

## GENERATIONS, CONTEMPORANEITY, AND INTERSECTIONALITY IN LITERARY HISTORY

ANDREEA MIRONESCU<sup>1</sup>

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*Article history: Received 27 February 2022; Revised 28 July 2022; Accepted 31 August 2022; Available online 20 September 2022; Available print 30 September 2022.*

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**ABSTRACT.** *Generations, Contemporaneity, and Intersectionality in Literary History.*<sup>2</sup> While several traditional concepts of literary history, including literary periods, periodization itself, and genre, have been recently put into question and reframed in transnational, cross-temporal, and transdisciplinary ways, the notion of generation has received much less attention. At the same time, in various branches of cultural studies, and even more prominently in sociology, the problem of generations has taken center stage once again. In this article, the critic takes as her departure point Mihai Iovănel's 2021 *History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020* to discuss how the generational operator could be employed in post-Cold War literary history. Mironescu argues that a transversal and intersectional integration of generation into contemporary literary criticism could ensure a better understanding of intra- and transgenerational dynamics in terms of self-representations and group narratives, inclusions and exclusions, as well as gender and literary affiliations.

**Keywords:** *generation, generationality, literary history, postcommunism, intersectionality*

**REZUMAT.** *Generații, contemporaneitate și intersecționalitate în istoria literară.* Dacă diverse concepte tradiționale ale istoriei literare, precum perioadele literare (și conceptul însuși de periodizare) sau genurile literare au fost, în ultima vreme, chestionate critic și regândite în contexte transnaționale, cross-temporale și transdisciplinare, noțiunea de generație a primit mult mai puțină atenție din partea criticilor. În același timp, în diferite subdomenii ale studiilor

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<sup>1</sup> **Andreea MIRONESCU** is Senior Researcher at the Institute of Interdisciplinary Research – Department of Social Sciences and Humanities of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași. Her scholarly interests cover Romanian modernism, literary history, and memory and postmemory studies with emphasis of Communism. Email: andreea.mironescu@uaic.ro.

<sup>2</sup> This work was supported by a grant of the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitization, CNCS - UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.1-TE-2021-1429, within PNCDI III.

culturale, și, mai pregnant, în sociologie, problema generațiilor a recâștigat o nouă actualitate. În acest articol Mironescu ia ca punct de plecare *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990-2020* (2021), pentru a discuta cum operatorul generațional poate fi utilizat în istoria literară de după sfârșitul Războiului Rece. Ea susține că o integrare transversală și intersecțională a noțiunii de generație în critica literară contemporană poate duce la o mai corectă înțelegere a dinamicii intra- și transgeneraționale în ceea ce privește autoreprezentările și narațiunile de grup, includerile și excluderile, afilierea literară sau de gen.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** generație, generaționalitate, istorie literară, postcomunism, intersecționalitate

Surprisingly, despite the momentum of the millennials' generation in various parts of the global literary ecosystem, *generation* does not seem to be a fashionable concept in today's literary historiography. Some critics call it "a fiction" "created out of discourse," a construct that, due to its lack of precision, is liable to generate "false thinking about literary development and history" (Hentea 2013, 583-584). Like other classic operators of literary history, generation dates back to the origins of the discipline itself. However, while several traditional concepts of literary studies, including literary periods, periodization itself, and genre, have been recently put into question and reframed in transnational, cross-temporal, and transdisciplinary ways, the notion of generation has received much less attention from the practitioners of the field. Instead, in cultural studies, memory studies, youth studies, but especially in sociology, the concept was, in the last century and particularly over the last two decades, revisited, reframed, and updated. In this context, it is not surprising that a claim such as "Generation deserves to be put on the agenda of the 'new' literary history," from a 2014 article published in the *New Literary History* journal, has been made by a literary and memory studies scholar like Astrid Erll (2014, 385). And yet, how can the concept of generation keep up with world literature studies and its new cartographies, such as transnational, transregional, transcontinental, global, etc.? Could generation, a notion so closely tied to an age group as well as to a particular historical and spatial context, function as a "transconcept," to quote Eric Hayot's term (2011, 740), one able to account for the new intersectional and "worlded" configurations of national literatures in the planetary ecosystem? To my mind, the answer is affirmative. It is enough to think about the new vocabulary of the concept, which speaks, in the post-colonial context, of transregional and global generations, as well as about second/third generation(s), or about Susan Suleiman's notion, the "1.5 generation" (2002), coined in relation to children born

during the Holocaust, but further applied in postsocialist studies, not to mention Marianne Hirsch's already classicized term "post-generation" (2012). In the same vein, one could mention, in the narrower field of literary studies, the rise of the "9/11 Generation" as a critical concept.

In what follows, I will explore the potential of the generational operator to reform literary history after the Cold War, taking as a starting point Mihai Iovănel's *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990-2020 (History of Contemporary Romanian Literature: 1990-2020)*, published in Romania in 2021. Specifically, I will look into how Iovănel, a member of the millennial generation, employs this notion biographically and methodologically. My aim is to respond to the following questions: How does Iovănel relate to his own generation of critics, poets, and prose writers? What is the place and role of the generation as an instrument of critical narrative, compared to other Romanian literary histories? How important is for Iovănel the dynamic of generations in postcommunist cultural space and what kind of narrative does that dynamic generate? And finally, what alternative scenarios of Romanian literary history might one discover through an intersectional approach of generations?

### **Generation as method**

Starting with the new millennium, and perhaps most notably with Alexei Yurchak's 2005 book *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, a new vocabulary emerged in Eastern European and global postsocialist studies, employing notions like "generation of the end," "the last generation" (of Socialism, Yugoslavia or the GDR), but also, and especially referring to the postsocialist transition, "generation of transformation" (Artwińska and Mrozik 2020, 18-19). Although from the sociological point of view, these generations are far from being homogenous in terms of age, or, in Karl Mannheim's words, in terms of "temporal location"—for instance, Yurchak refers to the generation that matures in the last three decades of socialism—it is nonetheless true that this body of scholarship indicated what may be termed as a "generational turn," both methodologically and biographically. This turn is more present with the members of the millennial generation, those who were born roughly during the last two decades of the Cold War in this part of the globe. More precisely, the last children of the socialist regimes spanning Eastern and Central Europe have built a methodological discourse based in many ways on this generational experience, and at the same time they have explored collaborative and creative forms of research based on individual and generational memory, among which auto-ethnography (Lenart-Cheng and Luca 2018) and collective autobiography (Zin and Gannon 2022). In addition

to their orientation towards experience and affect in the study of postsocialism/postcommunism, these studies have generated a transnational reframing of generation, on the one hand, and a critical questioning of the notion, on the other hand. For instance, while suggesting that generation is an intersectional concept, Anna Artwińska and Agnieszka Mrozik point out that the notion is also a “slippery” one. If it is perceived as a homogenous unit, “it blurs a lot of tensions and conflicts of class, gender, ethnic, or sexual nature within groups that declare themselves as generational communities” (Artwińska and Mrozik 2020, 13).

Still, while generation proves a multifunctional concept for periodizing the history of Eastern and Central Europe, as Artwińska and Mrozik argue, the same cannot be said about the revival of this concept in literary studies in general and in literary history in particular, both in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. And recent criticisms of periodization as the foundation of literary history made by critics such as Eric Hayot (2011) and Susan Stanford Friedman (2019), among others, most likely play an important role here: like eras and currents, literary generations are among the traditional tools for ordering chronologically literary phenomena. However, nowadays, after the deconstruction of the very notion of periodization, the role of literary tools is no longer, or should not be, that of dividing the literary ecosystem into successive “slices.” With an eye to Hayot’s article referenced above, the question I ask is whether and how generation can become a “transperiodizing concept” (2011, 742)? Not only is the answer yes, but this, I would add, is already happening in literary studies, particularly through the interdisciplinary integration of the notion of generation from classical sociology, as defined in the 1920s by Karl Mannheim. True, in literary history “the term ‘generation’ acquired a sociological dimension in the nineteenth century,” as Marius Hentea notes, a “change in meaning” that occurred “across a number of fields, including history, literature and politics” (2013, 571). However, this change in meaning, as Hentea implies, has remained without epistemological value in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century West European literary historiography. Instead, the sociological turn manifests itself, to my mind, quite strongly in contemporary criticism and literary theory, and the (Mannheimian) concept of generation plays a key role in this process. To give only one particular example, in his chapter “Generation” from *Literature Now: Key Terms and Methods for Literary History* (Bru and de Bruyn 2016), Julian Hanna relies heavily on Mannheim and Pierre Bourdieu (along with recent theorists of popular culture) to reshape the concept and give it a new applicability in the global literary system.

As Erll notes in her 2014 article quoted above, *generationality* is an important notion in the discussion on literary generations. The term refers, on

the one hand, to the “generational identity,” but on the other hand, Erll suggests, it has much to do with the “fundamental constructedness” of this identity, that is always dependent on cultural practices (Erll 2014, 387). “Generationality is produced in the act of representation,” and, perhaps more importantly, in the act of group representations; at the same time, it is dependent on cultural and social practices (Erll 2014, 391). In Romanian literary historiography, the issue of generations, with a nod to Mannheim, is generally disconnected from the social context, which played a decisive role in the work of the German sociologist (Mannheim 1972). The notion is used primarily as a chronological operator, also designating an object of study (generations of writers and critics) and less as a *dispositif* to which the author of the critical narrative belongs. This is why the generational engagement of various Romanian critics is usually understood in terms of affinities and solidarities—more often than not conceived within a masculinist frame of thought<sup>3</sup>—and also critical action, while the extra-literary factors that determine these affinities and the homogenous, often homosocial structure of a literary generation are not subjected to critical reflection.<sup>4</sup>

All this has led to an institutionalization of generations as an authoritative operator in Romanian criticism, one generation especially subjecting themselves to such a self-institutionalization. Although the writers belonging to the generation of the 1980s appear in the collective mind as very good self-promoters, given both their challenging attitude towards the 1960s generation, as well as their numerous group self-portrayals and anthologies<sup>5</sup>, the writers and critics of the 1960s have dominated the decades up to 1990 and are very important players in postcommunism also, overshadowing institutionally both the 1980s generation and the millennial generation. They are still influential in cultural politics, as directors of cultural magazines such as *România literară*, leaders and key-members in powerful cultural organizations such as the Union of Writers in Romania and the Romanian Academy. In Mannheimian terms, they are a “strategic generation,” one that “conservatively attempts to retain control over social and cultural resources” (Turner 2002, 44),<sup>6</sup> ever since they secured a strategic position in the literary field in the decade of their debut, during the Romanian political and cultural Thaw, through their promotion of aesthetic autonomy. The 1960s generation’s struggle to remain relevant in the contemporary literary system is mirrored in Nicolae Manolescu’s 2008 *Istoria*

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Iovănel and Moraru (2019).

<sup>4</sup> A sociological approach to the dynamics of literary generations under communism comes from millennial critic Ioana Macrea-Toma. See Macrea-Toma (2009).

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Gheorghe Crăciun (1999) and Mircea Cărtărescu (1999), to which Iovănel dedicates a critical subchapter, unveiling precisely the strategies through which Cărtărescu aims to bring the 1980s generation to the forefront of the (post)communist cultural field.

<sup>6</sup> See also Macrea-Toma (2009), especially the chapter “Critics and the problem of ‘generation’.”

*critică a literaturii române: 5 secole de literatură* (*Critical History of Romanian Literature: 5 centuries of literature*). Manolescu is perhaps the most influential critic of the 1960s generation and his *Critical History* offers a privileged position to this literary group, although not overtly. The book relies on the concept of generation, without conceptualizing or questioning it, in order to delineate the systemic movements of the national literary history. However, the generational narrative created by Manolescu is not to be found in the macro-structure of the book, where several “post-Maioreescu”<sup>7</sup> generations succeed each other, in a struggle for “aesthetic autonomy” in different eras and under different political regimes, but instead in its microstructure, where one can read an unconcealed plea for the generation of critics to which Manolescu himself belongs. This can be verified in an editorial published recently in *România literară*, where the critic demonstrates the numerical and qualitative importance (the figures are the result of a careful selection, he notes) of the 1960s generation in Romanian literary criticism. Thus, in Manolescu’s own counting, there are 39 critics who made their name in the 1960s and were indexed in his *Critical History*, compared to just 8 names belonging to the 1980s generation (Manolescu 2022). Surprisingly (or not), there isn’t a single millennial critic that Manolescu deemed worthy of being included in his 2022 synopsis.

At this point, it is worth questioning how does Iovănel tackle in his *History* all these issues (the crisis of periodization in global literary studies, generations as poles of power in local literary history, as well as the surge of generationality and the critical questioning of the concept in postsocialist/postcommunist studies)? Before proceeding any further, I must note that Iovănel’s 2021 book is the first and, for now, the only history dedicated to postcommunist literature in Romania and, possibly, in the East-Central European space<sup>8</sup> (along with Cristina Modreanu’s 2020 book *The History of Romanian Theatre from Communism to Capitalism*), and its reception is still an ongoing, tumultuous process. While critic Christian Moraru labelled the *History* as an “event,” as meant by Alain Badiou (Moraru 2021), the book also encountered criticism among the members of the various generations that are active in the contemporary Romanian space. These criticisms generally had two causes: the

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<sup>7</sup> Titu Maioreescu was the most influential critic in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, projected afterwards as the symbol of cultural authority in Romanian literary historiography. However, in his *History* Iovănel draws a different filiation of autochthonous criticism, founded by Maioreescu’s main opponent, C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea.

<sup>8</sup> There are notable and innovative histories of the entire East-Central European space, such as the multi-volume *History of the literary cultures of East-Central Europe* (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2004-2010) and *Columbia Literary History of Eastern Europe since 1945* (Segel 2008), which are marginally interested in the postcommunist period. Just like Manolescu’s *History*, they all end with only a chapter dedicated to postcommunism.

fact that the volume is polemical in relation to traditional literary historiography and its nationalist, essayistic and escapist character, driven by the principle of the “autonomy of the aesthetic,” and Iovănel’s option for an approach to the literary ecosystem from the angle of post-Marxist materialism. In doing so, Iovănel, a critic close to the intellectual left in Romania, perfectly illustrates the social and trans-aesthetic turn (Mironescu and Mironescu 2019) in contemporary Romanian criticism.

Against the backdrop of the crisis of periodization in literary history, Iovănel’s solution to this problem becomes particularly interesting, given that the subject matter of the book covers a period of three decades in which important, in some cases even systemic, mutations took place in Romania. It is significant, from this point of view, that his volume opens with a “Brief history of postcommunism,” in the form of a chronological and synthetic picture that eludes almost entirely the literary element, offering instead an excellent bird’s eye view of the mutations occurring at political, economic, social and ideological levels: the adoption of a democratic regime, the privatization of the industrial and, partly, of the cultural heritage (publishing houses, magazines), the country’s integration into NATO and the EU, the explosion of Romanian labour migration in the European Community space, the financial crisis of 2008 and the rise of the neoliberal ideology, the birth of a culture of (sometimes politically instrumented) civic protests, but also the rise of media technologies, all of which decisively influenced and modified cultural practices over the last 30 years. The same type of “exterior” periodization, dictated by historical and political contexts, seems to be used in Eugen Negrici’s synthesis *Literatura română sub comunism (Romanian Literature under Communism)* (2019), but the difference between the two models is radical: while Negrici sees the evolution of literature to resemble the defence reaction of an organism under attack, for Iovănel it is the social and material practices that influence the changes in the postcommunist literary field. In the same vein, the first part of the volume, “The evolution of ideologies,” has relatively little to do with literature *per se*, Iovănel’s approach being centred instead on the context—but not on the historical context, the classic frame of traditional literary historiography, except only to a small extent—focusing instead mainly on the conditionings, opportunities and material practices of the literary field. Conversely, in the third and fourth parts, respectively “The evolution of fiction” and “The evolution of poetry,” Iovănel’s method changes, and the critic chooses a genealogical approach to the “evolution” of fiction, respectively poetry, in postcommunism. To this end, the critic establishes several transgenerational typologies within the two literary genres, and afterwards studies their metamorphoses at a generational level.

## Generationality and intersectionality

Himself a prominent member of the millennial generation, Iovănel employs, directly or indirectly, his generational membership and position, both in the frame of his *History* and in the interviews given about the book.<sup>9</sup> Right from the introduction, Iovănel invokes the autobiographical character of his *History*, which “comes from countless chance encounters with certain books” and which the critic associates with Louis Althusser’s “materialist philosophy of randomness and contingency.”<sup>10</sup> This goes to say that Iovănel does not employ here a generational, but rather a procedural argument; his biographic approach is not a method, but a disclaimer. Even so, through his claim Iovănel differentiates himself from the model of the objective critic who judges literary phenomena as aesthetically autonomous, which is the dominant model in local literary historiography. Although throughout the book millennial writers and critics are more often than others subject to a generational narration, Iovănel avoids the assumption of an intragenerational perspective, in terms of the position he himself occupies in the literary system, as well as at the methodological level. “Contrary to what I had believed for a long time, as I was conditioned by my belonging to my own generation, that of the 2000s,” the critic states, “while writing this book I was forced to note that the mobility of literary forms is transgenerational.”<sup>11</sup> Next, the critic argues that, while he “do[es] not bracket the issue of generations,” which he sees as “a useful chronological marker,” he “additionally find[s] in realism an operator capable of transgenerationally suggesting the common reference—the writers’s relation to reality through a set of theoretical and rhetorical conventions.”<sup>12</sup>

A first thing that can be noted here is that, even though literary forms are transgenerational, their realisations are *also*, or *primarily*, generational, and this is verified, I argue, especially in the case of postcommunist literature, where the break between the two eras, between *before* and *after*, have further deepened the generational divide not only at the social level, but also in the

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<sup>9</sup> A similar claim (and disclaimer) is made by Cristina Modreanu (2020), who is also a member of the millennial generation. Modreanu’s generational engagement is, however, more present throughout the book than Iovănel’s.

<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The original Romanian reads: “vine din atâtea și atâtea întâlniri întâmplătoare cu o carte” (Iovănel 2021, 13); “filozofi[a] materialist a aleatoriului și contingenței” (12).

<sup>11</sup> “Contrar a ce crezusem multă vreme condiționat de apartenența la propria mea generație, cea douămiistă, scriind această carte am fost forțat să constat că mobilitatea formelor literare este transgenerațională” (Iovănel 2021, 11).

<sup>12</sup> “nu pun[e] în paranteză problema generațiilor”; “marker chronologic util”; “găsind suplimentar în realism un operator capabil să sugereze transgenerational referința comună” (Iovănel 2021, 11).

literary field. As I have already noted, in the historical, social and cultural space of postcommunism, the writers that had made their debut during the 1960s, the writers of the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the generation of the 2000s are, at least since the beginning of the new millennium, contemporaries. But within this contemporaneity, intra-generational common points (concerning institutional insertion, promotion strategies, group self-representations, and generational poetics) are stronger, I argue, than transgenerational literary filiations.

However, even without performing a transversal integration of the generational operator in his *History*, Iovănel is surprisingly attentive to intra- and inter-generational dynamics. On the other hand, although the social context in which writers belonging to a generational shift is most of the time implied or even carefully dismantled, the only subsection of the book explicitly dedicated to “Generational dynamics” resorts to framing from the perspective of literary historiography, in connection with the so-called “internal revisions” of the canon. Starting from the observation that, after 1989, “the substance of the canon does not change radically,” although “the generational subject [...] tries to monopolize the scene”<sup>13</sup> the critic assembles a press file of the debates regarding coagulation and affirmation in cultural magazines—and less in the cultural space *per se*—of new generations, that of the 1990s, during the first postcommunist decades, and that of the 2000s, at the beginning of the new millennium. This is also the section where the use of the term “generation” has the highest density in the entire book. However, in the two chapters in which he traces the evolution of prose and poetry, Iovănel explicitly abandons the use of the concept of *generation*, replacing it with the more neutral “wave.”

Of course, generational and intra-/transgenerational dynamics in the literary system are more complex and ambiguous than they may appear at first glance. But there is another important aspect here. Especially if we stop looking at it within the framework of literary history *stricto sensu*, this dynamic reveals a struggle that takes place outside the canon made and remade in the pages of cultural magazines, a competition in which, as Bryan S. Turner observes, “generations, like competitive status groups and classes, enter into a field of social struggle because the transmission of social resources through time is not entirely regulated by law and is necessarily characterized by conflict” (2002, 44). In no historical period, I would add, has this struggle been so complex as in postcommunism, a battleground where three distinct and influential generations, that of the 1960s, that of the 1980s and, since the mid-2000s, the millennial generation, are competing for resources.

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<sup>13</sup> “substanța canonului nu se schimbă radical”; subiectul generațional [...] încearcă să monopolizeze scena” (Iovănel 2021, 168).

Returning to the typologies proposed by Iovănel within the two main literary genres, poetry and prose, and to the writers he selects in order to exemplify these typologies, it is fairly clear that they have a generational character. Let us take prose fiction as an example. Whereas “postmodern metarealism” is a typical formula for both the writers of the eighties and of the nineties, “miserabilist realism” finds its representatives almost exclusively among the members of the 1990s generation, and “capitalist realism” is an even more markedly generational formula, being reserved almost exclusively for writers who debuted in the first years of the new millennium. But even within the 2000s generation, which asserted itself *en bloc*, simultaneously in prose and poetry, and advanced several coherent group poetics, the retro-active establishment of different literary genealogies within the national literary history may prove less productive than identifying some “generational” forms and genres. One case in point is, I suggest, the coming-of-age (auto)fiction, a subgenre that has some points in common with the *Bildungsroman* emerging in Western Europe “in the late eighteenth century, around the time that the generation began to take on a sociological meaning” (Hentea 2013, 572). However, the generational character of postcommunist, often autofictional, coming-of-age novels exploring the heroes’/authors’ childhood during communism and their maturing during the transitional years is more pronounced than that of the *Bildungsroman*, given the fact that it is practiced by millennial prose writers born, with some exceptions, in the last two decades of socialism, among which Radu Pavel Gheo, Bogdan Alexandru Stănescu, Florin Lăzărescu, Florin Irimia, Ioana Nicolaie, and Diana Bădica.

In the same vein, it is more likely that between the millennial male and women poets that Iovănel includes in the dynamics of various typological models, such as neo-expressionism (Ruxandra Novac, Claudiu Komartin, Teodor Dună) and biographical minimalism (Elena Vlădăreanu, Dan Sociu) there are more affinities than there are between them and their precursors from previous generations, a fact that Iovănel himself states several times in his book. In addition, the gender factor plays an important role here, which, however, remains less visible in the framework of an evolution of literary forms. For example, Novac and Vlădăreanu have more in common, through their poetry with biographical, social and political accents, than do Novac and Komartin. It is equally true that the two millennial women poets share more poetic features than each of them shares with their common precursor, Angela Marinescu (b. 1949), despite her influence on the millennial poets. Moreover, this drive to establish trans-generational correspondences between literary forms leads Iovănel, a critic who is usually attentive to gender representations and labels, to implicitly characterize Simona Popescu twice as a feminine Cărtărescu of her

own generation: “*Exuvii* (1997) by Simona Popescu is an *Orbitor* without the part of a metaphysical thriller through which Mircea Cărtărescu energises his autobiographical material,”<sup>14</sup> and “Generation 90 aspires to produce its own *Levant* through *Lucrări în verde sau Pledoaria mea pentru poezie* by Simona Popescu.”<sup>15</sup> An intersectional approach to Generation 2000 and the dynamics of literary forms in the last half century would present an evolution at least partially different from that depicted by the *History* discussed here.

For example, one thing left unnoticed would be that transgenerational influences, as they emerge in the evolutionary template presented by Iovănel, occur almost exclusively on male and female lines, but the meaning of affiliation is different in each of the two situations. Thus, while male literary filiations, even when they are made in a spirit of rebellion against the national literary tradition, most often remain in the canonical area, by adhering to prestigious models<sup>16</sup> (true, among Romanian millennial male poets there are also examples that contradict this model), affiliations on the female line are rarer and have a polemical character. For women poets, literary affiliations are aware of their gender-marked character and express solidarity with what is marginal or non-existent in the canon made by men, and it is no coincidence that poets like Vlădăreanu, Medeea Iancu or Miruna Vlada have repeatedly emphasized that they resented the lack of women writers in the school canon, which was formative for them in their teenage years.

To do justice to Iovănel and to his – in many aspects pioneering – critical enterprise, I must emphasise that he is the first Romanian literary historian to propose a systemic intersectional approach to the domestic literary field, in terms of (trans)nationality, gender and gender identity, race and class. Transnationality—in the guise of series of Moldovan writers, Romanian born writers, exile, academic and literary diaspora—is the most obvious and best integrated device throughout the book, at several level. In regard to the other categories mentioned above, they are approached synthetically in the chapter “Resistance Points”; at the same time, the manifestations of racism, misogyny, classism in various individual critical and literary discourses are repeatedly highlighted and denounced. Still, the subsequent sections on LGBT+, race and subcultures, to name but a few, are oftentimes focused on their literary representations in “dominant,” canonical literary works and cultural discourses.

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<sup>14</sup> “*Exuvii* de Simona Popescu este un *Orbitor* fără partea de thriller metafizic prin care Mircea Cărtărescu își dinamiza materialul autobiografic” (Iovănel 2021, 395).

<sup>15</sup> “Generația 90 aspiră să dea și ea un *Levant* prin *Lucrări în verde sau Pledoaria mea pentru poezie* de Simona Popescu” (Iovănel 2021, 527).

<sup>16</sup> For an analysis on how the Western canon is integrated in Iovănel’s book, see Borza (2021, 123-127).

Furthermore, the fact that these categories are labelled as “resistance points” to the mainstream cultural field and featured in autonomous and lateral subchapters may be seen as reinforcing their subalternity. Of course, there are exceptions to this treatment, for instance the place awarded to Adrian Schiop’s autofictional novels, in which the author openly reveals his homosexuality, but the role of the marginal in the generational dynamics of the millennial writers could have received more attention, given the fact that millennials are probably the first generation sensitive to these issues.

In concluding, I am not arguing that Iovănel should have deployed the genealogy of literary forms in favour of a generational, Mannheim-inspired, perspective, although such an angle could have served the critic’s (post)Marxist-leaning vision better. I am pleading, instead, for an introduction of the concept of generation and of the dynamics it enters in postcommunist literary history, and especially in the history of contemporary literature. Such a move would have, I believe, two distinct advantages. First, in Iovănel’s particular case, a better problematization of the dynamics of literary forms from a generational perspective would have reduced the hiatus between the first two parts of the book, written from a visibly more “materialist” perspective, and the following two, in which the presentation of the evolution of literary forms is less attached to the social context. Secondly, without necessarily conceiving the history of contemporary Romanian literature as a Darwinian struggle for resources (although, in part, it is that too), the generational perspective could shed light on issues such as the construction of self-representations and group narratives, inclusions and exclusions at the level of generational units or in the poetics of its members, intra- and trans-generational gender dynamics. In other words, it would reveal the whole hidden part (because almost undiscussed until now) of what traditional literary history has called and still calls, with an escapist term, “generations of creation.” Along with a concept like “autonomy of the aesthetic,” the idea of “generations of creation,” a notion originally coined by Tudor Vianu and still persistent in the critical *vulgata*, rightfully needs to be deconstructed, as Iovănel does in his *History* precisely through the materialist approach of the continuum that we call Romanian literature. At the same time, there is urgent need for a critique of the concept of generation from an intersectional perspective that would shed light on how generationality is produced in terms of ethnicity, gender, and nationality. Such a critical approach, already present in the scholarship and literature of many millennial and post-millennial writers and researchers, would also help increase the awareness of these generations’ position in the national and global literary systems, as well as in today’s world.

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