

BOOK REVIEWS by Iulian Boldea/ Eugeniu Nistor/ Dumitru-Mircea Buda

Ștefan Borbély, *The Diaphanous Existence / Existența diafană* (Editura Ideea Europeană, 2011)

In Ștefan Borbély's books (*Thomas, the magister's garden, Xenogrames, The dream of the wolf from the steppe, Constructive oppositions, From Heracles to Eulenspiegel, The heroic in the literature, Mircea Eliade's fantastic prose. The Gnostic complex, The circle of grace, Matei Călinescu – monographic, Thomas Mann and other essays, A book a week, Starting from Nietzsche*) there is, despite the thematic diversity of the comparative excursions, a set of affinities, of relationships and of analogies which are meant to express the individuality of the writer. Either it analyses the relationship between Freud and Jung, the topos of the insulated in Thomas Mann, *The wolf from the steppe* belonging to H. Hesse, perceived from the angle of initiated scenarios, the germinate forces from Rilke's *Elegies*, or they approach some concepts of an ample intellectual opening (the idea of Mitteleuropa, ecumenism, New-Age, etc.) or the theme of the heroic, the author manages to delimit and radiography the major significances of the topos and of the literary forms, through the capitalization of an impressing bibliography. Ștefan Borbély's collections of literary chronicles are both supple, as a critical diction, subtle as a hermeneutical speech, explanatory and interpretative, as a way of work and the constructive enthusiasm, as well as the empathic resort, represent the two resources for Ștefan Borbély's writing, that his books emphasize. An applied and methodical spirit, the author betrays, in his serial pages, also the scholarship, an uninstructed scholarship, lacking boldness.

The diaphanous existence (The European Idea Publishing House, 2011) can be regarded as radiography of an entire literary decade (2000-2010), through commenting some of the most important publishing appearances from this period. Here can be found critical texts consecrated to reference names of Romanian contemporary literature (Marin Sorescu, Mircea Zăciu, Nicolae Breban, Marin Mincu, Livius Ciocârlie, Adrian Marino, Horia-Roman Patapievi, Mircea Cărtărescu, Paul Cornea, Dan C. Mihăilescu), but also comments of books belonging to becoming authors (Adrian Dohotaru, Cătălin și Roxana Ghiță, Adriana Teodorescu, Florina Codreanu, Ioana Macrea-Toma, Constantina Raveca Buleu). We can also state the fact that the author has a visible predilection for those books which enlist in the sphere of history and syntax of the mentalities or in the perimeter of the cultural studies. Ștefan Borbély's interpretations from this volume are characterised by analytical firmness, through conceptual opening and precision of the nuance, qualities which allow the author to circumscribe ideas and literary forms, to reveal artistic structures or to fixate the cultural symptoms. What are revealing for the critic's analytical availabilities are, for example, the texts dedicated to Adrian Marino's journal (*The life of a lonely man*), those dedicated to Marin Mincu's experimental attitude or of the Romanian literary modernity in Paul Cornea's vision.

In the preamble of his book, Ștefan Borbély offers several clarifying explanations regarding the title: „the diaphanous existence represents both a personal program and a finality, and an exorcism: of reaching, through the serial, continuous writing, above the filth we are leaving in, beyond the promiscuous present the majority of the books we have to read, needs to conquer”. A considerate observer of the literary mundane, with a sure aesthetic sense, but also with a playful spirit which transpires beyond the procedural gravity, Ștefan Borbély records, within the

Romanian editorial perimeter the existence of two tendencies: an ideology one, either explicit or implicit, „decanted from the imperative of the confrontation with a reality – that of the post-war Romania – which torments us even when we want to turn our back on it” and another one materialised in the existence of „a feeling of the existential «late» of the ending, as well as the fatigue of the 20 years after December 1989, these would gather in a collective suicidal thrill, thematically related to the dominant apocalypse from other spaces of culture”. It is not a chance that the author considers the actual stage of the Romanian literature characterises itself by a state of „resented, anti-vital tiredness, consonant with the social and political lethargy around”. The fact that his own book enlists in this conceptual sphere of the „tiredness” (being considered by the author himself „the indirect form of a participating melancholy”) is not by chance at all. Being significantly argued upon, articulated by an assumed rigour of interdisciplinary and of an ample conceptual horizon, the critic discourse is as unostentatious as firm in options and judgments.

The books commented upon in this volume (*The origins of the Romanian romanticism*, Paul Cornea’s book reprinted in 2008, *The Romanian literary balcanism*, by Mircea Muthu, *The secret history of the Romanian literature*, by Cornel Ungureanu, *The Romanian literature in post-ceausism*, by Dan C. Mihăilescu, *About ideas and blockages*, by de H.-R. Patapievici, *The illusions of Romanian literature*, by Eugen Negrici, *The betrayal of criticism*, by Nicolae Breban, *Matein investigations*, by Ion Vianu) are valued both by emphasising their theoretical characteristics and by extracting subterranean significances of the text, or through the excursion inside the historical context. Equally exciting are the chronicles of several books of authors belonging to the cultural space from Cluj, like Ion Pop, Ion Vartic, Irina Petraş, Aurel Sasu, Mircea Petean, Radu Mareş, Mihai Dragolea, Cornel Robu, etc. In a register of the admiring affinities are written the critical texts consecrated to Paul Cornea, Marin Mincu, Adrian Marino or Mircea Horia Simionescu. Still, we have to state the fact that it is about an admiration from where the fastidious pose does not miss, the attention to detail or the tonality of the analysed texts. Characterised by a „critical, loose and substantial freedom”, and through „an energetic, clear and cursive style, of an experienced swordsman’s elegance” (Adrian Marino), Ştefan Borbély is, as it was stated by the same hermeneut of the literary ideas, a follower of the idea’s critic, way which is found not only within his comparative studies, but also in the literary chronicle, of a distinct conceptual pose, where, starting from several cases or concrete literary forms, the author accedes to the idea tic layer of the book as a whole, proving extreme caution in the nuances of the text and making, in the same time, the necessary connections, between the works, the literary époques or the creation styles, in a way which refuses any constraint, any interpretative abuse, any axiological relaxation, still without avoiding a vague, playful sense, a certain premeditated posture, a certain sense, inconspicuous, of the paradox.

Iulian BOLDEA

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Daniela Gîfu, *Symbolic Violence in Electoral Speech / Violența simbolică în discursul electoral*, Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj Napoca, 2011

From the start, let us notice that the entire content from the volume *Symbolic Violence in Electoral Discourse* by Daniela Gifu (Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj Napoca, 2011) is built by an interdisciplinary approach, where the effort and the spirit of synthesis is used to build up a skeleton of new theoretical constructions, employing concepts and knowledge from a vast circle of Humanities such as: Politics, Sociology, Philosophy, Rhetoric, Theory of communications, Semiotics, Linguistics, etc. It is a modern approach of this phenomenon of communications, putting together, techniques and strategy of discursiveness used throughout history, starting from ancient Greeks up to present, when schools and models of American communication, like The School from Paolo Alto and the new inventions on European Rhetoric within The School of Brussels and the μ Group are recognized.

Explaining the expression *symbolic violence* on a social background, and especially on the electoral background, the author uses the writings of Pierre de Bourdieu, from which she tries to use the definition of this as "imposing form", then she stops on hermeneutic essays of philosopher Paul Ricoeur, on which the meaning of this expression is that of "manipulating action" and eventually she dwells on this complex hue.

In the first part of the book, the author is making clear the basic notions of discursive manifestation. Able to see that written press is like a mirror for society, the author considers that today's society is a live factor of changes, using for this a quote of Hyppolyte Taine, which considered it as a "corridor in which the wind of history is passing". From this perspective, an analysis of the entire discourse is performed, putting the accent on text structure and on journalistic style, suggesting that both have a degree of subjectivism. Next, political discourse is analyzed, also through the lenses of Political science, Rhetorics and symbolic configuration, the last one used when the political discourse is becoming a discourse of power. A vivid description of written press is made, highlighting its features and making a description of its typology.

Discussing the specific problems of modern discourse, the author finds out that everything is discourse an discursiveness, starting from private life and up to the academic speech: science became an rigorous discourse; art – a figurative and pathetic discourse; Philosophy – an analysis of discourse. Most of the people only give attention to what they say, but they neglect the form they are using to express what they want to say. These forms of communication are explained in relation to the ideal communication situation which German philosopher Jürgen Habermas used. In this particular section are summarized some forms of discursive translation, when the postmodern society uses more and more Semiotics and Linguistics, the author referring to Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of signs and to the Logics of language imposed by Ludwig Wittgenstein. With these the politician may gain legitimacy, authority and prestige. Daniela Gifu states that the political life is structured in language facts – political discourses, political ideas, symbols - all of these being meant to persuade, to start passions, to convince someone into doing something. An entire form of language is being sketched with the precision of one who is a specialist in communication. In the final part the author shows a series of examples of political discourse, proven to be *active presence* in the pages of written press, or as slogan or figure of speech, the latter coming from the sphere of Rhetorics.

The second part of the book tries to highlight the discursive strategies used in Politics and the author also highlights a phenomenon which is part of the Romanian politics: the use of too many American terms in the discourse and also that the fact that Politics has become a public practice, when actually it should be subordinated to the public space. The model of persuasion specific to Aristotle's *Rhetorics* and to the *New Rhetorics is used*, the last one discovered by Chaïm Perelman and his assistant Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. Daniela Grifu lists three types of logical methods: positive, negative and neutral. Another series of arguments is formed by those based on *acts, examples, authority* and *various analogies*. The use of sophisms, of sentences with aporetic content with good examples is treated with maximum of exigency, as the author analyzes numerous lines of paralogisms, lines which I would risk calling "a negative Decalogue".

In the third part the main keys of information in Politics are presented, and the mechanisms through which act upon human sensibility are explained— the social is seen from a psychological perspective, especially when modalities and techniques that are not so plausible are employed, like gossip or disinformation. But we are warned that everything becomes more dangerous when the events are opened up to a psychological key and the politic event "evolves" from dark to darker, the social scene being brought face to face with numerous manipulation methods used by the politic scene: from false surveys and the creation of a better image for a politician to a cunning change of public interest through festive vote

The fourth part of the book is strictly technical, built upon the way in which a discourse should be constructed, the author referring to ancient lessons of about Oratory, on the heritage left to humanity by Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, in which their work scheme is very functional and easy: *introduction*, continuing with the *discourse* (narration of the acts, their confirmation or (neglection) and in the end the *peroration* (a summary of the acts, pathetic presentation of them and conclusion). The changes that occur in modern political discourse eventually highlight the pragmatic side of their development and the need for more persuasion, as in the case of the Ancients, aiming to make the political discourse a symbolic manifestation of power, building an entire "route" to persuade the public, with an energy well organized in "three-strokes" of action or in three facets, as the author calls them, the descriptive, evolutive and the prescriptive.

In the fifth part, the author performs an analysis of the content of written press, by using the American methods of Harold D. Lasswell and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, who initiated their work during the war at Princeton University, beginning from the panic that was installed among more than a million citizens, who after hearing on the radio *The War of the Worlds* by science-fiction author H. G. Wells, on the 30th October 1938, in which martians invaded the Earth, thought that the invasion is real, so they ran from their houses and cities. Although not thoroughly described, elements used to impress the public, like the *bandwagon effect*, are described - according to Lazarsfeld those who vote are always tempted to be on the side of the winner; *the theory of the silence spiral* (Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann): those who share the dominant point of view, are not reluctant in sharing, but those who have different points of view keep the silence just because they are frightened by those with the dominant point of view, and the *magic bullet theory* (Lasswell) according to which humans are conducted by instincts so every human being acts in the same way.

Finally, the author performs a strict analysis of the 2009 presidential elections from Romania, based on data collected from the press and with a graphical representation generated with LIWC-2007 software, which lead to a final resolution: the description of the way in which these discursive methods are used in the sphere of Politics in order to determine the final results, and these results may affect intention, opinions and even feelings.

On the whole, although it appears to be too dense, Daniela Grifu's book keeps the original track, giving numerous informations, some of them new even to those who are familiar with the theme of communication and public space – a field that has not been well researched yet.

Eugeniu NISTOR

Cornel Ungureanu, *The Secret History of Romanian Literature / Istoria secretă a literaturii române*, Editura Aula, Braşov, 2007

One of Cornel Ungureanu's experimental books is written on a mysterious Poetics of criticism and secret cultural code, presumably able to open doors through unseen fields of cultural history. *Istoria secretă a literaturii române / The Secret History of Romanian Literature* is a direct application that sets in practice the matrix-concept of his critical system, while at the same time remaining faithful to his logics of revision, revisitation or upgrade of some hypothesis, methods and previous results. A sort of upgrade which also works autoreferentially – since the book becomes a hypertext of some previous texts, in which the demonstration makes direct or indirect reference to texts written before. This kind of recontextualization has high implications on the text used for *Istoria secreta...* and on the book itself, which becomes the last version of the concept used for the first time. Actually, the analogy used between the geography of literature and a secret history was previewed some five years earlier, in the first volume of Cornel Ungureanu's *Geografia literară / The Literary Geography*.

In an article that has some interesting suggestions concerning Cornel Ungureanu's book, Bianca Burța-Cernat notices that *Istoria secretă a literaturii române* works as a 'preface' to a 'propedeutic' for a larger project of the author. It is interesting that although it is the last from the series, at the moment when the article was written (2008, March), the *Istoria secretă...* is perceived as an introduction. Furthermore, it is seen as a Propedeutics of some previous books which are upgraded.

Beyond the 'disclosures' intended to be made - most of them inciting - *Istoria secretă...* manages to bring into a central position writers which were marginalized or their works have never been officially recorded (like the avant-garde writer Ionathan X. Uranus, Vasile Lovinescu or Mircea Streinul). These are writers who can win an identity quest that attempts to rebuild a plausible literary history, starting from regaining the original contexts of these works. A regaining which turns, with every book written by Cornel Ungureanu, into a larger range of methods used but also into a larger range of cultural information.

The great achievement of this book lies in its ability to perceive the history of Romanian literature in a new way, attempting to fit into a Postmodernist concept. The same Bianca-

Burța Cernat says that with Manolescu's *Istoria critică... / The Critical History...* a concept of making literary history ends and this book is a new way to make literary history, a way that will eventually become the only one correct. Partially, the change of concepts is authentic: from that of a history built upon a canonical modernity, of an immutable system of value judgments, with official verdicts dictated by a Critic; however, Cornel Ungureanu suggests an alternative, if not the contrary: a history of revealing cutout, a subjective approach. For an enclosure to the esthetic canon all that is necessary is the absolute opening to alternative and plurality provided by literary geography, the main concept in the new cultural history.

And the goal of this open project of Cornel Ungureanu may be seen in the very structure of his book. The demonstrations skim over long circular hikes, painting orbits around some productive hypotheses; finally there is an irradiative center of the entire work of the writer, a set of theses on a sort of philosophy of culture and identity, understood as a network of influences of multiple identities, and the book perpetually remakes this centre, as in a nostalgic trance, a reincarnation of original ideas in a utopian search of their best versions. The result is an unfinished series of explorations on a historical site seen as an ensemble which makes a matrix assimilable to a grand hypertext

Dumitru-Mircea BUDA