

# An Exercise in Fictional Liminality: the Postcolonial, the Postcommunist, and Romania's Threshold Generation

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## Five Questions and a Realization

In the late 1990s I was working on a critical study on the fiction of the so-called "Generation of the Eighties,"<sup>1</sup> an informal literary group who made their debut in the mid-1980s, and whose experiment in prose and poetry was to alter Romania's literary landscape in the decade to come.<sup>2</sup> Practicing a self-styled "textualist engineering," blending intertextual games with a zest for "live broadcasts" of unmediated reality, and deliberately blurring the borderline between fiction and fact, the representatives of the Generation of the Eighties (that I will subsequently refer to as "G80") have earned critical acclaim as the first practitioners of postmodern writing in Romania.<sup>3</sup> Uneasily placed at the threshold of two regimes, the group was the last significant literary generation produced in Romania's forty-year period of communist dictatorship and the first to confront the unsettling ambiguities of the postcommunist era. Under the impact of this dramatic political change, most G80 writers, such as Mircea Nedelciu, Gheorghe Crăciun, Cristian Teodorescu, and Viorel Marineasa, have gradually abandoned much of their textualist experimentation and self-referential games (often suspected of escapism) and have turned towards a more overt and straightforward grasp of reality. The monolithic appearance of the group's beginnings has dissolved into an array of idiosyncratic styles. Such changes have rendered earlier critical perceptions obsolete; the labels tagged to their names now seemed no longer appropriate. "Textualism," the all-encompassing label of the group's beginnings,<sup>4</sup> no longer applied to those G80 writers who had traded radical experiment against more reader-friendly writing. If "textualism" seemed too small an umbrella, then "postmodernism" was too wide a critical tarpaulin under which the group's identity was lost,<sup>5</sup> as was its humanist engagement in the quest for sense within the senseless confines of dictator Ceausescu's Romania. It is precisely this redefinition of the human in hard times that "*the New Anthropocentrism*," a term coined by Alexandru Musina, attempted to cover,<sup>6</sup> yet not without overstating

the scope of this "anthropogenetic performance."<sup>7</sup> Other theorists insisted on the group's anti-hermeneutic realism and described G80 fiction as reiterating the so-called "*prose of authenticity*" that had been practiced by several great inter-war novelists like Mircea Eliade.<sup>8</sup>

Growing out of my dissatisfaction with all these ill-matched labels, my critical enterprise aimed to identify a more precise and flexible concept that would cut across the variety of G80 fictional modes. I also meant to shift the focus from the group's center to its fringe zones, insisting on its marginal or provincial figures (such as Petru Cimpoesu, Viorel Marineasa or Florin Slapac), on its "lost stars" (like Constantin Stan or Mihai Măniutiu), on its lone wolves (unaffiliated figures like Dan Grădinaru or Ovidiu Hurdzeu) and on older mavericks that the group annexed as "precursors of G80" (Stefan Agopian, Bedros Horasangian). All these expansions and focus shifts did but further complicate the already diverse landscape I was attempting to describe. Was there any invisible thread to tie together all this seemingly irreducible variety of G80 writing? Was there any common *figura mentis* of the Generation of the Eighties?

An intriguing aspect of G80 literature is that it encompasses both textual experimentation and a form of raw realism tagged "authenticism." Most critics used these "incompatible" modes to divide the Generation into "textualists" and "authenticists."<sup>9</sup> Yet most G80 authors fall into both groups. How could it be possible that the aesthetics of authenticity should be based on a poetics of textual manipulation? *Authenticity* and *textualism* seemed to be polar opposites, never to meet—like the two sides of a sheet of paper. I wrote the two words on the two sides of a strip of paper that lay on my desk. Never to meet, indeed.... except... except if one twists the strip into a Möbius band! I pasted two ends and formed the well-known band, and now both words could miraculously meet on the same surface. This was it: in order to coexist, the incompatible ingredients of G80 poetics needed a different type of space. A surface in a different geometry, where oppositions as *authenticity*

*vs. textualism* should be dissolved. A geometry to replace the logic of *either/or* with that of *both/and*. A threshold space, neither in, neither out. Threshold. *Limen*, the Latin for threshold. The word sparked a flash of serendipitous<sup>10</sup> realization:

*Liminality—that's what unites the Generation of the Eighties!*

Indeed—as this exclamation (the first in my series) implied—everything about the Generation of the Eighties suggested liminality and its plethora of associations: ambiguity, hybridity, transgression. Liminality is a key term of postcolonial theory, used by theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha to describe “the in-between spaces” of cultural ambiguity where diasporic and migrant identities, hovering in the indecision of in-betweenness, are shaped. Postcolonial theorists re-valorize the threshold and the interstice, purging it of its negative connotations of hesitation and vacillation, and affirm it as a privileged space of cultural renewal. Hybridity had undergone a similar process: no longer a despicable debilitating mixing of bloods and races, its potential for regeneration has now come to the forefront.

Many G80 stories are located in threshold spaces, in no man's lands; their protagonists are either borderline personalities or deliberate *declassés* self-relegated to the gray zones of society, caught in dilemmatic situations they prefer to leave unresolved. Moreover, the narrative strategies of these texts tend to disorient readers by placing them in the liminal spaces of indecision. The narrator's position suggests a similar hesitation; as narrators alternatively strengthen and relax their control of their narrative, they are both insiders and outsiders in the stories they unfold, staying both visible and invisible.<sup>11</sup> Once I had discovered the optics of liminality, the hitherto blurred landscape of G80 fiction suddenly appeared with great clarity and coherence. And indeed the idea of essential liminality of G80 writing was to become the conceptual backbone of my future book.

The flipside of my triumphant recognition was a series of questions that attempted to contemplate a wider picture:

*Is there anything liminal in Romania's wider context (be it historical, geographical or cultural) that might account for the liminality of G80 narratives?*

Which led me to a second question about the legitimacy of my method:

*Since liminality is chiefly a concept used in postcolonial theory, are we entitled to use it outside the postcolonial sphere?*

The question was echoed several months later when, on a Budapest-Stuttgart plane, I read a chapter in Anthony K. Appiah's *My Father's House* whose title, “The Postmodern and the Postcolonial,”<sup>12</sup> promised an exploration of the possible relationships between these two ample paradigms of the contemporary age. Reunited superficially by the same delusive prefix, yet divided by a different way of confronting reality imaginatively, the

postmodern and the postcolonial seemed to defy such comparison. Yet Appiah identified the similarities: “the *post* in postcolonial, like the *post* in postmodern is the *post* of space clearing gesture;”<sup>13</sup> besides, even if for dissimilar reasons, both paradigms are *postrealist*, in the sense that they are (in Ihab Hassan's terms) anti-mimetic.<sup>14</sup> I found the last argument particularly apt to describe a similar aspect of postcommunist fiction: indeed its postrealism amounted to the rejection of socialist realism. But then I wondered if one could draw such parallels; my third question was an extension of the previous one:

*Is the “post” in postcommunist the same as the “post” in postcolonial?*

On arrival, I flipped the book shut and told myself that there was no better chance to find an answer to this question than to plunge into the seminar on *The Translatability of Cultures* for which I had come. But as I was soon to discover with disappointment, the cross-cultural dialogue that the seminar fellows were trying to establish only ping-ponged between nationals from the former colonies and representatives of the former colonial powers, while it simply ignored us, the few scholars from the former Eastern block. My appeal for a dialogue that should include issues relevant to the postcommunist world was met with a shrug or a frown. We Eastern Europeans felt that in the perfectly choreographed volley exchanged between the former colonizer and colonial subject every movement had been carefully rehearsed, every new coinage carefully minted. It was not, as I had first thought, that Eastern Europe simply did not seem to be on the map of cultures worth translating. The real reason for this exclusion was the lack of a shared language. Our colleagues from South Africa and England were united by the common theoretical idiom of postcolonial discourse that invited common reflections. We were no more capable to conceptualize our recent traumatic communist past than to describe the dilemmas of postcommunist transition. We soon discovered that we even had this language problem among ourselves. One American colleague noted the absurdity of the situation as reflected in our evenings out: while the former colonizers and colonized were discussing postcolonial matters over a glass of Swabian wine at “Mon Repos,” the few postcommunist fellows sat isolated from one another on park benches and drank nothing but thin air. So then my fourth question:

*Why is postcommunist theory such a feeble companion voice in the dialogue with the postcolonial?*

When, years later, together with some of the Stuttgart Seminar fellows I organized a summer course aiming to deal specifically with the relationship between postcolonial and postcommunist ethnicity,<sup>15</sup> we noted that the “language problem” still existed among ourselves. Despite their common post-totalitarian legacy, the Latvian

could hardly find common theoretical ground with the Armenian or the Croatian. Moreover, some of the Russians felt incriminated when we tried to describe the USSR as an imperial and possibly colonial power. Hence my fifth and last question:

*Why is postcommunist theory so fragmented and so slow to emerge?*

As one can easily note, my recognition and the questions it entailed are landmarks of a route that took me from a serendipitous intuition of the liminality of recent Romanian prose to the acknowledgement of the liminal in postcolonial theory and then to the possible relation between the postcolonial and the postcommunist. I moved from one local observation to a wider context and then to an even wider comparison. It was not a deductive route, but an inductive one.

But even when venturing to the wider context, I tried to keep my initial bearings, for my main interest is to question the common application of liminality to postcolonial realities, to assess the validity of its modified application to postcommunist contexts and eventually to propose my own model of liminality, which is anchored in narratology and reception theory, as defining the deliberately ambiguous construction of both the narrator and the narratee in fictions that cultivate not just threshold spaces but also threshold discourses. Since a better understanding of my approach would require a deductive rather than inductive route, let me now retrace my steps backwards and spool my questions in reverse.

### **Postcommunist theory and its Discontents**

*Why is postcommunist theory so fragmented and so slow to emerge?*

The dramatic events of 1989—the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Velvet Revolution in Prague and the Romanian blood bath—put an end to forty years of red nightmare throughout the former Eastern Block by means of a brutal yet symbolic act: on Christmas Day, in a caserne in Wallachia, after a mock trial worthy of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, the execution squad not only shot Nicolae Ceausescu, Romania's Dracula *redivivus*, but seemed to aim at a larger evil, as if to “nail down the vampire before the sun sets and he learns to fly again” (as the protagonist of Julian Barnes' *The Porcupine* muses).<sup>16</sup> The vampire of totalitarianism once nailed down, many of its subjects would have expected to witness its thorough and meticulous dissection. For the average citizen this amounted to a “trial of communism,” while for the intellectual this would mean a rationalization and conceptualization of both the pre-1989 stasis and the post-1989 transition phase. However, in most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe the dissection of recent history never thoroughly occurred.

Many intellectuals had also expected that the demise of Soviet-inspired communism would be lavished with

the same amount of scholarship as the one that emerged in the wake of the collapse of the colonial system. In other words, many thought that the problems of the former Soviet block were to inspire theoretical constructions as encompassing and widely applicable to the variety of local contexts as were postcolonial studies to the dissimilar experiences of Nigeria, India, Morocco, or Haiti.

However, none of this happened. A lot of primary work was done to recover captivity narratives, Gulag poetry, oratures of displaced populations, diaries of the disgraced bourgeois intelligentsia, as well as more elaborated *samiždat* texts and so-called “drawer literature”; the critical analyses that tried to deconstruct this painful history remained confined to certain geographical areas, without consistent efforts to extend this reflection to the whole ex-communist block. In other words, Post-Soviet Studies did not intersect with Balkan and Eastern Europe Studies. Mikhail Epstein and Chingiz Aitmatov alike stay focussed on Russia alone. Vladimir Tismăneanu's critique concentrates on Romania, while Slavoj Žižek's critique of ideology only occasionally touches the Slovenian soil. Even Maria Todorova, whose seminal *Imagining the Balkans*<sup>17</sup> opens the widest perspectives for such a comparative reflection, remains strongly anchored in the reality of South-Eastern Europe.

One explanation for this paradoxical lack of convergence might be that, since they had been yoked together and forced to revolve on the same orbit for so many decades, the countries of the now exploded “Soviet block” have been struggling to follow their own course independently, that it is only natural that such a centrifugal thrust should ensue after so many years of centripetal coercion. Besides, one feels that the considerable analytical effort already deployed was not doubled by a similar synthetic work. Generalizations are scarce, as are elaborations of critical utensils of wide applicability. The discourse that might enable this shattered landscape to coalesce into a coherent picture is yet to be articulated.

*Why is postcommunist theory such a feeble companion voice in the dialogue with the postcolonial?*

It is obvious that in the thirteen years since the fall of the Berlin Wall the yet-to-be-coalesced discipline of postcommunist studies has failed to produce a theoretical construction that should have acquired the intellectual force, cultural prestige, and scholarly coherence that postcolonial studies have in the Western world. There are several reasons for this failure. One could blame it on the irreducible complexity and variety of national situations in Eastern Europe. Indeed, no country here is like the other. Take the cases of language balance in the pre- and post-1989 period in three countries with significant Romanian populations: Romania, Moldavia, and

Ukraine.

Romania's case is the least ambiguous: during the communist regime, the Romanian language—mother tongue to some 90 percent of its 23 million inhabitants—was not threatened by a colonial language, except for a few years in the Stalinist period, when (with Soviet troops stationed there until 1959) Russian became the language of scientific and technical communication. For the three decades that followed, the official policy slightly deviated from the Soviet line, earning Ceausescu the bogus fame abroad of a reformist maverick, while in fact he grew increasingly despotic at home. Posing as an international mediator abroad, Ceausescu was oppressively nationalist in Romania. Even if his xenophobia never resulted in solutions as violent as the displacement of the Romanian-German ethnics from Banat to the Bărăgan lowlands that had occurred in the mid 1950s,<sup>18</sup> the dictator initiated a low-profile program of assimilation of ethnic minorities that resulted in a restriction of their educational and cultural rights. Population displacements from the poorer regions of Oltenia or Moldova to the wealthier Transylvania were triggered by economic incentives rather than force, and their hidden aim was to dilute the non-Romanian component of this multi-ethnic province. To many of these ethnic groups in Transylvania, Romanian became the language of the oppressor. After 1989, the adoption of alternative languages in public administration in Transylvania was met with hostility by the majority, which also regarded with suspicion the suggestion of a multicultural solution to the province's multi-ethnic mix.

Moldavia or Bessarabia, a traditional province of Romania, was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 and during the process of Sovietization that ensued, a quarter of a million Moldavians were deported, ethnic Russians were settled in the region, the Cyrillic alphabet was imposed on the Moldavian language, and Russian became the official language. Between 1989 and 1990, Moldavia regained its independence, its language and the Latin alphabet. The complicated ethnic mix left in place by the Soviet policy of denationalization and Russification had a violent backlash in the 1990s, fueling ethnic tensions, and a war with the self-proclaimed state of Transdniestri. The newly regained prominence of the so-called Moldavian language (a subdialect of Romanian) has been constantly challenged by Moscow-backed Russian ethnics.<sup>19</sup>

Even grimmer was the lot of Bukovina, the north-eastern province of Romania annexed by the Soviet Union in 1947. After the demise of the USSR, the newly established state of Ukraine has struggled to assert its national identity at the expense of minimizing cultural difference, thus continuing the policy of assimilation of ethnic minorities perfected by the Soviet Union. Isolated, despised, denied cultural rights, and not even rec-

ognized as an ethnic group, the Romanian community of Bukovina is facing imminent cultural extinction; the Romanian language of this community, which survived for decades downgraded to the status of household and parochial patois, seems likely to disappear shortly.

Thus, in these three provinces—Transylvania, Bessarabia, and Bukovina—the same language, Romanian, is in turn perceived as a colonial language that stifles cultural difference, an indigenous language regaining its dignity, and a native vernacular pushed into oblivion. These examples epitomize the insoluble diversity of situations, which is probably one of the main causes for the failure of this part of Europe to coalesce its multifarious experience into a synthetic theoretical reflection.

One more footnote to this dispersion: theorists of postcolonialism, despite the diversity of their ethnic backgrounds, ended up largely writing in English or French and working in Western universities; hence the feeling of homogeneity-in-diversity that one has about their writing. The theorists of postcommunism write in a diversity of languages among which translations are seldom made; this is why synthetic or contrastive approaches—like Victor Neumann's recent comparative study on the history of the political thought in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>20</sup>—fail to cross physically the very borders that they successfully transgress and obliterate theoretically. The remarkable editorial work led by the reflection group *The Third Europe* in Timisoara<sup>21</sup> has been struggling to assert the idea of a Central European identity, by making available to the reader a vast variety of texts created in this half-mythical "Mitteleuropa"; yet, since their publications are in Romanian, their readership is necessarily confined to speakers of this language.

Thirteen years after the demise of the Eastern Block, a lucid spectator can not help noting that the recent history of this large part of Europe is sinking back into a sort of dubious, Huntingtonian gray zone. It is sad but probably natural that, in this age when the Great Narratives were proclaimed dead, there should be no "master narrative" left to account for the recent fates of some 115 million inhabitants (or nearly 200 million, if one includes the Soviet split-ups from Vilnius to Odessa). While postcolonial studies swelled up considerably to include nations such as Canada or Ireland, whose colonial past is anything but recent (then why not medieval England, as Jeffrey J. Cohen suggested), the postcommunist states are lingering in limbo disputed among competing disciplines that fail to encompass them all. Thus post-Soviet studies seem to be a better defined field, yet they omit the whole of Eastern Europe, while Balkan and Southeastern European studies ignore everything to the north of the Danube. Well represented worldwide, Slavic studies might seem to do better justice to the prevailing Slavic population of the region, but still leave aside between 35 and 47 million people that speak

languages belonging to the Finno-Ugric (Hungarians), Romance (Romanians and “Moldavians”) or Baltic groups (Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians). Such exclusion is not simply regrettable, but could turn out to be damaging, as Baudrillard put it in a form that is half-prophetic, half-playful: “this thawing of the East could prove to be harmful in the long run and, like carbon gases in the higher layers of the atmosphere, may create a political greenhouse effect, a rewarming of human relations on the planet through the melting down of Communist ice fields and thereby flood the shores of the West.”<sup>22</sup>

### A Dilemmatic Encounter: The Postcommunist and the Postcolonial

*Is the “post” in postcommunist the same as the “post” in postcolonial?*

In purely historical, economic and societal terms, the colonial experience and the communist experiment have distinct profiles that cannot be conflated. The ideologies that put them into orbit are obviously different. Colonialism is rooted in capitalist ideology whereas the communist experiment claims to represent a final transcendence of capitalism. The former produced a rhetoric of difference, constructing the Other as antagonistically different; the latter employed an egalitarian discourse and purportedly aimed to abolish all difference. Race and ethnicity issues are central in the colonial order, but seldom appear in the official communist agenda. However, one should beware of the misleading rhetoric of communism, a rhetoric whose terms must often be read in reverse: the oxymoronic “fight for peace” meant aggressive armament; another unlikely pair, “democratic centralism” amounted to ubiquitous state control and despotism; the flipside of egalitarian rhetoric was political cleansing and the Gulag.

I would argue moreover that different historical forces may end up producing similar effects. From the economic and political standpoint, ancient Rome, the so-called “classical” Aztec age, and the British (neo)classical period have little in common; yet we use the same term (“classical”) to define them, thus acknowledging our intuition that their architecture, literature, and arts have much in common, even if they were inspired by dissimilar realities. Consequently I do not think it is illegitimate for us to analyze these effects by means of similar conceptual tools. Indeed if two diseases happen to produce the same symptoms, we tend to describe those symptoms in the same terms.

Postcommunist studies should emerge not as a subsidiary of postcolonial studies—for their respective contexts are far too different—but as a discipline capable of entertaining a fruitful exchange of ideas with postcolonial theory. Therefore, postcolonial and postcommunist studies should intersect not in order to pro-

duce reductionist approaches to their object, but to enrich the effectiveness of their critical perceptions by widening their respective contexts. Such cross-pollinations and theoretical hybridizations can but benefit both these fields of reflection.

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In this age of endless chains of semantic appropriations, borrowing from ever more remote disciplines is common. One cannot help noticing the enormous exchange of terminology between disciplines that bear only distant resemblance. I think we have every right to borrow postcolonial terminology and even to adapt it to our needs as long as it casts a new light on the realities we scrutinize. Thus a term like *hybridity* is not the property of postcolonial theorists any more than that of the biologists that first circulated it. Neither was it first put into use in cultural theory by Homi Bhabha, but by Latin American commentators of the phenomena of *mestizaje*, *indigenismo*, *diversalite*, *creolite*, and *raza cósmica*.<sup>23</sup>

The career of *liminality* is even more complicated. Despite its air of novelty, liminality—a concept often confused with “limit condition,” marginality, or *limes*<sup>24</sup>—is in fact near centenary. It was in 1908 that Arnold van Gennep<sup>25</sup> derived it from *limen* (Latin for *threshold*) and made it the pivotal term of his analysis of the rites of passage; these would consist of three stages: (1) the separation or *pre-liminal* stage, when the person or the group detaches itself from an order of the point of social structure; (2) the threshold or *liminal* stage, when the subject of the ritual is in an ambiguous position, no longer a member of the old order, and not having yet attained the new one; and (3) the reaggregation or *post-liminal* stage that marks the insertion into the new social order.

“Rediscovered” in the late sixties by the anthropologist Victor Turner, liminality was to become the focal point of his studies on ritual.<sup>26</sup> Turner suggests that the very identity of the liminal subject is paradoxical and ambiguous: “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.”<sup>27</sup> In this phase of “no longer/not yet” the ambiguity is total: the liminal subjects are neither dead nor alive, and simultaneously they are both dead and alive; their sex, rank, or social position are equally equivocal. One of Turner’s main suggestions, later to be developed by Mihai Spărișu,<sup>28</sup> is that, in the liminal phase, the antagonistic tensions between polar opposites are neutralized in an almost impossible balance.

Homi Bhabha adopted the *limen* to describe the “in-between spaces” where the strategies of identity are elaborated,<sup>29</sup> the “initiatory interstices,” the “boundary [that] becomes the place from which something begins its presencing,”<sup>30</sup> or (with a metaphor reshaped after

Clifford Geertz)<sup>31</sup> “the *amniotic* structure of cultural spacing—a watery skin if ever there was one—a “difference” that is at once liminal and fluid.”<sup>32</sup> Even if Bhabha confines its applicability to the point of contact of two cultures (diasporic, migrant, postcolonial) and the equivocal identities it generates, his notion of liminality is disturbingly apt to characterize the Eastern European space.

### Stalled in In-betweenness: Romania and the Balkans

*Is there anything liminal in Romania's wider context (be it historical, geographical or cultural) that might account for the liminality of G80 narratives?*

“What an extraordinary episode, this thawing of the countries of the East, this thawing of freedom!” Jean Baudrillard’s words seem to echo the engrossment of the public imagination in the events of 1989, but then turn to a cautionary tone: “But what becomes of freedom once it is thawed out? A dangerous operation that may produce some rather *ambiguous* results.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, one has the feeling that 1989 was one of the few unambiguous moments in the recent history of the former “Soviet satellites.” This short-lived moment of exhilaration surfaced amidst a sea of historical and geopolitical ambiguity.

In a chapter dealing with self-designations of the Balkan nations, Maria Todorova noted as amazingly recurrent the perception of “the state of transition, complexity, mixture, ambiguity” that was resented throughout history as “an abnormal condition” or “a stigma.”<sup>34</sup> This transition is to be read both spatially and temporally. Geographically, it refers to “the feature common to all Balkan nations, the self-perception of being a crossroads of civilizational contacts, of having the character of a bridge between cultures,”<sup>35</sup> that is, between East and West, Islam and Christianity. Temporally, it represents “a bridge between stages of growth,” where the Balkans seem to be suspended over a civilizational gap in a never-finished movement, appearing not just as “backward,” but also as “half-made” and “semi-developed.”<sup>36</sup>

Located geographically outside the Balkan peninsula proper, Romania shares many civilizational features with this region, as authors like Mircea Muthu have long demonstrated.<sup>37</sup> Yet to a great extent, Balkan and Balkanism remain designations that most Romanians reject with indignation. Opinion leaders in both the academic sphere and the media tend to identify the proximity of the Balkans as a historical mishap rather than an opportunity, and identify Balkanism with Byzantine scheming and institutionalized corruption. Whether they identify themselves with the Balkans or with the more appealing space of Mitteleuropa, the Romanians still view their position in Europe as peripheral. Lucian

Boia’s interpretation of Romania is that of a “borderland of Europe,”<sup>38</sup> which is “at the same time Balkan, Eastern, and Central European, without fully belonging to either of these divisions,”<sup>39</sup> a perception shared by another historian, Neagu Djuvara, who places Romania “between the Orient and the Occident.”<sup>40</sup>

Perceptions of Romania (or rather of its central-western province of Transylvania) as a part of Mitteleuropa also imply a similar peripherality. Cornel Ungureanu polemically prefers a “Mitteleuropa of the peripheries” over a “Central Europe” that is not only “a raped Occident” (as Kundera put it) but also a space amputated of its margins. A periphery that, paradoxically, “assumes the condition of the Center.”<sup>41</sup> In his controversial *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington<sup>42</sup> also placed Romania in a no man’s land: its Western part, Transylvania is still a part of Western Christianity, while Moldova and Wallachia are undeniably a part of Eastern Christianity, the Carpathian ridge marking the divide between two civilizations.

Not only a threshold between the Orient and the Occident, but also a defensive frontier of the latter—this is how Romanians perceive their historical role. This led to the partly self-victimizing, partly self-heroicizing myth of “the sacrificed nation” that now suffers economically because it assumed the historical role of “defending European civilization.”<sup>43</sup> Typically, the Balkan nations bemoan “having sacrificed themselves to save Europe from the incursions of Asia,”<sup>44</sup> a sacrifice that resulted in “the perpetual Balkan lament of in-betweenness,”<sup>45</sup> translated into the metaphor of a bridge over the chasm between civilizations.

A book that is inevitable in this discussion is Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans*, a study of imagology (or *xenology*, as Munasu Duala-M’bedy termed it) that is probably one of the few attempts to relate postcolonial theory to an area traditionally excluded from its sphere. In this dense, fact-packed, and inspirational volume, Todorova draws a panorama of the successive layers of perception of the Balkans that led at the beginning of the twentieth century to their negative stereotyping and stigmatizing as the “powder keg” of Europe, the backward, violent and nationalist “excrement of Europe.” Solidly anchored in documentation of amazing vastness, Todorova never yields to the temptation of facile simplification and advances only cautiously into generalization.

Todorova uses Edward Said’s *Orientalism* as a scaffolding to erect her own arguments, but soon adopts a critical attitude toward it, which prevents her study from becoming but another epigonic rewriting of this classic of postcolonial theory. Gauging the Balkans against the Saidian yardstick, Todorova records more differences than similarities. Thus, unlike the abstract and idealized Orient, the Balkans display historical and geographical

concreteness; such concreteness could feed neither escapist reverie nor become a metaphor of the forbidden. While “there was an explicit relationship between the Orient and the feminine,”<sup>46</sup> the Balkans possess “a distinctly male appeal,”<sup>47</sup> a repulsive and primitive masculinity. Even the faintest resemblance between the two is dismantled in its finest shades: the mystery that seems, like the Orient, to pervade the Balkans is “but the reflected light of the Orient.”<sup>48</sup>

If the relationship between the West and the East is one of opposition and antagonism, the Balkans are felt as a transition, a *degradé* of the West, because, as Todorova insists, Orientalism implies “a difference between types,” whereas, “Balkanism treats the differences within one type.”<sup>49</sup> This is why “unlike Orientalism, which is a discourse about an imputed opposition, Balkanism is a discourse about an imputed ambiguity.”<sup>50</sup> In a memorable phrase, Todorova shows that, while orientalism is a way of confronting the Other, Balkanism engages with “the incomplete self.”<sup>51</sup> Superbly phrased and supported by a wealth of argument, the logic of the demonstration is impeccable. And yet, I find surprising that Todorova fails to fully exploit the *in-betweenness*, *ambiguity*, and *transition* she so perceptively describes. I would argue that these characteristics of the Balkans could be collapsed into a term that is almost absent from her discourse, but which comprises them all: *liminality*.

Actually Todorova mentions liminality in one instance alone: when she tries to align “the ambiguity of transitional states” to one of the three terms: *liminality*, *marginality*, and the *lowermost*. Todorova prefers to identify the *lowermost* as best illustrating the Balkans. The *lowermost*—describing “the shadow, the structurally despised alter-ego”<sup>52</sup>—enables her to develop her idea of the stigmatized self as the typical negative *imago* of the Balkans. Nevertheless, I will argue that it is *liminality* that coincides almost perfectly with her description and has the advantage of relating to similar conceptions in postcolonial theory. *Liminality*, *hybridity*, and *ambiguity*—key words in postcolonial studies—might provide fruitful points of intersection between postcolonial theory and postcommunist realities as well as a vantage point for the contemplation of Romania’s recent history.

“The former Soviet republic of Moldova...is a country in a limbo,” is the striking line that opens the presentation of this country in the *Lonely Planet* guide.<sup>53</sup> While this assertion could apply equally well to almost any country in Eastern Europe, it is Romania that seems to be the next best match. For Romania seems to have secured its place in the limbo of a liminal *n eithernor*—neither fully Oriental, nor altogether Western. Romania’s liminal condition in terms of its geographical position, civilizational makeup, and historical role is doubled by a similar “threshold” condition of compla-

cent ambiguity in terms of its contemporary economy, politics, and national psyche. Still lingering in the ambiguous gray zone of the “failed states,” Romania’s economy could be said to be both capitalist and communist and, therefore, stalled in a threshold space where opposites meet and coexist without annihilating each other. Paradoxically, the country is in transition to a market economy but still seems to be stagnating. It has a functional democracy and yet has been shattered periodically by crises of anarchy (such as the miners’ forays to Bucharest in 1990, 1991, and 1999). It is an oasis of multicultural harmony in the midst of nations torn by ethnic hatred, which nevertheless has been the theater of violent interethnic conflict (Târgu Mures 1990, repeated conflicts with the Roma minority). Hybrid democracy, hybrid economy, double-coded discourse, ambiguous position.

Hybridity, double-codedness, and ambiguity were ingredients of everyday life under the Ceausescu regime, when experience was double-coded from the earliest age. Six-year-old children already knew that the Ceausescu vilified at home as the ogre-that-cuts-gas-and-electricity was unmentionable at school, where the sinister Mr. Hyde turned into a benign Dr. Jekyll, “most beloved son of the nation” and “magisterial Helmsman.” Such a training in double-codedness was to develop in children the schizoid skills needed for survival as adults. Almost every phrase of the official discourse had to be read in the negative: “systematization of the villages” meant indiscriminate demolition of churches and farms and ghettoization of the farmers; “modernization of the Bucharest downtown area” was the official euphemism for razing hectares of old Romanian architecture to erect instead the nightmarish “House of the People”; “free elections” amounted to the confirmation of a single candidate of the only party.

The blurred borderline between the public and private spheres also placed people’s lives on the edge of survival: the party “demographic policy” required gynecological control of every female patient; home consumption of electricity, gas, and food was strictly regulated by means of artificially-induced shortages; phones were bugged, typewriters were recorded with the police, home videos were regarded as a threat to “communist ethics.” To the eyes of the Westerner, such deprivations and invasions of privacy should have made life simply impossible. Yet, the Romanians survived, either by circumventing the rules, or by adapting to them, while sneering at their absurdity. However, this survival was not without a cost. The national virtue of non-violence often turned into resignation and fatalism. The typical national sport, “a face haz de necaz”—literally “to laugh over one’s misery”—is responsible for the mushrooming of thousands of political jokes (probably the most succulent of Eastern Europe); while showing that the

Romanians were fully aware of the Ubuesque absurdities of the regime (after all, the creator of the theater of the absurd, Eugène Ionesco, was of Romanian origin), these also vented out anger and frustration to the point that the whole pressure of misery was exhausted; this is probably why Romania had the scantiest *samizdat* literature, and the smallest number of dissidents. Therefore the “skills” required for survival—ranging from the schizoid internalization of double-codedness to the paranoid fear of informers—left indelible marks on the psyche of every citizen.

Artists were no exception. They were even more exposed, as the Chinese-style “cultural revolution” initiated by Ceausescu in the early seventies attempted to force them into the role of party propagandists, eager to praise the “socialist achievements” and to support the cult of personality. Patriarchal, nationalist, xenophobic, and rudimentarily mimetic, the doctrine of “socialist realism” seemed inescapable. Yet, artists survived too, but not without paying a price. The ideological censors had a long list of banned words against which they gauged manuscripts; the list of unpalatable words included everyday terms that bore any reference to the chronic shortages that plagued the country: *meat, oil, candy, heat*. The mere mention of the “lover’s flesh” was a crime, for the word “carne” (meaning both *flesh* and *meat*) was blacklisted. When the official “suppression of censorship” was announced in the ‘80s, this euphemism confirmed Romanians’ worst fears: now it was publishers who turned down every manuscript that contained traces of subversion, whether real or imaginary. Soon it was the writers themselves who stopped submitting such “hopeless” manuscripts; and before long they even stopped writing such manuscripts, thus reaching the perverse stage of “self-censorship.”

Another way to flout censorship was to use allegory, parable, and encrypted reference to point to political realities, therefore using double-codedness again. Such *romans à clef* were the real bestsellers of the eighties and they implied complicity with a reader who was both able and willing to decipher such intricate Aesopian reference. Sometimes a mere shift of period sufficed to evade censorship; the fad for the “novel of the obsessive decade” allowed many authors to point to the evils of the present by relegating them to the Stalinist fifties; often the reference was pushed further back, as in Al Vlad’s *Summer Child*<sup>54</sup> (where a presentation of Hitler’s cultural policy is a transparent allusion to Ceausescu’s similar practices), or in Ioan Grosan’s *One Hundred Years at the Gates of the Orient*<sup>55</sup> (where the degraded political mores at the court of an imaginary Wallachian prince of the seventeenth century hint at contemporary Byzantine scheming).

The 1989 moment suddenly promised to resolve these ambiguities, but soon afterwards they emerged

again. Eva Hoffman noted the paradoxical “acceptance of ambiguity” in post-1989 Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, after 1989, Romania traded one type of ambiguity for another. Until then, the country was applauded by the West as the maverick of the Eastern block (on account of Ceausescu’s refusal to join the troops that invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968), when in fact a severe crackdown on dissident voices and severe infringements of human rights had long been the norm. After Romania’s dubious revolution (itself another type of equivocal event—half spontaneous popular uprising, half *coup d’état* concocted by second-line apparatchiks) the country has slipped back into a quagmire of ambiguities and contradictions: a faltering market economy cohabits with massively subsidized state-owned industrial mammoths; multiethnic Transylvania has been perceived as both an island of stability not affected by the “Balkan powder keg” syndrome, while it was also the scene of serious multiethnic trouble involving the Hungarian minority and the Roma population; Romanians have grown increasingly aware of their European vocation, while still waiting for an official “entrance to Europe.”

When someone inquires which of these contrasting countries is Romania in reality, the best answer one could give is: both. Romania is both a Balkan Land of Dracula “at the Gates of the Orient,” and a European nation. It is both modern and Western-oriented (the polls indicate the greatest popular sympathy for NATO and the EU among CEE candidate states) and backward and Oriental (even if this “Balkanism” is perceived here negatively as part of a burdensome historical legacy); the Romanians feel they inhabit “some kind of no-man’s land, not European at all, but not Asiatic at all.”<sup>57</sup> It is both unitary and fragmented; tolerant and intolerant; capable of change and mired in stagnation; the transition to a market economy and democracy is both too slow and too violent; these perceptions are not always merely an effect of different viewpoints, or different moments; very often they are simultaneous.

Just as in the case of postcolonial nations or of diasporic groups, postcommunist identities are often painfully dilemmatic, fragmented and inevitably hybrid. The Hungarian-Romanian ethnics of Transylvania experience the dilemmas of “hyphenated” ethnicity: neither Romanian in spirit nor fully Hungarian, they often feel betrayed by both states. The blue collars would stick to communist-style slipshod work, while expecting capitalist-like wages; the white collars expect communist-style subsidies, while earning capitalist dividends; in the eyes of the government, the coal miners of Jiu Valley are, ironically, both “pillars of democracy” (when used as a paramilitary group to clamp down on the students’ anticommunist demonstration in 1991) and “expendables” (as the first to be made redundant on the dictates

of the IMF); the farmers love their land as much as their ancestors did, but leave it by the thousands to work Spanish or Portuguese land; my students scorn politics but dream about careers in diplomacy, they don't read newspapers but wish to work in the media; the Transylvanians consider themselves different from their southern compatriots, yet react violently at any plan of regional devolution. Until today the official discourse has remained split-tongued: thus, as the latest news revealed, the committee designed to expose the undercover agents of the former secret police—the much feared and seemingly ubiquitous *Securitate*—has slowly turned into a black hole where every *Securitate*-related document mysteriously disappears.

### Steeped in Fictional Liminality: The Generation of the Eighties

With such a long log of social ambiguity, political double-talk, and geostrategic liminality, it is no surprise that G80 authors, themselves placed on the threshold between two historical paradigms, should have developed a type of literature that abounds in hybrid identities and threshold spaces. *The Woman in Red*—doubtlessly the most significant contribution to postmodern literature wrought by this generation, a novel written in the late 1980s by an unlikely trio consisting of a novelist, Mircea Nedelciu, and two cultural critics, Mircea Mihăies and Adriana Babeti<sup>58</sup>—would come closest to both Todorova's and Bhabha's notions of the transitory or liminal. Borderlines of every sort (physical, class-defined, internalized, real, or imaginary) crisscross the trajectory of the book's heroine, Ana Cumpănas-Sage, a Romanian peasant from Banat who emigrated at the beginning of the last century to the United States, where she thrived as the patron of a *speakeasy cum brothel* in the Prohibition era, and was recorded by history and the tabloid press alike as the mysterious informer who led to the police's shooting of the (in)famous gangster John Dillinger in Chicago. Ana is a perfect example of diasporic identity, able neither to attain to fully accepted American-ness, nor—once expelled from the United States—to slide back into her original Romanian-ness.

In the fluid geography of the early twentieth century, the borderlines are moving—in Europe along the fissures of the crumbling empires, and in America by pushing westward the pioneers' frontier. The Banat region is a center turned margin.<sup>59</sup> The Midwest is a margin turned center. Enjoying a freedom of movement whose mere mention in the 1980s was subversive, the Banat people of 1910 move along these moving frontiers, initiating one of those periodic migrations of the poor. Ana Cumpănas, Anghelina-Hellen, Ioan Y., and Alexandru Suci cross the fluid frontier of the Atlantic only to discover, beyond Ellis Island, another frontier,

that of a hegemonic culture, which—in Lévi-Strauss' terms recycled by Zygmunt Bauman—is *anthropophagous*, “annihilating the strangers by *devouring* them..., smothering cultural or linguistic distinctions; forbidding all traditions and loyalties except those meant to feed the conformity to the new and all-embracing order.”<sup>60</sup> Even so, they remain *neither-nors*, dubious marginals: Helen is humiliated by her xenophobic colleagues, the lawyer has no clients, Ioan Y. is a perpetual *hand* at the conveyor belt, and Ana's business slides towards the edge of legality. Ten years later, despite her enviable wealth, Ana's assimilation is still incomplete, and “her English is a sort of Negro-French,”<sup>61</sup> as another immigrant notes.

On her first trip back to Romania, Ana is shocked to discover—along with the newly traced border with Serbia—several freshly erected barriers of a very different nature. Her mercantile in-laws become strangers to her, as she “feels that between them there is a frontier,...a moving frontier that surrounds her tighter and tighter.”<sup>62</sup> Her youth love, Liviu, has become a doctor, and thus “his leap to a world unattainable to her erected a barrier against her.”<sup>63</sup> The proliferation of these external barriers causes the fracture of the character's moral axis, who feels that “her inner frontier had broken for ever.”<sup>64</sup> The fissure affects Ana's ethical being, and that “limit embedded in one's soul”<sup>65</sup> between moral and immoral is suspended. “The border,” notices Mircea Nedelciu in his only solo partition in this novel, “is but the man's interior dimension, which, once lost, is unrecoverable.”<sup>66</sup> Her moral de-territorialization once triggered, Ana returns to America and lets herself be guided by a uniquely pragmatic compass, which soon ends up in her association with the Mob.

When the police begin to pester her, Ana tries to buy her peace by turning in Dillinger. Turned overnight into “Dillinger's Delilah,” the apocalyptic whore and media heroine, Ana has trespassed unwillingly another line, the one defining the prerogatives of the police. Blamed for having compromised the American justiciary myth, an uncomfortable witness, Ana soon confronts the other face of the reaction to strangers, the *anthropoemic*, that of “vomiting the strangers” and “expelling [them] beyond the frontiers of the managed and the manageable territory.”<sup>67</sup> Expelled back to a “homeland” which is no longer home, Ana lives as a perpetual exile in her native Banat. A rich American for the Banat people, just as she had been a suspect European for the Americans, unable to rediscover her true self in a real homeland, Ana is hurled into a space of indeterminacy—in the *in-betweenness*—“that place outside every border, where nothing is called home.”<sup>68</sup>

Outside unidimensional borders, there are bidimensional frontiers, not lines, but spaces of unreclaimed sovereignty, such as “those weird border zones between the boarding lounge and the airstrip,” which are located

“inside the country and not at its edge.”<sup>69</sup> This might be read as an allusion to a transgressive type of literature privileged by the three authors. In the bleak paranoid isolation of 1987 Romania, they conceive literature as a way of going “beyond the imaginary lines guarded by... watchtowers, uniformed people, and weapons.”<sup>70</sup>

A similar obsession with borderline situations occurs in *The Waiting Lounge* by Bedros Horasangian.<sup>71</sup> A solitary tourist is arrested in an almost Tarkovskian “frontier zone” at the Danube for his simply “looking suspect,” and his relentless interrogation by suspicious officers triggers a flow of long-suppressed memories. Beyond the political implications of the incident in the frontier zone, this episode points to another type of interstice, the one between the *immediacy* of the present and the ever *mediated* access to the past. This meditative hero is in quest of a vantage point that might enable him to experience simultaneously the present and the past, that is, to see beyond “the blurred borders, the living flesh of the past”<sup>72</sup> or to penetrate “the inertial space between the [photographic] image and memory’s space.”<sup>73</sup>

Liminal characters abound in the prose of the G80 group. Mircea Cărtărescu’s novellas are peopled with androgynes, twins, doppelgängers, narcissistic figures, and teenagers caught in the crisis of becoming adults. Some, like *REM* or *Travesty*,<sup>74</sup> read like ample rites of initiation, where the identity of a novice is suspended, and his relentless trial mixes opposites: tenderness and cruelty, divine pride and humiliation, bliss and horror. In *The Twins*,<sup>75</sup> Andrei, a genialoid and recluse teenager, is tormented by an unrequited love-hate for the frivolous Gina, and their long-deferred erotic prelude, consumed in a backroom of the Antipa Museum of Natural History, generates an enormous energy that brings all the paleontologic exhibits back to a hallucinating life, while their final and apocalyptic love-making is sheer atomic fission that causes the two lovers to swap sexes; Andrei becoming Gina, and vice versa, with the reader eventually realizing that the “failed androgynous” has long been inscribed in the very names of the heroes [Andrei+Gina=Andr(o)Gyn(e)].

Often such characters are inscribed as mediators between two worlds. Such a character in Petru Cimpoesu’s recent novel *Simion liftnicul*<sup>76</sup> claims to be able to converse directly with God and, to the consternation of his neighbors, he decides to move both his place of worship and his home to the only location that enables him to physically depart the misery of a larval humanity, and that connects him with a higher entity: therefore he squats in the elevator.<sup>77</sup>

The reader frequently encounters characters whose social status is uncertain—marginals, misfits, *déclassés*; these once secondary characters now occupy the focal point of the narratives. The marginalized elderly in

Daniel Vighi’s novel *December at 10*<sup>78</sup> live in the dilapidated blocks at the periphery and are suspicious of the other marginals (homeless, hobos, handicapped) or equivocal categories (the new farmers, *colons* of the suburbs). The typical marginal in Mircea Nedelciu’s prose is the orphan, a socially unfixed individual, oscillating between random part-time jobs. A curiously frequent presence is that of the voluntary *déclassé* (what I would call a *self-unmade man*), the individual who opts for a precarious existence, the enigmatic solitary who refuses to play by the rules; such characters are frequent in the fiction of Cristian Teodorescu, where they seem to extract some secret pleasure from their dishonor. Acvila Baldovin in G. Cusnarencu’s *Memory Tango*<sup>79</sup> quits his family to become a philosophizing tramp. A victim of intolerant ideological watchdogs, the academic from “The Crystal Globe” by Răzvan Petrescu<sup>80</sup> relishes his fall and explores the liminal space of imminent death. The inscrutable and reluctant George from *The Bodiless Beauty* by Gheorghe Crăciun<sup>81</sup>—a university graduate who prefers to perform menial jobs—becomes the reader’s Vergil, a *stalker* between the real world and the fictional one.

Yet these liminal spaces, hybrid characters, and transitory phenomena do not exhaust the inventory of textual liminalities. Indeed their presence should be seen as extending beyond the physical world recreated by the text to the text itself, that is, to the way the narrator manipulates the story s/he unfolds. At this point we have to part with Bhabha, as we have reached the limit of his definition of liminality. His *in-betweenness* turns out to be a concept used at only half of its potential. Especially when one intends to analyze *liminality* in literary texts, one discovers that Bhabha’s approach to the text enables one to map a repertory of liminal spaces and liminal identities only as *represented* by the text. That is, it forces us to consider the text as a wholly transparent window onto physical reality; or a faithful mirror, an unambiguous piece of evidence, an unquestionable documentary trace. It compels us to discuss the representation of reality in the same terms we would discuss reality itself: in anthropological, sociological, or political terms. What is left aside is the nature of the *representation* itself, the textual strategies it mobilizes, the narrative instances it stages, and the discursive practices it puts to work. Bhabha seems strangely uninterested in the texture of the discourse itself, as if he were (mis)taking the canvas for the picture on it. Marjorie Perloff critiques Bhabha for assuming that “the artwork has, evidently, no more than instrumental value, illustrating and exemplifying the political and ideological thesis of the critic who happens to find it of use.”<sup>82</sup>

Several cultural theorists have attempted to provide liminality with a definition that could deal with its specific presence in the arts. The first was Victor Turner himself, whose later books expanded his observations,

by describing liminality and marginality as overall conditions of artistic and philosophical creativity<sup>83</sup> and by linking the *liminoid* to ritual-like situations in modern societies (sport, performance). Mihai Spariosu's book *The Wreath of Wild Olive: Play, Liminality and the Study of Literature* attempts to turn liminality into a condition of art itself. Liminality, insists Spariosu, should be dissociated from marginality, as the former describes a neutral relationship, whereas the latter refers to an antagonistic relation. Unlike marginality, liminality "may open access to new worlds" and "may initiate new worlds" by transcending the dialectics of margin and center.<sup>84</sup> In Spariosu's view, liminality becomes a place to which literature seems to turn after it has exhausted the *agonic*—the principle of antinomy and belligerence represented by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche—in order to rediscover the pacified spirit of the non-agonic, the *irenic*.

Another intuition of the liminal occurs in a recent study by Wolfgang Iser<sup>85</sup> that defines fictionalizing—the process by means of which a text acquires its fictional character—as including frontier transgression, installation into an *in-between* space and the simultaneity of polar opposites, also called *doubledness*. While acknowledging the elegance of Spariosu's theory and the precision of Iser's construction, I would argue that they tend to use liminality as a model for almost any form of serious art. This amounts to diluting the term excessively and stripping it of its potential for defining a particular type of art endowed with a special internal dynamism.

My contention is that liminality may manifest itself at the discursive level whenever the narrator adopts a strategy of an "impossible" location in the simultaneous spheres of *both/and* or *neither/nor*. Both outside and inside the narrative. Both objective and subjective. Neither familiar nor remote. Such a logically improbable position seems to be the secret dream expressed by many narrators of the G80 group. Bedros Horasangian seems fascinated by the idea of such an impossible equilibrium: "he would like to... place himself in a *cusp of inflection*, the point where a curve changes its gradient, this is how they put it in mathematical analysis, [i.e.,] a status of *unstable balance*."<sup>86</sup> The algebraic figure of the *cusp of inflection* is a scientific metaphor that points again at the magical point where contrary tensions are—if only for a brief moment—in a precarious and peaceful balance. This indicates a simultaneous temptation of narrative distance and proximity, an oscillation between the contrary seductions of indifferent detachment and arbitrary interventions into the diegesis.

Similarly, the novel *The Woman in Red* was "engineered" by its narrative team as a Leviathan-like novel, made of seemingly incongruous ingredients and aiming to perform quasi-incompatible functions. A good illustration of Ihab Hassan's principle of *hybridization*<sup>87</sup>—a

notion located in a different sphere from Bhabha's *hybridity*—the novel was designed to be "a documentary novel," an evenly-dosed and sophisticated *mélange* of fact and fiction. Its recipe was to observe the principle of "neither-nor/both-and," which would accommodate otherwise irreconcilable ingredients: mythical permanence and "the illogical logic" of fashion, Broch's modernist gravity and Vonnegut's postmodern gusto,<sup>88</sup> box office and *succès d'estime*.

But, one might wonder, how could such quixotic goals ever be achieved? It is a matter of narrative strategy. The full answer would consist of a long inventory of textual practices, of which I will analyze just two:

#### *Placing the Narrator in Liminal Space: Free Indirect Discourse*

Traditionally, narratorial discourse has two alternative for the representation of the character's speech and thought. This occurs either by using direct speech and providing the reader an *ad litteram* transcription of the characters' words; or by using indirect speech and by relating or summarizing the original dialogue. In direct discourse the narrator's presence seems to fade, giving way to the characters' voices that can be heard in their original sound. In indirect discourse, instead of the original dialogue, what we hear is but a narrative of this dialogue, which is reformulated in the narrator's own words.

In between these two standard types of discourse representation comes a third, a hybrid form that seems to defy logic and whose paradoxical character has been challenging linguists and narratologists: free indirect discourse. Linguistic or pragmatic approaches to free indirect discourse<sup>89</sup> define it as a mixed code of representation, where elements pertaining to indirect discourse coexist with those specific to direct discourse. Such a hybrid that could be tagged a grammatical anomaly is nevertheless fully acceptable in fiction<sup>90</sup> and has even been described as one of the proofs of a text's fictionality.<sup>91</sup>

The following sample, taken from Dan Grădinaru's mock-historical story "Ignatius of Loyola and Voltaire," epitomizes almost every characteristic of free indirect discourse. A slightly senile and ludicrously enamoured Voltaire prepares an extravagant banquet for the lady of his dreams:

Under the chandelier teeming light like a tamed blaze, there were Maréchal Richelieu, the Earl of Lauzun, the brothers d'Argenson, the Count Pont-de-Veyle, with their wives, and before him, resplendent—a gleaming ruby—Olympie. *What a joy! He was to regale her! He was to...* Next to the cutlery and crockery arrayed like chess pieces before the game, the guests rested in expectation of the culinary battle. *Twelve sorts of wine! She would hardly believe it! And no less than thirty-two hors-d'oeuvres! She wouldn't believe her eyes,*

*oh mon Dieu!... Fresh foie gras, caviar, brain with aspic and custard, cheese (how many sorts, Jeannot?), carp in sauce, Vienna pâté, and then, surprise! the appetizer he himself had concocted. A relish! Olympie peeped at him through her eyelashes powdered with too effulgent a light. Oh, Olympie, his white jewel, his treasure! Beholding her pick about the food with her teenyweeny finger lifted in the air and her almond-shaped eyes green like the sea at Calais... oh, now everything everything was possible! With the memory of an evening like this, one could live happily one hundred years from now!*<sup>92</sup>

The voice that opens the passage, the blasé voice of a highlife chronicler, soon seems to tune in a different wavelength. The detached enumeration of the guests is interrupted by passionate exclamations that don't seem to belong to the same worldly reporter. This other voice, which I highlighted in italics—the voice of the elderly Voltaire, chuckling with glee, heated with anticipation—is never reproduced in direct speech, yet it is more full-bodied than in indirect speech. Its presence is still mediated by the narrator: Voltaire is still referred to as *he*, his words are in the past tense, quotation marks are absent (as is the rule in indirect discourse). And yet the character's idiolect slowly permeates the narrator's discourse; even if muffled by the tense and person shift, every sign of this contagious orality is there: the old man's Gallicisms, exclamations, questions, hesitations, interruptions, endearments, and speech stereotypes. It is as if the sober narrator slowly became contaminated with the old man's jubilation, and came to share Voltaire's admiration for Olympie and his culinary *jouissance*.

Whether we call this effect “coloring,” “reflectorisation,” or “contamination” (as Franz Stanzel does), free indirect discourse is best described by Roy Pascal's “dual voice theory” as the merger of two voices (rather than their alternation) that results in a hybrid discourse of uncertain paternity in which the character's voice maintains the full range of its expressivity, while the narrator maintains a limited control of the text. My own reading of free indirect discourse is that it performs a form of ventriloquism, a verbal masquerade (that betrays either narratorial empathy or auctorial irony for the character) in which the speaker's identity becomes blurred, oscillating in the liminal interstice between the narrator and the character.

This device is significantly frequent in G80 fiction and seems to indicate the desire to undermine the established role of the narrator by means of ambiguitization. Free indirect discourse becomes the privileged way of transcribing limit situations (the panicked thoughts of a drowning man in a novel by Bedros Horasangian flood the hitherto calm narrative discourse)<sup>93</sup> or psychologically liminal states, like the following case of a woman seized by a heart attack in a tramway:

[a] Why her, why doesn't he go? [b] She collapsed

on the only vacant seat. [c] Like a whale, like a leech, that's how they see her. Don't they sit? Why shouldn't they? [d] Then a blue shadow hovered toward the driver along the vast aisle. [e] And when the chicken soup simmers, she rings at Sanda's door, the chicken on the plate, pushes the door open—why don't you make a stew with it, she says, for I got soup. Sanda—a limp, another one, takes the plate, the chicken's steaming, [f] a smell of rusted iron and wickerwork, [g], oh, no, not this. [h] She tilted her head backwards, took a long breath. It was abating. The hand, turned blue, was still lying on her chest—[i] and then what's next?<sup>94</sup>

Despite the first impression, there is still a logic in this delirious discourse. This logic can only be perceived if we acknowledge the presence of more than a single perspective. I have segmented the text so that we can follow these perspectival fluctuations. At the beginning [a] the perspective is interior: Rodica reproaches her lover for using her in his black-marketeering; then [b] the woman's collapsing under the first symptoms of a heart attack is seen from the outside; [c] we return to the woman's interior monologue, in which she resents the hostility of the passengers; [d] to the eyes of the delirious woman, reality distorts itself, the tramway car dilates, and a passenger transmogrifies into a floating shadow; [e] shattered by her fear of death, Rodica recalls her bringing food to the moribund neighbor next door; [f] a return to the reality of the tramway; [g] “oh, no, not this” is Rodica's inner shriek at a new pang in the heart; [h] as the pain abates, Rodica observes her body as if it were an outlandish object and [i] is worried of the possibility of another attack.

Two extreme perspectives are conflated here: a non-participatory camera-view and a highly subjective self-scrutiny. Both are equally frustrating to the reader. The former fails to produce an explanation of the woman's unusual behavior captured in its mere exteriority, while the latter is totally absorbed in hypochondriac self-surveillance. The usual difference in pronoun regime (*she* for the exterior view, *I* for the inner one) does not occur here, as the woman's words are only approximated in narrativized interior monologue. More than a mere alternation of viewpoints, this seems to be an attempt to create simultaneous plurifocality.

“The dialogue re-naturalizes itself after it has undergone reductive transcriptions, reconstitutions, reinventions and constructions in the order of signification.”<sup>95</sup> How is this possible—the reader might react at the paradox of Mircea Nedelciu's statement—how could a dialogue revert to its pristine naturalness once it has been manipulated? Well, this is possible only if we depart the sphere of what Bakhtin called *the monologic* and adopt the plural logic of the *dialogic*. Even without mentioning it, Nedelciu's plea is

steeped in Bakhtinian *heteroglossia*.<sup>96</sup> The fictional text should always revert to *natural dialogue*, which Nedelciu defines as “the use—within the same short text—of several types of transcription (hence of several ideologies).” The internal dialogism of such “democratic texts” renders them capable of engaging in a “dialogue with the dominant ideology of the society in which the author lives”.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the leader of the G80 group relates a matter of poetics to ideology. And, since his text was written at the acme of Ceausescu’s totalitarian (and hence monologic) rule, the subversive undertone of this invitation to dialogue could hardly be overstated. There was no question of “several ideologies” in Ceausescu’s regime. Nedelciu’s whole text is a plea for interrogative texts that might generate “a natural dialogue between all the participants and [that] admits no ‘mere assistants.’”<sup>98</sup>

#### *Placing the Reader in Liminal Space: Second-person Narrative*

Just as narrators are frequently made ambiguous in G80 fiction by their positioning in the hybrid form of free indirect discourse, their listeners too are ambiguated when they appear inserted in the texture of the so-called *second-person narrative*. In the prose of Mircea Nedelciu, Cristian Teodorescu, or Stefan Agopian, this unusual type of narrative has a systematic presence. Nedelciu, a lover of self-imposed hurdles, experimented with several short stories written entirely in the second person. Teodorescu’s novel *The Secrets of the Heart* traces the footsteps of a mysterious *declassé* that is constantly referred to as *you*, even if no further clues for his identification are given. In many other G80 texts the *you*-narrative occurs on shorter stretches and sometimes tends to be nothing but a stylistic stereotype.

The function of this type of narrative (which is curiously absent from major theories of focalization) is commonly regarded as aiming “to involve the reader in the narrative.”<sup>99</sup> This critical fallacy is based on the assumption that every use of *you* presupposes the existence of a communicational context, in which the readers have to identify themselves with this *you*. However, the instances of *you* implying direct address to the reader are relatively rare. Most of them are parodic rewritings of eighteenth century interpellations of the reader, as when the chronicler in Ioan Grosan’s historiographic pastiche *One Hundred Years at the Gates of the Orient* flatters the reader: “If you well remember, beloved Reader—and we do not see what could hinder you from remembering: for you have distributive memory, you are cultivated and self-taught.”<sup>100</sup>

*You* remains a pronoun that may invite multiple identifications. Based on Capecci, Hantzis, Bonheim and McHale,<sup>101</sup> I would suggest the following typology of the narrative *you*: (1) *you* denoting the narratee, that is, the fictional character addressed by the narrator; (2) *you*

denoting the implied reader, i.e., the reader as imaginatively constructed by the author; (3) *you* as the narrator, often in specular introspection or narcissistic self-address; (4) *you* as generic person, in the instances of impersonal formulations used in proverbs, as a colloquial substitute for the pronoun *one* (as in “*You* can never know”), or as procedural *you*,<sup>102</sup> (5) *you* as a dramatized character who is not addressed but *designated* by this pronoun.<sup>103</sup>

The first four forms are widely represented in G80 fiction. Cărtărescu’s adolescent characters often plunge in narcissistic self-interpellation; the narrators’ “collective” in Grosan’s parodic science fiction or historical novels repeatedly pleads with the reader; Al Vlad and Horasangian’s heroes passionately confess to their estranged partners. Much of this betrays communication gone amiss: in Al Vlad’s “The Telephone,” a young man argues with his dead lover; in George Cusnarencu’s “What are the Names of the Four Beatles,” a middle-aged disk jockey at an FM radio station fails to capture the attention of a younger audience; in Nedelciu’s “Moreno-style Provocation,” the communication lines between two victims of the 1977 earthquake (a disabled youth and a trauma victim) are broken; in Horasangian’s *The Waiting Lounge*, the victim of secret-police abuse absurdly appeals to the humanity of his former torturer in a letter that is never sent; even diaries seem to speak to a defunct version of one’s self, as in Cărtărescu’s “REM.”

It is however the fifth type that reveals the extraordinary potential for ambiguity of *you*-narrative. I would even argue that it is only this type that deserves the name “second-person narrative.” This is a paradoxical *you*, for it is placed outside a communicative context; *you* here no longer serves to address but to designate a character, in the way the pronouns *he* or *she* do. This special type of narrative tends to insinuate itself into third-person contexts. The opening of Mircea Nedelciu’s short story “Christian the Traveler” introduces a character in conventional third-person narrative: “Geza washes the kettle, pours two cups of cold water, adds two teaspoons of coffee, two of sugar, turns on the gas” and so on. Then the narrator switches to what seems to be the procedural second-person (Morrisette’s “cookbook *you*”): “now *you* should perform the not-so-simple task of holding the hot handle of the kettle”; yet the impersonality of this mode slowly fades away as the text accumulates details that are too minute to refer to a generic *you*: “now *you* should pour it into each cup, twice, while *you* hear the water running in the bathroom.” If the readers felt like identifying themselves with this seemingly impersonal *you*, the identification becomes unlikely when further details point at Geza who sips his coffee while he musingly watches his friend tenderly hugging her baby: “*You* taste the coffee,... *you* smile as if *you* understood something and knew it well, though *you*

know *yourself* that *you* don't understand anything."<sup>104</sup> Therefore this *you* points at Geza, though without addressing him. Any other possibility of identification is to be ruled out: this *you* is not the narrator, who is a distinct actor always speaking in the first person.<sup>105</sup> To further complicate the situation, Geza is sometimes referred to as *he*. Since this *you* is not systematic, whenever it occurs the reader will feel the tingle of interpellation, quickly to wane as the *you* points again at the character.

Another story by Nedelciu, "The Tundra Chrysanthemum," experiments programmatically with multiple second-person mode. A young tourist guide is asked by an elderly Norwegian tourist to locate the woman with whom he had had a brief romance many years ago, during the Soviet-inspired World Youth Festival held in 1958 in Bucharest. The guide's failed excursion into somebody else's past dramatizes the tragic difference between personal history and collective history in the Stalinist era. In a deliberately confusing way, the five actors of this drama are all called *you* (*you* Marcel, *you* Sorina, *you* Mom, etc.) and this might suggest that oppressive History calls all its victims by the same name. And that the reader could at any time become such a victimized *you*.

The following text by Ovidiu Moceanu, speaking of a frontier world, places the reader her/himself at the fluid frontier between *you* and *he*, both pointing in fact at the same character:

He could hear the puff of the same locomotive, he could see the same engine drivers and conductors in the stations. It was a frontier world, still uncharted, *you* pass across it and *you* feel liberated if *you* see the station of L., *you* plunge into oblivion and *you* surface after a while, amazed at what *you* discover...<sup>106</sup>

The volatile pronominal makeup of Gheorghe Crăciun's early stories repeatedly reverts to second person whenever the narrator's self-analysis reaches a certain level of intimacy; it is as if, whenever the narrator plunges into the hero's psyche, the emotional temperature raised and the pronoun *you*, acting as an affective marker, betrayed this sudden empathy. Thus, in a scene where a young man returns home from the army, the narrator seems to forget that his hero used to be "a third person": "and in *your* soul there was such a yearning such a restlessness to recover *your* small civilian liberties."<sup>107</sup>

We have to concede that, however unlikely this seems in linguistic terms, this *you* is devoid of communicational value, as it does not result from allocution. Since everyday experience does not prepare us for such an aberrant use of *you*, we always tend to identify ourselves as its targets, an identification quickly to be frustrated by the text. One could provide dozens of similar examples in G80 fiction (some of them running book-length), which all display the same deceptive scenario. The *you* of such

problematic fictions tends to be extremely versatile and unstable, reverting itself easily to either the impersonal *you* or the reader-addressed *you*. Such semantic instability is deliberately cultivated by G80 artists to induce the strategic disorientation of the reader. This dilemmatic *you* might be described as a pivotal pointer that can rapidly shift its reference, pointing at the nearly complete gamut of narrative actors, from the narrator to the implied reader. The liminality of second-person narratives would be this very rejection of clear-cut choices and the establishing of an intermediate zone where a pronoun can point almost simultaneously at actors whose roles are otherwise antagonistic.

The most spectacular case of liminal insertion is when the heterodiegetic narrator (the narrator exterior to the story) encounters either his reader or the characters he himself has shaped. A sheer scandal in the order of formal logic, such an encounter implies a transgression of the borderline separating the characters' world from the narrator's sphere. *Metalepsis* is the name given by Gérard Genette to this type of narratological quantum leap.<sup>108</sup> As Constanza Del Rio Alvaro aptly points out, "metaleptic jumps . . . always involve a confusion between sign and referent, reality and fiction" as "they flaunt the artificiality of art by undoing the hierarchy between outside and inside, high and low, narrating subject and narrated object."<sup>109</sup>

In Mircea Cărtărescu's "REM," a group of children play weird games that end up by altering the reality they pretended to mimic; in the ultimate game of this rite of initiation one of the children penetrates into the enigmatic REM, that is, an apartment room of the distant 1980s (the game takes place in the 1960s), where a young man whose description points at Cărtărescu himself is writing feverishly the very story we have been reading. In other stories by the same author the fictionality of the world characters live in is revealed to them, which amounts to a warrant of invulnerability (in "The Roulette Player") or eternal participation in beauty (in *Travesty*).

If many of the metalepses that occur in G80 fiction are merely ironic-nostalgic denunciations of literary conventions, some suggest much graver concerns. Indeed, characters are held captive by their fictional worlds in a way that hints at their authors' much more real captivity. Characters can escape their fictional world no more than the writers who shaped them can escape their real one. And if this world is the oppressive country-sized prison of totalitarianism, the plea of Ioan Grosan's heroes in *One Hundred Years at the Gates of the Orient* and the hopeless answer given by their narrators become even more dramatic. Published in serialized form in a magazine that discreetly defied the Communist Party line, Grosan's tale of the seventeenth century poet and courtier living in a world of Byzantine intrigue at

the Gates of the Orient that is strangely reminiscent of contemporary times was abruptly and brutally discontinued by censorship. Having to improvise an ending, the author suddenly abandoned the hitherto facetious tone of this half-Oriental, picaresque fable and let his characters express a despair which was not just theirs, but also that of a whole nation in 1988, the darkest year of Ceausescu's rule:

Now we just cannot proceed with our story. Or rather...it's not that we cannot...but we may not.... Time fades behind us, and it darkens ahead of us, the times begin to rumble and to shatter and our frail epic construction is halted mid-way.... Over the places, over the characters and over the Aesopian language that made them possible falls the gray dust of foreboded catastrophe. . . . Our heroes have strayed and, despite our will, we can no longer bring them home, forcing them to eternal exile. Metodi and Iovănut wave at us in despair from afar and, if there were more silence, we might hear their voices:

"Don't let us go! Take us home!"

Would they be consoled if they could hear our faint whisper in response: "Nor do we fare well here, wait for us, we are going to join you."<sup>10</sup>

Placed in a uniquely ambiguous space—in a country deeply rooted in the in-betweenness of the Balkans and the peripherality of Mitteleuropa—conditioned by an equivocal history and born at the threshold of two historical paradigms, the Generation of the Eighties has succeeded to turn all these circumstances to their advantage and produced a literature that feeds creatively from the very ambiguity that so many deplore as part of Romania's handicap. They assumed their liminal condition in many ways, cultivating hybridity and double-codedness, and exploring the potential for ambiguity offered by the very nature of fictional narrative.

The present study has attempted to test the validity of several postcolonial concepts in the critical exploration of this literature and to suggest that similar comparative inroads could be made into other literatures of the postcommunist space. I intended to move beyond the mere observation of liminality in the world evoked by fiction and to discover liminal situations in the way narrators, readers, and characters are made to operate in G80 fiction. This, of course, represents an extension of liminality beyond the limits acknowledged by postcolonial theorists. If these extensions of liminality to narratology might prove fruitful suggestions to colleagues working in postcolonial or literary studies, then this study will have reached its aim.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This research resulted in my doctoral thesis entitled "Transgressive Strategies in the Fiction of the Generation of the Eighties" (Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, 2001)

and was subsequently published as a two-volume study, consisting of *Trafic de frontieră: Strategii transgresive în proza generației '80* (Frontier traffic: Transgressive Strategies in the Fiction of the Generation of the Eighties) (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2000) and *Ochiul bifurcat, limba sasie: Alte transgresiuni în proza generației '80* (The Forked Eye and the Squinting Tongue: Other Transgressions in the Fiction of the Generation of the Eighties, II) (Bucharest: Paralela 45, 2003).

I wish to express my gratitude to my dissertation supervisor, Professor Ion Pop, from Babes-Bolyai University Cluj, whose empathic and irenic guidance secured this research a smooth takeoff. Dr. Rebecca Saunders encouraged me to persevere with the present article despite the difficulty of "explaining" Romania to a foreign readership, and my heartfelt thanks go to her as well.

<sup>2</sup>The core of the group coagulated in the late 1970s around two literary circles in Bucharest: *Cenacul de luni* (The Monday Literary Circle), led by literary critic Nicolae Manolescu, reunited poets like Mircea Cărtărescu, Liviu Ioan Stoiciu, Alexandru Musina, Mariana Marin, Florin Iaru, Traian T. Cosovei, and Romulus Bucur, while *Cenacul Junimea* (The "Youth" Literary Circle), led by Ovid Crohmălniceanu, was the meeting point of young fiction writers such as Mircea Nedelciu, Gheorghe Crăciun, Gheorghe Iova, Cristian Teodorescu, Ioan Grosan, Sorin Preda, Adina Keneres, and Nicolae Iliescu. A second nucleus crystallized in Cluj-Napoca, Transylvania, around the *Echinoc* literary magazine, led by Ion Pop and Marian Papahagi; the *Echinoc* group, whose aesthetics differed in many points from that of the Bucharest groups, included novelist Alexandru Vlad and poets Ioan Muresan, Ioan Moldovan, Marta Petreu, Aurel Pantea, and Augustin Pop. A third nucleus was formed in the western city of Timisoara, grouping authors with a regional penchant, such as Daniel Vighi and Viorel Marineasa.

As the movement gained impetus, the Generation of the Eighties produced its own critics (Radu Gh. Teposu, Gh. Iova, Ion Bogdan-Lefter, Radu-Călin Cristea, Mircea Mihăieș, Al. Cistelean and Virgil Podoabă), some of whom tended to retrospectively enlarge the definition of the group by enrolling in it authors who had hitherto been unaffiliated, "mavericks" of the older generation, like Stefan Agopian, Bedros Horasangian, or provincials like Petre Cimpoesu, Florin Slapac, and Dan Grădinaru. As the group snowballed by means of such annexations, it also lost much of its initial gusto for "textualist" experiment. Both tendencies further complicate the efforts to accommodate all of them within one single coherent paradigm.

<sup>3</sup>The English-speaking reader might sample these writerly practices in several anthologies, such as: *The Phantom Church and Other Stories from Romania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996); Ion Bogdan-Lefter, ed., *Romanian Fiction of the '80s and '90s* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 1998); Andrei Bodi, Romulus Bucur, and Georgeta Moarcă, eds. *Romanian Poets of the '80s and '90s* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 1999).

<sup>4</sup>Textualism was variously defined as "the awareness of textuality" (Vasile Andru), "the awareness of language" and "the preference for the text as an open structure" (Gheorghe Crăciun), "a signifying practice in the manner of the *Tel Quel* group" from Roland Barthes to Julia Kristeva (Radu Gh. Teposu). These definitions have been collected in the anthol-

ogy compiled by Gheorghe Crăciun, *Competitia continuă: Generația '80 în texte teoretice* (Pitești: Editura Vlasie, 1994); see in the above-mentioned anthology: Vasile Andru, "Proză si modernitate," 217; Gheorghe Crăciun, "Arhipelagul '70-'80 si noul flux," 214; Radu Gh. Teposu, "Cu ochii deschisi, pe tarâmul unei alte paradigme literare," 203).

<sup>5</sup>Surprisingly for the Western reader, in Romania (as in many other Soviet satellites) postmodernism was regarded as a radical and anti-dogmatic term that undermined the stifling conventions of socialist realism. Its pluralism, its openness, its gusto for hybridization, and its tendency to destabilize established norms by means of Bakhtinian carnivalesque reversals—all this had an extraordinarily subversive potential. This might explain why in the Eastern block the postmodern paradigm was seldom viewed as the sterile parlor game of endless self-referentiality that was deplored by some Western critics.

In the first theoretical discussions on postmodernism, hosted by an issue of *Catete critice* of 1986, the young generation of critics used the term as a touchstone to gauge artists' value as innovators. Attracted by the term's international prestige, several critics hastened to monopolize it to the benefit of the G80 group alone. Later on this exclusivist appropriation was subdued, but even extended definitions of Romanian postmodernism continue to view the G80 group as central in any such definition. In his major study *Postmodernismul românesc*, which aims to redefine the literary canon of the post-1990 era, Mircea Cărtărescu still sees his generation-fellows as making up the hardcore of Romanian postmodernism. More recently, the youngest generation of critics seems more relaxed in defining Romanian postmodernism as significantly stretching outside the confines of the G80 group. See: Radu Gh. Teposu, *Istoria tragică & grotescă a întunecatului deceniu nouă* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1993); Mircea Cărtărescu, *Postmodernismul românesc* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999); Carmen Musat, *Perspective asupra romanului românesc postmodern* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 1998); and Mihaela Ursa, *Optzecismul si promisiunile postmodernismului* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 1999).

<sup>6</sup>A similar approach reads later G80 fiction as "a prose of existence" that managed "to extricate itself from the theoretical deadend it had itself created" (see Ion Bogdan Lefter, "Introducere în noua poetică a prozei," in Crăciun, *Competitia continuă*, 230).

<sup>7</sup>The "writing [process] as anthropogeny" is described by Vasile Andru, "În dialog cu proza nouă," *România literară* (2 April 1987): 14.

<sup>8</sup>This is the position adopted by Gheorghe Crăciun in numerous articles and best epitomized in "Autenticitatea ca metodă de lucru," *Astra* (April 1982): 4.

<sup>9</sup>See such typologies in Radu Gh. Teposu, *Istoria tragică* and Mircea Cărtărescu, *Postmodernismul românesc*.

<sup>10</sup>This quaint word would deserve a full study of applied postcolonial theory. *Serendipity* and *serendipitous* are words that epitomize perfectly the Westerners' appropriation of the Orient to serve their own aims. Maybe the fact that the West needed to import this term from the East also suggests that, in the Western tradition of thought, chance is seldom acknowledged to play a role in scientific discoveries. This is one more sample of the rationalist legacy of the Enlightenment: empirical observation, deduction, ratiocination, and calculation are the only neat pathways to the Truth. Chance discov-

ery (like that triggered by Newton's apple) is a mere accident, a reminder of our superstitious backbone and therefore is not to be relied upon. And since hazard is no pillar of discovery in the Western world, one should borrow an exotic word to name it. This is how *Serendip*, the former name of Ceylon, contemporary Sri Lanka—home of Horace Walpole's legendary *Three Princes of Serendip* who were the champions of chance discovery—became the root of these extravagant names.

<sup>11</sup>My intuition of the essentially liminal character of these fictions might stem in my sharing the same dual optics of an insider-outsider. My own position as a novelist is that of an outsider to the G80 group who was subsequently "adopted" and granted an insider's position that I preferred to decline.

<sup>12</sup>Anthony, K. Appiah, *My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1992). See especially the chapter entitled "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern," 137-155.

<sup>13</sup>Appiah, "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern," 149.

<sup>14</sup>What the postmoderns reject is, in my view, the modernist claim to a total, all-round representation of reality (including its secret symbolism, its shorthand of consciousness, and its occult correspondence between the layers of reality, epitomized by Joyce's ambition to capture "an all-round character"). Appiah, however, argues that what postcolonial artists reject is the "convention of realism" that had been legitimated by "the national [African] bourgeoisie that took the baton of rationalization, industrialization, bureaucratization in the name of nationalism", and which, "by 1968, had plainly failed" (150).

<sup>15</sup>The course bore the title "Cultural Diversities East and West: Postcolonialism, Postcommunism, and Ethnicity" and was organized between July 22 and August 3, 2002 at the Central European University in Budapest. The teaching team (consisting of six scholars from Malta, Mexico, USA, Hungary, and Romania) urged the 25 students (who came from countries as diverse as Indonesia, Latvia, Nigeria, Armenia, South Africa, Ukraine, and Bosnia-Herzegovina) to reflect on the possible local variants of Orientalisms (such as Russia's imaginative recreation of the Caucasus as a different Other), on the similarities or differences between postcolonial and postcommunist contexts, and on minority politics in the NIS and CEE region. The course syllabus is accessible online at <<http://www.ceu.hu/sun/SUN%202002/>>.

<sup>16</sup>This is how Stoyo Petkanov, the former President of an imaginary post-communist state, modelled on Bulgaria's Todor Zhivkov, reacts apprehensively at the news of Ceausescu's execution: "Nicolae. They shot him. On Christmas Day too.... Just like that, nail down the vampire . . . nail him down, quick, this is Romania, thrust a stake through his heart, nail him down." Julian Barnes, *The Porcupine* (London: Picador, 1992), 17.

<sup>17</sup>Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup>This painful episode was thoroughly researched by two G80 novelists from Banat and recorded in two impressive collections of oral histories: Daniel Vighi and Viorel Marineasa, *Rusalii '51: Fragmente din deportarea în Bărăgan* (Timisoara: Marineasa, 1994) and *Deportarea în Bărăgan: Destine, documente, reportaje* (Timisoara: Mirton, 1996).

<sup>19</sup>This is not just a matter of academic debate, but one of political pressure. The presence of the Russian Fourteenth Army, stationed at the edge of Moldova (despite the agreement for its withdrawal signed in 1994), only complicates this situation. Claiming to protect the Russian ethnics of Moldova, the Fourteenth Army supported the proclamation of the Republic of Transdnestr (a phantom state that was not recognized by any state in the international community) and supplied the local militia with weapons during the Moldovan-Transdnestrian conflict of 1992.

<sup>20</sup>Victor Neumann, *Ideologie și fantasmagorie* (Iasi: Polirom, 2001).

<sup>21</sup>It is not without interest to note that both Timisoara and Banat (the westernmost province of Romania where Timisoara is located) are good examples of harmonious multi-ethnic cohabitation; now a borderland province, Timisoara is home to Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Roma, Jews, Serbs, and Greeks.

<sup>22</sup>Jean Baudrillard, "Thawing of the East," Trans. Charles Dudas (York University, Canada), [http://ctheory.aac.at/thawing\\_of\\_the\\_east.html](http://ctheory.aac.at/thawing_of_the_east.html) (10 September 2000); originally published in French *L'Illusion de la fin: ou La grève des événements* (Galilée: Paris, 1992).

<sup>23</sup>Although hybridity has been a perennial feature of art and cultural discourse in Latin America—highlighted in such terms as *mestizaje*, *indigenismo*, *diversalite*, *creolite*, *raza cósmica*—it has recently been recoded as a symptom of the postmodern, postcolonial and post-nationalist moment." See: Robert Stam, "Hybridity and the Aesthetics of Garbage: The Case of Brazilian Cinema," in *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de la America Latina u el Caribe: Cultura Visual en America Latina*, Enero-Junio 1998, 9:1.

<sup>24</sup>While I cannot develop these distinctions here, liminality, as a condition that transcends the agonistic logic of the margin and reconciles the two zones it touches, is different from a limit (that is reached and eventually overcome), a margin (that defines two mutually exclusive spaces), or the *limes* (the fortified wall that protects—and hence defines—a space). For a thorough discussion of the difference between liminality and marginality, see Mihai Spariosu, *The Wreath of Wild Olive: Play, Liminality and the Study of Literature* (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), 38. For Spariosu, marginality is agonistic, whereas liminality is neutral "A margin can be liminal, but a limes cannot be marginal.... Liminality can both subsume and transcend a dialectic of margin and center" (38).

<sup>25</sup>Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

<sup>26</sup>Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); Victor Turner, *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes Among the Ndembu of Zambia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

<sup>27</sup>Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.

<sup>28</sup>See Part Two of Mihai Spariosu's *The Wreath of Wild Olive*, "Literary Thematics and Ludic-Irenic Hermeneutics".

<sup>29</sup>Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 216-219, 1.

<sup>30</sup>Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 5.

<sup>31</sup>More exactly, he states in *The Uses of Diversity* that "For-

eignness does not start at the water's edge but at the skin's."

<sup>32</sup>Homi K. Bhabha, "One of Us," in *The Translatability of Cultures: Proceedings of the Fifth Stuttgart Seminar in Cultural Studies 03.08-14.08.1998*, ed., Heide Ziegler (Weimar/Leipzig: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 1999), 133.

<sup>33</sup>Baudrillard, "Thawing of the East."

<sup>34</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 58.

<sup>35</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 57-8.

<sup>36</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 16.

<sup>37</sup>Author of a recent treatise on "Balkanology," Mircea Muthu has brought a lifelong contribution to the development of South-East European studies in Romania, a discipline that attempt to go beyond the "deprecatory category of Balkanness" dissected at length by Todorova (See *Imagining the Balkans*, 46-9).

<sup>38</sup>Hence the title of his book designed to "explain" Romania to a Western audience: *Romania: Borderland of Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001).

<sup>39</sup>Lucian Boia, *România, țară de frontieră a Europei* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002), 14.

<sup>40</sup>See Neagu Djuvara, *Între Orient și Occident* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2001).

<sup>41</sup>Cornel Ungureanu, *Mitteleuropa periferiilor* (Iasi: Polirom, 2002), 375, 376.

<sup>42</sup>Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 1996.

<sup>43</sup>See Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2002), 85.

<sup>44</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 59.

<sup>45</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 49.

<sup>46</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 13.

<sup>47</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 14.

<sup>48</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 15.

<sup>49</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 19.

<sup>50</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 17.

<sup>51</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 18.

<sup>52</sup>Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 18.

<sup>53</sup>Nicola Williams, *Romania & Moldova* (Hawthorn: Lonely Planet, 1998) 442.

<sup>54</sup>Al Vlad, *Frigul verii [Summer Chill]* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1985).

<sup>55</sup>Ioan Grosan, *O sută de ani la porțile Orientului: Roman istoric foileton [One Hundred Years at the Gates of the Orient: Serialized Historical Novel]* (Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1992).

<sup>56</sup>Quoted in Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 59.

<sup>57</sup>Malcomson, quoted in Todorova, 49.

<sup>58</sup>Mircea Nedelciu, Adriana Babeti and Mircea Mihăies, *Femeia în roșu [The Woman in Red]* (Bucharest: Cartea românească, 1990).

<sup>59</sup>Banat is nowadays Romania's westernmost region, but until 1918 was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

<sup>60</sup>Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>61</sup>Nedelciu et. al., *Femeia în roșu*, 205.

<sup>62</sup>Nedelciu et. al., *Femeia în roșu*, 128.

<sup>63</sup>Nedelciu et. al., *Femeia în roșu*, 128.

<sup>64</sup>Nedelciu et. al., *Femeia în roșu*, 134.

<sup>65</sup>Nedelciu et. al., *Femeia în roșu*, 385.

<sup>66</sup>Nedelciu et. al., *Femeia în roșu*, 384.

- <sup>67</sup>Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, 18.
- <sup>68</sup>Nedelciu et. al., *Femeia în rosu*, 135.
- <sup>69</sup>Nedelciu et. al., *Femeia în rosu*, 12.
- <sup>70</sup>Nedelciu et. al., *Femeia în rosu*, 366.
- <sup>71</sup>Bedros Horasangian, *Sala de asteptare [The Waiting Lounge]* (Bucharest: Cartea românească), 1987.
- <sup>72</sup>Horasangian, *Sala de asteptare*, 492.
- <sup>73</sup>Horasangian, *Sala de asteptare*, 409.
- <sup>74</sup>Mircea Cărtărescu, *Nostalgia* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997); *Travesti* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994).
- <sup>75</sup>A section of Cărtărescu's *Nostalgia*.
- <sup>76</sup>Petru Cimpoesu, *Simion liftnicul* (Bucharest: Compania, 2001).
- <sup>77</sup>The very title of the novel contains an untranslatable pun: in the Christian Orthodox tradition, Simeon Stălpnicul is a saint whose penance consisted of standing on the top of a post, hence his name, which is derived from *stălp* (post) + the suffix *nic*. Using the same suffix, Cimpoesu invented a new half-parodic name for his "saintly" character: *lift* (elevator) + *nic*, that is *Simion liftnicul*, a grotesque coinage to the ear of any Romanian.
- <sup>78</sup>Daniel Vighi, *Decembrie, ora 10* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1997).
- <sup>79</sup>George Cusnarencu, *Tangoul Memoriei* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1988).
- <sup>80</sup>Răzvan Petrescu, *Eclipsa* (Bucharest: Cartea românească, 1993); see his short story "Globul de cristal".
- <sup>81</sup>Gheorghe Crăciun, *Frumoasa fără corp* (Bucharest: Cartea românească, 1993).
- <sup>82</sup>Marjorie Perloff, "Cultural Liminality / Aesthetic Closure?: The 'Interstitial Perspective' of Homi Bhabha," 1998, online: <http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/perloff/bhabha.html> (7 December 2002).
- <sup>83</sup>Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 128-9.
- <sup>84</sup>Spariosu, *The Wreath of Wild Olive*, 39.
- <sup>85</sup>Wolfgang Iser, "The Significance of Fictionalizing," in *Anthropoetics III: The Electronic Journal of Generative Anthropology*, 2 (Fall 1997/Winter 1998), [http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/anthropoetics/ap0302/iser\\_fiction.htm](http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/anthropoetics/ap0302/iser_fiction.htm) (8 February 2001).
- <sup>86</sup>Horasangian, *Sala de asteptare*, 362 (emphasis mine).
- <sup>87</sup>Hybridization is one of the ten principles that, according to Hassan, define the postmodern. See Ihab Hassan, "Pluralism in Postmodern Perspective," in *Exploring Postmodernism*, eds., Matei Călinescu and Douwe Fokkema (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1990).
- <sup>88</sup>Nedelciu et. al., *Femeia în rosu*, 38, 40.
- <sup>89</sup>See Monika Fludernik, *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction: The Linguistic Representation of Speech and Consciousness* (London: Routledge, 1993); Ann Banfield, *Un-speakable Sentences: Narration and Representation in the Language of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1982); Jon K. Adams, *Pragmatics and Fiction* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1985); and Schlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1999), 110-16.
- <sup>90</sup>Adams, *Pragmatics and Fiction*, 18.
- <sup>91</sup>Shari and Bernard Benstock, "The Benstock Principle" in *The Seventh of Joyce*, ed., Bernard Benstock (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 18.
- <sup>92</sup>Dan Grădinaru, *Patru povestiri* (Cluj: Dacia, 1986), 124-5 (emphasis mine).
- <sup>93</sup>Bedros Horasangian, *În larg* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1989), 64-77.
- <sup>94</sup>Adina Keneres, *Rochia de crin* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1985), 75 (my segmentation).
- <sup>95</sup>Mircea Nedelciu, "Dialogul în proza scurtă," in Crăciun, *Competitia continuă* (Pitești: Vlasie, 1984), 289.
- <sup>96</sup>Under the name of "interferential diphonous construction," defined as a discourse hovering at the boundary between narrative and "the hero's word," free indirect discourse was one of the main pillars of Mikhail Bakhtin's heteroglossia and dialogism. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problemele poeziei lui Dostoievski* (Bucharest: Univers, 1970), 307.
- <sup>97</sup>Nedelciu, "Dialogul în proza scurtă," 274.
- <sup>98</sup>Nedelciu, "Dialogul în proza scurtă," 289.
- <sup>99</sup>This is the common assumption among Romanian critics. Even narratologists like Irene Kakandes and Louis Oppenheim still maintain that the second-person addresses the reader in an irresistible invitation to take part in the narrative. See Irene Kakandes, "Narrative Apostrophe: Case Studies in Second Person Fiction," doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1991; Louis Oppenheim, *Intentionality and Intersubjectivity: A Phenomenological Study of Butor's La Modification* (Lexington: French Forum Publishers, 1980).
- <sup>100</sup>Ioan Grosan, *O sută de ani de zile la Portile Orientului* (Bucharest: Editura Fundatiei Culturale Române, 1992), 47.
- <sup>101</sup>Bonheim considers that the pronoun *you* may indicate in fictional contexts: (a) the addressee (either placed inside or outside the fictional world), (b) a dramatized I, (c) a neutral value. Capecchi distinguishes four forms: (a) "generalized *you*," (b) "specific external *you*," (c) "specific internal *you*," and (d) "*you* as I under disguise," where "internal" stands for "extradiegetic" and "external" for "intradiegetic." Hantzis describes the following values for the fictional *you*: (a) dramatized character, (b) self-addressing narrator, (c) narratee; Hantzis is the only theorist who identifies a "dramatized character." McHale's typology is the most complicated, yet of his eight types several seem either superfluous or partly overlapping. See Helmut Bonheim, "Narration in the Second-Person," in *Recherches Anglaises et Américaines*, 16 (1983): 69-80; John Capecchi, "Performing the Second Person," in *Text and Performance Quarterly*, no. 1 (1989): 42-52; Darlene Marie Hantzis, "You Are About To Begin Reading: The Nature and Function of Second Person Point of View in Narrative," doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1992; Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1992), 89-109.
- <sup>102</sup>Morrisette distinguishes several subtypes: the travelogue *you*, the cookbook *you*, the courtroom *you*, and the journalistic *you*. See Bruce Morrisette, "Narrative 'You,' in Contemporary Fiction," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 2:1 (1965): 1-24.
- <sup>103</sup>This typology is discussed at length in a chapter of my book *Ochiul bifurcat, limba sasie* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2003), 189-237.
- <sup>104</sup>Mircea Nedelciu, *Efectul de ecou controlat* (Bucharest: Cartea românească, 1981), 18-9.
- <sup>105</sup>The distinction is obvious here: "He is, no doubt, slightly in love with Luiza, and, as I am sure that he wouldn't recognize it, I can even say that he is very slightly in love," Nedelciu, *Efectul de ecou controlat*, 14.
- <sup>106</sup>Ovidiu Mocanu, *Fii bineneni, călătorule* (Cluj: Dacia,

1986), 115 (my emphasis).

<sup>107</sup>Gheorghe Crăciun, *Acte originale, copii legalizate* [*Original Papers, Authenticated Copies*] (Bucharest: Cartea românească, 1982), 76 ([my emphasis]).

<sup>108</sup>See Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 238-43.

<sup>109</sup>Constanza Del Rio Alvaro, "Narrative embeddings in Flann O'Brien's 'At Swim-Two-Birds'", *Miscelánea: A Journal of English and American Studies* (Universidad de Zaragoza) 1994, 16.

<sup>110</sup>Grosan, *O sută de ani la portile Orientului*, 260-1.