

## POSTMODERNISM AS A BROAD MOVEMENT

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*Abstract: The eighth literary phenomenon, accompanied by the atmosphere of the new poetry, is formed in 1977, when the beginning of a nucleus of the living and innovative Romanian literary life. “Cenaclul de luni” (The Cenacle of Monday) had been for seven years the nucleus of the consciousness of generation and the expression of the sensibility of the world, shaped by the poetry written by the members of this literary circle, led by Nicolae Manolescu.*

*The space we refer to recognizes postmodernism as a viable interpretation method, and the action of writers coming out of a long silence is a way of recovering values, traditions, patterns abandoned or denied in previous decades. Postmodern poetry is covered up by the biographical and real element that blends in an absolutely spectacular way with ludic, ironic, humorous, symbolic, and even fantasy.*

*Keywords: generation, cenacle, interpretation, conscience, biographical*

In this article we intend to present a short history of postmodernism's occurrences in the Romanian specialty critique as well as the discussions that the emergence of the term has generated in our country. The first important debate from Romania on this issue took place in 1986, with the occasion of the emergence of a special number of "Critical Books" dedicated to postmodernism. A presentation of the evolution of the term before 1986 was made by Ion Bogdan Lefter in several articles included in the volume of Postmodernism. From the file of a cultural "battle" as well as in the anthology of Gheorghe Crăciun's book, *Competition continues. Generation '80 in theoretical texts*.

A first Romanian application of the term postmodernism is that of Andrei Brezeanu, in an article from 1974 about American postmodernist writers: *American Postmodernists - a trajectory to the future*<sup>1</sup>. The concept of postmodernism reappears six years later in a preface (the poem as a gesture) of the translator Stefan Stoenescu to a volume of poems by Frank O'Hara. The Romanian translator also draws a typological sketch of postmodernism in relation to modernism: "The post-modernist poet descends again in the street, a gesture by which he assumes existence in his own name, giving up the armor of impersonalism.

The poem becomes a record of the very act by which the existence is circumscribed in it. The distinction to modernity is clear: we do not have to do with the cerebral reflexivity of the creative act".<sup>2</sup> As Ion Bogdan Lefter writes, the same is Stefan Ștefan Stoenescu who, in 1983, on the occasion of the Critical Colloquium of "*Transilvania*"

<sup>1</sup> Andrei Brezeanu, *Post-modernii americani- o traiectorie spre viitor*, în "Secolul 20", nr. 8 (163), 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Ștefan Stoenescu, *Poemul ca gest*, prefață la Frank O'Hara, *Meditații în imponderabil*, Editura Univers, București, 1980, p. 5, apud. Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei bătălii culturale*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești, 2000.

magazine in Sibiu makes a synthesis of the debate on postmodernism in the American cultural space.

Of the consecrated literary critics, the one who uses the concept of postmodernism is Nicolae Manolescu. In an article in 1983 titled *Poetry Postmodernism*, the critic speaks of post-1960 poetry, whose main spirit is not innovative, but a follower. Manolescu carries out a categorization of Romanian poetry, but there are several theoretical inaccuracies. Postmodernism is framed with avant-garde in a category of modern poetry (although modern is also considered symbolic poetry), and something further postmodernism is defined by opposition to modernism. The critic then goes on to add that "the terms themselves should be reviewed."<sup>3</sup> As Ion Bogdan Lefter remarks, Nicolae Manolescu then used the term in several chronicles.

Mircea Cărtărescu speaks about postmodernism in response to an inquiry into the literature of young people in 1985. He saw in postmodernism a possibility of regenerating poetry and distinguishing between the characteristics of postmodernism, textualism, biography and stylistic synchronicity. A clearer and more documented position seems to have Monica Spiridon who made a translation of an essay by Malcolm Bradbury. It defined postmodernism as the "number one subject in the culture of our time".<sup>4</sup> The author also gave a general overview of theoretical debates on postmodernism, with a large number of international references.

Ion Bogdan Lefter also remembers Eugen Simion in the context of the debates on postmodernism, the critic applied the term in the characterization of Leonid Dimov's poetry. Another critic (Radu G. Țeposu) used postmodernism referring to Marin Sorescu. In turn, Mircea Martin spoke in the *Only Criticism* about the poetry of postmodern age: a poem that comes from culture, a poetry of poetry, a playful, ironic attitude not once, and less of reverie and metaphorical unleash. Everyday implications and political implications abound in its content."<sup>5</sup>

Referring to postmodernism, Mircea Iorgulescu considers it "the latest terminological passe-partout"<sup>6</sup>, and Livius Ciocârlie presents it as "demonetised before it is clear"<sup>7</sup>. We have been able to observe from what has been presented so far the difficulties encountered by the acceptance of the term on the Romanian realm, before the discussions in "Caiete critice" which we will present in the following paragraphs. The concept of postmodernism was not yet sufficiently clarified and settled in us, hence the imprecision in its definition and use.

As we have already mentioned, a defining role in the evolution of Romanian postmodernism had its debates in the large number dedicated to it in the "Caiete critice",

<sup>3</sup> Nicolae Manolescu, *O ușă întredeschisă (Teme 6)*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1986, p. 108, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Monica Spiridon, *Modernisme și postmodernisme...*, în "România literară", nr. 47/1985, p. 20, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, op. cit., p.28.

<sup>5</sup> Mircea Martin, *Singura critică*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1986, p. 40, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Mircea Iorgulescu, *Autoportret liric*, în "România literară", nr. 37/ 1986, p. 5, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> Livius Ciocârlie, *Critica de artă ca "introducere la un mod de a fi"*, în "România literară", nr. 41/1986, apud Ion Bogdan Lefter, op. cit., p. 29.

no. 1-2 / 1986. Top personalities of Romanian culture have presented articles in various fields and have been translated for the first time in a few fundamental texts by John Barth, Gerald Graff, Jean-François Lyotard, Ihab Hassan and Guy Scarpetta.

The articles published here have remained a reference point in the Romanian specialized critique. We will continue to look at some of them, trying to release the main ideas that were circulated in the era about the concept of postmodernism. An interesting article published in that issue of "Caiete critice" John Buduca (Wave or corpuscle). The author believes that before any postmodernism "there is a postulate: suppose there is something that could be called postmodernism."<sup>8</sup>

The principle of postmodernism is considered to be a holographic one, and the literary model analyzed is Borges (in the footsteps of John Barth in *The Literature of Replenishment*). There is a question of defining the term, and the author wonders when we can really know what postmodernism is. The term is defined as a response to the human need of "an episteme of the spirit, perhaps of a wave and corpuscle type."<sup>9</sup>

A more skeptical position has Mircea Mihăieș. In the article entitled "*Mai-mult-ca-modernismul*", he considers postmodernism "an ambiguous term, hard to know when, where and how to use it. At first glance he is but one of the innumerable *-isms* that make up, in their own way, a bad, insoluble history of the theoretical thinking of this century."<sup>10</sup> The author believes that the difficulties in defining postmodernism stem from the imprecision 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 formulate conclusions, but to provide prerequisites for further research.

In the article *Poezie și psihic (teze despre modernismul și postmodernismul poeziei)*, Calin Vlasie puts forward modernist poetry and postmodern poetry, the latter considering it "the current moment of poetry", "the beginning of a future bound to redefine its psychology, conception and structure."<sup>11</sup> Poetry would be a sort of "psycheism" capable of matching the formal availability and the psychological content appropriate to the new humanism. The critic Radu G. Țeposu proposes for the definition of postmodernism the formula of "romance returned". He sees in postmodernism the tendency of a conciliation between romanticism (with its idea of totality) and modernism (characterized by fragmentarism, empty transcendence, individualism). Modernist aesthetics would graft on a spiritual background borrowed from romantics. The author notes the recurring inclination of postmodernism, eclecticism and the vocation of the text.<sup>12</sup>

We will stop here by presenting the articles in the forementioned "Caietele critice". The analysis so far has revealed pros and cons, some inaccuracies, but also

<sup>8</sup> Ioan Buduca, *Undă sau corpuscul*, în Gheorghe Crăciun, *Competiția continuă (Generația '80 în texte teoretice)*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești, 1999, p. 395.

<sup>9</sup> ibidem, p. 399.

<sup>10</sup> Mircea Mihăieș, *Mai-mult-ca-modernismul*, în Gheorghe Crăciun, op. cit., p. 415.

<sup>11</sup> Călin Vlasie, *Poezie și psihic (teze despre modernismul și postmodernismul poeziei)*, în Gheorghe Crăciun, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>12</sup> Radu G. Țeposu, *Un romantism întors*, în Gheorghe Crăciun, op. cit., p. 409-414.

some proposals for defining the concept. The discussion of post-modernism continued after 1986, and it has not been concluded until now, though there are voices saying that it would end in the early 1990s. The bibliography in the field is steadily rising: proof that the discussion still open. There are opinions that proclaim the post-postmodernism.<sup>13</sup>

Today's postmodernism is devoid of the ideological-subversive load of the 1980s. It has become a fairly widespread term in the journalistic jargon, a kind of "chapeau" under which various realities enter and at the same time a point of our desired "alignment" to Western standards.

A discussion of Romanian postmodernism cannot bypass an implicit reference to the eightieth generation with which it has often been associated. There have been many debates on this issue, with both "insiders" (eighty-six themselves) and "outsiders" (elder critics or very young authors who have asserted in recent years).<sup>14</sup>

In many cases, the eighth-century writers were attributed to the postmodernist emblem. This is the case of Gheorghe Perian who publishes a book entitled *Postmodern Romanian Writers*. Without giving a definition of postmodernism, the author seems to mark the equality between eightieth and postmodernism. Commenting on the title of the paper, Mihaela Ursa notes that he "announces not a discussion of a generation, but an inventory of postmodern Romanian writers", so a paradigm unit and, perhaps poetic, not necessarily related to the idea of generation."<sup>15</sup> The same sign of equality between the notions of eightieth and postmodernism is also put by Nicolae Manolescu, who has an enthusiastic attitude towards the young writers, to whom he will serve as a mentor.

As far as the eightieth are concerned, they have contradictory attitudes about the relationship between postmodernism and eightieth. We will still look at some of them. As Bogdan Ghiu remarked in the article "*The Historical Generation Project and the 80th Generation Project*", the eighth-century poets call themselves "*generation*", in other words they self-institutionalize. In this way, writers of the 1980s want to liquidate this complex of literary history masked in literary critique, "and they illustrate" the case of the great artist who produces his own quotations that do not exist."<sup>16</sup> According to Cristian Moraru, postmodern sensitivity was established as an "aesthetic standard through the 80s."<sup>17</sup> The author sets some features of the generation: self-reflection accompanied by irony and self-irony, self-writing, ludism as a paradoxical form of seriousness. The exponential writer of the young generation is considered to be Mircea Cărtărescu.

Ion Simuț places the eightieth generation under Caragiale's spiritual patronage by searching the daily theme, the language comic and the anonymous character. The critic believes that the new generation has "paced" with Caragiale because he is a great writer and for a "personal" reason: the aesthetic radicalism of the eightieth generation,

<sup>13</sup> vezi Mihaela Constantinescu, *Post/postmodernismul. Cultura divertismentului*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Among the older authors we mention Eugen Simion, Nicolae Manolescu, and among the young ones Mihaela Ursa.

<sup>15</sup> Mihaela Ursa, *Optzecismul și promisiunile postmodernismului*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești, 1999, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Bogdan Ghiu, *Proiectul istoric de generație și proiectul generației '80*, în Gheorghe Crăciun, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Cristian Moraru, *Către o nouă poetică*, în Gheorghe Crăciun, op. cit., p. 26.

the need to impose their originality in a striking way.<sup>18</sup> In the article "*Permanent Experiment Temptation*", Mircea Scarlat uses the "80's" and highlights the polemic character of the experiment. Its characteristic features would be: "irony, ludic vocation and ... especially, the permanent temptation of the artistic experiment."<sup>19</sup>

The critic Radu G. Țeposu makes a "radiography" of the generation in a book written in the 1980s, but published only in 1993: *The tragic and grotesque history of the dark new literary decade*. In his opinion, "the new poetry, as well as the prose, is under the sign of lost ingenuity, typically post-modern."<sup>20</sup> The author is aware that the program of the generation cannot be identical, but they belong to a common mentality. Radu G. Țeposu carries out a categorization of the eightieth writers according to a thematic criterion: the prosaic daily and the buffoon; the gnomes and esoteric, the manners; abstract and hermetic fantasy; the crisis of interiorization, the sarcastic and ironic pathos; the theatrical and histrionic criticism, the comedy of literature; refined sentimentalists. For Ion Bogdan Lefter postmodernism is a current characteristic of the eightieth generation that synchronizes Romanian and Western literature: "For about two decades, the postmodern current (since 1980, with isolated antecedents since the second half of the 1960s) continues to resynchronize literature Romanian and Western ones, anticipating and then accompanying through its pluralist philosophy the exit from the communist regime and the transition to the current democracy. The subsequent literary and cultural patterns remain to be identified in the programmatic diversity of postmodernity."<sup>21</sup>

Mircea Cărtărescu reveals the specificity of the relationship between eightieth and postmodernism at the beginning of the chapter *The eighth poetry in the great work Romanian postmodernism*: "How not the optometry, but postmodernism is the subject of the present work, and how the distinction between these two facts of literary history seems to me absolutely necessary obviously, I will only discuss tangentially the poetry aspects of the 1980s that do not fit into the postmodern paradigm. I will not obtain, therefore, a complete and complex picture of this genre, but rather an anamorphosis which, apart from any axiological control (except the basal: all the authors discussed are true and valuable poets), will highlight, a technique of "artificial coloring", the membership of poets, poems, isolated verses, even attitudes, atmospheres and / or postmodern techniques.<sup>22</sup> According to Cărtărescu, only certain eightieth-century writers can be considered postmodernists. He establishes a "central core" made up of poets belonging to "*Cenacle of Monday*" coordinated by Nicolae Manolescu (Mircea Cărtărescu, Traian T. Coșovei, Florin Iaru, Ion Stratan, Magdalena Ghica, Matei Vișniec, Doru Mareș, Alexandru Mușina, Bogdan Ghiu, Ion Bogdan Lefter, Romulus Bucur, Mariana Marin, Petru Romosan, Daniel Piscu).

<sup>18</sup> Ion Simuț, *O nouă școală a lui Caragiale*, în Gheorghe Crăciun, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> Mircea Scarlat, *Ispita permanentă a experimentului*, în Gheorghe Crăciun, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>20</sup> Radu G. Țeposu, *Istoria tragică & grotescă a întunecatului deceniu literar nouă*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1993, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Ion Bogdan Lefter, *Recapitularea modernității*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești, 2000, p. 195.

<sup>22</sup> Mircea Cărtărescu, op. cit., p. 369.

The author makes a distinction between soft postmodernism, characteristic of the eightieth and hard, marginal in the 1980s and central to the next decade. The author also formulates a definition of the postmodern eighth poem: "Thus, the eighth-century standard poem tends to be long, narrative, agglutinating, with a well-defined oral, special, aggressive (Beat-specific), ironic and self-imaginative to honesty, ludic, proving a lexical dexterity out of the ordinary (the non-modernist Romanian tradition), finally impregnated by cultural scholarships inserted by metatextual and self-referential processes."<sup>23</sup>

Judging by the presentation of all these opinions, I was able to observe the different points of view regarding the relationship between eightieth and postmodernism. We cannot deny the existence of an eight-generation "generation" in Romanian literature. Regarding the link between writers and postmodernism, most of the eighth-year-olds subscribed to the postmodernist program, as it had been in the West, but also responding to an internal need for paradigm shift in Romanian literature.

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<sup>23</sup> Mircea Cărtărescu, op. cit., p. 154.