

BOOK REVIEWS

MICHAEL FINKENTHAL, *Grupul Infra-Noir, o reuniune de singurătăți (Suprerealismul literar românesc, 1940-1947)* [The Infra-Noir Group, a gathering of solitudes (The Romanian literary Surrealism, 1940-1947)] (Bucharest: Tracus Arte, 2022).

By shifting the focus from Surrealism to the Surrealists, in addition to his previous research on the Romanian literary and artistic Avant-Garde (materialised into books, essays and articles), Michael Finkenthal recently published the volume *Grupul Infra-Noir, o reuniune de singurătăți (Suprerealismul literar românesc, 1940-1947)* [The Infra-Noir Group, a gathering of solitudes (The Romanian literary Surrealism, 1940-1947)] at the Tracus Arte publishing house (2022). With a tripartite structure (I. Introduction, II. Dramatis Personae, III. Annex: On Sesto Pals and his connections to the Infra-Noir group), the volume containing the articles written by the author over the past years explores the (late) “explosive” surrealist manifestation in Bucharest, as it had been configured by Virgil Teodorescu (1909-1987), Gellu Naum (1915-2001), Gherasim Luca (1913-1994), Dolfi Trost (1916-1966) and Paul Păun (1915-1994).

After their return to Romania from Paris, on the brink of World War II, Gherasim Luca and Gellu Naum associate with Virgil Teodorescu, Dolfi Trost and Paul Păun, and they form the surrealist group later known as the *Infra-Noir* group, which was highly active between 1945-1947 (p. 37). The group would, in fact, disband shortly thereafter, at the beginning of the 1950s, because of Luca and Trost’s departure to Israel (and, later, to Paris) and because of the social marginalisation of Paul Păun and Gellu Naum, due to their refusal to collaborate with the communist regime. Having been, in the beginning, more or less partisans in the infra-noires methods of intervening in an object, the group was the promoter of a new aesthetic, with the purpose of creating a new universe in which the artistic creation, as the new spirit of absolute freedom, would exploit, quite to the extreme, the unusual, the intellectual shock and the apparently incompatible associations. By refusing to explain surrealism, the members of the *Infra-Noir* group desired to live the supra-reality experience (p. 137), to revolutionarily reinvent love, death and the void through a completely new experience, based on a radical change of the human thought structures (p. 112), with immediate applicability on the perceptive view on the nature of the real, in order to immediately liberate life and reason from the imprisonment of falsehood.

By attacking the traditional concept of the work of art, the five surrealist poets bluntly destroy the *aura* (Walter Benjamin) or their own creation by appealing to linguistic waste, obscene phrases and... the classical shattered windows. In a dramatic historical period,

traversed by the quake of the Legionnaire Movement, followed by the outbreak of the war on the Eastern European front, the author compellingly argues that, for these ideological rebels and aestheticians, the work of art is a means to concuss, through shock, all of the senses, in order to create the opportunity for public scandal and indignation. While avoiding reductionist explanations for causes or effects, Michael Finkenthal highlights, in a detailed outline, a complex Romanian literary history phenomenon, through a “portrayal of the actors involved in the drama” (p. 21). As a result of an assiduous analytical reading of the texts published by the members of the Infra-Noir group in the press of that time, or of their correspondence, the author offers the readers a presentation of the five surrealists not only through biographical sequences, which begin with their university studies and continues with their journeys abroad, or their contacts with the (Romanian and foreign) colleagues with whom they share similar artistic ideals, but also through their poetic beliefs and their philosophical and ideological ideas. With a core represented by the keywords *object*, *objective hazard*, *relative absolute* and *objective love*, interpreted by each member of the group more or less differently (pp. 38-39, 139), and the manifesto belief stated by Dolfi Trost, according to which Art lives in and from freedom (p. 35), Michael Finkenthal tries to outline the supreme goal of the late Romanian surrealism as a “sur-reality” that militates for “the complete liberation of man and of the human creation in all its aspects” (p. 176), although the “less visible” paths taken by the protagonists of the “new utopia” are often somewhat esoteric, confused and contradictory.

Fruitfully exploiting the Romanian or foreign specialised bibliography published in this field, the volume *Grupul Infra-Noir, o reuniune de singurătăți (Suprerealismul literar românesc, 1940-1947)* [The Infra-Noir Group, a gathering of solitudes (The Romanian literary Surrealism, 1940-1947)] is not only an addition to the details required by those initiated in the subject of the Romanian surrealism, but also an introduction for those less or not at all familiar with the subject, but are interested in the literary-artistic movements in general. With the lucid spirit of the scholar who takes account of all of the details that could compile the main axes for a “nuanced interpretation”, Michael Finkenthal proposes the “anatomy” of the surrealist phenomenon that is “excessively complex” (p. 191), from the viewpoint of a palimpsest-movement, understood as a cultural and ideological protest “within the space of the radical modernism (in art and/or literature)” (p. 189) of the 20th century. As a subtle and challenging invitation to the reader to enter the spiritual resonance not only with the spirit of the movement, but also with the spirit of the period, so as to discover, in awe, *the poets with their fingers trembling like poplars and short like bullets* (Gherasim Luca, *Tragedii care vor trebui să se întâmple* [Tragedies that will have to happen]).

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2022.27.2.14>