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## **Summary**

# **Postmodernism in Romanian Literary Theory**

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**Summary:**

The subject of the PhD thesis does not refer to postmodernism itself, but rather to the evolution of Romanian theories on the topic. Therefore, the intention of the study is to configure a history of Romanian theories on postmodernism, identifying the essential stages and directions here. The study chronologically follows the evolution of Romanian theories, from the first attempts to clarify postmodernism to the most important contributions, thus establishing a coherent general perspective on the subject.

Given the fact that the thesis is a history of Romanian literary theories, the chapters are also configured following the chronological criteria determined by different stages that can be identified in this evolution of comments on postmodernism.

In several cases, the texts I analyze were first published as articles in literary magazines and afterwards published in collective or individual volumes. Evidently, I will not discuss an article several times according to each of its publications, but rather I will try to identify its most relevant publication based on criteria such as: visibility of the magazine/book, impact in Romanian literature based on ulterior quotations, the author's (personal and explicit) preference when referring to his article etc.

A first, important, stage in the history of Romania theories on postmodernism is related to an issue of the "Caiete critice" magazine from 1986, a first issue entirely dedicated to postmodernism in Romania. To this day, the issue remains one of the most referenced resources on the topic in Romanian literature. A similar special issue dedicated to postmodernism was published in 1995 by the "Euresis" magazine, and this reference is also of great importance in terms of popularity regarding Romanian postmodernism. However, the contexts in which the two magazines were published are quite different: in 1986 Romania was under the communist regime and Western bibliography was not available, while in 1995 we can identify a real tradition in terms of Romanian theoretical comments on postmodernism and, even more, many of the important Western books on postmodernism were translated into Romanian or available in their original format (given the fall of Communism in 1989).

The first Romanian books dedicated entirely to postmodernism appear beginning with 1994 and, afterwards, we have a period of 2-3 years that represents a peak in terms of Romanian theories on postmodernism. It is between 1998 and 2000 that no less than five books are published on the subject, two of them becoming quite important in Romanian literature in the years to come: Mircea Cărtărescu's *Romanian Postmodernism (Postmodernismul românesc, 1999)* and Ion Bogdan Lefter's *Postmodernism. From the files of a cultural "battle" (Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei bătălii "culturale", 2000)*.

Of course, these are just some important stages in the evolution/history of Romanian theories on postmodernism; in the study I shall point out several other contributions that had an important role in this process and some contributions that were less discussed by historians.

The first chapter of the thesis focuses on the 1974-1985 period when the first Romanian articles on postmodernism are published. In other words, these are the articles published before "Caiete critice" 1986 (that issue of the publication being considered by many the start of the Romanian debate on postmodernism). The articles I discuss in this chapter are: Andrei Brezianu's *Post-modernii americani. O traiectorie spre viitor (American postmodernists. A direction towards the future, 1974)*, Ștefan Stoenescu's *Poemul ca gest (The poem as a gesture, 1980)*, two articles by Alexandru Mușina dating from 1981 and 1982 (referring to topics such as everyday poetry or the „new anthropocentrism”) and an issue of "Caiete critice" from 1983 dedicated to "the new poetry" from that time (an issue with contributions from several authors, including Nicolae Manolescu, on topics such as everyday poetry, modern poetry, postmodern poetry).

My approach is not limited to a historical and metacritical analysis of these texts. I also propose a comparative analysis between Andrei Brezianu's article from 1974 and Nicolae Manolescu's article from 1983. The two authors advance the idea of an elitist postmodernism. The topic itself is quite uncommon in Romanian culture (and in Western culture, as well) and the two authors find very different solutions for this possibility of an elitist feature of postmodernism. Given the fact that we are talking about two very atypical articles in Romanian culture and, at the same time, two of the first Romanian articles, a comparative analysis of the two is relevant for illustrating a theoretical framework that could prove to be symptomatic to that certain context (Communist Romanian – early Romanian theories on postmodernism).

The second chapter of the thesis focuses on the special issue of "Caiete critice" 1986. I will point out the diversity of contributions from this issue based on the stylistic features of the texts,

on the references used, on the theoretical solutions proposed or on the relevance of the texts in terms of defining postmodernism. Some texts, for example, are simple essays that only address some of the author's beliefs, other discuss a certain novel or poem stating that it is postmodern, without actually defining postmodernism. We also find solid theoretical approaches – if some of these are presented from a literary point of view, others are actually closer to fields such as architecture, music, visual arts etc. Illustrating this diversity of texts on postmodernism is relevant since many of the authors in question chose to characterize the concept as being eclectic. Therefore, this diversity of opinions can be, in fact, correlated to the intrinsic eclectic nature of postmodernism.

The third chapter focuses on theoretical texts dating from 1987-1995. In other words, this texts were published after “Caiete critice” 1986 and before the first major Romanian books on postmodernism (1996). At first, the chapter addresses the works of two authors: Ioana Em. Petrescu and Alexandru Mușina. Their texts had a certain impact in Romanian theory at the time of their appearance, but they became more and more referenced after 1990. Both of the authors associate postmodernism to a shift in understanding humanity, even though they describe this shift in quite opposite ways. Therefore, the thesis proposes a comparative analysis between the works of the two.

The chapter also focuses on other important publications from that time. In 1991, for example, we find an issue of the “Contrapunct” publication dedicated to a Seminar in Stuttgart that included participants from most European countries (including Romania) but also some important Western theorists of postmodernism: John Barth, Malcom Bradbury, Raymond Federman, William H. Gass, Ihab Hassan. The articles published in “Contrapunct” 1991 belong to the Romanian participants in the seminar, and also include interviews with the keynote speakers. From this point of view, the publication is important since it provides a first image of the cultural dialogue between Romania and Western countries in terms of postmodernism (since Communism in Romania fell at the end of 1989, thus allowing free circulation abroad, and free circulation of books as well).

The chapter also discusses a survey on postmodernism published in 1993 by “Echinox”. The survey included contributions on the topic from four authors: Monica Spiridon, Ion Bogdan Lefter, Sanda Cordoș and Ștefan Borbély.

Another important publication that is analyzed in this chapter is a special issue of “Euresis” from 1995, dedicated entirely to postmodernism. Just like “Caiete critice” 1986, this issue of “Euresis” is among the most referenced Romanian publications on postmodernism to this day. Last but not least, the chapter discusses an anthology edited by Gheorghe Crăciun in 1994. The importance of this anthology of theoretical texts comes from the fact that all texts were initially published in the 80’s and, at the same time, they all discuss 80’s literature. In other words, the anthology provides a very clear perspective concerning that certain context in which postmodernism started to develop in Romania.

The next chapter of the thesis is dedicated to the books and dictionaries on postmodernism in Romanian literature, starting from the firsts volumes partially or entirely dedicated to the concept: Radu Lupan’s *Moderni și postmoderni (Modernists and postmodernists, 1988)*, Liviu Petrescu’s *Vîrstele romanului (The ages of the novel , 1992)*, Radu G. Țeposu’s *Istoria tragică și grotescă a întunecatului deceniu literar nouă (The tragic and grotesque history of the dark ninth decade, 1993)*, Marin Mincu’s *Textualism și autenticitate (Textualism and authenticity, 1993)*, Dan Grigorescu’s *Între cucută și Coca-Cola (From Hemlock to Coca-Cola, 1994)*, Liviu Petrescu’s *Poetica postmodernismului (The poetics of postmodernism, 1996 – this book, in fact, is an updated version of a previous book of the author’s, published in 1992)*, Monica Spiridon’s *Apărarea și ilustrarea criticii (The defense and illustration of criticism, 1996)* and Magda Cârneli’s *Texte despre postmodernism. Artă anilor ’80 (Texts on postmodernism. The art of the 80’s, 1996)*.

After an analysis of these first Romanian volumes on postmodernism this chapter moves towards the 1998-2000 period. These 2-3 years can be considered as a high point in terms of Romanian theories on postmodernism since many books are now published, including some of the most important Romanian works on the topic to this day. Some of the titles published in this period and discussed in this chapter include: Carmen Mușat’s *Perspective asupra romanului românesc postmodern și alte ficțiuni teoretice (Perspectives on the Romanian postmodern novel and other theoretical fictions, 1998)*, Gheorghe Crăciun’s *În căutarea referinței (In search of the reference, 1998)*, Gheorghe Crăciun *Reducerea la scară (Scale reduction, 1999)*, Mihaela Ursa’s *Optzecismul și promisiunile postmodernismului (The 80’s and the promises of postmodernism, 1999)*, Mihaela Constantinescu’s *Forme în mișcare. Postmodernismul (Shapes in motion. Postmodernism, 1999)*.

However, with all these numerous books on postmodernism published between 1998-2000, one seems to stand out in terms of visibility, impact or even popularity – it is Mircea Cărtărescu's *Postmodernismul românesc (Romanian postmodernism, 1999)*. We are dealing, in this case, with one of the most popular theoretical books in Romanian culture and part of this popularity is most probably related to the fact that the author himself is one of the most famous Romanian writers.

When talking about postmodern Romanian literature from the 80's, or from today, most theorists refers to Mircea Cărtărescu's prose or poetry, as he is considered a leader of the 80's generation. Also, Cărtărescu is probably one of the most famous Romanian writers of all time at an international level (excluding those Romanian authors that permanently moved to the West and partially or totally abandoned writing in Romanian), as he received several important international awards in this sense. Therefore, it is important to note that part of the author's popularity could have reflected in the visibility of his theoretical book on postmodernism (that was initially his PhD thesis). However, independent of this context of popularity, the book itself is one of the most ambitious Romanian contributions on the topic.

Another important contribution dating from the same period (that I analyze in this chapter of my thesis) is Ion Bogdan Lefter's *Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei „bătălii” culturale (Postmodernism. From the files of a cultural “battle”, 2000)*. Ion Bogdan Lefter is seen today as one of the most important Romanian theorists on postmodernism and he started publishing articles on the topic from the beginning of the 80's (he had important contributions, for example, in “Caiete critice” 1986 which he also co-edited, in “Echinoc” 1993 or “Euresis” 1995). However, his first book entirely dedicated to postmodernism is published only in the year 2000 and by that time Romanian culture had quite a vast tradition in terms of postmodern studies (as can be seen from the current and previous chapters in my thesis). Also the book is a collection of articles previously published, some of them dating from the early 80's. Given this situation, the book automatically does not refer to several important Romanian studies in most chapters, however the author provides a very complex preface in which he discusses several of these studies, thus compensating for a certain lack of information in the chapters of the book.

The last two parts of this chapter from my thesis are dedicated to the end(ing) of the debate concerning postmodernism in Romanian culture. First of all, it is important to note that many authors, especially after the year 2000 tend to see “postmodernism” as a synonym for



“contemporary”. In other words, when they talk about postmodern society or postmodern art, they are actually referring to contemporary society or contemporary art. Such texts are no longer interested in postmodernism itself, as the term becomes a simple alternative to the (over-used) word “contemporary”. Postmodernism, in this case, begins to lose its conceptual relevance, becoming a simple stylistic alternative. It is a first major sign for the ending of the debate on postmodernism in Romanian culture. Another important indicator for the ending of this debate is the appearance of Romanian dictionaries of postmodernism beginning with 2005.

In the final concluding chapter, the study focuses on some essential features that can be identified in the different stages of the Romanian theoretical debate on postmodernism. It addresses the issue of 80’s literature VS textualism VS postmodernism. For many Romanian theorists the three terms designate the same reality. There would be no major differences between them. However, others believe that 80’s literature and textualism might be the same thing, but they are definitely not related to the concept of postmodernism which would refer to a totally different reality. Also there are authors that suggest that the three concepts (labels) have nothing in common. These different opinions regarding the three terms (labels) are, in a way, specific to the Romanian context.

However, other major differences in postmodern theory are present both in the Romanian context or at an international level. All these diverse theories are discussed in the concluding chapter of my thesis in relation to the eclectic nature of postmodernism itself and its relation to postmodernism’s lack of “trust” in metanarrative legitimation (as the French philosopher Lyotard would call it). In other words, a theory of postmodernism might be impossible to formulate, given the fact that postmodernism’s main “program” is that of avoiding metanarrative legitimation and given the fact that a theory of postmodernism is, in a sense, a metanarrative legitimation of postmodernism.

Another feature I discuss in the concluding chapter of my thesis involves the fact that we can find a common tendency among Romanian theorists to define postmodernism by negative approaches, underlining not what “postmodernism is”, but rather what “postmodernism is definitely not”. There is also a clear preference for a strictly aesthetic approach on postmodernism that often ignores important social aspects. From this point of view, it is interesting to note here that several authors (beginning with Mircea Martin in 1995 in “Euresis”) describe Romanian postmodernism as a postmodernism without postmodernity. In other words, even

though Romanian literature might seem postmodern, Romanian culture in general and Romania society are not (or, at least, they were not) postmodern. In this case, Romania literature did not only develop a postmodernism without postmodernity, but also theorized one, since most Romanian theorists, when discussing postmodernism in general, are actually referring to a local, aesthetic, version of postmodernism.