The Relative Autonomy of Literature: Romanian Literary Criticism and Theory Before World War II

Ștefan BAGHIU

Universitatea „Lucian Blaga" din Sibiu, Facultatea de Litere și Arte
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Faculty of Letters and Arts
Personal e-mail: stefan.baghiu@ulbsibiu.ro

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This article discusses Galin Tihanov's understanding of regimes of relevance and their connection to the birth of modern literary theory and argues that Romanian pre-communist literary theory has failed to work with literature as an autonomous domain. Romania's most preeminent literary critic of the 19th century, Titu Maiorescu, although trying to create a theoretical framework against which poetry could be analyzed, to put it in Tihanov's words "for some presumed discursive uniqueness," also saw the relevance of Romanian poetry abroad as a byproduct of its national character – so within a socio-political role. Eugen Lovinescu used the autonomy of literature in order to discriminate against both rural literature and the avant-gardes, failing to accept the autonomy of the literary per se. Baghiu claims that literary theory's intrinsic connection at birth to the foreign and world literature should never be neglected, and that the cultures of relative literary autonomy most often are the ones in which transnational contacts are undermined in order for the national to prevail. Thus, the birth of literary theory can never be a truly national affair.

Keywords: regimes of relevance, literary autonomy, Galin Tihanov, literary theory, Romanian literary criticism.

There have been recently several attempts to chart Romanian literary theory, and many of them have pointed out the fact that theory has often lived through other genres of literary scholarship. As Alex Goldiș explains, his 2011 *Critica în tranșee. De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului* [Criticism in Trenches. From Socialist Realism to the Autonomy of the Aesthetics], probably the most comprehensive study of the transfer from dogmatic literary criticism during socialist realism (1948-1964) to the local autonomy of the aesthetics during the 60s, was first intended as a study of the "main theoretical models of Romanian postwar literary criticism." Goldiș continues by stating that

> "[t]he fact that there was little discussion in Romania over paradigms and directions does not mean that they did not exist, since, at least from Barthes onwards, we are aware that any form of criticism requires – even implicitly – a theory of criticism. Although the number of theorists that would see themselves and proclaim themselves as such is small, matters of method have been debated and concepts were proposed in this period."[1]

In the case of literary histories, probably the most important clusters of literary criticism in Romania during the 20th century, Andrei Terian explains that "most of the histories of literary criticism are in fact histories of literary theories in which authors try to recreate from fragments of analysis the great broken mirrors of paradigms and methods."[2] This idea that literary theory is often embedded in literary criticism is in a way the workspace of theory around here. There are few theorists in the history of Romanian literary scholarship, yet much criticism that hides and uses many literary theories, making things in a way much more difficult for contemporary scholars: they have to follow theory as it articulates through thousands of articles on different topics and within several other scholarly genres.[3]

The main topic I would like to address in this article is the connection between theory and the autonomy of the literary itself, starting from Galin Tihanov's latest work, *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory. Regimes of Relevance in Russia and Beyond*, where he develops the thesis that has elicited great scholarly interest since 2004, when he first published his "Why Did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Central and Eastern Europe? (And Why Is It Now Dead?)."[4] One of the key questions in one of Tihanov's chapters is "how did [semantic paleontology in his case] shape the way its practitioners assigned significance to literature?"[5] A question one should address to every major group of literary scholars, to every theoretical school, and to any individual canonical or marginal literary critic in order to assign some clear function to their critical endeavors. Namely, I will try to see how Titu Maiorescu's 'aesthetic criticism', Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea's 'scientific criticism', and Eugen Lovinescu's 'impressionism', alongside many others, shaped the "assigned significance to literature" or the level of autonomy of the literary itself in order to transform perspectives on literature into literary theory. Or not.

Moreover, since for Tihanov, modern literary theory is often connected to the international relevance of the theoretical approach itself, and since for Andrei Terian "the 'export value' of a critical discourse is directly proportional to its coefficient of generality,"[6] I will try to explain how criticism has touched more or less on modern literary theory depending on its focus on national or European/world literature.[7] Small/semiperipheral cultures are often tempted to overstate their legitimation through *original* literature while borrowing the schemata of literature from elsewhere. The most compelling effort in this regard made in the Romanian context is Alex Goldiș's concept of 'structural correspondence', representing "the generative pattern subtending most historical descriptions of national literary systems in Southeastern Europe and particularly in Romania." This indicates that "literary histories illustrating the nationalist paradigm are more or less deliberately built on a closed system of relations involving rigid and discrete notions of time and space."[8] Those literary histories have of late been used as works *for/of* literary theory, meaning that the lack of literary theory *per se* has resulted in repeating the same "discrete notions of time and space" *ad nauseam*.

What is worth mentioning for now is that literary theory in this particular acceptation has a discreet yet profound connection to world literature and space. Tihanov debates this in his *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory* mainly in chapters such as "Interwar Exiles: Regimes of Relevance in Émigré Criticism and Theory" and "Epilogue: A Fast-Forward to 'World Literature'." Although I will not touch on those subjects as applied to postwar theory, since my focus is Romanian literary criticism before World War II, one could think of the great importance that migration played in the local history of literary theory, and how poorly it was described by literary scholars in Romania. The works of Lucien Goldmann, which are rarely discussed here, might represent the first major contribution of Romanian literary scholarship in the European theoretical field. And theory's connection to the international production of literature and migration is indispensable. From Lucien Goldmann and Nicolas Tertulian to Matei Călinescu, Thomas Pavel, Virgil Nemoianu, and Christian Moraru, the most internationally relevant literary theory products put forward by Romanian theorists were created by focusing on world literature. As Roxana Eichel puts it with reference to Thomas Pavel, Virgil Nemoianu, and Matei Călinescu, "the image of the three Romanian-American professors develops from that of literary critics and columnists in publications with official status during their time, to the one of internationally established authors, comparatists and theorists with a more diverse reception than the one in Romania."[9] In Tihanov's view,

> "[e]xile remains a key aspect in the formation of literary theory (...) it does so because literary theory seeks, of necessity, to flee the constraints of thinking about literature through the prism of a national culture and a single national language; it wants to go further and establish what constitutes literature beyond the singularity of the language in which it happens to be written."

What I want to discuss in this article is the connection between literary theory as embedded in Romanian literary criticism, the autonomy of the literary itself that can be observed through those texts, and national literature. It is my belief that even within a national culture, literary theory only emerged as a result of reflection on connections between the national and the world. When it did not reflect on such a large scale, it remained mostly uninterested of the autonomy of the literary *per se*.

The idea that theory is the offspring of a regime of relevance in which the autonomy of literature is highly regarded and well-guarded is really important for a preliminary explanation of cultures of *relative literary autonomy*. The main peculiarity of the development of Romanian literary theory in the interwar period is that literature's autonomy is mostly guarded from abstract and impressionistic positions, and rarely from a theoretical position that can remind us of the Russian Formalism. As Adriana Stan showed, the Romanian literary critic and theorist D. Caracostea (1879-1964), who qualifies as the most likely candidate for a local version of formalism, was in fact "more preoccupied of the avatars of literary individualities than the consolidation of a science of literature with linguistic base."[10] Both Adriana Stan and Mircea Martin (the latter in his foreword to Stan's study of Romanian structuralism) claim that formalism was rather absent from the Romanian literary scene during the interwar period. And this happened, as Adriana Stan notes, mainly because "the general conditions shown in the genesis of interwar formalisms – the polemics with determinism, the need to secure the autonomy of the field, assuming the principles of a non-realistic literature – have cumulated in the postwar period."[11] They have cumulated and helped structuralism develop on a very large scale, but only in the 60s, as Goldiș and Stan show, after a long experience with linguistics as a form of escapism during socialist realism.

Relative autonomy does not imply that there are cultures that experience no systematic approach to literature, but rather that they do not deploy this special use of language to discriminate literature from all other discourses and beyond the national role of systematically thinking about literature. Or, simply put, they don't afford too much attention to this.

Regimes of relevance

Tihanov describes his effort as one that should explain "foundational paradoxes of literary theory" and aims "to grasp what thinking theoretically about literature involves over longer segments of time" against "an illusion of timelessness."[12] This illusion of *timelessness* aside, one could think of another illusion that literary theory has created in the shared intellectual history of the 20th and early 21st centuries, namely the illusion of *spacelessness*. By becoming a standalone discipline in Western thought after its early Central and East-European development right after World War I, it became the core of all national cultures' discourse of literature. This is the second step Galin Tihanov takes, namely putting a geopolitical frame at work and stating that literary theory, meaning an organized theoretical action in the late regime of relevance of literature as autonomous discourse, was born in Russia and East-Central Europe. This is quite a strategy in all major works of Tihanov, who seems to be the proponent of outlining the historicity and localization of literary theory, which seems to have lost its specificity to the extent where it no longer seems to fulfil its original function. Tihanov also declares theory dead, meaning that it has no continuous effect in the way it had at its birth and before its dissolution in the 80s within another regime of relevance "where literature is increasingly recognized not for its social and political weight, nor indeed for some presumed discursive uniqueness, but, in a rather low-key way, for the (largely individual) entertainment and therapy it can provide."[13]

To be more specific, theory no longer being alive means that theoretical thought – although ubiquitous – doesn't yield as much as it used to and at the same time has shifted its focus. Tihanov identifies the birth of literary theory as having taken place in interwar Eastern and Central Europe[14] because of a special context and, by that, because of a special *regime of relevance*: "To put it briefly, and in anticipation of the more elaborated argument I offer in the book, this specific regime of relevance sees literature as an autonomous discourse that tends to differ—in various ways and to a varying degree—from other discourses: journalistic, philosophical, quotidian, and so forth."[15] He develops on this definition:

> "I submit that the rise in the years around World War I of literary theory as an autonomous discourse and field of enquiry that thinks of literature in terms of its uniqueness (informed by the notion of intrinsic 'literariness') was tracking the transition to a new regime of relevance in which literature—for the first time—began to matter not because of what it can do for society or the individual, but because of what it was: a discourse taken to be original and different from other discourses, essentially because of the self-sufficient way language works in it."[16]

I will further refer to the tendency toward differentiation that literary theory holds at its core in order to *qualify as* literary theory as a form of discrimination. Not necessarily as a form of community segregation—although it is such a thing as well—but rather as a form of separation that promotes a *special place* for literature within general discourses. A privileged place, as I will show, beyond what Tihanov sees as the main reason for literary theory in the first place: "the wider discursive formation we still refer to as Romanticism."[17] And a place that has been taken down in literary scholarship over the past decades precisely because it created a space of reflection where it could not respond to the ideological comeback in literary studies against the rise of world systems analysis, gender studies and feminism, and postcolonial thinking. Moreover, I believe that the third regime of relevance, namely the one in which literature is important for the kinds of "entertainment and therapy it can provide" tends to become obsolete due to the

general radicalization of theory in worldwide literary scholarship and through the contemporary literary market itself, for which "therapy" is mainly political and "entertainment" is always reserved for anything but literature.

To put it briefly, what is generally known as modern literary theory, drawing mainly from Formalism and Structuralism, has often been contemporary and indebted to a privileged status of the literary that guaranteed for the autonomy of the literary itself. And in the Romanian context, this privileged status mainly functioned in the interwar period as an ideological tool for segregation within literature. What Adriana Stan argues in the case of Caracostea can easily become a metaphor of the second regime of relevance as a whole in Romania: the focus "on the avatars of literary individualities" rather "than the consolidation of a science of literature with linguistic base."

Literary criticism and theory during the long 19th century: social and political weight

In the second half of 19th-century Romania there can be found many accounts of such a battle for isolating artistic language from general discourse. The first name that comes to mind here is that of conservative literary critic Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917), who fought on many occasions to detach literary scholarship from ideological readings. Drawing from German philosophy and within a general conservative framework, he mainly fought against the political and ethical readings of literature and transformed his aesthetical reading of literature into one of the first and most important statements that can be connected to the second regime of relevance in Tihanov's terms.[18] He was inclined to give up militant tones over political implications of literature, and create a more autonomous approach. One of the first accounts of this theoretical trial, that of separating literature from other discourses, had already been put forward by Radu Ionescu (1834-1872) in 1861, when he firmly advocated that literary criticism must examine "any work, with no other passion than that of beauty itself."[19] This was a huge step forward from Mihail Kogălniceanu's (1817-1891) early statement that criticism's goal should be that of discussing the works that "can be of any use through their goodness or through their Romanian purpose."[20] However, Ionescu attributes a very important educational role to literature, especially through theatre and drama, thus identifying a high social relevance of literature. Its idealistic approach is not pushing criticism toward a regime of autonomy, but rather claims that the representation should be *ideal*. The works of Maiorescu are the most preeminent in promoting the autonomy of the aesthetics in Romanian culture, mainly through his local most important articles "O cercetare critică asupra poeziei române de la 1867" [A Critical Research of Romanian Poetry from 1867] and "Comediile d-lui I.L. Caragiale" [The Comedies of Mr. I.L. Caragiale].[21] In the first article, he claims that art holds a different status than science and that literary works should not be politically driven. In the second, he explains that art should be separated from the moral and ideological discourse. Regarding the second article, one should know that Caragiale (1852-1912) sparked a very intriguing interest in ideological readings as well. Not only did the most important Marxist literary critic of the late 19th century and early 20th century in Romania, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea (1855-1920), train his ideological reading by analyzing Caragiale's works, but the writer's name appears in Leo Trotsky's letters, where he claims that "the remarkable Romanian satirist Caragiale (...) did with his classic comedy *Oscrisoare pierduta (The Lost Letter)* for the political mores of Romania what Gogol did with *The Inspector General* for the mores of the Russian bureaucracy."[22] What I am trying to point out is not so much the international dispersion of Caragiale's writing, since writing about Caragiale was pretty much conjunctural to the presence of Trotsky in Romania and his interaction to the Romanian socialists' circle, but rather the dual regime of relevance within the same work of fiction. Gaining autonomy for the literary itself was never an easy task since it was 'sabotaged' not only by Marxist and deterministic readings of literature, but also by those who claimed the need for autonomy. Maiorescu himself, although trying to create a theoretical framework against which poetry could be analyzed, to put it in Tihanov's words "for some presumed discursive uniqueness," also saw the relevance of Romanian poetry abroad as a byproduct of its national character – so within a socio-political role. This means that when prompted to test the autonomy *per se*, in another language, Maiorescu only finds literature to be relevant not for the way in which language itself works, but for the manner through which the national is embedded in poetry. Moreover, in the same article, Maiorescu claims that the relevance of the novel, which he describes as the rising genre of European literature, is intrinsically linked to the representation of the lower classes. The blueprint of the ideological regime of relevance on his texts can also be seen through Maiorescu's apprehension of literary autonomy as a byproduct of the national itself. Also, as Maiorescu himself claims, "the beautiful is not a theoretical idea," although he refers to his analysis as a "theoretical research." He does so in other articles, such as "Asupra poeziei noastre populare" (1868) [On Our Folk Poetry] or "Literatura română și străinătatea" (1882) [Romanian Literature and Foreign Countries], where he describes his premises as "theoretical presentations" and introduces a "theory of the novel" in an attempt to clarify the status of the character within the new genre, but ends up entangled in nationalistic drives.[23] Of course,

perfectly explainable for the 19th century, where the national lies at the roots of every intellectual endeavor.

So here we are: neither Marxists nor idealists managed to promote a coherent version of literary autonomy, although the polemics between those two sides spurred local literary criticism. Indeed, what we understand nowadays through Romanian "modern literary theory" has its local roots in the writings of those two, with complementary yet unfinished projects: Maiorescu's idealistic autonomy that remains an aesthetical project with more and more nation-building explicit drives, and Gherea's 'scientific' approach that passes on no coherent theoretical corpus, but rather spontaneous *avant la lettre* ideas for analyzing Romanian literature. The first was closer to *autonomy*, the second was closer to *theory*. As Alex Drace-Francis claims,

> "if for *Convorbiri literare* [Maiorescu's magazine], the keyword had been *critică* [meaning criticism], for *Contemporanul* [Gherea's magazine] the tone was given by the word știință [meaning science]. 'Scientific' standards were called for in university life, in philosophy, in agriculture. It was also the first paper in Romania to give serious attention to ideas of feminist emancipation: the journal published numerous articles on this theme by Sofia Nădejde, and Dobrogeanu Gherea's study of Eminescu (1887) contains some of the first feminist literary criticism worthy of the name."[24]

If Tihanov sees "the emergence of literary theory [as] conditional upon the process of disintegration and modification of monolithic philosophical approaches that occurred around the time of World War I," both Maiorescu and Gherea missed this by following two different models. Maiorescu turned his theoretical approach toward a canon-configuration schema and let his idealistic approach develop theories of autonomy only if they could help Romanian literature gain specificity. Gherea used Marxism more as a stage for literary criticism, never actually putting it at work as a coherent corpus for literary analysis. What is interesting here is the exchange of structure between the two directions: "Ironically, the Romanian socialists had only turned their journal into a literary review after extensive political harassment: their career was the reverse of that of Junimea, moving from political failure to literary prestige: *Contemporanul* was one of the most popular in the country in the 1880s, with a print run of over 3,000 copies."[25] But as Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea himself added in respect to his writing, in a letter to Kautsky, "my articles represent only popularizations of scientific socialism and, like all writings of this genre, suffer the same short-comings: lack of rigour and clarity."[26]

A more adequate search for autonomy understood through "all those definitions that are merely variants of Kantian analysis,"[27] as Pierre Bourdieu once described it, can be found in the theoretical approach of pre-symbolist poet Alexandru Macedonski (1854-1920), who notoriously claimed in several articles, starting 1880, that poetry stands as a language of its own, and that the logic of poetry is the absurd itself. In this articles (Despre logica poeziei [On The Logic of Poetry] in 1880, and Poezia viitorului [The Poetry of the Future] in 1892), not only does Macedonski aim at a complete divorce with sociological readings and educational or moral scopes, but he also names one of the most important aspects of the second regime of relevance theorized by Tihanov, namely the cohabitation with "artistic developments that emphasized the value of language as such, making it 'difficult' (...) or 'absurd,' deliberately denying it the status of a medium that expresses logically advanced arguments."[28] Macedonski is a local pioneer of this denial of "logically advanced arguments," but also part of a European network that sought to detach literature from practical functions and to push literary criticism and theory "beyond aesthetics,"[29] as Tihanov himself foresees that "no one regime of relevance is ever available in pure form."[30] But this detachment should be thought of as a particular bourgeois and cosmopolitan affair. Macedonski was an urban poet, striving to 'make it' in the World Capital of Letters, to use Pascale Casanova's concept. By publishing in Paris in the late 19th century and cultivating strong ties with French symbolist writers, he was able to witness the peculiarities of what Pierre Bourdieu describes as a time in which "the climate of spiritual restoration helps to favour the return to forms of art that, like Symbolist poetry or the psychological novel, carry to the highest degree the reassuring denial of the social world."[31] This will further develop during the interwar period through theorists of modernism such as Eugen Lovinescu (1881-1943), for whom the "denial of the social world" turns into a radical impressionistic agenda. It is not that theorists such as Lovinescu did not have in mind the "social world" when engaging literary works, since he himself put forward the most important theory of cultural imitation and development during the interwar period, but they voluntarily renounced this perspective in favor of their own taste, to put it lightly, since I will further explain how the quest for autonomy brought about a series of classist perspectives.

Impressionism against theory during the interwar period

At the turn of the century, Romanian literary criticism was profoundly "ideologized, subordinating itself to the diverse programs and tendencies of social, national, and moral nuances (especially *sămănătorism* and *poporanism*)."[32] This came after the retreat of Maiorescu and Gherea and with the rise of several literary groups that sought to promote ideological readings of Romanian and European literature through "criticism of direction."[33]

In this period, autonomy was of no use for literary scholars, since their goal was to dominate the center of the literary field through a coherent political program in relation to the social dynamic of literary criticism as an institution. Moreover, while struggling to face the French influence in the urban sets, populists of *sămănătorism* and *poporanism* started a great battle for reinstituting the national, through numerous nationalistic bouts, combined with unprecedented translation programs from small or peripheral cultures.[34] Ironically, in trying to combat cultural hegemony, nationalists and populists created one of the most geographically diverse translation programs of that time.[35] But they were still nationalists. Autonomy was reserved for marginal and urban literature of symbolism, not for the greater debates, especially when the national was still the central issue. Romanian literary critic Garabet Ibrăileanu (1871-1936) published in 1909 his locally famous *Spiritul critic în cultura românească* [The Critical Spirit in Romanian Culture], where he writes that "through normal Romanian literature we understand that literature that has been influenced by foreign literatures, but has still assimilated those influences within its national soul."[36] This is still far from overcoming the idea that literature is anything else but a synthesis of national characteristics. Moreover, he claims that "decadent writing repudiated our national literary tradition" and aggressively refuses symbolism and Macedonski's works. Ibrăileanu was part of the *poporanist* movement, but would later become one the most comprehensive literary theorist of the interwar period, mainly through his approach to the novel.[37] What changed? As I will try to show, mainly the focus on foreign literature (especially Proust's writing), which sparked his most remarkable categories for the analysis of the novel, in his 1926 "Creație și analiză" [Creation and Analysis] article series.[38] His 1926 "Scriitori români și străini" [Romanian and Foreign Writers] is another account of his shift from the national focus to the novel as international genre, and in turn to the autonomy of literature.[39]

The polemics between traditionalism and modernism that have their background in this specific moment are extremely important for the evolution of interwar theoretical approach to literature. One should know that traditionalists did not always oppose the autonomy of the literary, and modernists were not always driven by desires of autonomy. Tihanov links the birth of literary theory to the connection of theorists to the avant-garde movements that elicited through radical experiments a high interest in explaining the artistic language and representation methods.[40] This brings us to an intriguing case in Romania, where the greatest number of literary critics were intolerant toward avant-gardes. Moreover, few of the writers of the avant-garde movements were theoretically coherent. With the exception of Romanian avant-garde writer Ilarie Voronca, other artists were simply not interesting enough for the main promoter of Romanian modernist trends, Eugen Lovinescu. And there is more to that: the leftist continuous struggle of Romanian avant-garde writers was not helping them gain the center of cultural life, since nationalistic projects prevailed. Although the Romanian avant-garde was a complex phenomenon that strived to enhance through *manifestos* the understanding of the literary itself, one can firmly claim that criticism was never receptive to those movements during the interwar period. As Emanuel Modoc shows, Eugen Lovinescu, the main promoter of Romanian modernism, and one of the most important cultural theorists, thought that every avant-garde writer that read in his *Sburătorul* reading circle was "'Dadaist' or 'anti-poetic'." Voronca's poems also triggered Lovinescu's fatigue, since they contained "myriads of images," were "cubist attempts," and "lacked talent."[41] This means in a way that in this case literature was not valued necessarily for being a distinctive discourse, but a *certain* discourse with pre-established functions. Consequently, theory could not be generative in Lovinescu's case, since literature *per se* had to look and behave in a certain way in order to become fit for theoretical analysis. And although Lovinescu is often regarded as the main advocate for the autonomy of the aesthetics during the interwar period, Teodora Dumitru shows that Lovinescu's "pleas for the autonomy of literature and of the aesthetics have limited themselves to affirming the preeminence of talent over other interferences (ethnical, moral, etc.)."[42] But one should further note that "Lovinescu did not hesitate to select talents depending on the degree of adequacy (synchronization) of a writer or of a literary work with the project of one Romanian bourgeois and capitalist society."[43] As Dumitru has splendidly argued again recently, Lovinescu's theory of synchronism, through which a smaller culture should rapidly borrow and make a local synthesis of the cultural achievements of more developed ones, was in fact a classist approach to literature, in which the main goal of Romanian culture was driven by "the urgency of overcoming the focus on peasantry in literature and of outgrowing the genre of literature built on a preponderantly or exclusively rural theme." Dumitru identifies a "classist or sociologically discriminatory sense"[44] within the most important theoretical product of this time that strove for literary autonomy. It is not traditionalism working against the autonomy of literature here, neither nationalism, nor ideological readings in a direct manner, but modernism itself.[45]

And these two extremes of Lovinescu (definitely the most preeminent cultural theorist of his times, through his *Istoria civilizației române moderne* [The History of Modern Romanian Civilization] in 1924-1925 and *Mutația valorilor estetice. Concluzii* [The Mutation of Aesthetic Values. Conclusions] in 1929) show how far away from

the autonomy of the literary were in fact those who were most inclined to acknowledge and protect it. In Lovinescu's case, this is most intriguing since, as Andrei Terian shows, he was often inclined toward formalist approaches as well: "Lovinescu distinguished, along the lines of French philosopher Frédéric Paulhan, between the 'notional'—'psychological,' intellectual, denotative, prosaic—and the 'suggestive'—'esthetic,' affective, connotative, poetic—functions of language." And, furthermore, "[t]he former is that of everyday language, whereas the latter imbues the poetic text with artistic value; in other words, to Lovinescu, the great poetry is an 'enhancement' of the suggestive function of language."[46] Where did he go wrong in this respect? As Terian shows, Lovinescu had to give "untranslatability" a primary role in explaining the functioning of literature since Romanian literature had failed to show itself as valuable on the international scene.[47] Although avant-garde writers often made it on the international scene, his incompatibility with the avant-gardes was decisive in the way he would employ theory only to legitimize his canon. Therefore, the autonomy of literature was still much grounded on the benefits autonomy would bring to his personal agenda. Conversely, as Terian also shows in the case of G. Călinescu (1899-1965), his mistake was to think, in accordance to his 'anti-formalist' views, that "'form' (in this case 'composition') is autonomous in its relation to meaning and, in this respect, indifferent to it."[48] What Lovinescu and Călinescu have in common is a constant plea for impressionism, which drives us back to their constant tendency of putting theory behind personal taste and national interest. As Goldiș claims, their literary histories were interested "simultaneously in the exploration and glorification of the nation's archive as a way of consolidating collective mythologies in hard times."[49]

This points out to the complex history of canceling the autonomy of the literary due to several factors, but mainly for national reasons. If the aesthetic autonomy functioned many times against the autonomy of literature itself, further developments of literary theory in interwar Romania suffered from a personal and local drive that made theory merely a tool for enforcing impressionism and legitimating the international failure of local literatures. Most of these times, theory was used as a form of discriminating literary doctrines, movements and genres, allowing the regime of relevance where the autonomy of literature played a vital role mix up with strange personal agendas. These examples show how important the development of translations and world literature perspectives was in the creation and professionalization of modern literary theory. As Tihanov emphasizes, Russian formalism was contemporary and entangled with projects like Gorki's World Literature Publishing House. Also, many fruitful approaches were the result of the migration of theorists and even exile. The Romanian case could offer a telltale example of what happened to the autonomy of literature when it rarely left its national frame.

Notes:

1. Alex Goldiș, *Critica în tranșee. De la realismul socialist la autonomia esteticului* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2011), 7. Translation mine.
2. Andrei Terian, *Critica de export* (Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2013). Translation mine.
3. See more on contemporary approaches and their incentives in Emanuel Modoc, Ștefan Baghiu, "New Paradigms in Contemporary Romanian Literary Studies (I)," *Transilvania*, no.5-6 (2019): 13-16.
4. Galin Tihanov, "Why Did Modern Literary Theory Originate in Central and Eastern Europe? (And Why Is It Now Dead?)," *Common Knowledge* 10, no.1 (2004): 61-81.
5. Galin Tihanov, *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory: Regimes of Relevance in Russia and Beyond* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 135. See also Daiana Gârdan, "Galin Tihanov, The Birth and Death of Literary Theory: Regimes of Relevance in Russia and Beyond," *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 5, no.2 (2019). Online at: https://www.metacriticjournal.com/article/141/galin-tihanov-the-birth-and-death-of-literary-theory-regimes-of-relevance-in-russia-and-beyond.
6. Terian, *Critica*, 18.
7. See Maria Chiorean, "Regimes of Relevance: The Newcomers," *Transilvania*, no. 5 (2020): 20-28.
8. Alex Goldiș, "Beyond Nation Building: Literary History as Transnational Geolocation," in *Romanian Literature as World Literature*, eds. Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, Andrei Terian (New York: Bloomsbury: 2018), 95-113.
9. Roxana Eichel, *Critica regăsirii. Matei Călinescu, Virgil Nemoianu și Toma Pavel – dialogul contextelor românești și transnaționale* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2020). Translation mine.
10. Adriana Stan, *Bastionul lingvistic. O istorie comparată a structuralismului în România* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2017), 32. Translation mine.
11. Ibid., 30.
12. Tihanov, *The Birth*, 1.

13. Ibid., 22.
14. "This focus on the interwar decades, vital as it is if we want to understand how literary theory operates early on, is supplemented by attention to the present day: what happens once literary theory is no more, how can one capture its elusively seminal afterlives?" Ibid.
15. Ibid., 2.
16. Ibid., 20-21.
17. Ibid., 2.
18. "Both ideological positions were actually worked into Maiorescu's cultural-political theory of 'forms without substance,' which doctrine rejected the 'revolutionary' achievements of the previous generation—the Romantic revolutionaries of1848, also known as the 'Forty-Eighters'—in whose accomplishments he saw an expression of a hollow and phony nationalism, advocating instead a 'natural evolution' and an 'organic,' internally driven development of Romanian culture and society." Andrei Terian, "Mihai Eminescu: From National Mythology to the World Pantheon," in *Romanian Literature as World Literature*, eds. Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 38.
19. Radu Ionescu, "Principiile criticei," *Revista română pentru ştiinţe, litere şi arte*, vol. I (1861), 131. Translation mine.
20. Kogălniceanu launched a column titled "Critica" [Criticism] in *Alăuta românească*, no.2 (1838), 24.
21. All of Maiorescu's mentioned articles can be found in Titu Maiorescu, *Opere,* vol. 1, ed. D. Vatamaniuc, with an introduction by Eugen Simion (Bucharest: Editura Fundaţiei Naţionale pentru Ştiinţă şi Artă, Univers Enciclopedic, 2005).
22. Leon Trotsky, "A Trip to the Dobruja," in *The War Correspondence of Leon Trotsky. The Balkan Wars: 1912-13*, eds. George Weissman and Duncan Williams, translated by Brian Pearce (New York: Monad Press, 1980), 421-443. Quotation from 442.
23. „Without addressing in any way the complicated issue of language, the Romanian critic notes that literature is 'the most direct manifestation of a nations spirit,' and therefore a privileged instrument for the forging of relations between cultures and the exchanges between them. Maiorescu, for instance, emphasizes how it is not by chance that Romanian translations were received well in Germany, given that 'the Germans have taken the greatest interest in the literary spirit of other nations' through translations of their works." Andrei Terian, „Translating the World, Building the Nation. Microtheories of Translation in Romanian Cultural Criticism (1829-1948)," in *The Culture of Translation in Romania / Übersetzungskultur und Literaturübersetzen in Rumänien*, eds. Maria Sass, Ștefan Baghiu, and Vlad Pojoga (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018), 18-29.
24. Alex Drace-Francis, *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture. Literacy and the Development of National Identity* (London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006), 175.
25. Ibid.
26. Michael Kitch, "Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea and Rumanian Marxism," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 55, no.1 (1977): 65-89.
27. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 285.
28. "[T]hink of Tzara's Seven Dada Manifestos, which celebrate the power of literature to contradict itself, to be a safe haven for the absurd and the illogical)." Tihanov, *Regimes*, 4.
29. Ibid., 16.
30. Ibid, 4.
31. Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 128.
32. Andrei Terian, "Critică literară," in *Dicționarul general al literaturii române: C*, ed. Eugen Simion (Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2016), 801-810. Quotation from 804. Translation mine.
33. Ibid.
34. Best described in Cosmin Borza, "Translating Against Colonization. Romanian Populist's Plea for Peripheral Literatures (1890-1916)," in *The Culture of Translation in Romania / Übersetzungskultur und Literaturübersetzen in Rumänien*, eds. Maria Sass, Ștefan Baghiu, and Vlad Pojoga (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018).
35. Ibid.,
36. Garabet Ibrăileanu, *Spiritul critic în cultura românească* (Iași: Editura Revistei "Viața Românească", 1909).
37. See Cosmin Borza, "The National No Man's Land. Imagining Rurality in the Romanian Literary Histories," *Dacoromania Litteraria* VI (2019): 170-180.
38. Garabet Ibrăileanu, *Studii literare* (Iași: Viața românească, 1931).
39. In respect to "Negotiating the place of the novel" and *regimes of relevance* see Daiana Gârdan, "One Theory's Underdog is Another Theory's Treasure: The Novelistic Genre in Different Regimes of Relevance," *Transilvania*, no.5 (2020): 15-19.
40. "The history of the interaction between literary theory and literature, and between theorists and writers, among the Russian Formalists and in the Prague Linguistic Circle is by now well known, which makes it possible for me, without further rehearsal, to concentrate on one resilient misapprehension. It has become customary among students of this period to claim that both Russian Formalism and the Prague Linguistic Circle were born out of avant-garde experiments with form that demanded scholarly rationalization. It has not been sufficiently acknowledged, however, that the programs and ideas of these two groups reached back to preoccupations emblematic of the Romantic literary and critical tradition." „This persistent interest

in Romanticism, among both Russian and Czechoslovak theorists, may have been grounded in the intrinsic links between Romanticism and the avant-garde, whose experiments the Formalists and the Prague Linguistic Circle held in high esteem." Tihanov, *Regimes*, 18-19; 19-20.

41. Emanuel Modoc, *Internaționala periferiilor. Rețeaua avangardelor din Europa Centrală și de Est* (Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2020), 96.
42. Teodora Dumitru, *Modernitaeta politică și literară în gândirea lui E. Lovinescu* (Bucharest: Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2016), 132.
43. Ibid., 132-133.
44. Teodora Dumitru, "Social Class Difference and the Evolution of Romanian Literature from Lovinescu's Perspective (1924-1929)," in *Ruralism and Literature in Romania*, ed. Ștefan Baghiu, Vlad Pojoga, and Maria Sass (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019), 205-218. Quotation from 207.
45. "This 'new art' represented by symbolism is 'a form of art addressed to a different aesthetic sensibility,' even in a classist or sociologically discriminatory sense: it is, therefore, *an urban sensibility type of art,* a type of literature 'that does not come from and is not meant for the people,' meaning the large masses represented by peasantry. On the type of literature that falls into the 'sămănătorist-poporanist' category, Lovinescu had expressed opinions that were even more acutely classist. He accused the reactionary thinking of populist doctrines which were quasi-exclusive interested in promoting the peasantry 'organic,' traditional values, ignoring the bourgeois, capitalist ones, perceived as imported, non-traditional products." Dumitru, "Social Class Difference," 208.
46. Terian, „Translating," 26.
47. „Lovinescus binary microtheory is, beyond any doubt, one of the most original contributions to Romanian translation studies. Yet, it also possesses an ideological agenda, as its origins are not by any means arbitrary: Lovinescu postulated the inherent "untranslatability" of poetry at a time when Romanian literature experienced full-on the failure—or absence of success—of the translations of works written by the great Romanian poets, including Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889), the "national poet" and the main source of "suggestive" examples for Lovinescus microtheory. Under these circumstances, it hardly comes as a surprise that the Romanian critic discusses translation in such depth in the last volume of his Istoria, where one would expect to find a synthesis of Romanian contributions to world literature: in practice, Lovinescus microtheory of the Untranslatable comes to mask, in fact, the shameful reality of the Unspeakable—namely the fear of provincialism and mediocrity that threatens to clip the wings of young Romanian literature." Ibid.
48. Andrei Terian, *G. Călinescu. A cincea esență* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2009), 155.
49. Goldiș, „Beyond," 98.

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