

THE FAILURE OF LITERARY SOCIOLOGY IN POST-WAR ROMANIAN CRITICISM

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Abstract The paper dwells upon the crisis of literary sociology in Romanian criticism in the decade(s) after the demise of Socialist Realism. Viewing it as a paradox within the research commandments of a communist regime, the study relates this crisis both to the decline of the Marxist-Leninist frame in post-Stalinist, Soviet-emancipated Romania, and to the rising fame of French Structuralism. Some relevant case studies are chosen to highlight the development of Romanian sociological criticism, its difficulty to make amends with the dogmatic past and to swiftly move on to the next level.

Keywords sociology, structuralism, Socialist Realism, Marxism, narratology

The impact of structuralism in the Romanian literary education and criticism of the 1970s can be measured against the proportional fading of sociological, ideological or generally contextual directions of research and their inability to develop after the demise of Socialist Realism. The official condemnation of dogmatic sociology paved the way towards immanent criticism, but at the same time discouraged contextual criticism. Militant critics of the 1950s lost the limelight to the 1960s generation of autonomist critics. The former tried to swap focus: in literary reviews (Paul Georgescu), in literary history (Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu). Some other leading critics of Socialist Realism (N. Tertulian, Mihai Novicov, Mihail Petroveanu) strove to maintain their standpoints, only to gain very few young followers (such as Mihai Ungheanu). The Romanian critical community nurtured after 1964 by the principle of aesthetic autonomy became so tightly-knit that older ideology-minded critics faced a tacit, but effective snub. A few years after the end of Socialist Realism, the social-historical research of literature remained just a vague requirement, invoked by obligation or inertia, which even older dogmatic critics found difficult to make a case for. The 1960s' young critics' repulsion towards sociologism made them underestimate otherwise important landmarks of criticism (such as the

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“documentary” research in literary history, whose excess was famously criticized by Nicolae Manolescu).

The advance of structuralism was connected to this blockage and further enhanced it. Structuralism was not, however, the main culprit in the crisis of contextual literary research in Romania. In fact, the neighbouring case of the Soviet Union proved that literary sociology could actually be revived by structuralism. Around 1964, Yuri Lotman and the School of Tartu outlined an interlinked analysis of the internal literary structure and its relations to the social-cultural context, which was organized around the concept of “code”, shared by all cultural levels. The sociological frame assumed by the Soviet researchers had many shortcomings (it was asserted, but little explored in detail, and it concerned ancient or exotic cultures in order to avoid contemporary matters); even so, it proved that the problem of literary context could be theoretically reshaped even outside the master narrative of Stalinism. In Italy, where the political regime allowed open intellectual debates, Marxism had an even more fruitful collaboration with structuralism in the semiotics launched around 1965: no political constraints hindered the study of artistic reception, popular culture, and mechanisms of literary communication.

Structuralism was the undoubted leading force in European literary studies in the second half of the 1960s. But even before the 1970s semiotics would approach “the historicity of structures”,¹ the topic of social structures that determined literary works still lingered in French intellectual debates. First of all, there was Lucien Goldmann, who promoted the notion of “homology” between “the structures of the universe of work” and “certain social groups’ mind structures”.² The topic was also treated by Roland Barthes, even beyond his Marxist youth, in his *Elements of Semiology* and throughout his long-lasting interest in masked ideologies of contemporary culture and in the function of literature within “the pattern of social power”.³ More revolutionary insights into the social birth of literature were provided by Althusser’s School: Pierre Macherey,⁴ René and Etienne Balibar discussed the dependence of literature upon “ideological apparatuses”, and its inherently critical capacity to create a mental space able to temporarily suspend ideology. Of course, the latter idea, along with the similar theories of the Frankfurt School, would have had poor prospects of research in Communist Romania. Nevertheless, the cases cited above proved that researchers’ interest in literary contexts and ideologies was not completely swept away by French Structuralism. Not to mention the surviving branch of literary sociology relatively independent of structuralism and directly indebted to Marxist aesthetics (L. Löwenthal, J. Duvignaud, M. Zéaffa, G. Della Volpe etc.), that approached the mechanisms of literary production and consumption (concerning especially novel and dramatic genres, as well as the recently forged “cultural industries”).

¹ A. J. Greimas, *Du Sens. Essais sémiotiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), 21. If not marked otherwise, all English translations of quotes from sources in other languages were made by the author of the present paper.

² See Lucien Goldmann, *Pour une sociologie du roman* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

³ Annette Lavers, *Roland Barthes. Structuralism and After* (London: Methuen&Co., 1982), 12.

⁴ See Pierre Macherey, *Pour une théorie de la production littéraire* (Paris: François Maspero, 1966).

Several theorists of socio-criticism were translated to Romanian after 1968 at the Political Publishing House (L. Goldmann, A. Gramsci, E. Fischer, R. Escarpit, St. Morawski), but had an extremely feeble echo compared to structuralist theorists. Not even critics raised within the Marxist doctrine were eager to explore the recent developments of these theories. No wonder that the most systematic survey of the domain of literary sociology had to wait until Paul Cornea's 1980 volume, *The Rule of the Game*. Beyond that, even critics still faithful to their militant past would rather relentlessly criticize structuralism, than update their theoretical frame towards a new socio-criticism or ideological criticism. Paul Cornea remained the only Romanian critic authentically interested in keeping up with the developments of literary sociology: his 1972 *Origins of Romanian Romanticism*, a study still relevant today, described the connection between "a literature that hadn't yet acquired autonomy" and "the historical reality" on the shared ground of "mentalities" and the "intellectual activities"⁵ of the literature-producing social classes.

However, certain attempts to revive literary sociology⁶ were made at the beginning of the 1970s. Unfortunately, little help in this respect could come from sociology proper, an academic discipline choked by dogmatism, and subdued, along with psychology and pedagogy, within faculties of philosophy and history. The few critics still interested in sociology found it hard to put theory into practice. Mihail Novicov, Mihail Petroveanu and N. Tertulian were hopelessly stuck in a dogmatic vocabulary and in rudimentary arguments about "literary reflection", which they usually supported by customary quotes from G. Lukács. The credit given to such critics had declined dramatically.⁷ Besides them, certain convincing contributions of sociologically oriented literary history were provided by fresher critics like Florin Mihăilescu and Zigu Ornea, while Ion Vlad, Ion Ianoși and Ion Pascadi continuously and inconclusively theorised about sociological developments in aesthetics and literary theory. Paul Cornea was therefore right to reproach the aforementioned critics for "the combination of eclectic notions and the futile statements of research."⁸ The crisis of socio-criticism was also illustrated by two didactic anthologies published in 1972, *Analysis and Interpretation*, and *New Criteria, New*

⁵ Paul Cornea, *Originile romantismului românesc. Spiritul public, mișcarea ideilor și literatura între 1780–1840* (The Origins of Romanian Romanticism), second edition (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2008), 14.

⁶ Relevant issues in this respect are: *Probleme de literatură comparată și sociologie literară* (Problems of Comparative Literature and Literary Sociology), ed. Al. Dima, et al. (Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1970); *Revista de istorie și teorie literară* (Journal of Literary History and Theory) 3 (1971), which includes communications from the Bordeaux Symposium of Comparatism and Literary Sociology; *Cahiers roumains d'études littéraires* 1 (1973) with the topic "The Writer and Contemporary Society"; Traian Herseni, *Sociologia literaturii* (Sociology of Literature) (Bucharest: Univers, 1973).

⁷ Ov.S. Crohmălniceanu writes about N. Tertulian: "He's a literal lukácsian, who resorts [to Lukács like to a] *deus-ex-machina* in solving any philosophical dilemma," in *Pâinea noastră cea de toate zilele* (Our Daily Bread) (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1981), 347.

⁸ Paul Cornea, *Regula jocului. Versantul colectiv al literaturii: concepte, convenții, metode* (The Rule of the Game. The Collective Side of Literature) (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1980), 32.

Directions in Aesthetic Research:⁹ although reaffirming the Marxist frame of research, the authors of both volumes mostly discussed structuralism and stylistics, with only one stereotypical chapter dealing with “sociological criticism”.

Debates about structuralism pointed out the surprisingly low credit Lucien Goldmann was given even by openly Marxist commentators. Although he was the only French “new critic” with real insights into the sociology of literature, Goldmann seemed less interesting to Romanian Marxist-borne critics. In the second part of the seventh decade, sociologism had already fallen under official blame, so it would be understandable for Goldmann to be seen as the only member of the *nouvelle critique* who “overuses a single method”.¹⁰ However, the break with dogmatism essentially blocked the return to any other type of literary sociology as the demand to reject facile determinism became standard. Similar opinions were expressed by former militant critics like Paul Georgescu – “[Goldmann] puts too much emphasis on the genetic process, assuming the individual can’t influence the structure of the collective mind”¹¹ – and Savin Bratu – “A literary history based on Goldmann’s suggestions would simply bring us back to a general history of society as a whole.”¹² Even Mihai Novicov was dissatisfied with the fact that “Goldmann doesn’t count literary history among the overarching structures of the work.”¹³ Only towards the end of his panorama of sociological criticism did Romul Munteanu mention the author of *Sociology of the novel*, stating that he “only rarely studies the literary phenomenon in its own artistic terms”, therefore its “partial method should be subsumed to total criticism.”¹⁴ Zigu Ornea also avoided acknowledging that the Goldmannian socio-criticism would work on any literary object; he considered the method “especially useful in the study of literary trends,” where “the aesthetic, the sociological, the cultural, the political” were inevitably “conjoined.”¹⁵

However, Ion Pascadi seemed to favour formalism to Marxism in the preface of *Sociology of literature*, when he states that: “The switch from the perspective of synchronic stability to the perspective of diachronic dynamism neglects certain methodological gains of traditional structuralism (...). Lucien Goldmann’s position is more correct and corresponds to

⁹ Ion Pascadi, ed., *Noi criterii, noi direcții în cercetarea estetică* (New Criteria, New Directions in Aesthetic Research) (Cluj: Dacia, 1972).

¹⁰ George Munteanu, “Tendințe înnoitoare” (Innovator Trends), *Lupta de clasă* (Class Conflict) 4 (1967): 104.

¹¹ Paul Georgescu, “Operă, sociologie, valoare” (Work, Sociology, Value), *Luceafărul* (The Morning Star) 38 (1973): 3.

¹² Savin Bratu, *Ipoteze și ipostaze. Pentru o teorie a istoriei literare* (Hypotheses and Hypostases. For a Theory of Literary History) (Bucharest: Minerva 1973), 137.

¹³ Mihai Novicov, “Structuralismul genetic și școala sociologică rusă din anii douăzeci” (Genetic Structuralism and Russian Sociological School of the 20s), *Revista de istorie și teorie literară* 22.2 (1973): 283.

¹⁴ Romul Munteanu, “Biographie, oeuvre, société et la critique sociologique,” in *Cahiers roumains d’études littéraires* 1 (1973): 42.

¹⁵ Zigu Ornea, “O lucrare despre statutul sociologiei literaturii” (A Study about the Condition of Literary Sociology), in *Era socialistă* (Socialist Era) 12 (1972): 53–55.

the historical truth, yet it remains less fruitful in depicting the artistic organism as such (...). The author completely leaves out the role of artistic fantasy and of creative imagination, and barely touches upon formal problems of the language (...). It remains hard to accept that the genius is a collective, not an individual product.”¹⁶ The theorist of the “homology of structures” was an inconvenient anti-Stalinist and, just like his mentor G. Lukács, had a bad reputation in the Eastern dogmatic environment of the 1940s and 1950s, even in his country of origin, where Goldmann was also subject to some sort of envy. Despite these circumstances, a strange reversal of hierarchy stands out. If Soviet Marxists disliked Goldmann’s structuralism, branding the author within “the bourgeois science of art,”¹⁷ Romanian (so-called) Marxists blamed precisely his determinism and the fact that Goldmann ignored the specific problems of art.

An authentically critical reassessment of the sociology of the novel would have to wait until Nicolae Manolescu’s 1980 *Noah’s Arc*. Until then, debates about bringing structuralism closer to history and sociology remained fruitless in Romanian criticism. The case of the “genetic structuralism” shows that even the few critics still openly rallied to Marxism could no longer hold on to the doctrine tightly enough to derive from it a proper method of research. Instead, they merely piled up to public controversies around structuralism, which becomes an encroaching topic after 1970. Although structuralism is considered insufficient and faulty for ignoring social-historical contexts, his critics fail to point out a better method. The popularity of structuralism in Romania does not overshadow socio-criticism or hinder its development: rather, it comes at the right time to mask its chronic lack of alternative.

The crisis of Romanian sociological criticism was nowhere more obvious than in the case of former dogmatic critics reinvented as commentators of Western literary theory. Silvian Iosifescu, Savin Bratu, Vera Călin were fellow travellers of Socialist Realism, despite not having been its loudest leaders of opinion. The end of the 1960s saw them trying to reinvent themselves in the field of literary theory and making attempts to distance themselves from their dogmatic past. Unfortunately, their intellectual reinvention was not a complete metamorphosis. Unable to completely reject Marxism, they also strove to better comprehend structuralism.

Savin Bratu was, in the Romanian literary press after 1970, one of the most diligent reviewers of Western criticism, which he seemed to pine for in his attempt to leave behind dogmatic criticism. Claiming that we must break with “retrograde” sociology, the author came to the shocking conclusion that the “Marxist theory of reflection” was, in fact, more rightly assumed by “*New-criticism* or mythical criticism”¹⁸[?!]. Bratu’s critical panoramas assembled a flood of references, mixed categories and quotations which did not always match

¹⁶ Lucien Goldmann, *Sociologia literaturii* (Sociology of Literature), ed. Ion Pascadi (Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1972), 12, 13, 20, 23.

¹⁷ Iuri Surovțev, “Probleme privind studiul sociologic al artei” (Problems regarding the Sociological Study of Art), in *Poetică, estetică, sociologie (studii de teoria literaturii și artei)* (Poetics, Aesthetic, Sociology), ed. Vladimir Piskunov (Bucharest: Univers, 1979), 225.

¹⁸ Savin Bratu, “Criterii metodologice” (Methodological Criteria), in *Lucafașul* (The Morning Star) 31 (1972): 11.

the main directions to which they were assigned. Often enough, Savin Bratu forgot to use quotation marks, as if befuddled by too much theoretical information. The author seems to have kept intact his militant energy from the 1950s, the focus of which now simply switched from ideology to literary theory. A preface written in July 1971 showed his attempt to forge a patriotic explanation – and, probably, a secret plan of counter-espionage – for the urgency of acquainting with foreign literary theory: “Just like in contemporary Romania’s international politics, we must remain active in the world dialogue without any kind of complexes. What kind of Marxist militant would let himself scared off by Western new criticism and thus resemble the reactionary comfortably enclosed within his own stereotypes? The Communist who is akin to the reactionary in disapproving of recent research should ask himself whether he’s still a Communist (...). A literary researcher must *know and shed light on* the evolution of contemporary ideas.”¹⁹

Unfortunately, too much enthusiasm has never helped lucidity. Savin Bratu blurred all borders between critical directions: “*Nouvelle critique* refers, in a vague sense, to a French school and, in a complex one, to a trend of our entire contemporary thinking deeply marked by Marxism.”²⁰ But Marxism is far from marking any territory or from individualizing a stance, since Savin Bratu’s overview of French criticism from Sainte-Beuve to the present records countless heralds of structuralism. Roland Barthes was only praised as “Racine’s interpreter” and “as an author similar to our G. Călinescu”, while his adherence to Tel Quel’s left-wing programme seemed “strange” to the Romanian former dogmatic critic. However, he hastily defined Mallarmé and Lautréamont as “great thinkers of world communism”. The almost 400 pages of Savin Bratu’s volume summarized books and symposiums of the French new criticism of the 1960s, as if skimming through a bunch of reading notes. The author seemed to combat everybody, without polemizing, in fact, with anybody. Nicolae Manolescu was prompt to amend this not-so-legit promoter of French criticism: “Savin Bratu looks like an impressionist critic who forces himself to speak like a structuralist, he seems to punish himself for his old loves by writing pedantic new studies. Despite his attempts, he eventually seems rather sceptical of French new criticism.”²¹

Savin Bratu showed some more clarity in 1973’s *Hypotheses and Hypostases*, where he discussed the history of literary forms, conceived as the evolution of “literary trends and rhetoric”,²² and demanded that it be somehow connected to social history. This time, Bratu had the merit of approaching a truly challenging theoretical topic. Although opened by Russian poetics and Czech structuralism, the topic remained dormant in French structuralism: Gérard Genette suggested that literary historiography should focus on the history of “literary

¹⁹ Savin Bratu, *De la Sainte-Beuve la noua critică* (From Sainte-Beuve to New Criticism) (Bucharest: Univers, 1974), 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹ Nicolae Manolescu, “Cronica literară: *De la Sainte-Beuve la noua critică*” (Literary Review: From Sainte-Beuve to New Criticism), *România literară* (Literary Romania) 31 (1974): 6.

²² Savin Bratu, *Ipozeze și ipostaze. Pentru o teorie a istoriei literare*, 26.

functions” and of “synchronic relations”,²³ while Roland Barthes considered that literary history should split between the study of “forms” and the study of the literary “institution” and “functions (production, communication, consumption)”.²⁴ But these were generic statements, beyond which the prospects of literary history remained indefinitely delayed in French new criticism. However, Savin Bratu’s attempt to reunite structuralism and Marxism within the frame of literary history was not necessarily inspired by recent theory, but rather by his older debts to ideology. Would he manage to explain how the “history of the literary object” can be completed by a “history of literary reception”?²⁵ Rather unsure of what he should say, the Romanian critic did not view structure and history as dialectical, but rather as opposing forces. Savin Bratu was right to observe that “a literary work must be related to its moment defined by journals, polemical debates, programmatic statements”²⁶, and to claim the literary system be viewed as a “social institution”.²⁷ But his premises remained undeveloped once the author admitted that the formal and sociological perspectives led, in fact, to different directions: “Since one perspective cannot sufficiently explain the other, two parallel specialized studies are preferable to a single «history of literature» fusing the two perspectives”.²⁸ All in all, Savin Bratu struggled to decide what in literary history is more relevant – the form or the social context.

Of course this lack of denouement was disappointing. However, the case above proves the ascent of “formalism” in the Romanian criticism of the 1970s, since even devoted Marxist critics made efforts to assume it. The same author who had warned thirteen years earlier that “it is wrong to explain, based on the French model, the succession of literary currents in reaction to the previous ones”,²⁹ reached to the exact opposite idea in 1973, that literary forms have an autonomous logic of evolution characterized by “auto-movement”³⁰ (an unquoted term, obviously derived from Jean Piaget’s “self-regulation”³¹). Moreover, Bratu’s opinion that Goldmannian sociology dissolved the aesthetic specificity in the “history of society as a whole”³² made the extent of Bratu’s intellectual reconversion even more poignant.

²³ Gérard Genette, “Structuralismul și critica literară” (Structuralism and Literary Criticism), in *Figuri* (Figures) selection, translation and foreword by Angela Ion, Irina Mavrodin (Bucharest: Univers, 1978), 82–83.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁵ Savin Bratu, *Ipoteze și ipostaze. Pentru o teorie a istoriei literare*, 50.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁹ Savin Bratu, “Lupta împotriva ideologiei burgheze” (The Fight Against Bourgeois Ideology), *Gazeta literară* (Literary Gazette) 30 (1960): 9.

³⁰ Savin Bratu, *Ipoteze și ipostaze. Pentru o teorie a istoriei literare*, 59.

³¹ Jean Piaget, *Structuralismul* (Structuralism), trans. Al. Gheorghe (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1973), 13.

³² Savin Bratu, *Ipoteze și ipostaze. Pentru o teorie a istoriei literare*, 137.

Silvian Iosifescu was another critic affirmed within Socialist realism, on which grounds he used to strongly criticize “the idealist conception of the aesthetic autonomy”.³³ Since his 1946 debut until the mid-1960s, Iosifescu had unswervingly served the politically correct direction of criticism, in volumes like the 1956 *The Romanticism of the Revolutionary Hero*, 1959 *Around the Novel*, 1965 *Art and Arts* etc. After a few years of getting used to the post-dogmatic critical climate, Iosifescu upgraded his intellectual profile in several theoretical essays after 1969. As Chair of Literary Theory at the Faculty of Letters from Bucharest, Silvian Iosifescu must have felt the urge to keep up with Western theory, especially since “young researchers seem smitten with formalism”.³⁴ As a result, the professor focussed on structuralism, rather than trying to clarify his own stance on this critical doctrine: on the one hand, he was drawn by the rigor of structuralism and its pedagogic stability; on the other hand, he blamed its “reductionism” and “lack of applicability”, and also disapproved of the way it became fashionable in Romania. The author depicted in sometimes savoury terms this academic vogue: “You find second-hand structuralists, who only borrow terms already in use. You can find the cognate type, of more informed structuralists, but whose terminology only embellishes a more conservative mind-set, the way that middle-aged men try to bring back their youth by wearing long hair and funky ties.”³⁵

Like his colleague Savin Bratu, Silvian Iosifescu tried to update, but also to somehow bring in tow some of the critical principles under which he began his career. This *work-in-progress* is obvious in 1969’s *Border Literature*, originally Iosifescu’s doctoral thesis. The author debated here the “limits of the aesthetic”³⁶ in borderline types of texts (memoirs, press, historical and Sci-Fi novels etc.), thus approaching literature’s connections with philosophy, psychology, science, history etc. This is an unusual topic considering the immanent views of Romanian criticism of the 1960s-1980s. Unfortunately, the issue fell flat, as the author’s theoretical sources were limited to the venerable Maiorescu and Lovinescu. Instead of theorizing, Iosifescu resorted to anecdotal description and left literary examples unexplained, to illustrate the idea that the aesthetic domain can incorporate large parts of extra-literary matter. All in all, the given topic enabled Iosifescu to conclude that strictly formal methods of stylistics and structuralism could never “exhaust the specific domain of literature”.³⁷

But those blasted “formalized” methods still had to be of some use to Silvian Iosifescu, since all his work from the 1970s brought them to the fore. In all fairness, the author insisted on the shortcomings of structuralism: “confined to drawing diagrams and schemes, this

³³ Silvian Iosifescu, “Probleme privind studierea marxistă a unor curente literare” (Problems concerning the Marxist Study of Literary Trends), *Lupta de clasă* 12 (1960), 11.

³⁴ Silvian Iosifescu, *Configurație și rezonanță* (Configuration and Resonance) (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1973), 306.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁶ Silvian Iosifescu, *Literatura de frontieră* (Border Literature) (Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, 1969), 7.

³⁷ Silvian Iosifescu, *Border Literature*, 34.

direction aims towards the asceticism of linguistic-mathematical languages”;³⁸ “in structuralism, the critical text becomes hermetic, starts to resemble a laboratory test, puts on the dry tone of the scientist”.³⁹ Compared to this repugnant image, historical, social, generally extra-textual methods of analysis proportionally gain more legitimacy. By placing them in direct opposition with structuralism, the author subtly pleaded for their reconsideration, thus switching the 1950s’ ideological frame of argumentation to a purely theoretical one. However, Iosifescu understood well enough that extra-textual methods had lost the battle in Romanian criticism long before, and, consequently, he strove to keep up with both the contemporary prestige of aestheticism and the growing popularity of formal techniques. He therefore made amends, stating that “the new image of literary sociology” must come from “the vantage point of aesthetics and criticism”⁴⁰, that “cultural configurations can be grasped in filigree within the narrative technique”⁴¹, that “various practical relations between literary agents (journals, literary saloons)” are relevant only when connected to “stylistic relations”.⁴² As a result, Iosifescu believed that formal-structural methods were inevitably linked to literary sociology, to ensure it is no longer associated with “sociologism, understood as dogmatism”.⁴³

Both Bratu and Iosifescu highlighted the new accent in literary sociology, which concerned “not only the production, but mostly the consumption of literature and [the role of the] public”⁴⁴. Interestingly enough, they did not support this in line of reader response theories – as it would have been logical -, but rather in connection with structuralism, namely to counteract its reductionism. This shows us that even if they were not fully assumed, structuralist ideas could be indirectly efficient in order to refresh, by comparison, sociological criticism compromised by the ideological excesses of the 1960s.

Despite trying to bring together structuralism and sociology, the two aforementioned critics failed to put their premise to actual use. Their generic statements lacked concrete case studies able to show how social-cultural factors actually influenced literary forms. Bratu and Iosifescu tried to vary the perspective, but instead they lost clarity, speaking about an indefinite type of “integral” analysis. Their readers were quick to point out this indecision: “[S.I.] is equally pleased by all methods and resorts to various references in a demonstrative manner, as if he were at the try-outs of a sport event”⁴⁵; “Silvian Iosifescu practices a «border» criticism that crosses several disciplines and makes the various tendencies annihilate one

³⁸ Ibid., 393.

³⁹ Silvian Iosifescu, *Configurație și rezonanță*, 37.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 439.

⁴¹ Silvian Iosifescu, *Mobilitatea privirii. Narațiunea în secolul al XX-lea* (Mobility of Sight. The Narrative in the 20th century) (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1976), 58.

⁴² Silvian Iosifescu, *Configurație și rezonanță*, 349.

⁴³ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁴ Savin Bratu, “Însemnări despre publicul literar” (Notes about the Literary Public), in *Luceafărul* 38 (1973): 12.

⁴⁵ Vl. Streinu, “Literatura de frontieră” (Border Literature), in *Amfiteatru* (Amphiteatre) 7 (1970): 3.

another, just like the local specificity is annihilated in a big hotel crowded with people of different nationalities”.⁴⁶

The two former militant critics failed to argue for a reform of literary sociology; instead, they flooded the Romanian literary press of the 1970s with even more information about structuralism. As a matter of fact, Silvian Iosifescu became increasingly inclined towards the structuralist method he had initially labelled as reductionism. Iosifescu’s studies about the novel in his 1976 *Mobility of Sight* proved that the critic had completely forgotten about sociology. Instead, he was glad to observe that “the narratologists’ very diverse approaches are flexible”,⁴⁷ which made him eager to apply to various epic texts structuralist concepts concerning “the narrative point of view” related to “grammatical persons”.

Finally, a similar theoretical strategy and similar results can be found in the work of Ion Vlad, the chair of Literary Theory from the Faculty of Letters of Cluj. The critic lacked the ideologized past career of Silvian Iosifescu, his Bucharest homologue, but inclined towards the same ideological undertones. This explains his insistence on the idea that structuralism can contribute to “rehabilitating extra literary factors by subordinating them to the literary work”⁴⁸. Ion Vlad was certain that “laborious structuralist studies (...) can be perfectly consonant with the results of literary sociology”.⁴⁹ The truth is, however, that Ion Vlad fully disapproved of French structuralism – which he referenced mostly from the Cerisy-la-Salle symposium summarized in the 1968 *Chemins actuels de la critique* – especially when “confronted with the principles of Marxist-Leninist literary research”.⁵⁰

Where did he find then examples to support the possibility to “assimilate linguistics and stylistics”⁵¹ as “working methods within the larger frame of materialist-dialectic conception”?⁵² He sometimes found them in contemporary Romanian criticism, in the works of promoters of structuralism like Sorin Alexandrescu or Solomon Marcus. Other times, Ion Vlad dug deeper: he considered Tudor Vianu representative of an “organicist structuralism” through his “critical attitude ready to bind together all main methodological terms”, and credited the impressionist critic G. Călinescu with “having discovered the methodological and conceptual source of today’s structuralism”, since he “viewed poetry in an integral manner, as a structure driven by a meaning and a poetic idea, not as a mere agglutination of images”.⁵³ Ion Vlad’s eagerness to “find structuralist anticipations”⁵⁴ in the work of critics essentially foreign to this method was only matched by his attempt to find historicist tendencies at theorists who were

⁴⁶ Mircea Iorgulescu, “Critica de frontieră” (Frontier Criticism), in *România literară* 13 (1975): 3.

⁴⁷ Silvian Iosifescu, *Mobilitatea privirii. Narațiunea în secolul al XX-lea*, 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁹ Ion Vlad, *Descoperirea operei. Comentarii de teorie literară* (Discovering the Literary Work. Commentaries of Literary Theory) (Cluj: Dacia, 1970), 14.

⁵⁰ Ion Vlad, *Povestirea. Destinul unei structuri epice (Dimensiunile eposului)* (The Tale. The Fate of an Epic Structure (Dimensions of the Epos)) (Bucharest: Minerva, 1972), 212.

⁵¹ Ion Vlad, *Descoperirea operei. Comentarii de teorie literară*, 37.

⁵² Ion Vlad, *Lecturi constructive* (Constructive Readings) (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1975), 13.

⁵³ Ion Vlad, *Descoperirea operei. Comentarii de teorie literară*, 85.

⁵⁴ Dinu Flămând, “Între analiză și sinteză” (Between Analysis and Synthesis), *Amfiteatru* 9 (1970): 7.

essentially opposed to them: names like “Jakobson, Spitzer, Todorov, Barthes, Ingarden, Eco, Wellek, Kayser” are inexplicably listed by the Cluj-based critic within “contemporary research in literary sociology”.

The critic was obviously trying to erase some of the prejudices which were still weighing down the “social” and the “ideological” criteria in Romanian criticism. He was also keen on upgrading his discourse, in order to keep up with the academic fashion he surely noticed. But this twofold strategy brought no gain to any of the terms forcefully paired: structuralism was denied any novelty and relevance, while “sociology” remained a purely rhetorical prospect, never supported by actual analyses. In fact, Ion Vlad needed neither structuralism nor sociology in his defining work, the 1972 *The Short Story. The Fate of an Epic Structure*. Here, the critic occasionally referenced narratology, only to quickly dismiss it or, at the most, noted the idea of the *récit* developing from “simple structures”. However, the fact that ancient epic forms had a certain “audience” or were built in a context of “real communication” did not trigger the author’s interest in the types of audience or in other aspects of the cultural context. The formal conventions and the history defining the evolution of the short story were of secondary importance for the critic; he saw the epic structure primarily as an “eternal sign of connection between people”⁵⁵, an “ontological” event essential for “the human being’s evolution”. He consequently resorted to a hermeneutic, archetypal or simply traditional analysis, where structuralist concepts would indeed be out of place.

In conclusion, Romanian critics halfway out of dogmatism or those still drawn towards Marxism-Leninism found structuralism to be unexpectedly helpful in the combative rhetoric they were used to, offering them the means to measure the extent of their transformation, or simply to allow them to take part in academic trends. This exhausted, however, the usefulness of structuralism, which remained a convenient topic of conversation in Romanian criticism, rather than a source of fertile and transformative ideas. In spite of the several attempts to renew socio-criticism in opposition to structuralist schematism, we must finally acknowledge that Romanian literary sociology had reached an extensive quandary after the demise of Socialist Realism. The combination of structuralism and sociology attempted by authors analysed in this paper looks like a compromise, rather than an authentic synthesis. They eventually undermine both terms of the equation: structuralism, because it contradicts their true beliefs, sociology, because it has lost credit in Romanian contemporary autonomist criticism. Debates about structuralism and sociology in the Romanian criticism of the 1970s are more to the former’s gain than to the methodological progress of the latter.

⁵⁵ Ion Vlad, *Povestirea. Destinul unei structuri epice*, 39.