

A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF POSTMODERNISM

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Abstract: Postmodernism offers a new perspective on Romanian literature in the western context, anticipating the principles of philosophy to be pluralistic, that is, of the communist regime and the transition to current and literary democracy and cultural pursuit remains identified in the programmatic and postmodern diversity.

Postmodernism has experienced the most intense proclamations of its end and several critical perspectives after 1990. It is important to note that the first debate on this topic in the Romanian cultural space took place four years earlier from that moment, on the occasion of the emergence of a special number of "Critical Books" dedicated to the literary current mentioned above. The aim was also to trace directions that would outline an evolution of the word postmodernism and its derivatives, which began circulating in our national culture even before 1986.

Keywords: perspectives, transition, cognition, postmodernism, conscience.

The postmodern current of 1980, with isolated antecedents from the second half of the 1960s, „synchronizes Romanian literature with the western ones, anticipating and then accompanying by its pluralistic philosophy the exit from the communist regime and the transition to the current democracy, and the literary models and Subsequent cultural remains remain to be identified in the programmatic diversity of postmodernity”¹.

In the following lines is presented the literary space in the Romanian context, a brief history of the circumstances of postmodernism in the specialized Romanian criticism, as well as the debates generated by the appearance of the term in the territory of our country. Although postmodernism is not the subject of this work, we realize that "any attempt to circumscribe a phenomenon remains incomplete without the dissociation not only of precedent, but also of what followed”².

The nineties brought more critical perspectives and especially proclamations of the end of postmodernism, seeing the same triumphant pleasure. The first important debate on this topic in Romania took place in 1986, on the occasion of the emergence of a special number of "Critical Notebooks" dedicated to postmodernism. An exposition of the evolution of the word "postmodernism and its derivatives that began to circulate in the Romanian cultural press" before 1986 was made by Ion Bogdan Lefter in several articles included in the volume Postmodernism. From the file of a cultural "battle", as well as in the anthology of Gheorghe Crăciun, the Competition continues. The '80s generation in theoretical texts.

It should be added that Magda Cârnelci also wrote an article that was addressed to this topic, originally published in the magazine "Literary Romania", entitled *About Postmodernism in Eastern Europe and reprinted under different titles in various publications*. Magda Cârnelci subtly observes an interesting situation, namely that of the ideological nuance of the term in Eastern countries. This seems to be a point of view with broad analysis perspectives, but which is not the subject of this paper.

¹ Maria-Ana Tupan, *Discursul modernist*, București, Editura Cartea Românească, 2000, p. 25-26.

² Linda Hutcheon, *Poetica postmodernismului*, București, Editura Univers, 2002, p. 17.

Postmodernism does not learn that all cultural practices have a subtext ideological care determines the conditions necessary for the law to produce meaning. Taking into account the confusion and vague air associated with the term itself, postmodernism is „a contradictory phenomenon that can be cared for and abused, installed and then maintained concepts that can be taken care of (...) Postmodernism cannot simply be synonymous with contemporaneity and not only the description of a true international cultural woman, since it is, first and foremost, European and American”³.

The first use of the term postmodernism in our country is that of Andrei Brezeanu, in a 1974 article about American postmodern writers American post-moderns - a path to the future⁴. It is reported that this article was published in a time when the discussion about postmodernism had just begun to expand in the United States. It is not yet a question of Romanian postmodernism, but Andrei Brezeanu has the merit of highlighting a new reality of American literature, which, in a short time, will reach international scope, even exceeding the sphere of literature.

The term postmodernism reappears six years later in a preface Poem as a gesture of translator Stefan Stoenescu to a volume of poems from Frank O'Hara. Stoenescu also creates a typological scheme of postmodernism in relation to modernism: „The post-modernist poet descends again into the street, a gesture by which he assumes existence in his own name, renouncing the armor of impersonality. The poem becomes a record of the very act by which existence is circumscribed in the poem. The distinction with modernism is clear: we have nothing to do with the cerebral reflexivity of the creative act”⁵. As Ion Bogdan Lefter writes, Stefan Stoenescu is the one who, in 1983, on the occasion of the Critical Colloquies of the magazine "Transylvania" in Sibiu, realizes a synthesis of the debate on postmodernism in the American cultural space.

Very important are the contributions of „the first optician writer who used the term postmodernism”⁶, Alexandru Mușina. In 1982, in an article from „Astra" (Poetry - a chance ...), the concept highlights a reality of the new Romanian poetry, as opposed to the modernist „ascetic" model. The museum highlights two directions of this new Romanian poetic attitude: „a synchronization reaction (not from the spirit of imitation, as the eternal conservatives insinuate, but from the need to express a certain sensitivity and a specific vision and as a result of the evolution of post-war Romanian poetry). with this poetic opening”⁷. Mușina returns to the idea of postmodernism in a roundtable on the theme of today's poetry: „the poets of my generation have shifted the center of gravity of the discourse from imaginary and language, to the existence of the ordinary man, to his problems, ours, our daily lives. . Here I find that there is real originality. We are no longer dealing with modern poetry as defined by Hugo Friedrich, but with post-modernist poetry. An important break, I think. ” The discussion continues in an article from 1985, the author highlighting the playful tendency and the "complex directness of postmodern poetry”⁸.

One of the recognized literary critics, the one who uses the term postmodernism is Nicolae Manolescu. In a 1983 article entitled *Poetic Postmodernism*, Manolescu talks about the post-1960 poetry whose main spirit is not innovative, but a continuator. Manolescu creates

³ Andrei Brezeanu, *Post-modernii americani- o traieectorie spre viitor*, în „Secolul 20”, nr. 8 (163), 1974, p. 8.

⁴ Ștefan Stoenescu, *Poemul ca gest*, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei „bătălii” culturale*, p. 5.

⁵ George Bădărău, *Postmodernismul românesc*, Iași, Editura Institutului European, 2007, p. 11.

⁶ Alexandru Mușina, *Poezia- o șansă...*, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei „bătălii” culturale*, p. 24.

⁷ Alexandru Mușina, *Șase „teze” și o „addenda”*, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei „bătălii” culturale*, p. 8-9.

⁸ Nicolae Manolescu, *O ușă întredeschisă (Teme 6)*, București, Editura Cartea Românească, 1986, p. 108.

a classification of Romanian poetry, but several theoretical inaccuracies can be observed. Postmodernism is framed together with the avant-garde in a category of modern poetry (although modern is also considered symbolist poetry), and a little further postmodernism is defined by opposition to modernism. The critic comes back later adding that „the terms themselves should be revised”⁹. As Ion Bogdan Lefter notes, Nicolae Manolescu then used the term in several chronicles.

Mircea Cărtărescu appreciates that postmodernism responds to a survey of young people's literature in 1985. Cărtărescu admitted that postmodernism represents a possibility of regeneration of poetry and distinguishes between the characteristics of postmodernism textualism, biography and stylistic synchrony. Also in 1985, Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu refers to postmodernism in an article from „Literary talks” (Modernism at work). The case of Umberto Eco with references to the Name of the rose is analyzed on this occasion. A series of conceptual inaccuracies can be observed in articles signed by Cristian Livescu (Textual postmodernism, Story space, Nichita Stănescu - post-modern). Livescu uses as a synonym of textual postmodernism the formula of textualist trans-modernism. Also, Nichita Stănescu is considered „the most important post-modern poet so far in our literature”¹⁰, after a previous article had classified him as a modernist.

A clearer and more documented attitude seems to have Monica Spiridon who translated an essay by Malcolm Bradbury. She defined postmodernism as „the number one topic in the culture of our time”¹¹. The author also made an overview of the theoretical debates on postmodernism, with a large number of international references.

Ion Bogdan Lefter also remembers Eugen Simion in the context of the debates about postmodernism, the critic applying the term in characterizing Leonid Dimov's poetry. Another critic (Radu G. Țeposu) used postmodernism referring to Marin Sorescu. In his turn, Mircea Martin appreciated in the sole criticism that „the poetry of the postmodern age: a poetry that comes from culture, a poetry of poetry, of a playful, ironic attitude not once, and less of reverence and metaphorical unfolding. Daily allusions and political implications abound”¹². Referring to postmodernism, Mircea Iorgulescu considers it as „the most recent terminological pass-through”¹³, and Livius Ciocârlie presents him as „demonetized before being clarified”¹⁴.

The difficulties presented by the reception of the concept in the Romanian space, before the debates in "Critical Notebooks", were highlighted by those presented so far. The term postmodernism was not yet quite well clarified and commonplace with us, hence the inaccuracies in its definition and use.

As already stated, a defining role in the evolution of Romanian postmodernism was debated by the large number dedicated to it in the magazine "Critical Caeties", no. 1-2 / 1986. Leading personalities of Romanian culture have presented articles in various fields and have now translated for the first time some fundamental texts, belonging to John Barth, Gerald

⁹ Cristian Livescu, *Nichita Stănescu – post-modernul*, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei „bătălii” culturale*, p. 28.

¹⁰ Monica Spiridon, *Modernisme și postmodernisme...*, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei „bătălii” culturale*, p.28.

¹¹ Mircea Martin, *Singura critică*, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei „bătălii” culturale*, p. 29.

¹² Mircea Iorgulescu, *Autoportret liric*, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei „bătălii” culturale*, p. 29.

¹³ Livius Ciocârlie, *Critica de artă ca „introducere la un mod de a fi”*, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei „bătălii” culturale*, p. 29.

¹⁴ Ioan Buduca, *Undă sau corpuscul*, apud Gheorghe Crăciun, *Competiția continuă (Generația '80 în texte teoretice)*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești, 1999, p. 395.

Graff, Jean-François Lyotard, Ihab Hassan and Guy Scarpetta. The articles published there remained a reference point in the specialized Romanian criticism. We will continue to review some of them, trying to clear the main opinions conveyed at the time about the concept of postmodernism. In the article Datasheet for the analysis of a concept of Ion Bogdan Leter, in which the young author from then tried to analyze the uses of the term, the inaccuracies and confusions that existed at the beginning of the postmodernist movement in the Romanian space are highlighted.

An interesting article was published in that issue of "Critical Notebooks" Ioan Buduca (Wave or corpus). The author considers that, first of all, postmodernism "is a postulate: suppose there is something that could be called postmodernism"¹⁵. The principle of postmodernism is considered to be a holographic one, and the literary model analyzed is Borges (following in John Barth's *The Literature of Replenishment*). The problem of defining the concept arises, and the author wonders when we can really know what postmodernism is. The term is defined as an answer to the human need of „an epistem of the spirit, perhaps even of a wave type and the corpus"¹⁶.

A skeptical attitude exposes Mircea Mihăieș who, in the article entitled *More-than-modernism*, considers postmodernism „an ambiguous term, difficult to know when, where and how to use it. At first glance, he is only one of the myriad - isms that make, in their own way, for good, for evil, an unusual history of the theoretical thinking of this century"¹⁷. The author believes that the difficulties in defining postmodernism stem from the vagueness of the term modernism, which covers a very wide area of definition. Before giving a definition of postmodernism, Mircea Mihăieș tries to answer the question „What is modernism?" The author does not intend to offer conclusions, but to create premises for further research.

In the article *Poetry and psychic* (theses on modernism and postmodernism of poetry), Călin Vlasie puts face to face modernist poetry and postmodernist poetry, the latter considering it as „the present moment of poetry (...) the beginning of a future forced to- and redefine psychology, conception and structure"¹⁸. Poetry would be a kind of "psyche" capable of matching the formal availability with the psychological content appropriate to the new humanism.

The critic Radu G. Țeposu proposes, for the definition of postmodernism, the formula of "returned romance". He sees in postmodernism the tendency of a reconciliation between romanticism (with its idea of totality) and modernism (characterized by fragmentarism, empty transcendence, individualism). Modernist aestheticism would thus be grafted onto a spiritual background borrowed from the Romantics. The author notes the recuperative inclination of postmodernism, the eclecticism and the founding vocation of the text¹⁹. By exposing the articles in the aforementioned number of "Critical Specifications" it can be appreciated that the analysis revealed pros and cons, some inaccuracies, but also some proposals for defining the concept.

The debates around the postmodern term have continued even after 1986, even though they have not been completed so far, although there are voices who appreciate that the talks

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 399.

¹⁶ Mircea Mihăieș, *Mai-mult-ca-modernismul*, apud Gheorghe Crăciun, *Competiția continuă (Generația '80 în texte teoretice)*, p. 415.

¹⁷ Călin Vlasie, *Poezie și psihic (teze despre modernismul și postmodernismul poeziei)*, apud Gheorghe Crăciun, *Competiția continuă (Generația '80 în texte teoretice)*, p. 194.

¹⁸ Radu G. Țeposu, *Un romantism întors*, apud Gheorghe Crăciun, *Competiția continuă (Generația '80 în texte teoretice)*, p. 409-414.

¹⁹ Mihaela Constantinescu, *Post/postmodernismul. Cultura divertismentului*, București, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2001, p. 18.

with them ended in the early 1990s that the discussion was open. There are opinions that „currently proclaim the existence of post-postmodernism”²⁰.

After the appearance of the special issue of "Critical Notebooks" dedicated to postmodernism, many other magazines continued the discussion, but not to the same proportions, feeling the need for clarifications and completions. A suggestive example is the case of Ștefan Borbely in the article *Postmodernism - a (cultural) timely model?*, Published in 1987. The author reviews the concept internationally, mentioning names like Gerald Graff, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Ihab Hassan. Andrei Pleșu, Eugen Simion, Monica Spiridon, Ștefan Stoenescu are among the Romanians. Also mentioned are features of postmodernism such as „the return of the author, the multi-perspective, a slip to psychology at the expense of reason, tolerant pluralism, concessive democratism, eclectism”²¹.

We note the attitude of Alexandru Mușina in the article *Postmodernism, a beautiful story*, published in 1988, although written in 1986. The tone used is ironic. The writer criticizes the Romanian rush to use a term like that of postmodernism without a certain foundation. At that time, translations of the fundamental texts of Western authors in the field were non-existent, with the exception of fragments that appeared sporadically through magazines. The museum considers the categorizations made with the help of this term unfair by critics such as Nicolae Manolescu, Eugen Simion or Radu G. Țeposu. The author does not agree with the assertions that „all contemporary poetry would be postmodernist (Nicolae Manolescu), and Marin Sorescu is a postmodern author (Radu G. Țeposu) or with a postmodern reading by Leonid Dimov (Eugen Simion)”²².

The debates on postmodernism continued after 1989. Fundamental works have been translated from such authors as Jean-François Lyotard, Gianni Vattimo, Francis Fukuyama, Linda Hutcheon and others. Sound articles were published in a number of the magazine „Euresis" dedicated to postmodernism in Romanian culture²³.

We ask the question to what extent postmodernism continues to be a defining feature for today's culture, referring in particular to the literary field, where we know the largest circulation). In an article published in 2001 in the magazine „Euphorion", Cornel Moraru takes a retrospective look at the Romanian prose of the past decade and notes "the same mosaic of postmodern tendencies”²⁴.

Postmodernism today is one that lacks the ideological-subversive load of the 1980s. It has become a widespread term in the advertising jargon, a kind of „hat" under which different realities come in and at the same time a point of our desired „alignment". by Western standards, but which „entered a certain decline in the mid-1980s”²⁵.

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²⁰ Ștefan Borbely, *Postmodernismul – un model cultural oportun?*, apud Gheorghe Crăciun, *Competiția continuă (Generația '80 în texte teoretice)*, p. 389-392.

²¹ Alexandru Mușina, *Postmodernismul, o frumoasă poveste*, apud Gheorghe Crăciun, *Competiția continuă (Generația '80 în texte teoretice)*, p. 428.

²² vezi „Euresis, cahiers roumains d'études littéraires”, *Le postmodernisme dans la culture roumaine*, nr. 1-2/1995.

²³ Cornel Moraru, *Recuperări în proza ultimului deceniu*, în „Euphorion”, nr. 1-2/2001, p. 4.

²⁴ Mihaela Anghel Irimia, *Dialoguri postmoderne*, București, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1999, p. 326.

²⁵ Andrei Brezeanu, *Post-modernii americani- o traiectorie spre viitor*, în “Secolul 20”, nr. 8 (163), 1974.

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