

Oana Fotache Dubălaru

Rezumatul tezei de abilitare

*Literary Theory and the Practice of Literary Studies*

After 1989, the institutional position of literary theory in Romania was not stable enough to encourage a long-term interest in this field of research. At the University of Bucharest which I graduated from, literary theory was part of several administrative hybrids, more or less legitimate: together with comparative literature, ethnology, or Romanian literary studies. There are distinct BA programs in Romanian Language and Literature, World and Comparative Literature, Ethnology, but not in Literary Theory. The MA program has not functioned independently but for a couple of years, then evolving toward double or interdisciplinary specializations: literary theory and comparative literature, literary studies. The available PhD positions have always been fewer than for Romanian Literature. All these are reasons for which an educational route in literary theory takes longer and is more difficult to complete when compared to related disciplines. Besides, Romanian literary milieux have customarily perceived this discipline and its practitioners as prone to abstraction and lacking a clearly defined research object.

I have completed a study route in literary theory at the BA, MA, and PhD levels, then a postdoctoral research program. I started my academic career as a teaching assistant, then became an assistant and associate professor. The most important message that I have grasped during my study years and then rediscovered in the books of different authors/ thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Hans Georg Gadamer, or Giorgio Agamben (not

primarily literary theorists, but having a great impact on this field) regards the perception of theory as a form of *praxis* which is relevant for many dimensions of human existence. I believe that this view on literary theory should be passed on to the students at any level. Modern theory, to the extent that it had overcome the disciplinary design of rhetoric and poetics, is not to be placed beyond the literary space, but in its immediate proximity, as it adjusts its concepts and tools in order to cope with literary evolution.

Retrospectively, my research interests have changed, displaying continuities, desertions and comebacks due to unexpected searches and discoveries, or to the need to strengthen a new course to which I had already devoted a lot of reading. These interests could be organized into four main directions: 1) theory of criticism and literary history, 2) history of (literary) ideas, 3) travel literature and traveling theory, 4) literary/ cultural geography.

My first book, titled *Divanul criticii. Discursuri asupra metodei în critica românească postbelică* (2009) is to a lesser extent a history of Romanian literary criticism; instead, it purports to analyze from a theoretical perspective the phenomenon of Romanian criticism in the postwar era. Both this book and the courses and papers presented in national and international conferences on topics of theory of criticism and literary history have tried to provide a methodological standpoint for these disciplines, to inquire into their suppositions and methods in view of a more nuanced understanding of literature.

My second book, *Moșteniri intermitente. O altă istorie a teoriei literare* (2013), benefitting from the experience of the postdoctoral scholarship, provided the opportunity for an extension of my research interests toward another related field: history of literary ideas. Though at first sight the nine chapters discuss issues of literary theory, criticism, or history, I wouldn't place the book into any of these specialized discourses. Its main interest resides in the topic of *heritage* and the

relationship between novelty and tradition inside the field of literary studies. I think that the choice (actually, the creation of) an inheritable tradition takes place in a discontinuous, intermittent manner. In many cases, as I have shown in the book, there is no complete, undifferentiated heritage in the cultural space.

Besides, I have edited or co-authored several volumes and thematic issues of academic journals, published articles, participated in research projects, presented papers in international conferences, designed courses that were inspiring for the students. All these activities in the research directions I have mentioned above were not only occasions to test ideas for future publications, but also chances to establish academic contacts and networks with Romania-based and international scholars. In time, I helped developing academic partnerships and common projects that strengthened the position of “Tudor Vianu” Research Center in the international academic field. My permanent concern was to keep alive the center’s research activity through a series of invited conferences and thematic workshops for the students. I do believe that the survival of a “niche” specialization as is literary theory, to some extent, inside the Romanian academic field largely depends on the encouraging of students since the BA level to pursue their interest in this discipline and to acquire intellectual competences that could be useful in different professional contexts and career paths.

My most important project, which I think has relevance to both the research and didactic sides of my academic activity, consists in keeping an open attitude toward the evolution of the discipline I teach. Even though the intellectual attachment to a research topic or a methodological perspective usually stands for academic seriousness and professionalism, it is equally important, in my opinion, for a literary theorist to be able to adjust his/her vision in relation to the books one reads, the students and the colleagues one interacts and exchanges ideas with.