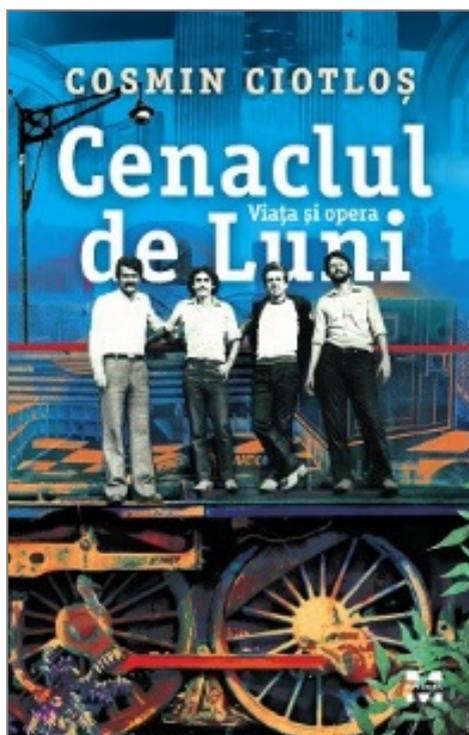


BOOKS

Cosmin Ciotloș, *Cenaclul de Luni. Viața și opera*, București: Pandora Publishing, 2021, 464 p.

Focusing on the 1980s generation of Romanian poets and with the portrayal of a specific sensitivity belonging to these authors, Cosmin Ciotloș proposes an archaeology of the well-known “Monday Literary Circle,” within which Romanian postmodernism was born and developed. Not having a unique methodology for exploring this institution of creation and debate, Ciotloș relies on the reconstruction of the group’s formative phases, mainly



by relating this phenomenon to other factors that exerted a significant influence on this literary circle: magazines such as *Amfiteatru* or *România literară*, the profoundly defamatory opposition criticism, represented by Eugen Barbu and *Săptămâna* magazine, as well as two other cenacles that succeeded the Monday Literary Circle—“Cenaclul Rapid” and “Cenaclul din Tei”. Beyond the fine

hermeneutics that the author carries out in the last part of the book, through thirteen case studies, the first two chapters, “Marile speranțe” [*Great Expectations*] and “Impactul cu realul” [*The Impact with Reality*], are built by analyzing texts from journal archives, which bring together lesser-known testimonies and details about the meetings that officially began on March 3, 1977, and were banned in 1986. Therefore, one of the researcher's

aims is to shed light on the background of this kaleidoscopic inception. The polymorphism of the Monday Literary Circle comes, first and foremost, from its evolutionary character, which shows, in fact, a sinuous trajectory, establishing its landmarks and directions along the way. In addition, its popularity, based on its central geographical and cultural position, and its emulation created historical and

literary confusion, thereby rallying false members, who pretended to be a part of the famous literary circle without ever having been a part of it. The foundations of this “minimal unity of an interpretive community,” a phrase by which Stanley Fish calls the “literary circle” and which Ciotloș takes over, are unearthed both in contemporary periodicals and subsequent reception. One of the launch pads of the 1980s young poets was the monthly magazine *Amfiteatru*, “an alternative space” (26) for (under)graduate students who were beginning to come into the light, timidly announcing a new generation’s rise. Ciotloș chooses to discuss this opportunity because this publication also had a literary circle. This was an important aspect for the “prehistory of the 1980s poets” (27), since one of the meetings of this quasi-literary circle was attended by Ion Stratan, who gave a poetry reading, and Radu Călin Cristea, who played the role of the critic, commenting on his peer’s texts. The observation is important, as the two would later launch the Monday Literary Circle. Some new protagonists in the Romanian literary field honed their critical and poetic spirit during these meetings: M. N. Rusu, “the official critic of the group” (30), Elena Ștefoi, “who was among the most active participants” (29), Viorel Padina, Ion Stratan, Magda Cârnelci, whose penname was Magdalena Ghica, Octavian Soviany, Matei Vișniec, Ioan Moldovan, William Totok, Ion Mureșan, Marta Petreu, Dumitru Chioaru, Traian T. Coșovei, Mariana Marin, Romulus Bucur, Mircea Cărtărescu, Liviu Ioan Stoiciu and others. Also, Ion Monoran, a minor poet from Timișoara, was widely recommended by Dinu Flămând in one of the issues of the *Amfiteatru* magazine. On the

one hand, the 1980s generation was beginning to flourish, gathering people from all over the country, and on the other hand, the future nucleus of the Monday Literary Circle was built, almost entirely, around poetic discourse. As Ciotloș states, the policy of supporting young people in the *Amfiteatru* magazine was very significant. The fact that they frequently published new texts, thus burning a lot of stages, causes the accumulation of symbolic capital and the need to seek a fresh new “stage” to perform. Therefore, the poems will benefit critical comments as adjuncts, consequently popularize and build the “new generation”. Following the stereotype that each generation has its critics, the 1980s generation seems to be established precisely by this strategy. As a direct effect, the desire to form their own “institution,” the Monday Literary Cenacle, was fueled by the effervescent radicalism of their discussions. In the words of Cosmin Ciotloș: “Throughout these years, the poetry of the 1980s generation was accompanied by a series of critical texts (literary reviews, surveys, debates, round tables) signed by the editors-in-chief of the magazine” (35).

A consistent part of the volume explores the denigrating reception of the young poets in the pages of the ideologized press of the time. This was orchestrated by Eugen Barbu, “a disavowable personality” (92) and a controversial writer and journalist. In this chapter, Ciotloș not only reconstructs, based on an analysis of literary publications, how Barbu dismissed young poets to the point of destroying their literary careers but also shows the schizoid character of the communist period, with its two faces: on the one hand, the false, defamatory discourse

of the novelist; on the other, the rebuttals, i.e. young poets' resistance to the harsh criticisms. One of the answers belongs to Mircea Cărtărescu, who, using as a pretext the famous *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, ingeniously blamed the direction proposed by Romanian literary critics and subversively attacked Eugen Barbu: "By stating the old, I do not understand the work of capitalizing on our cultural heritage, otherwise a noble practice, of encouraging epigones, which is something else entirely, and producing a literature based on mimetic forms" (101). Maintaining his distance and assuming the role of a *bricoleur*, given the vast amount of publications he synthesizes, Cosmin Ciotloș demonstrates that the new generation was not at all innocently involved in the ideological power games in the field of literature. At first, a minor evil, without ostensibly major effects for the artistic reception of young authors, Eugen Barbu's literary criticism gradually pursued more sinister purposes, exacerbating his inferiority complexes: he attacked prestigious literary critics and secured a hegemonic position in the literary establishment ("He thus had the opportunity to make and unmake destinies, to place himself, proudly, above the glories of the moment," 97). That being said, the Monday Literary Circle became a small yet strong institution, from which young voices spoke out loud and clear. This came in direct conflict with Barbu's damaging and aggressive mechanism. Despite its inherent dangers, the relationship between these two camps energized the Romanian literary system, on the one hand, and generated a strange phenomenon of pseudo-criticism, which replaced a lucid, ideologically unbiased resistance to what was new and disruptive, on the other

hand. Nevertheless, resistance did spur petty and harmful behavior, stemming from a twofold commitment: before anything else, to communist ideology, then to one's own interests.

The third chapter delves into the aesthetics and ethics of some authors both inside and outside the Monday Literary Circle. From Traian T. Coșovei, Romulus Bucur, Florin Iaru, Alexandru Mușina, to Ion Monoran, Daniel Pișcu or Alexandru Since, Ciotloș highlights the polymorphism of this institution, claiming that while not all the chosen writers were emblematic figures of this group, they nonetheless "shadowed" this literary movement. Ileana Zubașcu was one of the "outsiders." Although she is not the most fortunate example, the poet illustrated, on the one hand, the prerequisite of affinity to the "spirit of the cenacle" and, on the other hand, the privileged status that membership in this group could ensure. The trend of "retroactive investment in the 1980s poetical group" (338), according to Ciotloș, was a phenomenon that also revealed the "satellites" of the nucleus, i.e. writers who were deemed to be peripheral due to their lack of skill or their incompatibility with the promoted new sensibility. The power of the Monday Literary Circle was to be seen later, when many quasi-anonymous writers claimed to have been associated with or members of the main group.

In the same chapter, striving to depict various literary portraits, Ciotloș opts for an unusual hermeneutic approach. Some of the materials analyzed here are unpublished texts that have first seen the light of print in Ciotloș's book. Mariana Marin's poetic framework, for example, is also rendered through nine original poems, which show the poet's

trajectory and the distinctive “behavior” of her texts in parallel with the playfulness or minimalism of her colleagues’ poems. Mariana Marin’s poetry demonstrates an affinity of ethos rather than of literary devices, which confirms Ciotloș’s thesis. According to this, beyond the 1980s postmodernists’ debates or Romanian-American young poets’ relationship (especially with the Beat generation), this literary circle remains the main space in which this particular spirit emerged and was maintained, a spirit that is difficult to recover through archival research, since, by its nature, it is “doomed to remain exclusively oral” (379). However, Ciotloș

summarizes, according to a detective scheme entitled “coded dialogues,” how the fraternity of the members of the circle manifested itself in their poems, creating “a true underground system of legitimation” (379).

With the ambition to broach exhaustively a very complex literary phenomenon, Cosmin Ciołoș delivers a book about the Monday Literary Circle’s infrastructural network, managing to analytically and synthetically restore its group identity, its roots, as well as a kind of “emulation,” which records the impact that the cenacle run by the critic Nicolae Manolescu had on the Romanian literary system.

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