Post-1989 Romanian Literature and the Reframing of Cultural Identity

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Abstract The following article considers the reframing of cultural identity in post-1989 Romanian literature, in response to the growing pressures of globalization. Based on a careful analysis of a range of recent literary examples, the author argues that the reflection of cultural identity in Romanian literature has often been balanced, however precariously, between global and local interests. At its best, post-1989 literature emphasizes simultaneously transnational/intercultural aspirations and local specificity.
Key words cultural identity; globalization localism; regionalism; multicultural literature

Local, Regional, and Global Commitments in Recent Romanian Literary Culture

Any discussion of cultural identity is fraught with complexities, especially when identity is located in the uncertain space among the local, national, transnational, and the global. After the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, the traditional mapping of Europe into Eastern and Western spheres of influence was replaced with a contradictory mix of global and local delineations. In parts of the former Soviet block (especially in the Baltic and Balkan areas) a new ethnic separatism emerged in direct reaction not only to the earlier Soviet domination but also to the new trend of "globalization" that seemed to reinforce the "international division of labor and appropriation . . . benefiting First World countries at the expense of Third World" (Ebert 286) and, we should add, Second World post-communist societies. The lingering tensions between global interdependency and ethnocentric separatism, First World centers and Third World peripheries indicate an unresolved tension at the level of the ideological frames we use to relate to each other, with the policies of "reethnification" often vying with economic globalization.

As cultural theorists are quick to point out, neither an assimilative notion of globalism that recognizes the "unqualified multiplicity of cultures without positing ways for them to interact meaningfully" (Berry and Epstein 97), nor a defensive localism that unconditionally promotes one's own ethnicity or origins can ensure "a genuinely global consciousness" (Pratt 62). In fact, the "gestures of localism and globalism" may appear virtually synonymous insofar as they treat cultural difference in

an essentialist and idealized way, as something fixed and final (Chow 10). The mediating consciousness between native and foreign, global and local has to be sought elsewhere.

My contention is that, at its best, literature can perform that role, challenging monologic concepts of culture and emphasizing "interference" and "translation" between local and global, national and transnational. By interfacing cultures and messages, literature can help us rediscover and consolidate the middle ground between Eastern and Western, Northern and Southern, dominant and peripheral that we have neglected because of our polarized worldviews. As Gabriele Schwab has argued, most comprehensively in *The Mirror and the Killer-Queen: Otherness in Literary Language* (1996), literature's "imaginary ethnographies" mediate otherness for us through complex processes of "transference" and "translation." More specifically, literature enriches our cultural repertoire with unspoken emotions and alternative perspectives. The latter are most valuable when they occasion insights into the cultural imaginary of others. Literature can imagine encounters between different cultures, acting as a corrective to the ethnocentric/nationalistic concepts of culture and to the counter-theories of globalism.

We should be careful, however, not to idealize the mediating role of literature. Literary texts have operated both within and outside the national narrative, counterposing tradition and modernity, "national Self" and transnational "Other" (Cleary 54, 57). The concept of nation "regularly appeared [in literature] either as an all-encompassing value or as a total negative to be sacrificed at the altar of any and every alternative ideal" (Kiss 132). When the aspirations of nation-states were at its center, literary discourse took on certain defensive accents, responding to the uncertainties of identity and the presumption or reality of outside threat by reinforcing an exclusionary self-definition. However, literature has also had a certain degree of success reflecting the play of differences in the multiethnic space of East-Central Europe and proposing more flexible models of intercultural exchange.

As the contributors to the multi-volume *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe* have argued, the literatures of the ECE area have often worked as interfaces rather than as competing entities, emphasizing the flow of information and cultural products across borders, physical and otherwise (see Cornis-Pope and Neubauer, 2004–2010). For example, during the 19th and 20th centuries Transylvania and the Banat regions developed forms of multiculturality, some conflictual others integrative, that rendered borders permeable. An attentive analysis, such as that undertaken by the contributors to the ECE project, can foreground the space of intercultural understanding often concealed by nationalist and imperial passions. In the words of a recent reviewer, the *History of the Literary Cultures of East-Central Europe* "attempts to re-conceptualize literary traditions in the [East-Central European] region by deconstructing national myths and focusing on common themes, thereby opening up perspectives which are routinely overlooked in traditional national literary histories" (Baár 468–69).

The work of reconceptualizing the literary cultures of this region is far from finished. One of the questions we need to pose now is that of the relationship between

the growing trend of globalization and the specificity of a literature like the Romanian, its place in relation to regional, transnational, and global interests. As part of a new approach to Romanian literature, we need to develop a post-essentialist analytic practice that recognizes local specificities while emphasizing "multiple identity" and transcultural communication.

There are some encouraging signs that such a new approach is underway. A number of Romanian journals have devoted issues to the critical analysis of nationalism and ethnic essentialism, but also to the presentation of alternative models of Eastern European "multiculturalism," from the regional coexistence of parallel cultures in the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, to intercultural exchanges that demarginalize minority cultures. While this type of analysis has advanced our awareness of the causes of ethnic fundamentalism in pre- and postcommunist Eastern Europe, it still needs to achieve a more nuanced understanding of national identity, distinguishing between "open," or inclusive, and "closed" or exclusive national definitions. Once the multiple linguistic and communitarian roots of Eastern European cultures are recognized, national identity will no longer be viewed as monologic but rather as dialogic, a form of "multiple cultural identity" (Neumann 66). As the Romanian cultural sociologist Victor Neumann argues, this modified concept of national identity allows us simultaneously to recognize the "similitude of human values, their common origin," and to "assume pluralism by claiming participation in more cultural identities" (68). A similar dialogic understanding underlies Neumann's concept of multiculturalism: "Multiculturalism is legitimate when it accepts both the ideals derived from cultural specificities and those that refer to two or more cultures simultaneously" (62).

Crossing and Redefining Cultural Boundaries in post-1989 Romanian Literature

The Romanian literature published since 1989 has broached some of these issues, revising traditional definitions of national identity, gender, and race, and blurring the boundaries between highculture and low culture, politics and literature. At this point, it is still difficult to anticipate the directions that the creative work of Romanian writers will take. A common post-1989 complaint was that "literature" in the narrow, aesthetic sense, had been largely supplanted by event-oriented and market-driven writing. A retrospective of the editorial year 1990 in Romania began with a characteristic observation: "At no other time in our history have we experienced such a crisis in publications" (Ungureanu 10), and went on to explain that the pre-revolutionary literature was marked by an oppositional and recreative vocation: "the success of December 22 [1989] was also its own success." The post-revolutionary culture was by contrast plagued by a "self-devouring vocation" (Ungureanu 10). At the end of the 1990s, the poet and novelist Mircea Cărtărescu similarly noted that "nothing will be as before: the *system* has become unrecognizable, making impossible the reference to the same literary paradigm" (*Postmodernismul românesc* 462). According to Cărtărescu, his own 1980s generation "closed an important literary loop begun two centuries earlier that defined a system, that of modernity" (461). After the collapse of the Soviet-backed communist system, Eastern European cultures underwent "[a]

chaotic diversification and dissipation of texts, a hybridization of media, [. . .] an increasing virtualization of 'possible worlds' [that] will turn literature into a form of generalized *mind game*" (462). The main question on many critics' minds was whether this diversification led to a significant restructuring of our understanding of literature or if it simply represented the confusion that attended a prolonged period of transition.

Judging from the fact that much recent Romanian literature is still in a form of amorphous transition, there are no simpler answers to this question. After 1989, high literature has lost its privileged position, shielded from market forces (Wachtel 47). The very definition of literature has been diversified, split into conflicting cultural styles, high and low, experimental and traditionalist. Literature as a whole has been pushed to the periphery: while its "national tradition" has been turned into a list of compulsory school readings, its contemporary production has had to compete with versions of pulp literature and the "alternative worlds" of music and digital networks.

However, what some have perceived as incongruities, others have taken as signs of a new inclusiveness, proving the versatility and adaptability of contemporary literature. The present literary map is not only more diverse, but also richer in transitional and cross-genre forms (autobiographical nonfiction, docu-novels, graphic poetry, etc.). The growing editorial interest in previously censored manuscripts and translations from the work of the diaspora has filled important gaps, expanding and restructuring the corpus of Romanian (post) communist literature. More inclusive literary histories and critical dictionaries have been published, remedying the deficiencies of earlier works that ignored the literature of the diaspora. A good example is the four-volume *Dicţionarul scriitorilor români* (Dictionary of Romanian Writers, 1995 – 2002) coordinated by the same group of scholars who published an earlier version of the dictionary in 1978; this time, this massive work includes exiled writers. The re-integration of the exilic voices has moved forward in a faster way in the case of the performing arts: in addition to promoting the theatrical work of Eugène Ionesco and Mircea Eliade, previously forbidden by the Romanian Communist regime, a number of internationally prominent Romanian theater and film directors have been encouraged to return for longer or shorter periods to work in their country of origin.

As a result, Romanian literature has adopted a more internationalist or multicultural perspective, but this trend has been countered periodically by new nationalist and ethnocentric leanings. The battle for canonization was at times fierce in Romania, with the ultranationalist and anti-Semitic line promoted by *România Mare* (Greater Romania), published since June 1990, vying with the more liberal publications of the Writers' Union. Theater became an apt metaphor for the contradictory real-life drama of the Romanian Revolution and its aftermath. Drama critic Marian Popescu has linked what he calls the birth by "caesarian" of the new "democratic society" in Romania, to the political "happenings" in the streets and the climactic changes in the country's theaters and dramatic art (80 – 81). His observation, soon after 1989, that "Romanian theater is now the terrain of a confrontation between the laws of economics and those of art" (81), still rings true today. With all the social and cultural contradictions that continue to plague the country, we should not be surprised that

comedy in its varied forms of expression, from satire to tragicomedy, is thriving.

Dumitru Solomon's 1996 one act play, *Paradoxul* (The Paradox), is a good example of a "comic drama" about writing plays, acting and directing, but also the political theater that the country is caught in. The maddening confusion between playing and being, role and actor, appearance and essence hints to the state of things in post-revolutionary Romania. It is also a forceful metaphor for the state of art itself. Solomon's play questions all form of artistic authority including that of the author and of the stage director. In Solomon's play, one character raves against both the Monist and others like him, and against those who call themselves "dualists:" "These monists are everywhere. [. . .] [T]hey want to reduce the world to a single side! To destroy the other side. They must be apprehended, denounced! Do you realize what the world would be like, if it were reduced to one-sidedness, without dilemmas, without oppositions, without variants, without colors?" As for dualists, "they are even worse! They see double. [···] Everything has two sides, all phenomena have two sides. Dualists cause dissension among things and phenomena, until everything is destroyed, pounded, turned to dust" (27). One can recognize in this outcry a plea for a new kind of democracy that accommodates multi-sidedness and polychromatic dimensions.

The questioning of political and cultural agendas was central to the debates that emerged in the 1990s, challenging not only the vestiges of totalitarianism but also the limitations of oppositional trends of the 1970s and 1980s, including experimental and dissident writing. To Gheorghe Grigurcu, for example, postmodernism was a bastardly and "immodest" trend, especially in its programmatic manifestations (6 – 7). Across the Prut River, in the former Soviet Moldova that in the 1980s had its own group of innovative poets writing in Romanian (Ştefan Baştovoi, Emilian Galaicu-Păun, Dumitru Crudu, Vasile Gârbeţ), postmodernism was rejected in more strident terms, as the expression of a "pornographic" deviation from true cultural traditions. Leaving aside such intolerant reactions that were fortunately rare, the debate about postmodernism included a reexamination of the complicated strategies (metaphoric indirection, rhetorical mystification, etc.) that writers had to resort to in order to bypass communist censorship. By contrast, post-1989 literature broached many previously tabooed subjects with a direct, unadorned approach.

Entire thematic areas (such as the topic of the concentration camps, the post-war Soviet occupation, émigré issues) were rediscovered at the end of the eighties and the nineties. Some of these works exhibited a particularly poignant humor, like Nicolae Esinencu's *Un moldovean la închisoare* (A Moldavian in Prison; 1989) which insinuates ironically that life in prison was not any worse than life lived in the "freedom" allowed by the Soviets. Earlier narratives of the communist gulag had been published by Paul Goma, both through manuscripts smuggled abroad and in French, German, Swedish, and Dutch translations after his forced emigration to France in 1977. The most explicit of these semi-autobiographical narratives, documenting the extreme methods of Stalinist "reeducation" practiced in the Piteşti prison where the inmates were forced by the chief torturer Ţurcanu, himself a former prisoner, to participate in forms of "intertorture," was first published in French under the title *Les*

Chiens de mort, *ou*, *La passion selon Piteşti* (1981; The Dogs of Death, or The Passions in the Piteşti Version). The Romanian edition of this novel, *Patimile după Piteşti*, was printed in 1990 but distributed only in 1999. In 1989, Goma returned to a more "innocent" narrative point of view, exploring in *Le calidor* (subtitled "a Bessarabian Childhood" in its Romanian version) mid-century historical traumas as experienced by a young child. In spite of its broad autobiographical stretch, covering the troubled period of the 1940s, this novel offers a firmer narrative grip on history than some of Goma's previous works. The difference here is the consistency of the narrative point of view: from the privileged position offered by the "calidor" (house porch), the child is initiated into life and history during the Soviet occupation of Bessarabia, a period that brings about the destruction of the child's edenic vision of the world. *L'art de la fugue* (1990), published one year later under the Romanian title *Arta refugii*: *o copilărie transilvană* (The Art of Refuge/Taking Flight Again: A Transylvanian Childhood) continues the exploration begun in *Le calidor*, adopting the semi-autobiographical perspective of the slightly older boy as he witnesses a new act in the drama of his family, now committed to Transylvanian prisons. The boy's education in the terrors of history takes on a new ironic twist because this time the agents of persecution are not the Soviets but the Romanian "brethren." In the mid 1990s, Goma abandoned fiction altogether, focusing on the "hyperincendiary personal diary" (Piţu 131). This diary, which presents many contemporary Romanian writers and former associates in most unflattering terms, ruined the honeymoon that Goma's work enjoyed immediately after the fall of Ceauşescu regime, when several of his works were republished. After the publication of the first three volumes of his *Journal*, Goma became a *persona non grata* in many literary circles. Other exiles had slightly similar fates after the collapse of the communist regimes, being discouraged from returning home or being ignored after an initial flurry of articles about them.

Another topic that had to wait several decades for an honest representation wasethnic persecution under the Nazi and the Soviet totalitarian regimes. For example, both Mihail Sebastian's anti-Nazi Journal and Ion D. Sârbu's anti-Stalinistic memoirs, the latter describing the fate of a traditional socialist persecuted alternatively by the Nazis and the communists, could only be published after 1989. The representation of the tragic byproducts of World War Two in Eastern Europe did not fare any better, especially when it involved such tabooed subjects as the fate of Romanian peasants lost in the Soviet prison camps from where they emerged only much later, after Stalin's death. Alecu Ivan Ghilia's *Întoarcerea bărbaţilor* (*The Return of the Men*) on this theme was published only in 1991. World War Two was also treated by Matei Vişniec in a stark, unsparing way that did not distinguish between losers and victors. His short plays in *Caii la fereastră* (Horses at the Window, performed in Romania and France in 1992), and *Teatru descompus*, *sau*, *Omul-lada-de-gunoi*; *Femeia ca un câmp de luptă* (Decomposed Theater, or Man-as-a-Dumpster; Woman as a Battlefield; 1998) focus on heinous forms of behavior during war—cowardice, bestiality, greed, violence against women. The war is de-ideologized, presented in a light that deprives it of any justification. Patriotic slogans, national interests, and geopolitical reasons pale before the crude reality of carnage, persecution, and inhuman-

ity. The dramatic form itself underscores the extent to which individuals are victimized by history: Vişniec's texts unfold as anxious monologues addressed to interlocutors who are rarely identified and even more rarely respond. At the same time, Vişniec tries to engage us, viewers and readers, in a dialogue with his texts inviting us to reconstruct from textual splinters the "initial mirror" which once reflected "the sky, the world, and the human soul" (author's Foreword). We are helped in this enterprise by the dialogic pull of these texts, which share motifs, names of characters, and a more general aspiration to all-inclusive communication (several pieces associate devoted, talkative animals with the monologizing humans).

The same dialogic and polymorphic pull underscores Mircea Cărtărescu' srecently translated novel, *Nostalgia* (2005), with its "*mixtum compositum* of antimodernism , [···] nonmodernism [···], late modernism, and postmodernism" that Cărtărescu himself attributes to post-World War Two Romanian literature (*Postmodernismul românesc* 137). But Cărtărescu's prose complicates/rewrites these earlier paradigms, illustrating the radical potential of hybridity and polymorphism. Each of the five interlaced novellas that compose *Nostalgia*—"The Roulette Player," "Mentardy," "The Twins," "REM," and the Epilogue ("The Architect")—dramatizes the liberating potential of innovative narration, but also the political and poetic constraints that regulate the work of narrators and their audiences. Rich and protean, mixing high and low styles (narrative of growth, autobiography, philosophic parable, science fiction, gothic horror, erotic narrative), these stories contribute to the post-communist/postmodern diversification of the Eastern European narrative production, calling into questions pre-1989 fictional categories.

Adding to the symbolism of this book, the first Romanian edition of*Nostalgia* (titled *Visul/* The Dream) was published in the cusp year 1989, after circulating in manuscript through the eighties. The book's various narrators dramatize the difficulties of creative narration under communism but also the new opportunities for a self-problematized concept of literature at a time when the grand ideological narrative of communism was approaching dissolution. The metaphor used by Cărtărescu to describe the narrative structure resulting from this conflict of conditions is that of a web of "chaotically placed loops and holes," created by "a spider under the influence of a drug" (263). In similar ways, the creator-writer "deforms matter, disturbs it under the influence of the demented wind of inspiration" (263). The spider web functions alternatively as a deterministic metaphor, suggesting the inescapable economy of destiny and plot; and as a metafictional metaphor emphasizing the self-propelled nature of narrative, with characters gaining provisional release from the constrictions of the web, but only to the extent they become weavers of their own stories. The other structuring metaphor comes from the new media. Given Cărtărescu's interest in fractal orders and virtual reality (he titled a recent volume of essays *Pururi tînăr înfăşurat în pixeli* (Forever Young, Wrapped in Pixels; 2003), we could speculate that the interlaced stories in *Nostalgia* behave like a digital hypertext, embedding each other, expanding their narrative ontology through a process of interlinking of situations and motifs, creating a virtual suprastory. The locale (Bucharest) and historical period (several decades, before and after World War II) are pieced together in

similar ways, through interlaced allusions that are part of a narrator's or a character's mental scape. Cărtărescu treats Bucharest itself as a web of contradictory messages, magic and squalid at the same time, circulating along paradoxical circuits, some stuck in premodern history, others connected to a virtual future.

Cultural and narrative polymorphism, and the attending problematization of national and ethnic/local identity, is central to the work of ethnic minority writers, especially when confronted with the drama of exile and uprooting. Consider the case of the Romanian-German writers rallied in the Aktionsgruppe Banat. They had to confront continually the issue of what it meant to write German language literature in "the cities of the East" (Bossert, *neuntöter* 60; trans. Fritz H. König). Culturally, RomanianGerman literature exhibited the characteristics of a marginal enclave. As a consequence, the "language [was] often slightly archaic, permeated with 'Romanianisms,' and geared mainly toward their own surroundings" (König 35); yet aesthetically it was a true hybrid, bridging Western and East-European literary practices. This literature achieved a "Brechtian *Verfrendungseffekt*—an effect of distancing and estrangement—through all means available to them. They want[ed] to disconnect themselves from official literature, from the literature of their predecessors, from the poetry that 'serves.' They [were] antilyrical, antisentimental, antitraditionalist" (Ungureanu, "Richard Wagner" 5). The Aktionsgruppe Banat was officially banned in 1975, and its members subsequently emigrated to Germany, where they faced the task of creating another problematic identity. This identity crisis produced some very good literature, particularly in Herta Müller's case, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature.

Müller's fiction, published after her forced emigration to Germany in 1987, represents the difficulties of life under both totalitarianism and the exilic condition, emphasizing the conflicting facets of the writer's identity. Most often Müller work illustrates the genre of fictionalized autobiography as in *The Land of Green Plums* (1996; German original, *Herztier*/Heart-Beast, 1993), focused primarily on the encounter of a group of ethnic German writers with the Securitate in the 1980s. However, around this political core, Müller builds a larger story that reexamines the twentieth-century history of the ethnic Germans (Swabians) in the Romanian Banat, their effort to resist assimilation but also their proud ethnocentrism that led at times to chauvinism and involvement with the Nazi regime. Müller's more recent work, for example the novel *In der Falle* (Trapped; 1996), continues to explore one of the darkest periods in the recent history of her native Romania, Ceauşescu's self-dubbed "golden epoch," demonstrating how a totalitarian state can impact the most intimate aspects of individual life. Müller's style is surrealistic-experimental, trying to represent the paradoxes of both totalitarianism and of the exilic condition, with the writer feeling "unhomed" both in her adoptive country and in her native Romania.

Herta Müller exemplifies also the strong focus on women's issues in recent Romanian literature. The contemporary story in *The Land of Green Plums* focuses on the fate of two women and the autobiographical narrator. At first glance, the two female characters seem destined to lead different lives: Tereza enjoys the privileges of being the daughter of a high-ranking party official, while Lola, who joins the party in order

to escape poverty, commits suicide after she is seduced by a party functionary. Soon afterwards Tereza herself dies, her life cut short by cancer. The narrator herself confronts ethnocentric prejudice and political persecution, which finally force her into self-exile. Thus, in spite of their different ethnic background and political choices, "[i]n the end, it becomes evident that all three female characters [...] are victims of the communist dictatorship" (Glajar 141) but also of gender exploitation. The sexploitation of women pervades all aspects of their life, from prostitution to sexualized interrogation methods performed by the male political police. Müller's novel portrays an "inherently patriarchal society" in which "gender roles are fixed and rooted in old-fashioned peasant values" (Marven 37), but at the same time challenges this patriarchal order by suggesting the possibility of strong female interpersonal relationships.

Women writers have had a notable presence in post-1989 literature, especially the literature of exile and emigration. The work of the Croat Slavenka Drakulić and Dubravka Ugrešić, of the Polish Kinga Dunin, the Russian Tatiana Tolstaya, and the Romanian Liliana Ursu, Gabriela Melinescu, Adina Kenereş, and Carmen-Francesca Banciu, to mention just a few, addresses a great mix of issues, both political and social, having to do with life under the defunct communist regimes as well as with gender and ethnic issues both at home and in the adoptive cultures. In the case of Romanian culture, its definition and boundaries have been stretched by the work of writers who, both before and especially after 1989, shuttled freely between East and West. In the recently published *Columbia Literary History of Eastern Europe since* 1945, Harold B. Segel devotes Chapter 10 ("Glimpses of Other Worlds") to Eastern European writers traveling abroad, especially to the United States. The chapter discusses briefly the literature of the Romanian Liliana Ursu and Daniela Crăsnaru, among other Eastern European writers who at different times before and after 1989 focused on "contact zones" and crosscultural experiences. Their works range from personal reportage and realistic fiction to poetry of reflection, but most often they mix genres and themes.

The poetry of Liliana Ursu, for example, draws parallels between America and Transylvania, an Eastern and a Western perspective, without glossing over their differences. Written in Romanian and self-translated into English, in a strong first-person autobiographical voice, Ursu's poetry interacts with both worlds, interpreting one from the perspective of the other. Not surprisingly, Ovid, the ancient poet banished to the edge of the Roman Empire, on the shores of the Black Sea, and who allegedly wrote two lost books in the language of the local Getae, functions in Ursu's poetry as an intercultural archetype, defining her own condition sandwiched uncomfortably between the two cultures:

> In the end I will meet Ovid
> Himself a sandwich man.
> At the end of the millennium I will be his analyst
> And he will be my shore of this sea I travel
> Which is called America.

("Heart Washed like a Brain, Europe for Sale," in *Angel Riding a Beast* 61)

Unlike the exiled Ovid, Liliana Rusu was able after 1989 to shuttle between her culture of origin and her adopted culture. In that sense, her condition is better described by the term "migration" rather than that of "exile," emphasizing the multidirectionality of her physical and cultural movement. She illustrates the similar back-and-forth movement of Eastern European writers not only after 1989 but also during earlier historical periods, for example at the turn of the 19th century when transplanted writers like Marthe Bibesco shuttled between Bucharest and Paris; or the interwar period when avant-garde writers and artists likewise shuttled between their home culture and Western avant-garde centers.

Equally intriguing in their effort to expand/interface their home culture with their adoptive one have been the Eastern European writers who migrated to the Mediterranean area after 1989 (see Mauceri, "Writing outside the Borders: Personal Experience and History in the Works of Helga Schneider and Helena Janeczek"; also her article on Mihai Mircea Butcovan). Maria Mauceri has also offered the first synthesis on Eastern European émigré writing in Italy, "L'Europa venuta dall'Europa (dall'Albania alla Russia)" (The Europe Arrived from Europe [from Albania to Russia]), published in Armando Gnisci's *Nuovo Planetario Italiano* (New Italian Planetarium). Subtitled, *Geografia e antologia della letteratura della migrazione in Italia e in Europa* (Geography and Anthology of Migration Literature in Italy and Europe; 2006), Gnisci's historical-theoretical anthology attempts to canonize the new migrant literature but also to redefine Italian literature as multicultural. Drawing on multicultural authors like Salman Rushdie, Joseph Brodsky, and Derek Walcott, Gnisci's general introduction emphasizes a number of favorite themes: the poetics of worlds, the creolization and decolonization of Europe (see also Gnisci's other work, *Creolizzare l'Europa/* The Creolization of Europe), and the anthropological nature of migration and its literary expression (*Nuovo Planetario Italiano* 13-39). Gnisci's entire discussion is framed by the concepts of "dispatrio" (dispatriation) as the defining condition of being human in the twentieth- and twenty-first century, and of "Patrie imaginarie" (imagined homelands) borrowed from Salman Rushdie, as an antidote to uprooting.

The poetry of Mircea Butcovan illustrates well aspects of this paradoxical dialectic, negotiating in *Allunaggio di un immigrato inamorato* (*The Moon Landing of an Immigrant in Love*; 2006) the uncertain spaces between movement and rest, boundary-crossing and imaginary homelands. His poetry situates itself into what Franca Sinopoli has described as a Euro-Mediterranean "trans-continentality," an alternative model of European identity that resists both undifferentiated globalism and disconnected localism. Migrant writers like the Romanian Butcovan expand and virtualize both the space of their culture of origin and that of their adoptive culture (in this case Italian), inhabiting the porous literary spaces shaped by intercultural messages. The literary production contributed by such writers hybridizes the host culture, calling into question the concept of a stable monolingual national tradition based upon the coinci-

dence of language, people, and a national state. Straddling languages and geopolitical boundaries, such "translingual" Eastern European writers promote what Andrei Codrescu describes as "a new map of the world," bringing together "countries of memory" with real and imaginary homes at the intersection of several languages (*The Disappearance of the Outside* 57). The map recreated by exiled writers promises to "send shoots and wedges through the surfaces of the authorized world" (91), pluralizing it. Against the authorized text, multicultural and migrant mobilize a whole range of devices, from invention to imaginative memory ("ontological remembering" not mere "quotas of nostalgia"—*Disappearance* 103). Codrescu's own poetry illustrates this clearly, announcing through a semi-autobiographical speaker in *Comrade Past & Mister Present* (49) that his great discovery after thirty was Plurality:

> …In other
> Words, all other words, not just tolerance
> Of difference, but the joyful welcoming of differences
> Into one's heart spread out like the pages
> Of a newspaper…

Not all Romanian writers have viewed this pluralization of ethnic and national identity with the same celebratory attitude. We are reminded of Emil Cioran's association of the exile with the figure of the renegade and the deserter. Yet, as he argues in *Anathemas and Admirations*, the recourse to a new, borrowed language is a heroic betrayal that represents simultaneously a "terrible ordeal" and an "exalting" conquest of new territory, a self-construction and an escape (126, 204). The writers we have discussed in this essay seem to understand this all too well, as they respond to the pressures of globalization both by expanding the multicultural reach of their art, and by balancing the global pull of contemporary culture with a creative rethinking of local specificity.

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