

Comparative Literature in Contemporary Romania: Between National Self-Legitimation and International Recognition

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This paper examines the current state and prospects of comparative literature in Romania. Romanian literary studies in the 20th century was characterized by the subordination of comparative perspectives to the national literary historiography, the absence of a strong local methodological tradition, and the dominance of an essayistic and impressionistic brand of criticism. The study focuses on forms of institutionalization of comparative studies in postcommunist Romania (associations, research centers, journals, etc.) and the emergence of several comparative "schools" (particularly those in Timișoara, Cluj and Brașov).

Keywords: comparative literature / Romania / Romanian literary criticism / post-communism / institutionalization / internationalization

This study proposes a critical account of the current situation of comparative literature in Romania.¹ Such an endeavor is justified on at least two levels. On the one hand, a systematic survey of the current situation of Romanian comparatism is absent from international bibliography. Admittedly, at present, there are several very useful studies of the history of Romanian comparative literature. However, of these, many were published during the communist period (see, e.g., Dima and Papadima) and are no longer relevant nowadays because of their anachronism and the tendentious ideologization of their object. Furthermore, studies published over the past two decades are characterized by various deficiencies, such as the discontinuance of the investigation in the year 1990 (see, for instance, Cornea's 'La littérature', which, otherwise, remains the most pertinent outline of a history of Romanian comparatism), the lack of a rigorous delineation of the study object (as is the case of surveys which also cover the work of Romanian-born comparatists

who emigrated to the West) or a rather depthless approach to this topic (Ursa, 'Comparative').

On the other hand, my survey is not merely informative; rather, it approaches Romanian comparative studies as a paradigmatic case from at least three points of view: firstly, as an instance of the tension between the national and the transnational, typical of the so-called (semi)peripheral literary systems; secondly, as an expression of the methodological and informational lag still besetting some East-Central European cultures which have not yet completely emerged out of post-communism; finally, as a test of the difficult adjustment that marks literary cultures whose critical tradition still remains largely attached to essayism rather than to academic research.

The Institutional and Ideological Background of Romanian Comparative Studies

In order to understand the current state of Romanian comparatism, it is useful to start with a historical outline of its institutional and ideological backgrounds. Thus, in terms of its professionalization, the pre-institutionalized period must be distinguished from its disciplinization. The pre-institutionalized period, covering the span of one century (1846–1948), concerns the interval during which comparative literature was practiced in Romania without being established academically as a distinct discipline. The roots of this phenomenon can be traced back (approximately) to 1846, when the polymath Ion Heliade-Rădulescu launched the idea of an ambitious but utopian “Universal Library” which should make the grand oeuvres of classical and modern literatures accessible to Romanian readers. Although the rate of translations into Romanian was fairly high throughout the 19th century, exegesis was slow to follow suit. In this respect, an important moment is marked by the 1882 study dedicated by Titu Maiorescu, the most important critic of the era, to the reception of the first translations of Romanian literary works into an international language (German). Maiorescu’s study attempts to integrate such works in the allegedly European fad of the “popular novel” (**Literatura**). **Another significant moment is marked during the last decades of the 19th century by the activity of the Marxist critic C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea, who, influenced by Taine and Brandes, published many studies on translation policy and the succession of literary movements, and popularized in Romania a series of emerging literatures, such as the Russian, Scottish, Norwegian, Ukrainian and Polish. Conversely, in the first half of the 20th century, due to linguistic and political affinities, Romanian comparatism was dominated by the field of Romance studies,**

particularly by francophone concerns, as instantiated by the works of P. Eliade, N. I. Apostolescu, N. Iorga and O. Densusianu. Overall, before the communist period (when, as I show above, Romanian comparative studies becomes a blend of Marxist-Leninist clichés, history of ideas and forms, and disparate methods borrowed from *Nouvelle Critique*), comparative literature in Romania undergoes two methodological phases. The first one (1900s–1920s) is dominated by French positivism, concerned with the study of “themes” and “influences” (e.g., Eliade and Apostolescu), while the second one (1930s–1940s) marks an attempt to synthesize the efforts at renewal of the French school and the morphological researches of the German school (e.g., Tudor Vianu and D. Popovici).

In an institutionalized form, comparative literature emerges in Romania only after 1948, when, adopting the Soviet fashion, higher education institutions introduce “world literature” (*literatura universală*) as a discipline, to be taught in Bucharest by Vianu, in Iași by Al. Dima, and in Cluj by Popovici and Liviu Rusu. In the following years, the discipline is consolidated by the establishment of distinct chairs and departments at the main universities of Romania. Nonetheless, it is only after the end of socialist realism that an actual Romanian comparative literature emerges. Evidence of its professionalization is provided by the translation of the first foreign synopses of comparative literature, of which worth mentioning are *Littérature comparée* by Paul Van Tieghem (1966) and *Mimesis* by Erich Auerbach (1967). After 1970, the translation rate intensifies, owing to the recently established collection “Studii” of the Univers Publishing House (Terian, ‘Legalized’). Moreover, Romanian books begin to focus on the issues of comparative literature; of these, in a first phase, the significant ones are those by Tudor Vianu (*Studii*) and Al. Dima (*Conceptul; Principii*). In the 1970s–1980s, these works proliferate, following the activity of scholars such as Adrian Marino, Paul Cornea, Alexandru Duțu, Romul Munteanu, Vera Călin, Edgar Papu, Nicolae Balotă, Dan Grigorescu, Zoe Dumitrescu-Bușulenga, Ion Constantinescu, Livius Ciocârlie etc. (Cornea, ‘La littérature’ 120–134). At the same time, the first Romanian journals specializing in the reception of foreign literature are published in Bucharest. The first of these is *Secolul 20*, established in 1961 and specializing in translations and critical essays. The more important one is, however, *Cahiers roumains d’études littéraires (CREL)*, edited by Adrian Marino. Published exclusively in foreign languages, the journal acquired, by the fall of communism, a status comparable to the one of the Hungarian *Neohelicon* (both publications were established in 1973), since it included studies by prestigious theorists and comparatists such as René Etiemble, Marcel Raymond, Jean Starobinski, Jean Rousset, Tzvetan Todorov, A.-J. Greimas, Hans-Robert Jauss, Claudio Guillén, etc.

After 1990, the institutional background of Romanian comparative studies changes radically. The various administrative reorganizations engage the fusion or even disappearance of some of the comparative literature departments. At the same time, the transition to a capitalist economy had a significant impact on the publishing market. The translation of foreign works was not discontinued, but its rhythm was significantly lower than in the previous era, particularly when related to the possibilities the abolishment of censorship should have allowed (for example, the collection “Studii” was terminated at the beginning of the 2000s). The journals have also experienced the effects of the system change. In 1993, CREL changed its name to *Euresis*, but it did not manage to maintain its previous prestige – not because of the articles, whose quality remained the highest (the contributors to the new series include Jacques Derrida, J. Hillis Miller, Gianni Vattimo, Linda Hutcheon, Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, as well as the majority of the Romanian-born comparatists that worked in the West), but because of its limited circulation. On the other hand, after 1990, new journals emerged. Perhaps the most important of these is *Caietele Echinox* (Cluj-Napoca, founded in 2001), but this category also includes *A Treia Europă* (edited at Timișoara, in 5 issues, between 1997 and 2001) and *Acta Iassyensia Comparationis* (Iași, since 2003). Another significant moment for the current Romanian comparatism was the founding of ALGCR/RAGCL (Romanian Association of Comparative Literature, in 1997, which, in 2001, became the Romanian Association of General and Comparative Literature). Headed until 2010 by Paul Cornea, and currently by Mircea Martin, the association has been organizing annual colloquia since 2001, which have contributed visibly to the consolidation of comparative studies in Romania.

Equally important to the understanding of Romanian comparatism is its ideological background. Similar to other literary systems in Eastern Europe (see, for example, the Slovenian case examined in Juvan 119–120), Romania’s comparative studies emerged out of the need to legitimate its “national” literature in an international context. In fact, apart from the already mentioned article by Maiorescu, this ethnocentric and self-legitimizing function is fairly clear in the main work of “classic” Romanian literary historiography, Călinescu’s *History*, in which the role of the many foreign references remains that of establishing the identity and value of Romanian literature (Terian, *A cincea* 299–301). It is therefore no coincidence that the main nationalist ideology in communist Romania was based on a comparatist’s theories: Edgar Papu, the initiator of the so-called “protochronism,”² perceived its mission to be the assertion of the individuality as well as the priority of Romanian literature at world level (*Din clasicii*). More

significantly, unlike other East-Central European literary systems, the self-legitimation function still holds its domination in the field of Romanian comparative studies.

In fact, its anachronistic continuance explains several collateral phenomena. First of all, the typical procedure of Romanian comparative literature includes the confrontation between a Romanian writer and a foreign one. Thus, in Romania there are hundreds of studies that attempt to identify the classical, French, German, Russian or Sanskrit “sources” of the “national poet” Mihai Eminescu, but very few dare to approach the comparative analysis of foreign authors among themselves. Secondly, this ethnocentric function also explains the rather reduced visibility of Romanian comparative studies abroad. By designing their own approach as subordinate to national literary historiography, Romanian comparatists, at least before the fall of communism, were seldom concerned with the external dissemination of the results of their research. And, in this regard, names such as Marino, Cornea and Duțu are mere exceptions that prove the rule. Last but not least, turning comparative studies into a mere accessory of national historiography has determined the nature of its methods and procedures.

Consequently, more often than not, local comparative studies not only benefitted from the renewals, but it also perpetuated the clichés and inertia of “national” Romanian criticism. Such an assertion is confirmed by the limited success in Romanian criticism (comparative literature included) of two of the most important methodological directions of the 20th century: literary sociology (Marxist and neo-Marxist alike) and “formalist” criticism (in all its versions, from the idealist German one to the structural theories of the 1960s). The popularity deficiency of the former is explained by the distaste of post-Stalinist Romanian criticism for socialist realism (generated, in the 1950s, by the imposition of Marxism as state ideology) as well as by its endemic attachment to the purity of the “aesthetic” category. The popularity deficiency of the latter was conditioned, in general, by the strong essayistic-impressionist tradition of Romanian literary criticism (Marino, *Biografia* VI/234), which rejected the systemic and methodical approaches of the literary phenomenon and, in particular, by the rejection of any attempt to formalize the “aesthetic”. Hence the fact that, in the “new” Romanian criticism of the 1960s, the highest success was not achieved by the “hard” methodological, structuralist core of the *Nouvelle Critique*, which proclaimed the supremacy of the linguistic model (Roland Barthes and others); rather, it was attained by its moderate versions, with an inclination for “content” analysis, such as the “Geneva School” or J.-P. Richard’s thematic criticism, which, in the 1970s–1980s,

were joined by the mythical-archetypal criticism and the poetics of the imaginary. The same phenomenon generates the ambiguous situation of the Romanian comparative scholars, who, generally restricted to the audience of their own culture, were compelled either to stick to the “national” critical establishment or to accept their marginal condition.

Two Models of Contemporary Romanian Comparative Studies

The dominance of the traditional critical model in the Romanian literary system (the “tamed” version of the *Nouvelle Critique* included) has been challenged since communism by two authors who continue to represent landmarks of Romanian comparative studies: Adrian Marino and Paul Cornea. There are several attitudes which place them in opposition to the Romanian establishment. First of all, both of them questioned the nationalist-provincial model of Romanian culture (even in its “liberal” version), pleading decidedly for European receptivity. Then, both authors initiated a fracture into the traditional isolationism of Romanian criticism and carried out an ample international scholarly activity in foreign languages. Finally, both are worlds apart from the essayistic-impressionist model of Romanian criticism, making ample use of the newer methods of European literary research: hermeneutics, history of ideas, post-Marxist sociology, reader-response criticism, etc. (Terian, *A cincea* 582–594)

Nonetheless, the work of both authors is representative of the evolution of Romanian comparative literature. Marino established his own research direction, called the “criticism of literary ideas”, in the early 1970s, even if later his project was revised (see *Dicționar* 1–82; *Critica; Hermeneutica*). Obviously inspired by René Wellek’s work on the concepts of criticism, Marino focuses on the “literary idea”, in which the Romanian scholar identifies a “conventional name for the totality of the theoretical ‘matter’ or content... of literature”³ (*Dicționar* 35); however, to Marino the “literary idea” is more than a concept, since the possibility of semantic rephrasing and amplification of the former determines the status of an actual “work” or “creation”. These premises initiate an ambitious encyclopedic project which was to materialize first as a dictionary of literary ideas (unfortunately completed only up to the letter G), and then as a cycle of seven volumes (*Hermeneutica; Biografia* I–VI) dedicated to the evolution of the “idea of literature”, including that of the terms derived from it (national, universal, popular literature, para-literature, anti-literature etc.), from the Antiquity to the 20th century. Although Marino’s “criticism of literary ideas” is mainly a theoretical endeavor, it also has an important comparative dimension, since

“literary ideas” are “invariants”, and the invariant, irrespective of its nature, is the “essential manner in which literature participates in universality, the way to assign universal meaning to its common elements” (*Comparatisme* 95). Marino’s encyclopedic dimension is thus always accompanied by a “militant” commitment, which he undertook following the contact with René Étiemble’s work to which the Romanian scholar also dedicated a monograph (*Étiemble*). In line with Étiemble, Marino pleaded for a *littérature (vraiment) générale* and rejected “Eurocentrism” programmatically, although, on the other hand, he remained a supporter of the Europeanization of Romanian culture (*Pentru Europa*).

Similar to Marino, Cornea began his activity as a historian of Romanian literature by focusing on literary sociology, in an era during which the discipline was strongly marked by Marxist-Leninist clichés. Nevertheless, the critic departed relatively early from this dogmatic method. His outline of the origins of Romanian Romanticism, a detailed analysis of the relations between mentalities, ideology and literature during 1780–1840, is already indicative of an estrangement from canonical Marxism and of his affinity for the history of mentalities practiced by the School of *Annales* (*Originile* 598). Later, Cornea’s adoption of Lucien Goldmann’s and Robert Escarpit’s theories resulted in several studies on the sociology of reading and success, literary value, periodization, inter-literary relations, and imagology (*Regula*). In the second major phase of his activity, starting after 1980, the Romanian comparatist was interested in the theory of reading and in hermeneutics. These concerns are confirmed by the two fundamental studies of reading and interpretation (*Introducere* and *Interpretare*), which, adopting the stance of a moderate rationalism, contribute substantially to text typology, the strategies of “meaning negotiation”, criteria of interpretation validity, contexts and limits. In fact, unlike Marino, Cornea aims to find practical solutions to the theoretical problems of comparative literature rather than develop a sophisticated ideological system. This also explains the vast scope of his investigations, which, apart from the already mentioned aspects, cover various other sectors, such as the issue of the canon, the theory of systems, literary history as a genre, intentionalism and relativism (*Delimitări*).

Despite their prestige in Romania (and abroad), neither Marino nor Cornea managed to shake the dominant ethos of Romanian literary criticism. Their works remain exemplary for Romanian literary scholars, but their successors’ relation to them is usually limited to informative quotations or, at most, devoted mentions, rather than in line with an actual theoretical or methodological filiation. In other words, in contemporary Romanian comparative studies, there is not a “Marino” or a “Cornea school”, and, in general, there is no clear taxonomy of the various meth-

odological directions. This is why it is difficult to describe systematically the current situation of this cultural field characterized, if not by impressionism, at least by ebullient eclecticism. Nevertheless, in what follows I attempt an investigation of several comparative “schools” in terms of their institutional affinities.

“Schools” and Trends in Contemporary Romanian Comparative Literature

The earliest attempt at institutional integration of the post–1990 Romanian comparatists is the “Timișoara School”, supported by the Foundation “A Treia Europă”. With a core represented by three critics from Timișoara University (Adriana Babeți, Cornel Ungureanu and Mircea Mihăieș), the group proposed to delineate and study the (inter)cultural specificity of Central Europe. Intensive in the 1997–2003 period, the research of the Timișoara “school” resulted in the publication of a journal (*A Treia Europă*), of an eponymous collection (including fiction volumes, academic studies and essays, both Romanian and foreign), as well as the editing of several anthologies dedicated to the popularization of the concept in Romania. Unfortunately, the journal was discontinued in 2001, and the collection only two years later. Thereafter, the members of the group focused their attention on other issues. At any rate, Mircea Mihăieș has scarcely investigated “the Third Europe”, although, as a comparatist, he is the author of two challenging volumes on the private diary (*De veghe; Cărțile crude*). Adriana Babeți, who, in the group’s period of peak activity, published a volume of essays on the identity crises of Central Europe (*Dilemelă*), has since focused on the study of dandyism as a transcultural phenomenon (*Dandysmul*). Cornel Ungureanu alone continued to explore the Central-European space (*Mitteleuropa; Europa Centrală*), from the perspective of utopia and, equally, of imperial nostalgia, which he described as being characterized by “concentric circles” of writers, generated by the continuous interplay of center and periphery: “Vienna’s lessons inspire the lessons of the Empire, and the Empire would live, first of all, through its margins” (*Mitteleuropa* 12–13).

The most coherent and prominent “school” of Romanian comparative literature in the last two decades (and perhaps the only one which deserves this name) seems to be the “Cluj School”. This is evidenced not only by the existence of an active research center (The “Phantasma” Center for Imagination Studies, founded in 2002) and of an important journal (*Caietele Echinox*), but also by a common methodology (Braga

Concepte) and by work on several collective research projects. The defining field of Cluj comparative studies is the theory of the imaginary and its related domains (myth criticism and archetypology), and the theoretical leader of this research direction is Corin Braga. Braga began his activity in the early 1990s, with a series of analyses of Romanian authors, his theoretical affinities at that time being Jungian psychoanalysis, Gilbert Durand's archetypology and comparative mythology (*10 studii*). He developed his own theory through contacts with Jean-Jacques Wunenburger's works, which led Braga to several notable theoretical and practical results. His most important contribution to theory is probably the concept of "anarchetype", which he conceives as the opposite of the archetypes in earlier myth criticism. The anarchetype is defined as a "broken archetype, an archetype whose meaning core, the work's logos, was pulverized, like a supernova ... that explodes in a galactic cloud of meanings" (*De la arhetip* 250–251). Later, he introduced another term: the "eschatype", designating a model which emerges progressively; thus, in the end, the comparatist proposes the following formula:

If the archetypal structure describes a whole relying on a unique and central, perhaps preexistent and generating, model, and the anarchetypal structure describes a whole that avoids the pattern and evolves freely, apparently chaotically, then there is... a third type of structures [the eschatype], in which the elements move, gradually drawing a pattern. (Idem, 283)

Albeit not always programmatically, this theory informs his four-volume comparatist series (*Le paradis; La quête; Du paradis; Les antiutopies*), in which Braga examines the thematic and generic metamorphoses of a narrative configuration that begins with the medieval quests and ends (for now) with the "classic" European dystopias of the 18th century. Apart from this central idea, whose thrust is historical, Braga's research includes at least two interesting theses: that the main failure of all the quests in medieval European literature could be a direct outcome of the prohibition placed by the divinity on the garden of Eden since Genesis (*Le paradis; La quête*); and that the "classic" Utopia carries within itself the germs of Antiutopia, which it would be inaccurate to regard as a construct exclusively pertaining to the 20th century (*Du paradis; Les antiutopies*).

Besides Braga, other representative names of Cluj comparative studies are Ștefan Borbély and Mihaela Ursa. Borbély carried out his research mainly in the field of comparative myth criticism, as confirmed by his handbook titled *Mitologie*. Apart from this and from the volume *De la Herakles*, which is an erudite analysis of the category of the heroic from the Antiquity to the Renaissance, Borbély has chosen, however, an essayistic approach

to comparative issues. Although not very well founded theoretically, most of his volumes (e.g., *Despre Thomas Mann*) include refined and insightful interpretations, whose only notable fault is that the author narrows down his field of reference by resorting to stereotypical anthropological dualisms (masculine/feminine, form/substance and, particularly, Apollonian/Dionysian). Ursa, on the other hand, has analyzed systematically the fictionalization of the author's presence in theoretical discourse, thus questioning the border between critical and literary discourse (*Scritopia*).

Among the current Romanian comparatism "schools", perhaps the one that is best adapted to recent Western trends is the "Braşov School", which has shown interest particularly in cultural criticism and in the theory of poetry. On the subject of cultural criticism, the theoretical leader of the "school" is Caius Dobrescu, whose essays evince an interdisciplinary perspective, situated at the meeting point of the history of ideas, sociology, political science and cultural studies. Drawing mainly on Weber and his followers' theory of secularization, Dobrescu has approached a large range of issues – many of them for the first time in the Romanian academic sphere –, such as the relation between modern literature and politics (*Modernitatea* 9–74) or between the avant-garde and totalitarianism (idem 75–103), the intellectual's condition in the modern bourgeois society (*Semiizei*), the perverse effects generated by the phenomenon of modernization of communist cultures and societies in Eastern Europe (*Inamicul*) and, in general, the complex plurality of the (post)modernization process, which generated a series of alternative developments depending on local particularities (*Revoluția*). Dobrescu's more recent research seems to focus on 20th-century European critical culture ('European'; 'Literary'). Some of his and Ungureanu's ideas have been developed by Adrian Lăcătuş in a monograph dedicated to Central Europe (*Modernitatea*).

The other constant topic of research of the "Braşov School" is the theory of (mainly modern) poetry. In this respect, mention should be made of the works of Alexandru Muşina, Rodica Ilie and Gheorghe Crăciun. Muşina, for instance, proposes to define the "paradigm of modern poetry" in terms of its description of "a world in which the (desacralized) man has become himself the system of reference" of the text (175). Rodica Ilie explored particularly the avant-garde and experimentalist phenomenon in the field of Romance literatures (*Manifestul*). The most important work of poetics of the "Braşov School" is, however, that of Gheorghe Crăciun, who sets out to uncover the unseen bulk of the "iceberg of modern poetry" (*Aisbergul*). Contrary to most contemporary essentialist theories, which tend to reduce the poetic phenomenon to the categories of connotation, reflexivity, the metaphoric, opaqueness and/or

visionary nature, Crăciun states, drawing on one of Vianu's distinctions, that, apart from such "reflexive" poetry, modern poetry also hosts another tradition, that of "transitive" poetry. This marginalized tradition, which does not originate in Baudelaire, but rather in Whitman, was established by Pound (in his imagistic phase), Pessoa, Frost, Cavafy, William Carlos Williams, the later Montale, Ponge, Olson, Lowell, O'Hara etc., and is characterized by denotation, transparency, deliberate "prosaism", biographism and directness. These properties do not cancel its poetic status or place it on a position lower than "reflexive" poetry:

The reference of transitive poetry is reality. It crosses, it traverses this reality, its structures absorb it. It does not avoid reality, it does not modify it beyond recognition, it does not repudiate it, it does not intend to destroy it. The nourishing matter of transitive poetry is the routine, the ordinary, the biographic, immediate, common, objective life. (115)

Unlike the three "schools" mentioned above, the current situation of comparative studies in the Romanian capital city is rather faltering. Although Bucharest was the academic center that institutionalized comparative literature as a discipline in Romania and which dominated local studies until the fall of communism, after 1989 it no longer seems able to sustain its own firm direction of research. A potential cause of this setback is the absence of its own journal of comparative literature or of similar institutional mechanisms (of the latter, the "Tudor Vianu" Interdisciplinary Centre, founded in 2006, seems to have a rather discontinuous activity). Oddly, at least during the last decade, the most important comparative contributions in Bucharest come from Romanian literature specialists rather than from comparatists by profession, and they tend to focus on the analysis of postmodernism in the Romanian context. On this subject, the most seminal text comes from Mircea Martin, who states the existence of a profound gap between culture and society ("in Romanian social life, the state of postmodernity continues to be inexistent") and therefore defines Romanian postmodernism as "postmodernism without postmodernity" ('D'un postmodernisme' 19). Later, Mircea Martin's observations were extended and improved by researches on Romanian postmodernism by Mircea Cărtărescu (*Postmodernismul*), Ion Bogdan Lefter (*Postmodernism*), and Carmen Mușat (*Strategiile*).

In the institutional Bucharest context, a special situation is that of Monica Spiridon, whose professional status is the perfect example of the "state of exception" of Romanian comparative literature. Although she is currently the best-known Romanian comparative scholar, Spiridon is not a professor of comparative literature, but of semiotics and communication

studies. Her work further includes a series of monographs on important Romanian writers, as well as many theoretical studies, dedicated mainly to poststructuralist trends. Two phases can be distinguished in her activity as a comparatist. Before the year 2000, Spiridon was concerned particularly with the study of literariness and intertextuality (*Despre "aparența"; Melancholia*). In the latter book, by using many Romanian and foreign examples, she opposes to Harold Bloom's well-known concept of the "anxiety of influence" a type of regressive creativity ("melancholy of descent"), arising from the retrieval of patterns, rather than the attempt to escape them through parricidal subversion: "In one of its significant states, literature is, without any doubt, a 'descendant' of literature; a practice of re-suscitation, of re-storing, turning inheritance, in all its versions (from imaginative plagiarism to synonymy, from repetition to paraphrase), into a law and a value of creation." (*Melancholia* 43) On the other hand, Spiridon's more recent works signal a reorientation towards comparative imagology, resulting in the attempt to situate Romanian cultural identity within the European context (*Les dilemmes; "Cum poți să fi român?"; 'Identity'; 'Bucharest-on-the-Seine'* etc.). Of these, a particular case is that of *Les dilemmes*, which focuses on the "hermeneutic calling of the Occident/Orient binary" (16) in Romanian culture, by analyzing its various identity projections, whether of an ideological or fictional nature.

Undoubtedly, my outline does not purport to cover the entire recent Romanian research in the field of comparative literature. Although the institutional and methodological association in the form of "schools" is an exception rather than a rule in comparative (and, more generally, literary) studies in Romania, I have deliberately focused on these projects because they are more likely to facilitate dialogue between Romanian research and the international one. Certainly, this does not exclude certain significant individual achievements. Thus, in relation to the study of literary genres and movements, mention must be made of Liviu Petrescu's pioneering work on the poetics of postmodernism (*Poetica*) and Eugen Simion's ample analysis of the private diary (*Ficțiunea I–III*). At the same time, after 1990, comparative research of the relations of Romanian literature with other literatures has continued. Relevant here are the works of Pia Brînzeu (on the representation of Europe in contemporary British and Romanian fiction – *Corridors*), Sanda Cordoș (on the identity crisis in the Romanian and Russian literatures in the twentieth century – *Literatura*), Mircea Muthu (on the Balkan dimension of Romanian literature – *Balkanismul, I–III*), Ana-Karina Schneider (on the reception of the British and American novel in Romania – *Critical; 'The Romanian'*), Alex Goldiș (on the influence of *Nouvelle Critique* on Romanian post-Stalinism criticism – *Critica*), and

Rodica Grigore (on several literatures less often examined in Romania, such as the Latin-American or East-Asian ones – *Meridianele*).

Conclusions

At the end of this examination, several conclusions emerge. First, I note that, despite economic difficulties at the beginning of the 1990s and in more recent years, Romanian comparative studies has undergone an important institutional consolidation in the last two decades. The founding of ALGCR, the increase in the number of specialized journals and the fact that at present comparative literature is taught as a distinct subject in all the Schools of Letters in Romania are irrefutable evidence in this respect. Then, equally obvious is the fact that the fall of communism and the suspension of censorship provided the Romanian comparative scholars with the possibility to approach freely various socio-political or identity issues. Last but not least, this historic threshold has resulted in an increase in the number of Romanian researchers who have published works in foreign languages and, particularly, abroad.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that the process of international assertion of Romanian comparative studies is merely beginning. In order to note the gap that separates it not only from West European or US research, but also from that of Eastern Europe, a statistical overview of the current impact of comparative literature journals in Romania is sufficient. Thus, considering the gamut of articles published in such journals from 2001 to 2012 (self-referencing included), it can be noticed that *Caietele Echinox* benefitted, in this interval, from 5 references in Web of Science, *Acta Iassyensia Comparationis* 1, and *Euresis* 0. When compared with other similar journals in the region (*Primerjalna književnost* – 59 references, *Neohelicon* – 133 references), these numbers seem absurd. Of course, we could find a series of background explanations for this state of things: the low quality of certain articles, the difficult access to recent bibliography, the weak dissemination of Romanian journals (there is currently no Romanian comparative literature journal indexed in A&HCI), etc. Nevertheless, it is obvious that this state is indicative of certain system-related issues.

Thus, the field of literary criticism, previously marked by essayism and impressionism, has now had to adjust to the requirements of a well-organized academic market. A disturbing thought in this respect is that contributors to the three Romanian comparative journals mentioned above do not even consider reading one another, as shown by the quasi-absence of reciprocal referencing. Other apparently minor details are in fact indicative

of profound deficiencies. For example, one of the three journals claims to be Fabula and H-Net Academic Announcements “indexed” (http://literaturacomparata.ro/Site_Acta/indexation.html, retrieved on February 1, 2013), when, in fact, these are not scientific databases, but mere academic announcements and information networks. Another disturbing fact in the Romanian literary studies is that a series of young researchers (comparatists included), although financed from public funds, continue to publish the results of their work in magazines that lack the filter of the most elementary peer-reviewing, rather than in academic journals.

Secondly, a standard issue is the still markedly “national” nature of Romanian comparative literature. As seen above, the majority of Romanian comparative scholars continue to publish their work in Romania, and most of these volumes are published in Romanian (frequently, they do not even include an abstract in a foreign language). Then, the majority of the so-called “international” conferences in Romania take place in Romanian (at times, attendance is exclusively Romanian); and, unfortunately, RAGCL conferences are not yet an exception in this respect. The same is true of some journals and proceedings volumes, which frequently approach issues that interest a mere handful of Romanian specialists. Finally, research groups that run comparative research projects in Romania include only Romanians (who, more often than not, are members of the same academic center).

Thirdly, theoretically and methodologically, Romanian comparative studies still lags behind both the Western and the regional ones. Thus, with some exceptions, cultural and postcolonial studies are still perceived as a mere fad by Romanian comparative literature; although, for example, the relations between postcolonialism and postcommunism have been the topic of two special issues of *Caietele Echinox* (2001) and *Euresis* (2005), they had more contributors from English-language departments than from comparative literature specialists. Then, more recent directions such as empirical and constructivist studies, polysystem theory, cognitive poetics, ecocriticism or literary Darwinism are almost unknown in Romania. But this gap is most clear when analyzed in relation to world literature. If we consider only the three already “classic” theorists of this new academic paradigm (Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti and David Damrosch), it emerges that, although translated into Romanian in 2007, *La République Mondiale des Lettres* has had practically no echo in Romanian comparative studies; the same has happened with the works of Franco Moretti, with the exception of a challenging article by Alexandru Matei (‘Changeament’). More fortunate, David Damrosch, who, in 2008, took part in one of the few actually international conferences in Romania, has thus become better known to Romanian researchers (see, for example, the papers in

Papadima, Damrosch and D'haen). But it remains to be seen whether this event results in an actual research direction.

Therefore, although it has registered a series of indisputable developments as compared to the communist period, current Romanian comparative literature is still dealing with certain institutional hindrances, explained to a large extent by the prevalence of its self-legitimation function, if not of a provincial mentality. I appreciate that any increase in its international visibility will depend, in the next years, on the extent to which it will manage to overcome such inertia. Thus, from the point of view of strictly individual achievements, I do not believe I am making an overstatement when I claim that concepts such as the “melancholy of descent”, “transitive poetry” or “anarchetype” have the potential of going a long way in international comparative debates.

NOTES

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² The “protochronist” theory was launched in the early 1970s by Edgar Papu, in opposition to the “synchronist” theory, supported in the inter-war era by the critic E. Lovinescu, who argued that in order to accelerate its rhythm of evolution, Romanian culture should imitate Western models (especially the French one). Conversely, protochronism claimed that Romanian culture already surpassed Western cultures in many ways. While Papu’s awareness of the political implications of his theory remains a moot point, “protochronism” was embraced as a semi-official doctrine and invested with propagandistic purposes by Nicolae Ceaușescu’s communist regime (1965–1989).

³ Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are mine.

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Primerjalna književnost v današnji Romuniji: med nacionalnim samouveljavljanjem in mednarodnim priznanjem

Ključne besede: primerjalna književnost / Romunija / romunska literarna veda / postkomunizem / institucionalizacija / internacionalizacija

Članek preučuje trenutne razmere in obete v romunski primerjalni književnosti. V Romuniji se je primerjalna književnost razvila konec 19. stoletja na podlagi različnih prispevkov več kulturnih ideologov in strokovnjakov, na univerzitetni ravni pa je bila institucionalizirana šele po drugi svetovni vojni. V 20. stoletju se je nenehno soočala s številnimi težavami, kot so podrejenost primerjalnih vidikov nacionalnemu literarnemu zgodovinopisju, odsotnost močne lokalne metodološke tradicije ter prevlada esejistične in impresionistične kritike. Kljub temu je romunska komparativistika celo med komunizmom dosegla pomembne uspehe, kar dokazujejo tudi dela Paula Cornee in Adriana Marina. Članek se osredotoča na oblike institucionalizacije primerjalne vede v postkomunistični Romuniji (društva, raziskovalna središča, strokovne revije) in pojav različnih primerjalnih »šol« in posameznih projektov. Izmed šol so najvidnejše tiste v Timisoari (ki je urejala revijo *A Treia Europă* in se posveča primerjalnim raziskavam srednjeevropskih držav), Cluju (ki objavlja revijo *Caietele Echinox* in se ukvarja s teorijo in poetiko imaginarnega) in Brasovu (ki se večinoma ukvarja s poetiko in kulturologijo), med projekti pa je pomembno delo več samostojnih raziskovalcev, kot je Monica Spiridon. Članek obravnava nekatere aktualne težave primerjalne književnosti v Romuniji (majhen vpliv raziskav, mešanje akademskih raziskav in novinarstva, metodološka zaostalost v primerjavi s primerjalno književnostjo v drugih, predvsem zahodnih evropskih državah), pa tudi potencialno izvirnost, ki se kaže v različnih teorijah in konceptih, ki so jih predlagali romunski strokovnjaki; na primer »melanholija izvora« (Monica Spiridon), »tranzitivna poezija« (George Crăciun) in »anarhetip« (Corin Braga).

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