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*A Poetics of Rewriting in Romanian Contemporary Literature
(Summary)*

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The present study inscribes itself in an interdisciplinary field in which the appeal to a range of research areas such as poetics, literary theory, comparative literature and the history of Romanian literature aimed to give a systematic analysis of a phenomenon that became central in the postmodern aesthetics. From the generous area of „literature in the second degree” we focalized upon the hybrid practice of rewriting which borrows elements from several textual derivation processes while, at the same time, refuses to identify with any of them. Offering itself to research from a variety of angles – contextual, metafictional, intertextual, of the history of mentalities etc. – rewriting, manifested in all of its forms, from simple citation, allusion, parody, pastiche, up to what Genette theorized as hipertextuality, position itself in the contemporary literary field as a major textual strategy. Taking different forms, such a textual relationship outlines a highly varied repertoire. Since rewriting is a generic name which can describe the result of any process of imitation or textual transformation, we narrowed its scope to designate only those cases where rewriting takes the form of an explicit critical reinterpretation and of a polemical response towards canonical works. Analyzed from this perspective, the textual practice of rewriting acquires an important ideological and political dimension; thus, more than just a livresque exercise, the contemporary rewriting of canonical works (which, in their turn, expressed a number of literary, cultural and socio-political codes) highlights the fact that a mutation of these codes occurred and that it has to be reflected upon it.

Acquiring the status of a paradigmatic element of the contemporary period, by repositioning the subject, by reinterpreting canonical works and revisiting the past, rewriting comes to designate, broadly, a reevaluation of all existing relations in order to reformulate a new ontological sense. Oscillating between reiteration and decantation, transformation and projection of new meanings, the phenomena governed by rewriting reveal their potential of generating true conceptual revisions. Such a revision was aimed by this present study which, by illustrating and arguing the relevance that rewriting holds in several research areas pleaded not only for taking rewriting from the minor register in which it often was considered, but also for its elevation to the status of a concept.

Structured into two parts, the present research aimed to outline a theoretical profile of the concept of rewriting whose validity was subsequently tested throughout a series of examinations applied to works belonging both to Western and Romanian literature.

The stake of the **first chapter** was two-folded: on one hand there was the interest of creating a clear conceptual framework in which a discussion about rewriting could be inscribed in a coherent and unproblematic way; on the other hand there was a constant concern about arguing in a convincing manner the relevance of this concept and, implicitly, that of the entire analysis that was dedicated to it. This was the place where we have made a series of conceptual and terminological delimitations: thus, rewriting parts away from pastiche through a purpose that transcends the intention of a simple virtuosity exercise; it claims a different reading pact from that of parody in which the emphasis is not on entertainment and ludic; unlike intertextuality, it reactivates the category of author and auctorial intend, rebuilding an entire fictional world towards which intertextuality only indicated.

In the same time I examined the ways in which rewriting becomes a key concept in the theoretical repertoire of several study areas from the theories of the text to reader response criticism, fictional worlds or up to some cultural movements such as Feminism or Post-colonialism. Functional in a broad sphere of research, such a concept becomes the illustrative example for an entire series of debates which thus go beyond the purely abstract level of the discussion: within the theories of the text the concept of rewriting succeeds to materialize the inner and intrinsic pluralism of the text; for reader response criticism it fulfills the role of a real reading transcript, materializing the mental reconfiguration that a text undergoes in the reading process; for different cultural movements such as Feminism and Post-colonialism, rewriting canonical works makes visible not only the social agenda existing behind such an approach, but also highlights an important ideological and political dimension (the literary canon, considered to be the result of a patriarchal, Eurocentric and Christian culture is subjected, through rewriting, to a comprehensive restructuring, hoping in this way to make the voice of the marginal to be heard at the center of the cultural debate). Designating, simultaneously, a process and a product, rewriting acts on a double level – theoretical and artistic – through questioning or validating theoretical certainties as well as by turning them into a means of artistic representation.

The ideological and political component of rewriting made it necessary to move the discussion, starting with **the second chapter**, from poetics towards politics. After a preamble in

which I resorted to the bibliography of the subject, in an attempt to illustrate the political dimension of literary theories, I focalized on the theories of the “literature in the second degree” to identify, here as well, the same conflict and ideological bias. It is difficult to imagine, if not impossible, that there may be a truly non-ideological space from which to launch an objective and unbiased criticism against another ideology. The alleged disregard of the literary theories concerning the political, social or cultural arena was denounced in recent decades as illusory, under whose camouflage can always be found a social oriented agenda. It had been discussed amply and convincingly about the myth of the apolitical in culture – Terry Eagleton, Stephen Greenblatt, Linda Hutcheon etc. – arguing not only the fact that the literary work and the literary criticism and theory have a clear political and ideological dimension, but also that even the reading process itself is governed by a set of values and precepts on which it occurs, or not, the validation and, eventually, the canonization of a work and of an author.

The replacement of the study of literary influence with that of intertextuality is based, beyond the different positions they take on technical issues, such as practice and method, on an incompatibility which is, in fact, one of ideological matter. With different agendas, the two theories are placed on opposite sides not only in the literary field but also in the socio-political one. The critique made by intertextuality towards literary influence worked as litmus, highlighting in every key concept of the study of influence an ideologically contaminated reverse. The harmonious and closed structure of the literary work became a commercial indicator, through which the finished product is placed in a series of economic relations such as buying and selling; the inner richness of meanings of a work was related to the capitalist accumulation; the author, as the original point of the artistic creation, and the auctorial intend, as the correct way to understand the work evoked a vision of the literary work in the terms of private property over which one could not intervene; the epistemological simplicity, like Newtonian mechanics, became inadequate in an era dominated by the Einsteinian relativism.

If from the position of the opponent intertextuality represented the ideal alternative, once it became the norm, its profile changed, gaining the same conservative and restrictive features of any official discourse. In an attempt to strengthen its acquired scope and prevalence intertextuality will resort to a series of successive limitations and exclusions. Suffice to point out that the apparent democratization that followed after the suppression of the authorial figure represented, in fact, a conservative movement through which the “center” remained inaccessible

to the “periphery”. For Feminism, Post-colonialism or the sexual minorities, replacing the notion of author with the anonymous network of quotations was precisely a cancellation of the particular note that these discourses represent in relation to the official one. In a society considered to be dominated by patriarchy, Eurocentrism and heterosexuality it becomes very relevant whether the auctorial voice is the product of the center or it comes from the periphery. This kind of nuances intertextuality, after winning the foreground of the cultural debates, will not allow anymore and treating, in an intertextual manner, the feminist issue of subverting the patriarchal authority, deprives the entire movement of any substance, reducing it to the status of a product belonging to the anonymous cultural text, to that always-already-known.

If literary theories are by their nature polemical and the dynamics of the literary domain originates largely from these conflicts, then the hypertextual practices, as exponents of such a field, cannot remain neutral to these tensions, especially when considered from their vast potential. Becoming an extremely useful tool to maintain an authority or to attempt to undermine it, the derivational practices are classified according to this antagonist principle into two categories: one that preserves a literary model and one that tries to discredit it. Thus, in the first category can be found imitation, pastiche, plagiarism, adaptation and translation (those practices that try to establish a relation of equivalence with the source text) while in the second category can be found all those textual transformation made in a playful, ironic, satiric or controversial manner (which aims scoring a significant coefficient of difference).

Examined from the perspective of their function, the hypertextual practices make visible the existence of a relationship between the socio-political field and the literary one, of a permanent transfer of values through which the nature of their relationship is continuously negotiated. Being a plural and polyvalent relationship, the function of hypertextuality records the process of reconfiguring the power relations between the social groups and the way in which these tensions reverberate in the literary field where it determines different relations to the established models of a literary tradition; the duality of this link allows for a change that occurs in the literary field to continue, in its turn, its transformative potential in the socio-political field. Illustrative in this respect are those rewritings of canonical works undertaken on behalf of Feminism, Post-colonialism or political correctness which, like an Escher painting, reflects the mutual conditioning between the two spheres: the dynamics of one generates the transformations

of the other, while the effervescence of the later maintain the mobility of the former. So, in other words is a circular motion that involves both of the fields.

The conclusion of this chapter was that the hypertextual practices are not innocent, neutral or objective. To initiate a process of rewriting cannot be a random act but rather a gesture manifesto loaded with a strong motivation that aims, without any doubt, to produce an effect (among the readers, the literary hierarchy or broadly, in the cultural field). Rewriting canonical works is therefore a strategic practice, endowed with social significance, while derivation texts become real “black boxes” that preserve the memory of all the transformations that social, political or cultural codes have undergone. Thus, the literature in the second degree, despite its secondary character, is the point from which should start any attempt to reconstruct the *Zeitgeist* that produced those changes.

The following five chapters represent the area of case studies and punctual analysis which sought to identify in the Romanian literature those instances where rewriting operates in a similar manner to the Western ones, as they were illustrates by Feminist and Post-colonial rewritings. These five case studies had the role not only to establish an intercultural dialogue, but also to assure an export strategy of the Romanian literature in a conceptual framework that still raises a high interest among the European and American academics. We considered as a real opportunity for the Romanian literary field the possibility of nuancing a discussion of a broad interest (as an active participant and contributor to such a research) as well as for the Western research (to whom it completes the perspective on the mechanism of rewritings with the Romanian literary experience).

The conclusions of the second part have noted that, indeed, there is a particular note that the Romanian examples bring to a discussion about rewriting, namely, unlike the Western ones, which focalize on a canonical pre-text in order to deconstruct it, to identify its weakness and the blind spots where its internal philosophy ceases to convince anymore, the Romanian rewritings present no evidence of subversion against the source text. Instead, resorting to a model belonging to the universal literature has the purpose of developing, through a series of close readings and amplifications of its textual latencies, a necessary detour, a distraction of the censorship in order to launch, by ricochet, an attack on the Communist ideology. So, the subversive force of the Romanian rewritings is not to be found in the discredit of the source text, but in the constant undermining of the Communist utopia.

Moreover, if for the Feminist or Post-colonial rewritings this critical approach aims, in particular, to restructure and correct the fictional representations that such communities have recorded in the canonical works of the dominant order, for the Romanian literature, faced with the constraints imposed by the dictatorship, loading a literary formula with the signs of a socio-political critique proved to be a more effective means of disrupting the Communist ideology. Unlike the content of a work, strictly monitored by censorship, a literary formula that articulates a fictional work easily distract the vigilance of an eye trained to monitor only what is said. The hypertextual relations which are maintained by the literary form itself function like an optical illusion, where the camouflage is precisely in the most visible point. Placed in such a network of mutual interactions and influences, the literary code, through its form and conventions, acquire ideological valences, proving the existence of real policies of its literary formulae. Not only the content of a work can be subversive to an order (literary, social, political etc.), but also a literary convention which, like the memory of metals, theorized in the natural sciences, retains the features of the most famous examples that have ever illustrated its repertory of means and procedures and came to be redefine as the sum of them.

The corpus of texts that supported this argument consisted of the following literary works: *Gulliver in the Land of Lyres* by Ion Eremia (rewrites *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift); *The Waistcoat* by Mircea Horia Simionescu (rewrites *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann); *Late Education* by Mihai Zamfir (rewrites *Sentimental Education* by Flaubert); *Pupa Russa* by Gheorghe Crăciun (rewrites *Madame Bovary* by Flaubert); *Mister K. Released* by Matei Vișniec (rewrites Kafka's *The Trial*).

The ending of this research on rewriting is not equivalent to a moment of closure or of exhausting the topic because there can still be seen new possibilities of continuing the study, encouraged especially by the existence of the same type of rewritings belonging to the literatures of other countries from the former Soviet Bloc.