

Transculturality in Romanian literary histories: The case of literature from Moldova

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This study will be concerned with the inclusion or non-inclusion of literature written in the Romanian language in the Republic of Moldova¹ (and historical variants such as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic) in Romanian literary-historical narratives of the last two decades. The focus will be on works of literary history devoted exclusively to literature written in the Romanian language. A transcultural perspective might therefore appear to have no relevance here. However, as I will attempt to elucidate below, culture is defined not only by language but also by shared historical consciousness, norms, traditions, preferences, identity. Furthermore, even a single culture experiences various changes in its diachronic movement; it diversifies or may even disappear, sometimes fusing with another culture or cultures. As Václav Smyčka and Václav Petrbok write, culture involves “dynamically mutable constellations of being together, alongside and opposite to one another”² (2019, 12). In this light, the example of Moldovan³ culture and its literature seems apposite, because in the course of the 20th century its language and literature were used as means of legitimation in political projects seeking to orient the identity of this culture: either to the western, Romanian or the eastern, Russian (in the given case, Soviet) power space.

TRANSCULTURALITY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

According to Wolfgang Welsch (1999), the present-day form of cultures is best clarified by the concept of transculturality, which is “a consequence of *the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures*. These encompass [...] a number of ways of life and cultures, which also interpenetrate or emerge from one another” (197; italics W.W.). As opposed to the Herderian concept (essentializing, and in present-day conditions utopian) of one homogenizing, unifying, and thereby also separatist or exclusive culture, Welsch regards the concept of transculturality as better able to express the dynamics of contemporary cultures. However, this concept can also be applied to past cultures in any particular diachronic cross-section, as Welsch himself

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eventually corrects in his later studies (cf. Welsch 2022). Fernando Ortiz, the anthropologist and “father” of the concept of “transculturation”, has also shown, using Cuba as an example, that transculturation as an alternative to the unidirectional concept of acculturation can be applied to cultural phenomena from the prehistory of humankind ([1947] 1995, 97ff.).

The temporally simultaneous concepts of interculturality and multiculturalism, according to Welsch, presuppose the homogeneity of individual cultures, and hence do not solve the problem of cultures being unable to communicate one with another, but on the contrary accentuate their differences. By contrast, the transcultural perspective provides a non-centralized and non-centralizing view of otherness, of the “foreign”, because “henceforward there is no longer anything absolutely foreign” (1999, 198). Welsch emphasizes that transculturality affects not only the macro level (cultures of nations, states, ethnic populations, groups) but also individuals, and with the current diversification of cultures, more and more conspicuously (201–202).

Literature, as part of culture, does not stand outside the concept of transculturality. Anders Pettersson (2010) has alluded to this, vis-à-vis literary history. With a broad grasp of the transcultural history of literature, he sees it in cross-section through comparative studies, postcolonialism, and world literature itself. As he himself says: “Knowledge can instill some understanding of cultures other than one’s own and an attendant ability to take them seriously and view them with some respect, which may usefully be combined with criticism of things of considerable importance in our contemporary world” (466). Pettersson argues that a transcultural perspective, of whatever scale, helps the historian to avoid parochialism and the “insular” character of research, in other words focusing on the problem without its broader context.

Transculturality, as an expression of awareness of diversity in the individual components of culture and of the liquidity of boundaries from the lowest levels to the global, enables a revaluation of the homogenizing and simultaneously polarizing national idea. In defining what still is and what no longer is national in the given culture, many of its components remained excluded as non-appertaining, not expressing its “spirit”, or in more pragmatic terms not corresponding to the ideological requirements of political power. According to Arianna Dagnino, currently “with the denationalizing wave of globalization, even national literatures are under pressure to find new arrangements of form and content to adapt to a changed cultural and social paradigm” (2013, 2). In her view, national collective ideas are being remolded in the forge of transculturality and adapted to the vision of a new age of transnational and supranational economic, political, social and cultural processes. Accordingly, “we witness the increasing significance of a transcultural literature that, in its broader characteristics, tends to cross cultures and acknowledges the mutually transforming power of cultures”. (3)

Transcultural literature (literary studies, literary history) introduces a number of essential moments in the comprehension of literature as a cultural expression: mutual permeation or fusion (confluence – Dagnino) instead of dominance, inclusion instead of exclusion, an attempt at mutual understanding instead of separation. Pettersson highlights one further dimension of the transcultural perspective, citing

Zhang Longxi, who says that we may look at a work of foreign literature as the expression of a different perspective, but we ought to link it into a dialogue in the same way as many others, while at the same time regarding it as an individual manifestation and not as representative of an entire culture. “Once we recognize the diversity and heterogeneity of the Other, as we do of the self, cross-cultural understanding can be seen as part of our effort at understanding in general, of our endless dialogue with others, with ourselves, and with the world at large” (Longxi in Pettersson 2008, 469).

WHY WRITE ABOUT MONOLINGUAL HISTORIES OF ROMANIAN LITERATURE TRANSCULTURALLY?

In this part of the article, I will try to highlight the use of culture, more specifically its language and literature, as an instrument of power in creating the cultural identity of the society. Two glottonyms of one language – Romanian/Moldovan – are resultants of a vertical of power which, through language and the literature written in it, has managed to a certain extent first of all to isolate the Moldovan culture communicating in the Romanian language and its literature, and later to polarize it against Romanian culture.

The historical and power-political constitution of Moldova in the 20th century, firstly as part of Tsarist Russia (1812–1918), afterwards of the Kingdom of Romania (1918–1940 and 1941–1944), later as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (1940–1941, 1944–1991) and finally as the independent Moldovan Republic (1991–present day), required among other things a legitimizing ideology, which would integrate its culture and at the same time differentiate it from surrounding cultures. The unification of Moldova (“Bessarabia”, as the Russians called it after the 1812 annexation) to the Romanian kingdom (1918) was conducted with a fundamental idea of historical continuity (that Bessarabia had belonged to the Moldavian principality from 1359 to 1812). It was asserted that all of the Romanian-speaking population had a cultural and linguistic unity; in other words, unification was based on an ideology of “pan-Romanianism”. Simultaneously, however, beyond the borders of Bessarabia, in the Soviet Union, the politics and cultural identity of a new *imagined community* began to take shape during this period – the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (1924), with an identitarian and legitimating narrative of “Moldovanism”. According to the ideology of Moldovanism, the “Moldovan nation” from Bessarabia did not participate in the Romanian national revival movement in the 19th century, when a union was formed of the two Danubian principalities (Wallachia and Moldavia) in the Romanian principality (1859) and kingdom (1881). Bessarabia, that is to say, was then part of Tsarist Russia, and so, still according to the narrative of the ideologues of Moldovanism, its inhabitants did not seize the moment of formation of *Romanian* identity. Hence they remained loyal to the local Moldavian, not the national Romanian identity (cf. Țicu 2018, 183–213; King 2000, 49).

Accordingly, if the partisans of political Moldovanism sought to create a new Soviet republic, this required an independent nation, which in turn required a specific culture and its attributes, such as a language and a literature in that language. And inescapably there was a precondition that the culture of the “Moldovan nation”

should be distinguished from Romanian culture. That was done especially via language. The official language of the state, apart from Russian and Ukrainian, therefore became the so-called “Moldovan language”: a rudimentary Romanian, needless to say also artificially Russified, which was written in Cyrillic. The evident fact that morphologically and syntactically it was identical with Romanian was denied, and tautologically the opinion was expressed that “romanization” of the Moldovan language was permissible only “if we adopt a standpoint whereby the Moldovans do not exist as an independent nation” (Țicu 2018, 198).⁴

Soviet propaganda during the interwar period, in cultural politics concerning the Moldovan question, placed emphasis on the building of the new ethnic group and reinforcing its “Moldovan” cultural identity. Following the renewed attachment of Moldova to the Soviet Union (first in 1940, afterwards in 1944 until the Soviet Union’s dissolution and the 1991 declaration of independence of the Republic of Moldova), the prevailing cultural politics involved a thoroughgoing, and from its inception also brutal, eradication of “Romanianism” (with murders and forced deportations to Siberia and other remote parts, organized famine, and so on). After 1968 there was a policy of isolation of Moldovan culture from Romanian culture and a vigorous Sovietization and Russification of all areas of life.⁵ Literature and magazines were for the most part in Russian; Moldovan authors wrote in “Moldovan” (which is to say, a literary Romanian transliterated to Cyrillic); sometimes they made their own Russian translations, or they wrote directly in Russian. Works such as these, even supposing they did make their way to the Romanian side, were unreadable for the Romanian public. Like the Iron Curtain which then existed between Western and Eastern Europe, in like manner a politically, commercially and culturally impassable wall, only on a smaller scale, was erected at the river Prut, the natural border between Romania and the Moldavian SSR. During the period of socialism Romanian literature in the Moldavian SSR practically did not exist, and so it was not read or reciprocated. Again, in Moldova there was a highly selective choice and canonical formation of historical Romanian literature, corresponding to the ideological orientation of the culture. With few exceptions, almost all of the writers of the interwar (Romanian) period were culled from it, and the works of older writers were put through the sieve in a comprehensive ideological vetting (Șleahțișchi 2019; Lungu 2019).

After the 1991 declaration of Moldovan independence, Transnistrian and Gagauz separatism was added to the two identitarian ideologies (Moldovanism and Romanianism). In 1991 the Gagauz Republic⁶ in the south of the country declared independence; Moldova gave it recognition in 1994 and integrated it as an Autonomous Territorial Unit. Furthermore, in 1991 independence was also declared by Transnistria, which hitherto has not been recognized by any international institution or foreign state but is supported by Russia.

Politically and culturally, however, the ideologies of Moldovanism and Romanianism have had to change their forms in altered global political conditions. The pan-Romanian branch of political Romanianism has tried to promote unification with Romania, which was one of the pretexts for the minorities to take defensive

measures and accelerate their demands for separation. Moldovanism has again come to the forefront as a result of the war in Transnistria, and its advocates have firmly defended the national-constitutive idea of an independent state-forming East Romanian Moldovan nation, which is different from the Romanian, uses a different language, and has a different history. The histories of Moldova and Romania may have points of contact, but they have “different trajectories” (Țicu 2018, 387).

However, the literature in the Romanian language which was written in the Moldovan Republic after 1989 no longer had impermeable boundaries. Firstly, the Supreme Soviet of the Moldavian SSR on August 31, 1989 legalized the use of Latin script for “Moldovan”; again, in the Declaration of Independence in the Preamble to the 1991 Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, Romanian in the Latin script features as a state language.⁷ The language of the literature that appeared after 1989 was therefore also comprehensible for Romanians. Gradually, books from Moldovan publishers have entered the Romanian book market; books by Romanian authors are likewise received on the Moldovan side (the only remaining obstacles are the criteria of the not entirely free trade between these two countries). Furthermore, as a result of cultural politics and “inner exile”, many writers from the Republic of Moldova have studied, lived and worked, in Romania, and continue to do so. During the last decade, however, we have noticed the reverse process also: writings of Romanian authorship are issued by Moldovan publishers (e.g. Cartier, Arc).

By now the political adherents of the ideologies of Romanianism and Moldovanism, and the younger, “more neutral” generation, which attempted to integrate or ignore the elements of one or another intellectual and political current, have all alike understood that the ruling power in the first instance attempted to rob them of a language as a communicative means, not only in terms of its own isolated or self-isolating culture, but especially on the transcultural level. One cannot deny the population of Moldova their right to self-definition as “Moldovans”; problematic, however, is the insistence on the political construct, “the Moldovan language”, as a linguistic category on the grounds of its content, cultural impact, and power-political connotations.

Moldovan culture is to a certain extent different from Romanian culture; ultimately, even Romanian culture is not monolithic. The first is powerfully influenced especially by the Russian and Ukrainian cultures, but also by Gagauzian, Jewish, Bulgarian, and other cultures. Romania in the course of its history was influenced by the cultures of other ethnic groups who lived either around it or at its center: Hungarian, German, Jewish, Armenian, Greek, Turkish, Bulgarian, Roma etc. Currently, via media culture and free travel, both cultures are becoming globalized, and hence are converging. At any rate, traditionally there existed, and still exists, a powerful interpenetration and undeniable points of contact. As has been shown in recent decades, Moldova and Romania are a great deal closer in literary terms than they are politically. One may say that there is one literature with two histories, as the Romanian literary critic Răzvan Voncu expressed it in the title of his (not particularly optimistic) article analyzing the contemporary literary relationships of the two cultures (2017, 6).

EXAMPLES OF LITERARY-HISTORICAL NARRATIVES AND THEIR TENDENCY TO TRANSCULTURALITY

The demand for transculturality, as outlined above, comes up against a “snag” in literary-historical works, and that is the complexity of the survey that a single author must be responsible for. In summarizing the histories of Romanian literature written after 2000, and also in the widest range, from the beginnings until the present day, one fact catches the eye: that almost all, with the exception of lexicographical works, were written by a single author (Micu 2000; Negrici 2003; Ștefănescu 2005; Manolescu 2008; Popa 2009; Zamfir 2011; Iovănel 2021). Authors such as Dumitru Micu, Emil Alexandrescu and Nicolae Manolescu undertook huge projects: to map at least five centuries of Romanian literary production. The literary histories by the other cited authors defined a narrower research period: for Mihai Zamfir it was the 19th century; for Marian Pop, Eugen Negrici and Alex Ștefănescu it was literature after 1944, hence either explicitly in the period of communism, with its strict official supervision, or with an overlap to the period after 1989; for Mihai Iovănel it was contemporary literature between the years 1990 and 2020. Their histories are therefore naturally selective, on the one hand for subjective and on the other for objective reasons: they are building on previous works, whether 1) their own activity as literary critics; 2) the literary-historical canon, as constituted in more partial articles and books; or 3) the literary-historical tradition of large-scale syntheses by individual authors before the first half of the 20th century (cf. also Valentová 2017; Horáková 2017).

In the following section of the article, I focus on three selected literary-historical narratives from Romania. Two of them, by Nicolae Manolescu and Dumitru Micu, are “synthesizing”, while the third, by Mihai Iovănel, is a partial survey. While this presentation is selective, it seeks to be representative, hence to highlight three various modes of inclusion/non-inclusion of literature pertaining to another cultural sphere in its diachronic movement – that is to say, on time axes from 1944 to the present. For comparison I also include a consideration of two works that describe Romanian literature from the outside, from the standpoint of other cultures: I will look at the *Czech Slovník rumunských spisovatelů* (Dictionary of Romanian writers; Valentová et al. 2001) and the Slovak *Dejiny rumunskej literatúry: literárne dianie v kultúrnom priestore* (History of Romanian literature: Literary activity in a cultural space; Vajdová, Páleníková, and Kenderessy 2017). I will be interested in the transcultural perspective of these works, with special emphasis on Romanian literature from the Republic of Moldova.

Nicolae Manolescu: Critical history of Romanian literature. 5 centuries of literature (2008)

Nicolae Manolescu published his *Istoria critică a literaturii române: 5 secole de literatură* in 2008. More partial works of his on the history of Romanian literature had appeared earlier, but many of these were nonetheless synthesizing, indeed with a personal typology of the development of the Romanian novel (*Arca lui Noe* [Noah's Ark], 1980–1983; also a shorter version of the *Istoria critică a literaturii române* from 1990). In his synthesizing work he unambiguously associates himself with the legacy of George Călinescu (1899–1965), writer, literary critic and historian, but at the same

time aesthete, who wrote his monumental work *Istorie a literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* (History of Romanian literature from its beginnings to the present; 1941) both within and without the framework of the current scholarly conventions – without systematic notes or a methodological apparatus, and with minimal references to other literary-historical or theoretical works. His basic criterion in selecting literary works was their aesthetic value, regarding which he was naturally often swayed by subjective taste. This way of doing things comes naturally to Manolescu, as he immediately points out in his foreword (2008, 5–8), and his history also is a subjective selection according to his own aesthetic criteria and furthermore a dialogue, or in places a polemic, with the reception of the given works in their own times and later.

The author describes the history of Romanian literature from its beginnings. In contrast to other writers, he does not include (transculturally) works written in Church Slavonic, Greek or Latin from the centuries when writing first appears on the territory of present-day Romania, because “he strictly distinguishes between the history of culture, to which ancient monuments belong [...], and the history of national literature, which is inseparably linked with the national language, Romanian” (Valentová 2017, 44).

As for Moldovan literature in the Romanian language, only one writer of explicitly Moldovan provenance has a separate chapter in the *Critical history*: Constantin Stere, a Bessarabian interwar politician and writer, who was writing on the frontiers of present-day Romania. The points of contact between Manolescu’s *Critical history* and the history of Romanian literature in Bessarabia (as presented e.g. by Cimpoi [1996] 1997) are writers from the period of the Moldavian principality (the Moldavian chroniclers Grigore Ureche, Miron Costin, Ion Neculce, Dimitrie Cantemir etc.), and after the annexation of Bessarabia in 1812. In this instance, I am principally referring to writers who came from Bessarabia but were active in the principalities, or after 1881 in the Romanian Kingdom, such as Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, or writers from the Romanian part of Moldavia whose works made an impact despite Moldovanism (though frequently only in selections) even during Bolshevik and Communist times in Bessarabia (Mihai Eminescu, Ion Creangă etc.). Moldovan literary history appropriated these writers; this is equally true of the partisans of cultural Moldovanism and Romanianism. Each party, however, approved them for different reasons: the first because these cultural figures and their works unambiguously illustrated the artistic merit of “Moldovan” creativity and helped to forge literary-historical continuity; the second because they succeeded in making Moldovan culture belong to the Romanian whole (ultimately, even Călinescu and Cimpoi wrote their histories as demonstrations of the indivisibility of Romanian literature.)

Manolescu’s *Critical history* does not have any author representing the post-1944 period, if we omit the two-page section entitled “Authors of dictionaries” (2008, 1396–1397), where three names appear in the list: the literary historian Mihai Cimpoi, the prose-writer Ion Druță and the poet Grigore Vieru. On the last period studied, the 1990s, Manolescu has only this to say: “The Bessarabians, numerous, of unequal quality, are with minor exceptions (Vitalie Ciobanu, Leo Butnaru) en-

tirely outdated (Grigore Vieru) or on a different track⁸ (the majority). Their place in the history of Romanian literature cannot yet be precisely determined” (1401). Manolescu qualifies the absence of postwar and even post-revolution writers from Moldova in his *Critical history* by their “outdatedness” or being “on a different track”. It would be understandable if he did so based on the simple fact of their absence from the book market and non-reception at the time of their appearance, because of the writers referred to, Grigore Vieru at least had his creative peak during the period of socialism. The cultural politics of Moldovanism prior to 1989, when it was associated with a thoroughgoing isolationism of Romanian and Moldovan culture, and also after 1994, when again it did not create a political conjuncture for multicultural exchange, powerfully influenced the mutual awareness of each literature by the other. To refer to literature from the period of socialism in the chapter entitled “after 1989” as “outdated” speaks of an inadequate, time-bound reception both from the literary-historical and from the aesthetic standpoint.

Manolescu’s *Critical history* does not perceive literature as part of a broader cultural context, as a means of intercultural understanding. As Pettersson points out (citing the work of Zhang Longxi *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China*, 1998): “For any dialogue to happen between at least two voices, for any bridging of gaps and any temporal relationship to occur, there must be a common ground, a shared frame of reference and ways of communication, by means of which new experience and novel concepts can be articulated, appropriated, and transformed from one linguistic and cultural context to another” (2008, 468). Manolescu’s strict aesthetic criterion, as it happens, is intransigent and non-dialogic towards the transculturality of Romanian literature, even if written after 1989 in the requisite “national language”.

Dumitru Micu: History of Romanian literature, from folk production to postmodernism (2000)

Dumitru Micu takes a different approach to the history of Romanian literature from Moldova. His *Istoria literaturii române de la creația populară la postmodernism* is an attempt at an exhaustive, and to some extent also culturally contextualizing, survey. The comprehensiveness of the information provided is such that he does not have as much space for the aesthetic appraisal of individual works as Manolescu does. Regarding the issue addressed here, however, of the transcultural reach of the literary-historical work to include Moldovan culture, Micu devotes attention to writing from Moldova after 1812; he has separate sub-chapters on writers who were important for the evolution of Romanian literature as a whole, as well as for its regional existence (Constantin Stamati, Alexandru Donici etc.). For Micu, Bessarabian literature from the interwar period, when it once again found a place in the whole of Romanian “national” literature, does not form an organic part of the specific canonical trends and styles which he has chosen to structure his work. He reserves a concluding chapter for Moldovan authors. A similar, though more understandable mode of treatment is applied to “contemporary” literature after 1944, with separate sub-chapters devoted to poetry and prose: “Bessarabian Romanian poetry” or “Romanian prose in Bessara-

bia, north Bukovina, and the Yugoslavian space”. The writer Ion Druță (known in Slovakia through the medium of Russian translations as Ion Druce) actually has his own sub-chapter among the Romanian authors. Introducing the sub-chapter devoted to postwar prose, Micu writes: “It would be natural if the writers from beyond the river Prut [Bessarabia], entirely remarkable writers, were not described separately but rather were scattered in all or almost all chapters among authors from this side of the river [Romania], since they are part of the same literature” (Micu 2002, 654). This wish remains empathetically expressed but pragmatically unfulfilled. Micu’s *History*, based on a national idea of literature written in the national language, very emotionally describes the “struggles” of ethnic Romanians from Bessarabia, Ukrainian Bukovina, and the former Yugoslavia, for the ideals of patriotism. Aesthetic criteria take a hindmost position, in favor of the socio-cultural, political and ideological criteria associated with Romanianism.

Mihai Iovănel: History of contemporary Romanian literature 1990–2020 (2021)

If I sidestep the epistemological question (to which I return below) of the possibility of writing history about the present, I cannot avoid the words which Mihai Iovănel, as one of the authors of the monumental collective *Dicționarul general al literaturii române* (General dictionary of Romanian literature, 2004–2009, 2nd edition 2016–2020) contributed to the international colloquium devoted to issues related to writing the history of (Romanian) literature, held in 2012 in Bratislava. According to him, “histories of literature written by a single author (and thus implicitly with a single story/a single angle of vision) have recorded a sharp falling-off and have even been relatively discredited. Much more topical are histories by a number of authors, whose diversity (ideological, stylistic, in terms of approach or specialization etc.) offers a plural, more open and democratic view of the given theme” (2017, 71). Although Iovănel expressed thoughts on the “outmodedness” of the genre, he acknowledged that future histories of literature would emerge rather from lexicographical works than from histories of literature of the older kind. He himself, it appears, has made use of the arsenal of materials amassed in producing and revising the dictionary of Romanian literature, and in 2021 he published what is again a “single-author” history of literature, faithful to Romanian tradition.

Iovănel’s *Istoria literaturii române contemporane 1990–2020*, however, dissociated itself in striking fashion from the Romanian postwar tradition of writing history based on the autonomy of aesthetic criteria. In its title, and methodologically, it rests upon another pillar of interwar literary-historical writing: Eugen Lovinescu and his *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* (History of contemporary Romanian literature, 1926–1929, 1937). As Iovănel indicated, indeed, in his preceding book *Ideologiile literaturii în postcomunismul românesc* (Ideologies of literature in Romanian post-communism, 2017), he is first of all aiming at a history of ideas and ideologies, that is cultural policies associated with the literary system; at the same time, needless to say, texts by writers form the central theme in describing the context. In his own words: “Otherwise I do not think that one can speak

of a separation/opposition between the ideological and the aesthetic. Every aesthetics presupposes an ideology, and those who say otherwise are also just creating an ideology” (Iovănel and Pricăjan 2021, 12).

On the collocation *history of contemporary literature*, which sounds like an oxymoron, the author expresses himself as follows: “I think that the history of contemporary *literature* must also come through contemporary *history*. After all, we who are really living it can know it immediately. Those who come after us will know it through books, films, documents, archives, and so on. Maybe they will have a better perspective than we do, but that doesn’t mean that our perspective, however imperfect it may be, should not be archived” (Iovănel and Galaicu-Păun 2021, 7). It is worthy of note that insufficient detachment or “imperfect perspective” served the above-mentioned Nicolae Manolescu as a reason for not including literature from Moldova from his *Critical history*.

In Iovănel’s history, Romanian literature from Moldova takes on an entirely new image. A number of reasons come to mind immediately, most of which are connected with the change in the literary system after 1989, in Romania and Moldova, as described above: literature written in the Roman script is comprehensible by the Romanian public also; thanks to cultural migration, many writers from Moldova have studied, written and published in Romania; the book market, though not entirely free, is open on both sides. Iovănel however does not thematize either the Moldovan or Romanian cultural, social and political context concerning Moldova. Authors from Moldova in certain places simply form an uncontextualized organic part of the thematic picture he has constructed of the literary system in post-revolutionary Romania. We do not learn from his book how they earned the position of writers suitable for his literary *History*: that is to say, not all of them wrote and published in “inner exile”, namely in Romania. The author himself regards aesthetic primacy in literary-historical writing as an inadequate criterion; indeed, what the works analyzed represent is rather examples of contemporary social phenomena. Nonetheless it remains interesting, and this fact has been noticed also by Snejana Ung, that the author, concluding his history with a fourth section entitled “Specificul transnațional” (Transnational specificity), and concretely in the chapter on “Conectivitatea globală” (Global connectivity), integrates the poetic oeuvre of the contemporary Moldovan writer Emilian Gălăicu-Păun. By this means he demonstrates the synchronization of Romanian and Moldovan poetry “in the framework of a broader discussion on literary import-export, which underlines the fact that this literature is rather imported than a genuine component of Romanian literature” (2021, 16).

One must further note that Iovănel in his *History* did not give space to a large number of writers from Moldova. He replied to Gălăicu-Păun on the question of whether he should have been more generous to Bessarabian writing: “I could have written about several [authors]. I am sorry. [...]. But the first people who have not been generous to the Bessarabians are themselves” (Iovănel and Galaicu-Păun 2021, 12). Here he had in mind the insufficiency of literary-historical⁹ and other scholarly works on Romanian literature from Bessarabia.

One may consider that by not describing the cultural and social context which belongs to the history of another state (Moldova), Mihai Iovănel has in some sense con-

firmed what literary critics and historians by now accept as a self-evident fact: that literature from Moldova written in the Romanian language is implicitly Romanian literature. In addition, it is also worth mentioning that Iovănel, undoubtedly responding to the growing assertiveness for inclusiveness and minority rights, has opened his *History* to other criteria; he has directed attention on the one hand to genre literature, and also to literature that describes cultural, sexual and other minorities.

Czech and Slovak works on the history of Romanian literature

Until the division of Czechoslovakia in 1993, Czech and Slovak Romanian studies had developed in parallel, with two collaborating centers of research and teaching in Prague and Bratislava. I will now consider two works from these sources which are of different genres; I will speak of them together, because I observe a certain common ground in the conceptions they both have of literature from Moldova.

In 2001, *Slovník rumunských spisovatelů* (Dictionary of Romanian writers) appeared as part of a series of dictionaries of writers issued by the Czech publisher Libri. Its production was coordinated by the Prague-based scholar of Romanian studies Libuše Valentová, with the participation of three other authors: the Czech Jiří Našinec and two from Moldova, Vitalie Ciobanu and Vasile Gârnet. In a brief note on the back of the dustjacket we read: “Included for the first time are writers from the one-time Romanian province of Bessarabia (today’s Republic of Moldova), growing from the same linguistic and cultural base” (Valentová et al. 2001, dustjacket). The note alludes to a previous such dictionary from the totalitarian period, *Slovník spisovatelů: Rumunsko* (Kavková et al. 1984), which comprehensively avoided Moldavia, its culture and literature, having regard to the geopolitical situation of that time. The new *Dictionary*, like the previous one, opens with a synthesizing literary-historical “Introductory study”. The new one, however, includes a separate chapter on “Pisemnictví v Moldavské republice – nedílná součást pisemnictví rumunského” (Writing from the Republic of Moldova – an inseparable part of Romanian writing) by the Moldovan writer, critic and civic activist Vitalie Ciobanu. It is already clear from the chapter’s title that the author, as a leading representative of the ideology of Romanianism, regards literature from Moldova written in Romanian as indisputably part of Romanian literature. Despite “the manufacture of Soviet Moldavian” (27) literature in the period from 1944 to 1989, that is, literature isolated and difficult of access for Romanian culture, nonetheless writers from this period are included by Ciobanu in his chapter and by the entire collective in the *Dictionary* generally. (Overall, entries on writers from Moldova represent something over 10 percent, and when we take into account the year of publication of this dictionary, naturally most of these writers were active during the period of existence of the Moldavian SSR.) The final decade of the 20th century, overlapping with the 1980s, which were somewhat freer in the soviet Moldova than the previous totalitarian decades, comprises entries on those who contributed with their literary work to “Moldavian-Romanian synchronization” (31). The advance made in this *Dictionary* for the Czech and Slovak public is undeniable: inclusion of the Romanian literature from Moldova, apart from being a political gesture, also expressed an awareness of the ongoing integration

of Romanian and Moldovan culture, and in particular literature. However, Romanian literature originating in Bessarabia before 1944 remained in its entirety outside of the *Dictionary* (this is true of the introductory study as well as the entries). Hence the question is not raised of the mutual permeation, the common elements, of Romanian and Moldovan literary history from the times before 1812 and after it, down to the year 1944.

Dejiny rumunskej literatúry: literárne dianie v kultúrnom priestore (History of Romanian literature: Literary activity in a cultural space) – appeared in Slovakia in 2017 (Vajdová, Páleníková, and Kenderessy). Though finding an instructive example in the concept of the Czech *Dictionary*, ultimately the Slovak work was conceived differently and more broadly. On the initiative of Libuša Vajdová, a chapter devoted to Romanian literature in Moldova was included in the Slovak *History*. Literature from Moldova is also treated in its own right, separately from Romanian literature. It begins in 1812, passes through the essential phases of the socio-political organization of the given territory, and describes its cultural and literary achievements. An emphasis on socio-cultural contextualization characterizes this *History* as a whole, including the sections devoted to Moldovan culture, and distinguishes it from Manolescu's *Critical history* and from Iovănel's *History* also. This contextual emphasis was essential for a work originating in a different cultural context and designed (by the language used, namely Slovak) for a public from a different cultural sphere. Occasionally, uncomprehending questions have been posed from the Romanian academic milieu: is it necessary to write an "allochthonous" history of Romanian literature in another culture, when Romanian culture already has a multitude of "autochthonous" literary-historical narratives? To this Vajdová responded, when the Slovak *History* was still at the planning stage: "A history of literature, created in an original context, is comprehensible mainly only in the context where it was produced. Romanian readers regard most of the realia as self-evident, many historical events are well-known to them, and essentially they identify with that image of themselves which their own discourses of identity (histories of literature among them) have created. But none of this is true for a reader from another context, who often cannot make head or tail of phenomena which at home are thought blindingly obvious. A history of Romanian culture, if it is produced in a milieu outside of Romanian culture, is obliged to tackle such 'obvious' questions as these" (2017, 21).

Furthermore, the Slovak *History*, like the Moldovan *O istorie deschisă a literaturii române din Basarabia* (Open history of Romanian literature from Bessarabia; Cimpoi 1997), makes Romanian literature problematic and to some extent deprives it of national "uniqueness" and linguistic uniformity, thematizing precisely what is often its multicultural character. Indeed, with such mutable borders as we find in the history of the space as a whole, and the orientation of particular territories and their higher social and intellectual strata to various centers of culture (Constantinople, Kyiv, Budapest, Vienna, later Paris and Rome), a monolithic character of culture is scarcely imaginable. The Slovak *History* thus comprehensively acknowledges cultural overlaps, which are frequently overlooked by writers of the older periods in deference to the national idea. Cases in point are Dimitrie Cantemir and Costache Negruzzi,

and many others besides: the authors explicitly point out that these were writers active in Romanian culture, but who came from the Moldavian cultural milieu.

Apart from this, in the Slovak *History* there is one other essential dimension, though it is closely connected with cultural contextualization, and also with transculturality. Many phenomena from Romanian culture and literature are related to or compared with phenomena from the authors' own culture. This is not simply a matter of translations from Romanian literature, which during socialism, for example, arrived in the Slovak context in two forms: direct translations from Romanian in the case of Romanian literature, and translations mediated through Russian in the case of "Moldavian Soviet literature" (453–454; Şlehtiţchi 2019, 531).

CONCLUSION

As I have tried to show, using the example of Romanian literature from Moldova, histories of Romanian literature from Romania published after the year 2000 receive and address the literature of another culture, though written in the same language, variously: from almost total non-inclusion, through (multicultural) integration, to a (transcultural) non-contextualized and non-problematized, but still highly selective inclusion, or inclusion as a result of importation from another culture. The reasons for these approaches on the one hand have to do with differing authorial concepts in writing literary-historical works (aesthetic-axiological approach – national-patriotic (politicizing) approach – socio-cultural (sociologizing) approach). They are also, however, influenced by the prevailing social and political systems in which the culture to be described and its literature are found. Romanian literature in Moldova in the period of state socialism was in the clasp of the cultural policy and ideology of Moldovanism; it was produced in the "Moldovan language", in heavily censored contact with, or in isolation from, Romanian literature, and one can call it "Moldovan Soviet literature" (Şlehtiţchi 2019, 531). Assigning it to literary-historical narratives requires a differentiated socio-cultural contextualization. However, literary history, especially that dealing with post-1989 literature, is able to address literary works written in Romanian and distributed or published in Romania, without the need for any elaborate socio-political contextualizing apparatus.

The history of Romanian literature, such as presented in the works reviewed here, is still the history of literature written in the "national" language. Creating minor exceptions are the Church-Slavonic rudiments and the exile literature which Romanian literary historiography has adopted (if it is not too harsh to say this) not only from inclusive but also from interested motives: on the one hand they extend its tradition, on the other hand they raise its value and extend its scope, or make it global. One still has to wait for a history of Romanian literature which would take in not only literature written in the "national" language but also literature from Romania in Hungarian, German, Slovak, and other languages, or indeed not only "canonical" literature but also more marginal genres of literature (there is, for example, a history of Romanian science-fiction literature; Opreţă 2013), literature of other cultures and sub-cultures. Partial attempts, admittedly, do already exist (in token of many, I will mention for example the questions surrounding the mode of writing the history of Hungarian liter-

ature in Romanian; Vincze 2018). A transcultural perspective in writing the history of literature may serve not just as an instrument for comparison or coping with the “insufficiencies” and limits of one culture (translations being the best example) but also as an expression of intercultural acquaintance, understanding, and in the final analysis respect for the diversity of cultures, whether on the personal or “national” level.

Translated by John Minahane

NOTES

- ¹ For this state formation I also use the received names Moldova or Bessarabia. Since the text will refer only few times to Western Moldova, which is currently a region of Romania, I will distinguish this by using the word “Moldavia” (see also Buckmaster et al. 2022; <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Moldova>).
- ² Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Slovak and Czech are by John Minahane.
- ³ I deliberately do not write about “Romanian culture”, because its constitution, via nation-building and the integrative work involved in forming the Romanian Kingdom from two Danubian principalities (Wallachia [Țara românească] and Moldavia), came about after the annexation of the eastern part of the Moldavian principality by Tsarist Russia in 1812. This annexed part received the name of Bessarabia; administratively it gradually had the statute of an oblast and a gubernia; after a brief interwar period and a four-year interlude during World War II as part of Romania, it became a component of the Soviet Union; as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic it survived until 1991, when it declared independence as the Republic of Moldova.
- ⁴ According to one of the ideologists, the regional secretary of the party in MASSR I. Badejev, “in the fight for emancipation, even dialect can take on an enormous importance” (Țicu 2018, 202).
- ⁵ As a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, Romania refused to take part in the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and therefore the Soviet leadership viewed it with suspicion. Furthermore, from the 1970s Nicolae Ceaușescu began to pursue a policy of nationalist communism, which deviated notably from the requirements of socialist internationalism.
- ⁶ The Gagauz are a Turkic Christian ethnic group that Tsarist Russia resettled from Bulgaria to southern Bessarabia after its annexation in 1812 to the territories of the banished tribes of the Nogai Tatars.
- ⁷ The governing agrarians and communists, using Article 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, in 1994 replaced Romanian with Moldovan. However, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova in 2013 decided that the Declaration of Independence in the Constitution had precedence over what was enacted in Article 13, and hence the language of administration is Romanian.
- ⁸ Here, I assume that the author is referring to “patriotism” or the national ideas associated with Romanianism promoted through literature and criticism.
- ⁹ Worthy of note is the above-mentioned work by the literary critic and historian Mihai Cimpoi *O istorie deschisă a literaturii române din Basarabia* [An Open History of Romanian Literature from Bessarabia] from 1996, which, although it is written with boundless patriotic and national feeling, paradoxically also opens up the question of a parallel Romanian literature outside the borders of Romania. Cimpoi acknowledges and thematizes the transcultural character of several “nationally canonical” elements of Romanian literature, something that has been considered problematic in histories orientated to one “national” culture. Either the works at issue were written in other languages in the Moldavian principality on the territory of present-day Romania (medieval Church Slavonic sources, chronicles), or their authors came from Romanian minorities strongly connected to surrounding cultures (for example, the late Romantic poet Mihai Eminescu, regarded as a “national bard”, wrote his first poems in the town of Chernivtsi, which was in Bukovina, hence at that time in Austria), or were produced entirely outside the Romanian milieu, even in other languages, but they described the Romanian culture (for example, the works of Dimitrie Cantemir, Moldavian prince and later adviser to Peter the Great).

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Transculturality in Romanian literary histories: The case of literature from Moldova

History of Romanian literature. Moldova. Transculturality. Nicolae Manolescu.
Dumitru Micu. Mihai Iovănel.

The Romanian literary-historical reception of literature written in the Romanian language from the Republic of Moldova is an indicator of (trans)cultural tendencies, but it also expresses the ideological and political attitudes of its authors. This is because it is the literature of a culture that historically has been part of different cultural and power spheres: the Moldavian princely (from the Middle Ages to 1812), the Russian tsarist (1812–1920), the “Greater Romanian” (1920–1940, 1941–1944), the Soviet (1944–1991), and finally the autonomous Moldovan. In the present study, using the examples of three Romanian and two foreign (Slovak and Czech) literary-historical narratives on Romanian literature, I attempt to show how their authors approached the question of the inclusion/non-inclusion of literature, written in Romanian, from Moldova (as well as Moldavia), and to describe the mechanisms behind the formulation of these attitudes and their changes.

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