Romanian Literary History at a Crossroads:
Mihai Iovănel’s *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020* and the Cultural-Materialist and Transnational Turn in Literary Studies

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*Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Philologia*

The recent publication of *The History of Contemporary Romanian Literature (1990-2020)* by Mihai Iovănel has already sent shockwaves through the Romanian academe, raising key issues about literary historiography. As the first post-1989 history of contemporary Romanian literature, the volume poses and answers a range of fundamental questions on the literary canon, value criteria, contemporaneity, ideology, gender representation, and methodology. To use Stephen Greenblatt’s words, Iovănel’s *History* conveys the critic’s desire “to speak with the living.” The special issue *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Philologia* is planning for fall 2022 seeks to examine the defining moments of this dialogue and, more broadly, the accomplishments and challenges of this event-book over and against the backdrop of recent national and international developments in literary-cultural studies, in particular in the discipline of literary history.

Western literary historiography has taken a particular turn over the last few decades, becoming the domain of collective, transnational efforts while striving for an objectivity not available, apparently, to solitary endeavors. In this context, Iovănel’s literary history may seem at first glance to resemble more traditional historiographical projects. However, in his effort to transgress the national limitations inherent to any conventional literary history, Iovănel has opted for an ideological reading of Romanian literature. Moreover, in the concluding chapter, the author argues for a transnational history of Romanian literature, an approach that would pay more attention to the intercultural networks tying national literature into other literary cultures, far and near, as well as to the shaping of a “transnational canon.” Iovănel’s plea for a better marked relationality between Romanian literature and the world echoes other recent scholarly projects such as *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2018) while also engaging in dialogue with domestic critical tradition—notably, the title of the volume is an homage to Eugen Lovinescu’s literary history, which was published in the 1920s.

Considering these aspects, we invite papers that further unpack the major premises, claims, analyses, and overall conclusions of Iovănel’s project by placing it in conversation with works of comparable structure and goals. Contributions may deal with topics that include but are not limited to the following:

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- The role of literary history in the contemporary era;
- The problem of determining the canon in contemporary literature;
- Comparing contemporary authors, movements, literatures;
- Transnational mappings of contemporary literature: intersections and destinations;
- Contemporary literature and global connectivity;
- National canons, transnational canons;
- The position of marginal/minority cultures within national literary history;
- The integration of contemporary national literatures into international circuits (postmodernism, posthumanism, postcolonialism, capitalist realism, ecocriticism);
- Mihai Iovănel’s historiographic methodology;
- Organizing literary material: “resistance points,” genre, period, decade, generation;
- Literature and history;
- Literature and ideology;
- Literature and institutions;
- Academe and the Academy;
- Paradigm shift in criticism, paradigm shift in literature;
- Experimentalist fatigue and the realistic turn;

We invite papers that are preferably comparative and comprehensively theorized (5,000-7,000 words). All submissions must be in English or French and follow the Chicago AD style (see the journal’s Instructions for authors). They should be addressed to: studia.philologia@lett.ubbcluj.ro, alexandra.modoc@ubbcluj.ro & emanuel.modoc@ubbcluj.ro.

Indicative Bibliography:


Deadline: 15 May 2022