all bemoaned "Romania's manelization," a derogatory term condemning everything considered at fault for all the country's post-1989 shortcomings: lack of social protection, generalized precariousness, poor education and health, and so on.¹¹ Fascist nostalgia and communist nostalgia, two sides of the same aristocratic coin, met to blame the poor for being poor and the uncultured for being uncultured.

"Always historicize!" said the Jamesonian maxim. The socio-historical determinants of Romanian politics of the past 30 years are well known and have been intensely debated,¹² leading to the consensus that Romanian postcommunism is little more than a history of class struggle.¹³ But Romanian anticommunism has won the heart of the emerging middleclass precisely because it invoked "Western," presumably universal ideals – liberty, free market, unrestricted social mobility through meritocracy, Christian spirituality, liberal, capitalist work ethic, and so on. Yet, during the 1990s in Western Europe, these values were either redundant or on their way

of becoming redundant, not least due to the fact that many post-war Western economies had built their wealth on social democratic policies. The myth of “disembedded capitalism”¹⁴ and the illusion that hard work leads to success had proven unsubstantiated during the Thatcher-Nixon period, but it is precisely this rendition of Western capitalism that was most appealing to postcommunist Romanian elites, and the one that inadvertently seduced them into an “imitative capitalism.”¹⁵ However, the welfare enjoyed by late 20th century Western European countries was clearly not the consequence of unhampered capitalism, as postcommunist Eastern European nations believed it to be. Therefore, the pan-European governmental measures taken during the past 10 to 15 years towards social inclusion, sexual liberation, tolerance towards waves of refugees from the war-torn areas of the Middle East, religious plurality, inclusion of historically excluded identities – including women –, and multiculturalism have sparked conservative reactions from Eastern European cultures (Poland through a recent abortion ban, Romania through its same-sex ban referendum, Hungary under Viktor Orbán), eliciting the accusation of neo-Marxism or “sexo-Marxism”.¹⁶ This is both a phenomenon observed and criticized by Iovănel on numerous occasions throughout his *History*, but also precisely the kind of response provoked by its publication, showing that any debate on the social impact of literature and, indeed, on the *realpolitik* component of literature is regarded as ideologizing – and therefore inherently corrupt – discourse. Christian Moraru is more radical in expressing the disruption caused by Iovănel, framing it as an “unmendable tear [ripping] into their taken-for-granted coherence and institutional-administrative legitimacy.”¹⁷ In the central literary magazine *Observator Cultural*, in a review dedicated to the book, Șerban Axinte argues that “Mihai Iovănel only claims to be indebted to E. Lovinescu, but in reality, his roots stretch into the academic left, flooded by Marxist ideas, which perpetuated uncritically and even became arguments in their own right. *The History of Contemporary Romanian literature. 1990–2020* is unfortunately an ideological construct from start to finish, impervious to nuances.”¹⁸ Other reviewers have tried to underplay the ideological impartiality of Iovănel’s selection of authors – an impartiality he does not claim to be cultivating, however – and therefore reveal his hypocrisy by arguing that “any synthetical work, any panorama, and especially any literary history puts forward a hierarchy and even a literary canon. And Mihai Iovănel does this, regardless of how much he tries to keep away from the power play entailed by organizing his material.”¹⁹ Admittedly, any attempt at writing literary history implies a *selection*, but not necessarily a *hierarchy* in the sense of elaborating clear-cut rankings among authors. However, Iovănel is not proposing a canon, but rather makes an implicit acknowledgement of Zipf’s law: 20% of writers are responsible for 80% of the literary field, in the sense of accounting for 80% of the visible literary spectrum, i.e., being reviewed, discussed, invited to literary events, and mimicked by their peers. Furthermore, why is a presumed ideological reading of literature negatively connoted by these reviewers, since

most of the literary production of the 1990s and early 2000s is oftentimes strongly ideological, in the sense of addressing the communist trauma in anticommunist terms? In short, why is an ideological reading not suitable for ideologized literature? It seems the reviewers imply that only a certain ideology and a certain hierarchy are allowed: the capitalist ethos and the authors that endorse it. Speaking of ideology, Bogdan Cretu further remarks on Iovănel’s use of Mark Fisher’s concept of “capitalist realism” to describe postcommunist prose: “I don’t deny it, but there is a major difference: the first, socialist realism, was not optional, but a method of literary creation which was officially enforced, whereas the second is a direction towards which prose naturally oriented itself.”²⁰

The solidity of Cretu’s argument is only apparent. Following the revolution, literature was forced to compete against other forms of entertainment and expected to perform better than during a time when its importance was undermined neither by other forms of cultural production, nor by forms of non-canonical, low-brow literature. Much like social dumping and exploitation of labour, “capitalist realism” was not officially *enforced*; rather, literature was *coerced* into adopting it in order to survive. And, because literature-as-commodity was the only conceivable weapon against literature-as-ideology, it was thought to be the best possible way forward, notwithstanding that ideologized literature was virtually impotent in terms of symbolic capital during late communism.²¹ It was, borrowing Zizek’s terms, “as if the defetishization in the ‘relations between men’ (*disrupting the social hierarchies of communism* – my explanation) was paid for by the emergence of fetishism in the ‘relations between things (*books*)’ – by commodity fetishism.”²² From the standpoint of the book’s reviewers, it seems that discussing literary *production* is a fundamental Marxist gesture that must be immediately vilified, but the fact that literature has become little less than a *product* has no ideological underpinning whatsoever, since “aesthetic autonomy” would presumably ensure that “good literature” will prevail – against diminishing readerships, the ascension of translated literature,²³ and the increasing focus on living expenses to the detriment of cultural spending.

Points of resistance

One of the main arguments of the book regards what Iovănel calls “points of resistance,” the sociological, cultural, literary, and political prohibitions – literal obstacles, impediments, or shortcomings – in relation to which communist literature was compelled to perform. He argues that literature during the socialist realist phase was richer inasmuch as it allowed for the minute description of all segments of the social field – since all of them were actively undergoing and actively participating in the fundamental change to a socialist society. The novel of the so-called “obsessive decade” was not so inclusive, as it focused on the nefarious effects of forced collectivization and moved within the narrow space allowed by either official or unofficial censorship. It is precisely around this censorship that the literary production articulates itself, and it is



precisely censorship – expressed either as official institution or as prohibiting mainstream, such as protochronism – that forces authors to adopt and adapt new literary forms in order to enact a form of dissent or another, while refraining from realist representations of socialist life, since that would attract instant indictment and would effectively end one's career, and to focus on metafictional writings.²⁴

The regimes of relevance, “in which literature is valued for its autonomy and uniqueness as a discourse that is unlike other discourses, breaks with previous regimes of relevance in which literature’s significance is linked to its capacity to convey ideas, emotions, or knowledge of the world, or to instigate socially and politically oriented actions.”²⁵ Departing from Iovănel’s analysis, I will pursue some of the changes in the literary regimes of relevance by building on his concept of “points of resistance,” referring overwhelmingly to the sociology of literature according to the different actors involved in the literary process and, implicitly, in literature as sociological field. In this sense, it is clear that Romanian literature has undergone a series of shifts, all of them related to a “resistance threshold” that has been surpassed. I will present these shifts in the following, as they refer to several crucial converging points: 1. How literature is produced, and by whom; 2. How literature is read, and by whom; 3. How literature is interpreted; 4. How literature is instrumentalized, and where: on the one hand within national culture, but on the other, in a transnational context, as overcompensation for a perceived self-enclosure.

Written

First of all, who writes literature during the 30-year-long period under scrutiny? First to publish after the revolution were the underdogs of the last two communist decades. The ‘80s Generation, alongside authors who were met with reluctance or had been censored during the ‘80s, came forward with their previously unpublished work, gaining prominence in a literary market eager to assimilate all literary testimonies of political and cultural repression. Many authors aspired to emerge as heroes of political subversion and were keen on publishing their anticommunist journals, cultivated anticommunist stances, and competed against other authors in revealing the monstrous underbelly of the totalitarian regime, not unlike what was happening in other Eastern-European cultures: “Czech literature in the 1990s, to a greater extent than either Russian or Slovak, was dominated by explicitly or implicitly autobiographical works seeking to give an eye-witness account of the experience of the 1970s and 1980s, and at the same time to assert the writer’s own anti-Communist credentials.”²⁶

However, most of these unnuanced depictions of communist life failed precisely because the novels themselves “did not dare going against the anticommunist expectations within which they emerged: instead of disrupting interpretative habits, the anticommunist novel confirmed them.”²⁷ Regardless of their initial subversion – either real or contrived

post factum –, many of the authors occupied positions of power in the newly restructured cultural and political field of the early 2000s. However, the institutional support for authors-as-creators all but disappeared, given that literature became independent from the state. The disappearance of this “point of resistance” against which literature could entertain the illusion of fighting entailed the disappearance of several authors who, met with unrestricted creative freedom after the revolution, lost their creative impetus.²⁸ This is valid for the first wave of postcommunist writers. The ones following in their tracks, who were to later converge under the common denomination of “Generation 2000,” consisted of authors born during the last communist decade, the ‘80s. Their teenage and early adult years were riddled with poverty, poor housing conditions, inflation, the deregulated civil order of the 1990s, generalised social upheavals, protests and class conflicts bordering on “failed state,”²⁹ lack of access to bibliographical resources, generalized corruption, and so on.³⁰ The members of the ensuing “2010s generation”³¹ were born during the late ‘80s and early 1990s and were therefore not affected by the shortcomings of the former two decades or were shielded from them by their parents. Their contact to their peers was not nearly so distorted by socio-economic difficulties as that of prior generations. Furthermore, they underwent two fundamental shifts during their lifetimes: first, the digital revolution that shaped their early adolescence, and second, the 2007 integration into the broader political body of the European Union, with longstanding implications for their access to information, books, and other cultural or practical resources. For most of them, social dumping (labour migration to the emerging economies of Western Europe: Germany, Spain, Italy) created a sort of disenchantment with the West: their parents left them in the care of relatives and were oftentimes absent from fundamental stages of their early development. However, there is a clear divide between most members of this *biological* generation and the authors active during this time, since the latter did not suffer as much from the effects of growing inequality. The unfair advantage of the offspring of relatively wealthy or at least financially stable urban dwellers in contrast to their provincial peers was fundamental for the growing centralization of literary production (stemming from the centralization of Romanian economy). As noted in John Feffer’s 2017 *Aftershock: A Journey into Eastern Europe’s Broken Dreams*, “For the World War II generation in Eastern Europe, communism was the ‘god that failed.’ [...] For the current generation in the region, liberalism is the god that failed.”³²

Currently, one could turn this argument around and claim that “for the wealthy, communism is the god that failed. For the destitute, liberalism is the god that failed.” This explains the anticommunist stance of postcommunists elites, but also why literary production is increasingly a privilege of the financially comfortable: the writers most active during this time stem from one of the country’s cultural centres, Bucharest, Cluj, Sibiu, Iași, Brașov, or Timișoara, while the others – marginals in regard to the cultural field’s poles of symbolic power –

try either to relocate to these hubs (which oftentimes also represent a gateway to higher education and better-paying jobs) and become active there, or attempt to emulate and/or contest the former from a distance.

Regarding the second point, that of the authors' relation to their work: during communism, writing possessed the institutional support required to effectively become a career.³³ As the cultural field was liberated from political confines, writing professionally – either through state-commandeered books or through employment in one the country's numerous cultural magazines – lost any sort of financial incentive, as well as the symbolic capital associated with bohemian life, gradually becoming a hobby. The myth of creative genius all but disappeared, turning into a parody. During the 1990s, writers were mobilized by political consciousness and anticommunist impetus, as demasking the wrongdoings and abuses of communism was seen as a moral responsibility. Similarly, during the early 2000s, autobiographical writing acquired the guise of manifest revolt in front of the injustice of contemporary life. This revolt was gradually internalized, transforming into the individualistic impulse to expose one's most intimate desires and dissatisfactions. This unmitigated engagement with contemporary life is reflected in the literary production as well, since during the early 2000s, as noted by Iovănel, "the social structure of literary characters will decisively depend on the authors' own social structure"³⁴. Reality and its fictionalized renditions might seem to have overlapped, but in reality, social injustice, instead of provoking an engagement with the social and determining the countercanonical Generation 2000 to deliver a paramount account of the chaotic 1990s and early 2000s, inspired literary forms indebted either to modernist aesthetics (exemplified by the neo-expressionistic branch of early 2000s poetry) or to dry-witted post-war American poetry (Frank O'Hara and Charles Bukowski, for instance). The common denominator of these two is the individualistic outlook, heedless of any preoccupation with the social. During the 2010s, however, the writing process became increasingly more a leisure activity falling under the maxim of postmodern ennui: since everything has already been said, and in a myriad of possible manners, and, most importantly, since the socio-political and economic urgency and "points of resistance" disappeared, literature became a hobby practiced by the invariably urban intellectual elite, with no further apparent implication other than aesthetic enjoyment. This is noticeable in the social roles of prose characters as well, as writers start to integrate contemporary typologies in their books. Typically, this gesture oftentimes betrays their Western aspirations:

"Following the 'miserable' realism of the 1990s, underpinned by a sociology of victimhood (reflecting the perspective of the underprivileged), one can remark an aspiration among prose writers of the second half of the 2000s and the 2010s to confer their characters professions as urban and as sophisticated as possible."³⁵

In correlation to these aspirations, the shifts in the literary representation of class mirror the changes in the attitudes towards various social classes with surprisingly accuracy: peasants and proletarians, whose importance was inflated during communism, were now regarded as hindrances in the Europeanization process and despised as embodiments of a retrograde neocommunism. Without formulating it as such, Iovănel discusses the "privileged gaze" of the prose production:

"in the novels of the 1990s, peasants almost entirely disappear, when they don't feature in collectivization novels or in novels depicting the anticommunist resistance in the mountains – novels, therefore, which create anticommunist debate rather than novels addressing postcommunist reality [...] furthermore, the proletarian is featured throughout the 1990s exclusively as lumpenproletarian, as marginal, and as loser. The marginals' increased representation is illustrative not only of the ongoing destruction of the industrial proletariat, but also of the taxonomic confusion when faced with a social mobility which the authors do not possess the conceptual instruments to understand and classify."³⁶

All things considered, the change in the regime of auctorial relevance was not at all favourable for writers, now stripped of either their official role as endorsers of the communist status quo or their function as – more or less – credible opposers of the regime. The dictatorial "point of resistance" on which both functions they performed depended ceased to exist.

Read

Second, the question arising when talking about literature's "regime of relevance" for the readerships regards the massive changes that took place in the sociology of literature during the 30-year-long period. First of all, literature lost its ground in the hierarchy of entertainment channels during the postcommunist shift on account of television providing the former readerships with Western productions following a whole decade in which the TV set was rather a redundant piece of furniture, given that every programme in the 2-hour-long daily broadcast time featured news on Nicolae Ceaușescu. Second, reading became a bourgeois activity and an identity marker of the educated postcommunist middle-class, since the entire book market was gradually privatized, public libraries were shut down massively,³⁷ and state-funded cultural programmes were terminated. Moreover, the book-as-commodity became increasingly harder to get by, since the prices of books increased and the financial crisis and inflation of the 1990s rendered cultural spending an unnecessary luxury. Both these points are reducible to the aforementioned divide between an urban, educated class reproducing itself indefinitely, and a provincial class of labourers/former peasants for whom social mobility – and implicitly migration to university centres, cultural development, and literary engagement – has become increasingly difficult. The "great postcommunist heist"



has left the rich richer and the poor poorer, while leaving even the relatively well-off in financial predicaments.

The question therefore remains: who reads nowadays? Members of the urban population, preponderantly with a university degree, and for whom reading is not a vocational necessity, but a leisure activity in which they engage voluntarily. Furthermore, beyond the naïve enjoyment derived from literature, reading betrays an aspiration towards mutual recognition of one's cultural status. More than a strictly gratuitous activity, literature has become the subject of middle-brow conversation, divorced from the harsh realities of cultural consumption and access to education.³⁸

Another, perhaps more powerful factor for the transformation of literature into another constituent of class struggle is the national postcommunist rendition of the “canon wars.” The rehabilitation of interwar intellectuals,³⁹ together with the reassessment of 19th century authors who had been politically instrumentalized – and therefore “tarnished” by communist interpretations⁴⁰ –, as well as the cultivation of authors who had proven legitimately subversive throughout their works during the regime, led to the restructuring of the canon in a very conservative manner, something that more or less excluded emerging authors. Because of this, established literary critics (the main proponents of aesthetic autonomy, professors or Academy members, who possessed and still possess institutional leverage) busied themselves with reenforcing the identity-forging importance of the hypercanon, leaving little to no space to the countercanon. In this regime of relevance, hypercanonical authors new and old were placed on a pedestal and carefully ridded of their shortcomings, which have been constantly avoided, becoming taboo,⁴¹ while the countercanon, especially that of the early 2000s, was negatively connoted and used as backdrop for the presumably timeless hypercanonical authors, who seemed to shine brighter by contrast. This does not mean that a countercanon did not effectively emerge, but that, lacking institutional support and being the result of private initiatives, this countercanonical production was limited to a rather narrow readership at first. Notwithstanding the fact that currently, most of the established and emerging literary festivals are also state-funded (albeit indirectly, through grants and AFCN projects), the predilect locations where they are set are the country’s cultural centres. So that neither the more recent “capitalist realist” authors, nor the autobiographical, self-diminishing “Generation 2000,” nor ultracontemporary authors could properly become household names by entering school curricula or the general mainstream, i.e., by becoming “public intellectuals.” In fact, some of these authors even refuse official recognition.⁴² Given the formative potential of literary curricula in schools, the cleft between “living” literature and the ever-expanding hypercanonical bubble is slowly increasing.

Interpreted

Romanian literary historiography suffers from an obsession for aesthetic autonomy most visible in the manner in which literary criticism has attempted to justify its absence from political discourse, “the ‘unconscious of the aesthetic,’ that ‘other’ that the autonomous work of art has had to repress or displace in order to establish itself,”⁴³ by seeking refuge in the safe confines of Art. Retrospectively, this aesthetic autonomy, whose roots are to be found in 19th century cultural debates on the fate of Romanian literature in its early stages, has become the only conceivable way of conserving the independence of literary institutions faced with the perceived perversion of communist political discourse. Several contributions have throughout the time been made to the further strengthening of its hegemonic position within the Romanian cultural field following the Romanian revolution, among which the conservative positions of anticommunist elites stand out. A similar – and similarly interesting – case, the battle for aesthetic autonomy, better known as the battle between traditionalists and modernists, took place in Ukraine during the early years of the 20th century, when the reputed literary critic Ivan Franko harshly attacked the young symbolist experimentalism of the writers grouped under the umbrella of “The Young Muse.”⁴⁴ The attack against them combined nationalist resistance to modernist internationalism with socialist undertones stemming from the aspiration towards a universal, democratized literary production that would reach out to the masses:

“So deeply ingrained was the populist notion that literature ought to serve the people that any departure from it was sometimes regarded as an act of national betrayal. Jefremov could not conceive of literature as independent from social and national life, yet modernists often tried to reach an independent position. They did so in the name of ‘beauty and ‘art,’ both elusive qualities for the populists. This dichotomy lasted far into the twentieth century. It was not entirely resolved by the revolution of 1917, an event of literary as well as of political importance.”⁴⁵

In much the same way, the Romanian rendition of aesthetic autonomy built on the “elusive qualities” of “beauty” and “art.” But the official revival of aesthetic autonomy following the regime change was not necessarily dominated by nationalist undertones⁴⁶ but rather by a self-colonizing⁴⁷ disgust for all things local and provincial,⁴⁸ built on unwavering reverence towards the Western world, regarded as a cradle of civilization.

Consequently, the fundamental shift in the critical regime of relevance regards that from passive non-alignment, designating mechanisms through which authors eschewed the portrayal of the urgencies of everyday life, to effective political engagement. But during the 1990s, this engagement was solely an act, as it pursued the reinforcement of anticommunist tropes and the demasking of communist shortcomings: the disappearance of the most stringent point of resistance,

political repression, did not bring about a much needed discussing about literature's social function and its duty to depict *real life*. Instead, the Eastern-European authors who have gained most traction during postcommunism were the ones who most cleverly "aestheticized" reality when depicting communism; Milan Kundera and Herta Müller immediately come to mind. The closest postcommunist Romanian literature has ever come to depicting actual – i.e., sordid, precarious, difficult – reality in all its sorry complexity has been, according to Iovănel, through the poetry of Generation 2000, in their biographical and self-deprecatory trademark style (in the chapter "Minimalismul biografist"). While the generation failed where it was supposed to excel, namely in the novel, their poetry was thoroughly narrative and descriptive, succeeding in creating a credible account of the early 2000s.

As Iovănel himself argues, this shift entails a significant compromise: aesthetic autonomy resides in the particularities and nuances of language, whereas the freedom in which the literary field found itself after the regime change rendered superfluous the finesse of earlier works trying to plant subversive motifs that would go unnoticed, as well as the intertextual devices and attempts at highly imaginative metafictional narratives mimicking Western postmodernist works. When the "points of resistance" were removed, so was the creative power of many authors who had performed under communism. Therefore, postcommunist literature deliberately denies any real political engagement, following the prospect of non-adhesion, yet freely aligns itself to the new, capitalist ethos. Borrowing the concept from Mark Fisher,⁴⁹ Iovănel coins this new approach to literary production "capitalist realism." But while the practice of non-alignment was excusable during the regime's most repressive years, the Romanian revolution and the ensuing social crises represented, for literature, a great missed chance at reasserting its social function: instead of being used as an instrument for social protest, it retracted into an outdated paradigm of "literature for literature's sake," sometimes disguised as "literature as violent, cathartic self-expression." Producing literature against the grain of social life entails a conscious decision of overlooking readily available, highly relevant, and sociologically appealing literary material, which chips away at any remaining trace of autonomy.

Currently, literature is "weaponized" by the urban intelligentsia to distinguish itself from the "uncultured" masses. As symptomatic example, one of the most heated cultural debates during the early 2000s concerned *manele*, a popular musical genre derived from the ethno-folk music of the 1990s, mostly performed by members of the Roma community and wrongly associated with low-brow cultural productions of every type; highly racialised and despised by the general population, or used by hipsters to distinguish themselves from the presumably intolerant *manele*-haters in order for them to emerge as tolerant and cool, they became the embodiment of "subculture." This concealed contempt towards the underprivileged on account of their presumed cultural shortcomings has not grown cold: a recent investigation by *Recorder*, a private journalistic project, paid

visits to public rural libraries, bemoaning the fact that people do not read as much as during communism.⁵⁰

To sum up, this shift designates the mutation from a presumably subversive type of literature written in the '80s to a literature that is now forced to comply to the needs of the market. First, this means that literature is now forced to sell in order to exist as literature, as well as to meet and, most importantly, satisfy the cultural expectations of postcommunist readerships. Adrian Urmanov best describes this urgency in his *Utilitarian Poem*, where he comments on the nature of literature in a highly competitive entertainment market.⁵¹ Second, literature now has to compete with the massive input of translated fiction; the previous indictments of consumer literature are now transformed into a desperate attempt to import new forms and new contents. Lowbrow western fiction explodes, whereas Romanian literature understandably diminishes in size.

International prominence

Regarding a possible transnational instrumentalization of Romanian literature, Mircea Cărtărescu is widely regarded as the most likely Romanian author to receive the Nobel prize in literature. Indeed, so much so, that each passing year elicits ample media campaigns and social media debates on the likelihood of him winning the prize. Each year, Romanian cultural life laments the fact that he is not awarded the prize, insinuating that an unexplainable injustice has been made.⁵² But are Mircea Cărtărescu, however talented, and the ongoing debate over the Nobel prize, not in fact projections of our own transnational insecurities? As Iovănel remarks,

"albeit his novels abound in concepts from physics, biology, chemistry, their use is purely poetical [...] and do not reveal a scientific *weltanschauung* (such as Richard Powers). Corroborating this with the frequent impression of kitsch, resulted by the convergence of leitmotifs (biblical scenarios, autofiction, modernist metafiction of the Book) or with the author's prolixity, one may reach the conclusion that Cărtărescu's prose is oftentimes an instance of *middlebrow* fiction (literature that is accessible for middle class readerships aspiring to become cultured) that presents itself as *highbrow* literature."⁵³

His inflation in Romanian cultural periodicals is nothing short of a cult. His books and political stances are used in a transnational framework as instruments of national self-promotion, as desire to finally "put Romania on the map" of global literature, and he himself "rationalizes his plan for self-exportation,"⁵⁴ according to Iovănel. As Costi Rogozanu observes,

"after a short presentation of fetishism as it features in Marx, Iovănel goes on to present a first episode from the case of Cărtărescu, a writer who fetishizes literature, who proceeds from the literary to the real, and who substitutes reality with fiction. There are many things to say here, especially



since most likely, the maximum fetishization is aesthetic autonomy itself. Cărtărescu really seems a Manolescu-Borgesian project. Iovănel's correct intuition is the extreme attention paid by Cărtărescu to the market, to trends, his apolitical stance being clear even before 1989. The third volume of *Blinding* is the embodiment of his apolitically politicized position. Iovănel's hypothesis that literature-as-commodity finds a complete expression in Cărtărescu's case makes sense if we take into consideration the most important moment of Cărtărescu's career, which wasn't the Romanian Revolution of 1989, but his adherence to the ultraconservative group formed around Humanitas.⁵⁵

Conclusions

These shifts had and still have a two-pronged effect on the field. First, it reinforced the idea that literary production is nothing more than another form of entertainment, which has to exist on its own terms and to compete in an unequal fight against other, more visible forms of entertainment such as television, which was still enjoying considerable state support during the 1990s (Pro TV, for example, or TVR, the de facto national television broadcaster),⁵⁶ or – later, during the early 2000s – against the advent of the personal computer. Second, it occasioned the emergence of a transnational politics of literature, closely tied to the dissolving autarchy of the communist Romanian economic system: borders opened on every front, so that literature was from now on understood as a transnational field wherein Romanian literature could compete on equal footing against other national literatures, therefore becoming an instrument of national self-promotion.

But the advent of transnational interests also prompts the disappearance of traditional, “impressionistic” interpretation. The point of resistance is now “the national,” understood as the self-enclosed preoccupation with national literary heritage and a resistance to World and Comparative literature studies. Aesthetic autonomy has started to show its cracks, slowly fading away due to its sheer blindness to socio-political life. Because of this, impressionistic interpretation is doomed to fail. That is why articles and essays pursuing a highly specific

theme as it is reflected in the works of a highly specific author seem so outdated (“The theme of X as seen in the work(s) of Y”). It is because they are. However, substantiated by secondary literature, they oftentimes fall just short of an invisible “relevance threshold,” so to speak. The same thing applies to the tradition of literary reviews, once a thriving and fertile cultural battleground full of savoury arguments and clever retorts. First, because the Romanian journals and magazines hosting such reviews have all but disappeared or diminished in relevance,⁵⁷ and second, because the genre itself seems to have reached its natural limitations, given the renewal of methodological tools, a renewal to which Romanian scholars have not been impervious. From a strictly pragmatic standpoint, however, young literary researchers have sensed the inability of impressionistic criticism in the form of literary reviews to advance their careers or aid their academic development.

Now surely, one can easily argue that literature has become a field wherein the *production* supersedes the *artistry*, and that is somewhat true. But instead of lighting a candle for the aesthetic, one should perhaps ponder on the very bases on which the *literary product* is symbolically built. For, after literature exhausts its importance as mirror of the postrevolutionary bourgeois, wherein the emerging middle-class, still ignorant to its own privilege, finds reclusion and confirmation of its own social importance and progressive values in *capitalist realism*, literature will rebecome commonplace, in the sense of ceasing to be financially or symbolically unattainable for its potential readers. Every slightly conservative member of the social body would like to see cultural expenditure rise, to see people reading Plato and speak about the most recent Man Booker nominees. Until then, however, it is necessary to acknowledge that literature cannot thrive without material support, on the one hand, and that this material support is a prerequisite for literature to reflect the social body in all its complexity, not solely from the perspective of the privileged. This is why Iovănel's *History*, an outstanding solo performance at a time when the literary field is in dire need of collective and transnational collaboration, is a perfect starting point for drawing explicit attention to ideology against the backdrop of countless claims to an equally ideologized artistic autonomy.

Notes:

1. Mihai Iovănel, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990–2020* (Iași: Polirom, 2021).
2. Franco Moretti, *Distant reading* (London: Verso Books, 2013). See also the Romanian version of *Graphs, Maps, Trees. Franco Moretti, Grafice, hărți, arbori: literatura văzută de departe*, traducere de Cristian Cercel, prefată de Andrei Terian (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2016).
3. However, as Costi Rogozanu notes in a contribution to the present issue – a foretaste of some of the aspects I will discuss myself –, “there are strong chances that the literature between the 1950s and the 1970s will remain ‘contemporary’ for a long time from now, also because it was the first – and probably the last – time when Romanian literature enjoyed a massive distribution and exerted an overwhelming influence on the masses.” Costi Rogozanu, “Când totul e pierdut, ai grija să cazi cu stil. Istoria lui Iovănel: note, completări, provocări,” *Transilvania*, no. 7–8 (2021): 67–79.
4. Ștefan Baghiu, “Literatura contemporană – un termen umbrelă?,” in *Antologile revistei „Cultura”*, volume II, *Dosare tematice 2016–2017. Literatură, artă, societate*, eds. Angela Martin, Ștefan Baghiu, and Cosmin Borza (București: Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2018), 155–156. hñ
5. William H. Thornton, “The politics of literary historiography.” *Journal of Literary Studies* 10.3–4 (1994): 425–436, 430.

6. David Damrosch, "World literature in a postcanonical, hypercanonical age," in *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, ed. Haun Saussy (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 43–53.
7. As Cosmin Borza argues in a contribution to this very issue. See Cosmin Borza, "Canonul occidental din *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990–2020* de Mihai Iovănel," *Transilvania*, no. 7–8 (2021): 123–127.
8. Alongside the privatization of culture, discussed recently in Adriana Stan, Cosmin Borza, "Deetatization of Culture, Privatization of Politics. The Case of the Publishing Houses in Postcommunist Romania," *Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review* 20, no. 3 (2020): 382–397; Teodora Dumitru, "De la anticomunism de principiu la anticapitalism pragmatic: presa literară românească între 1990 și 1993," *Transilvania*, no. 3 (2019): 1–7.
9. Slavoj Žižek. *Living in the end times* (London: Verso, 2011), vii.
10. Sorin Adam Matei, *Boierii mintii. Intelectualii români între grupurile de prestigiu și piața liberă a ideilor* (Bucharest: Campania, 2004).
11. See Adrian Schiop, *Şmecherie și lume rea: Universul social al manelelor* [Trickery and Perverted World: The Social Universe of Manele] (Chișinău: Cartier, 2017); Margaret Beissinger, Speranța Rădulescu, and Anca Giurchescu (eds.), *Manele in Romania: Cultural expression and social meaning in Balkan popular music* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).
12. Vasile Ernu et al., *Iluzia anticomunismului: lecturi critice ale Raportului Tîsmăneanu* (Chișinău: Cartier, 2008); Emanuel Copilas, *Marele jaf postcomunist: spectacolul mărfi și revanșa capitalismului* (Iași: Adenium, 2017).
13. Florin Poenaru, *History and Intellectual Class Struggle in Post-communist Romania*, Ph.D. diss., Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology (Budapest: Central European University, 2013). See also Florin Poenaru, *Locuri comune. Clasă, anticomunism, stânga* (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2017).
14. The chapter "Romania's Disembedded Neoliberalism" from Cornel Ban's *Ruling ideas: How global neoliberalism goes local* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
15. Raúl Prebisch, "A critique of peripheral capitalism." *Cepal Review* (1976): 9–76, 11.
16. For this particular debate on the stances taken against what has been coined "the ideology of political correctness", especially as a presumed encroachment of Marxist thought in American universities, which has elicited the revolted reaction of Romanian elites, see the dialogue between Christian Moraru and Mihai Iovănel in *Euphorion*. See Mihai Iovănel, Christian Moraru, "Corectitudinea politică între realitate și fetiș", *Euphorion*, no. 4 (2019). Online: <https://revista-euphorion.ro/author/mihai-iovanel-si-christian-moraru/> (last accessed September 26, 2021).
17. Christian Moraru, "Literary Historiography as Event: Mihai Iovănel's History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990–2020," *Transilvania*, no. 7–8 (2021): 1–13.
18. Șerban Axinte, „O tentativă de reideologizare a literaturii”, *Observator Cultural*, no. 1067, June 25, 2021. Online: <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/o-tentativa-de-reideologizare-a-literaturii/>. (Last Accessed September 26, 2021).
19. Bogdan Crețu, „O istorie (post)marxistă a literaturii contemporane (I)”, *Observator Cultural*, no. 1067, June 25, 2021. Online: <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/o-tentativa-de-reideologizare-a-literaturii/>. (Last Accessed September 26, 2021).
20. Crețu, „O istorie.”
21. As any genuine author would have scoffed at protochronist productions or remnants of socialist realism alike.
22. Slavoj Žižek, *The sublime object of ideology* (London: Verso Books, 1989), 22.
23. Whose success was considerable despite the ridiculously small grants awarded to translators.
24. As shown by Ramona Hărșan, "The Melancholy of Resistance with Mircea Nedelciu and László Krasznahorkai: Symbolic Images of Community Under Communism and Alternative Constructions of Moral Identity," *Redefining Community in Intercultural Context* 4, no. 1 (2015): 308–316.
25. Galin Tihanov, *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory: Regimes of Relevance in Russia and Beyond*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 3. For a convincing and comprehensive explanation of the concept of "regime of relevance", which I will not conduct here, see Doris Mironescu's contribution to this issue, "Regimuri de relevantă, puncte de rezistență: literatura română în postcomunism," *Transilvania*, no. 7–8 (2021): 107–114.
26. Rajendra Anand Chitnis, *Liberation and the authority of the writer in the Russian, Czech and Slovak fiction of the Changes*, Ph.D. diss., University of London (London: University of London, 2003), 13–14.
27. Iovănel, *Istoria*, 291.
28. The metafictional authors of the 1980s.
29. I am fully aware of the Westernizing gaze entailed by the concept, as noted by Charles Call in Charles T. Call, "The fallacy of the 'Failed State,'" *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 8 (2008): 1491–1507; Charles T. Call, "Beyond the 'failed state': Toward conceptual alternatives," *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 2 (2011): 303–326. The issues regard 1. Methodologically, the careless nature of its employment and the fact that it could theoretically designate anything. 2. The fact that it is "based primarily on Western perceptions of Western security and interests." See also Morten Boås and Kathleen M. Jennings, "'Failed states' and 'state failure': Threats or opportunities?," *Globalizations* 4, no. 4 (2007): 475–485.
30. For more on the circumstances around the emergence of the Generation 2000 see Ovio Olaru, "Douămiismul poetic românesc. Condițiile unei schimbări de paradigmă," *Transilvania*, no. 6 (2017): 19–24.
31. Olaru, Ovio. "Postdouămiismul: O promovare." *Transilvania*, no. 7 (2017): 67–77.



32. John Feffer, *Aftershock: A Journey into Eastern Europe's Broken Dreams* (London: Zed Books, 2017), 35.
33. As shown by Andrew Baruch Wachtel in his *Remaining Relevant after Communism. The Role of the Writer in Eastern Europe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006). However, as noted by Ștefan Baghiu in his contribution to this very issue, currently “there is no available data on the salaries of writers, which could be analysed in order to conduct a material investigation of the exchange value of intellectual and literary work, there is no data concerning the production costs in order to gain an insight into the sociology of literature during the Romanian postcommunist transition.” Ștefan Baghiu, “Ideological Critique in the Era of Leftist Administrative Language: A New Left History of Contemporary Romanian Literature,” *Transilvania*, no. 7-8 (2021).
34. Iovănel, *Istoria*, 289.
35. Iovănel, *Istoria*, 290.
36. Iovănel, *Istoria*, 288.
37. A 2018 article quotes the National Institute for Statistics in claiming that “in 1990, Romania had 16,665 public libraries throughout its counties, cities, communes, and villages. [...] In 2017, in Romania there are only 9,594 public and private libraries left.” This number is unsurprisingly gradually decreasing: in 2020, there were only 8,929 public libraries left, in the urban and the rural environment alike. “***, “Peste 7.000 de biblioteci au dispărut din 1990, în România. Câtii cititori mai sunt în județul Alba”, *Alba24.ro*, October 23, 2018. Online: <https://alba24.ro/peste-7-000-de-biblioteci-au-disparut-din-1990-in-romania-cati-cititori-mai-sunt-in-judetul-alba-679678.html> (Last accessed September 25, 2021).
38. 39% of Romanian citizens declared not having read any book (regardless of whether in print or digital format) during the past 12 months. Carmen Croitoru, Anda Becuț Marinescu, eds., *Barometrul de consum cultural 2019. Experiența și practicile culturale de timp liber* (Bucharest: Editura Universul Academic, Editura Universitară, 2020), 60. Online: <https://www.culturadata.ro/barometrul-de-consum-cultural-2019-experienta-si-practicile-culturale-de-timp-liber> (Last accessed September 26, 2021).
39. Who, mirroring the detachment from local provincialism of those who revived them, found even the cultural capitals of interwar Romania too narrow for their internationalist ambitions. The following claim concerns Benjamine Fondane but can be expanded to include other interwar Romanian intellectuals as well, who “felt stifled and unfulfilled both in the patriarchal Iași and in the more cosmopolitan Bucharest” and sought to acquire “the aesthetic legitimacy of Western culture.” Florin Berindeanu, “A Tragic One-Way Ticket to Universality: Bucharest–Paris–Auschwitz, or the Case of Benjamin Fundoianu,” in *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe. Volume 2. Junctures and disjunctions in the 19th and 20th centuries*, eds. Marcel Corniș-Pop and John Neubauer (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006), 443–451, 444.
40. Particularly Eminescu’s poem *Împărat și Proletar/ Emperor and Proletarian*, whose rather loose interpretation rendered Eminescu into a communist *avant la lettre*. A slightly amusing example is Alex Ștefănescu’s account of how, during Ceaușescu’s regime, the zealous mayor of a small town had decided to commission a bust of Eminescu, portraying him with a less rebellious haircut that would better correspond to the period’s strict codes regarding attire and appearance. Alex. Ștefănescu, “Poemul Împărat și proletar recitat azi,” *Contemporanul*, no. 2, February 16, 2016. Online: <https://www.contemporanul.ro/lecturi-despre-carti/alex-stefanescu-poemul-imparat-si-proletar-recitat-azi.html> (Last accessed September 26, 2021).
41. Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian discuss G Călinescu’s ethnocentric positions in the Introduction to *Romanian Literature as World Literature*: “Călinescu presses into service anthropological clichés of immutable racial exceptionalism, explicit or implied ethno-racial superiority, and barely veiled anti-Semitism, all of which were mainstream in National Socialism and would be so again in Romania’s Socialist nationalism of the 1980s. By then, his work would become the uncontested gold standard of Romanian criticism. Moreover – and this is the darkest side of his legacy by far – his example would be obsessively invoked by the proponents of so-called ‘protochronism,’ a quasi-official, autochthonist, and ethno-supremacist doctrine of Romanian cultural, historical, and territorial ‘precedences.’” Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, Andrei Terian, eds., *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017), 11.
42. Dan Sociu, by far the most renowned of the countercanonical poets of the early 2000s, famously refused the prize awarded by the Romanian Cultural Institute in 2014 in the “Best Poetry Book of 2013” category for his *Vino cu mine și tu exact unde mergem* [Follow me I know exactly where we’re going].
43. Jonathan M. Hess, *Reconstituting the Body Politic: Enlightenment, Public Culture and the Invention of Aesthetic Autonomy* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), 27.
44. D. I Čyževskij, *A History of Ukrainian Literature (From the 11th to the End of the 19th Century)*, translated by Dolly Ferguson, Doreen Gorsline, and Ulana Petyk (New York and Englewood: The Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences and Ukrainian Academic Press, 1997), 690.
45. Čyževskij, *A History*, 705–706.
46. As it had been around the turn of the century, when aesthetic autonomy became an ideological arena in which Romanian nationalist conservatives fought against the cosmopolitan liberals.
47. Alexander Kiossev, “The self-colonizing metaphor,” *Atlas of Transformation* (2011). Online: <http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/s/self-colonization/the-self-colonizing-metaphor-alexander-kiossev.html> (Last accessed September 20, 2021).
48. A position mirroring Lovinescu’s classist assumption that peasant literature (e.g., *sămănătorist* literature), i.e., literature displaying empathy towards peasants and lower social classes, is inherently lower quality than literature addressing urban themes, as initially shown by Teodora Dumitru (Teodora Dumitru, “Conceptul lovinescian de ‘intelectualizare’ a literaturii față cu ipoteza postbelică a țăranului ‘intelectualizat,’” *Transilvania* no. 2 (2021): 31–50.)

49. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist realism. Is there no alternative?* (London: Zero Books, 2009).
50. Andrei Udișteanu, Isabela Pop, and David Muntean, "Cum se alege praful de bibliotecile de la sat," *Recorder*, September 10, 2021. Online: <https://recorder.ro/cum-se-alege-praful-de-bibliotecile-de-la-sat/> (Last accessed September 26, 2021). The investigation is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EQbq6Wqcl0>.
51. "There is a striking similarity between the poetic text and the advertisement, beyond the fact that both are forms of persuasion. An advertisement that doesn't sell anything is virtually defunct. Contemporary poetic texts are defunct, notwithstanding any technical virtuosity, precisely because – beyond their seeming innovation in regard to language or content – they do not produce any effect. [...] Utilitarian poetics is built around recomposing the communication mechanism and pursues the reader's re-sensibilization, the alteration of his immunity to the poetic text. If it will fulfil its mission, contemporary poetic utilitarianism has the potential of relaunching poetry as a viable form of expression and communication and could reopen the channels established between the poet and the reader, which now seem to be completely closed off." ***, "Poemul utilitar 'generatiei tu,'" *Blogosfera.md*, September 14, 2009. Online: <https://blogosfera.md/view-post-v-89603-o-romana.html>. (Last accessed September 20, 2021).
52. Mircea Cărtărescu, a possible nominee himself, claimed that it is "somehow revolting and could harm full-fledged authors" that Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 2016. ***, "Mircea Cărtărescu, despre Bob Dylan, la Gaudeamus: Merită orice premiu, dar Nobelul din acest an e oarecum scandalos", *Adevărul*, November 16, 2019. Online: https://m.adevarul.ro/cultura/carti/mircea-cartarescu-despre-bob-dylan-gaudeamus-merita-premiu-nobelul-an-e-oarecum-scandalos-1_58309c685ab6550cb8a70b19/index.html. (Last accessed September 26, 2021).
53. Iovănel, *Istoria*, 379.
54. Iovănel, *Istoria*, 651.
55. Rogozanu, "Când totul e pierdut."
56. Meanwhile, this balance has shifted. Pro TV was incredibly popular during the 1990s and the early 2000s, even eliciting the denomination of "Generația Pro."
57. Except official columns in magazines such as *România Literară* or *Observator Cultural*, published under the patronage of established cultural institutions.

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