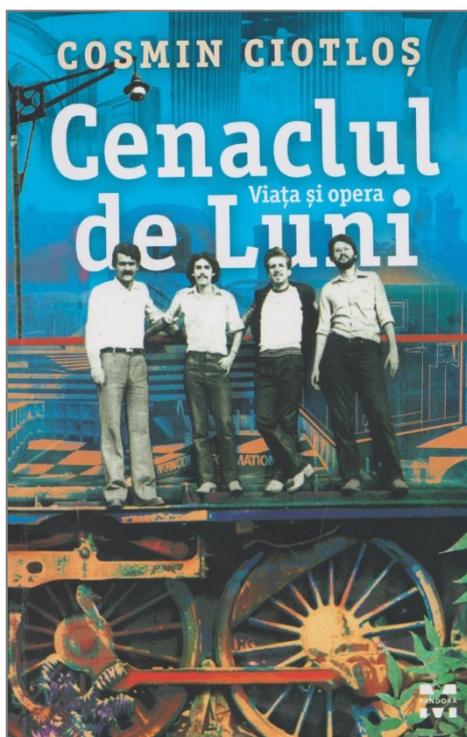


BOOKS

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

Theoretical contributions about the 80s literary generation converge towards defining their poetics and fuelling terminological debates around post-modernism. The critical reception of these writers' works has been shaped both by the members of this generation and by scholars outside it. The former category includes, among others, Mircea Cărtărescu's volume, *Postmodernismul românesc* [Romanian Postmodernism], and Ion Bogdan Lefter's *Flashback 1985: Începuturile noii poezii* [Flashback 1885: The Beginnings of the New Poetry]. The topic is interesting not only from a literary point of view, but also from a sociological point of view. On the one hand, it portrays the bohemian lifestyle within the totalitarian regime, and, on the other hand, it explains how a literature that does not satisfy the requirements of the system can survive, functioning underground.



Among the relatively recent studies dedicated to the topic, Mihail Vakulovsky approaches the phenomenon from a dual perspective: a critical look at poetry, in *Portret de grup cu generația 80. Poezia* [Group Portrait with Generation 80. Poetry], completed, in another volume, by interviews with members of the group, but also with those who were influenced by the particular atmosphere from the Monday Literary Circle. Analyses of this generation's literary output have also explored foreign influences. For example, Teodora Dumitru's study included in the collective volume *Romanian Literature as World Literature* discusses the impact of the Beat generation. Cosmin Ciotloș's volume, *Cenaclul de Luni. Viața și opera* [The Monday Literary Circle. Life and Work], continues this line of contributions with a biographical-oriented approach, as the title announces.

The fact that Ciotloș aims to overcome the commonplaces in the theoretical discussions about the topic is obvious, as he relies on new information in order to reveal that “particular sensibility” (9). For example, the way in which the critic refers to labels attached to poetry, preferring other concepts that have been overlooked, such as *lyric associativity*, introduced in an essay signed by Ion Stratan. The well documented, exhaustive perspective of the critic explores the complex relations between the members of the 80s generation, as well as the opposition to the official system. Ciotloș’s understanding of the literary circle is worth discussing, as he draws on Stanley Fish’s concept of “interpretive communities,” to explain why, although there were many reading circles at the time, they did not survive or have a decisive impact. “Lack of an autonomous critical vision” would be the main cause of value degradation.

Convinced that “the poetry of this generation means, first of all, the poetry of Bucharest” (8), Ciotloș is mainly interested in the Monday Literary Circle founded in 1977. However, he extends the area of investigation, as he wants to reveal the way the poets of the 80’s expressed themselves before joining the circle, but also how their project continued after the circle was closed in 1983 and which forms of camouflage were used. For the first direction, *Amfiteatru* [*The Amphitheater*] magazine, but also the meetings within the eponymous circle, offered a space for self-assertion. Moreover, the magazine also published poems, whose impact was quantified through reviews. What is interesting, referring to this part of the foundation of the circle, is the way in which Ciotloș resemanticizes the figures of some writers

who contributed to the formation of the group. Constanța Buzea’s case thus activates a position often neglected by critics (the writer’s “commentator position”).

Returning to the camouflage of the Monday Literary Circle that I mentioned earlier, the critic evokes the meetings within *Cenaclul Rapid* [The Rapid Literary Circle] and *Cenaclul din Tei* [The Tei Literary Circle]. Regarding the former, the attention paid to the name—which encourages an association with the football team—suggests a solidarity that worked not only within the alternative literary field, but also beyond its boundaries. Particular attention is given to the denigratory initiatives led by the *Săptămâna* [*The Week*] magazine that pleaded against the poetry of the Monday Literary Circle’s members. As for poetry, the chapter dedicated to Eugen Barbu demonstrates how the importance of the new poetic style was diminished and how the message was distorted, through comments applied on the text (see the episode involving Liviu Ioan Stoiciu). In fact, the aim was to deconstruct the new manner of making poetry and also the poets’ individual contributions. This practice applied also in the case of *Caietele debutanților* [*Notebooks of Beginners*], which functioned as a collective volume meant to neglect the individual voices and the aesthetic value of the texts, through “the intention to standardize” (142).

In addition to the nuances it brings, Ciotloș also refers to some clichés attached to the generation. One of them concerns the poets’ unity of perspective which, taken over by the opponents, threatened to attenuate the differences. In fact, “their literature was not written in one voice, as their opponents claimed. Remarkably homogeneous, however, was

the way of reading it" (56). The practice of reading creates, explains Ciotloș, a mythology of the literary circle which allowed, in the interviews with members of the generation, the association with the Beat poets. However, Ciotloș tones down the foreign influences, finding, instead, influences inside the Romanian space. Thus, he refers to Junimea, noting that a common practice of the foundation was to create a mythology. According to this hypothesis, the critic explains the absence of exact data in the interviews of the participants in the Monday Literary Circle. The practice worked, by extension, in the case of some writers who projected a legendary aura, postponing the publication of their volumes (see the case of Daniel Pișcu) or, later, when writers from other generations turned to the literary circle, in order to achieve validation.

Beyond the attention paid to the literary circle as a form of sociability, Ciotloș aims to reveal individual contributions in an important section of the volume dedicated to poetry. Ciotloș also relies on biographical inserts meant to explain the position of the writers. For instance, Coșovei's case is discussed through the lens of a volume published by his father, which makes possible some analogies between the writer's biographical events and the atmosphere of the Monday Literary Circle. However, the analogies between certain gestures made by Coșovei as a child and the photo placed on the fourth cover of the volume *Air with Diamonds* appear a bit forced. In other cases, Ciotloș starts from the less frequented theoretical texts of the writers, refuting the labels attached to them in their literary reception. This is what happens in the case of Romulus Bucur or Bogdan Ghiu.

One of the merits of the volume is related to the interest in less visible writers. On the other hand, the book also discusses unjustified recoveries. The former category includes the poet Ion Monoran, while the latter analyses the case of Ileana Zubașcu. Ciotloș convincingly rejects the idea of Zubașcu as a forerunner of the generation, proving that the idea is, in fact, grounded in protochronism. Not only was she not a forerunner of the poets from the Monday Literary Circle, but her poetry does not fit into the mindset of this generation. Viorel Padina's recovery is also symptomatic insofar as it explains the conditions for entering the literary field, but also the consequences of late debuts.

Other writers have a rather restrictive approach, through a single volume, as is the case of Alexandru Mușina. Although Ciotloș refers to Mușina's practice of moving lyrics from one volume to another, the critic's attention is focused on a single volume, *Strada Castelului 104 [104 Castle Street]*, annotated by another colleague of his generation. Mircea Cărtărescu has a similar approach, in an otherwise exemplary chapter, by developing references from *Levantul [The Levant]* that confirm an in-depth analysis of the text.

Following Ciotloș's analytical sections, revealing the system of relationships between poets seems to matter more than individual contributions, as the goal is to reconstruct "networks of relationships" (10). Hence the interest in the dialogue that writers initiate in texts, the way they respond to each other, contributing to the creation of an "underground system of legitimation" (379) exposed in the last section of the book. However, the typology that Ciotloș proposes in the introduction in order to mark the differ-

ences between poets remains at a theoretical level. Although the critic states that he does not conceive his volume as a textbook, that “it is more about trends than categories” and that he focuses on new aspects, these trends that he identified—from “nostalgic restitutive” poets to “centrifugal”—deserved further explanation. On the contrary, they remain almost inoperative.

The indisputable merit of the volume comes from registering new aspects

in order to complete or to redefine the literary space and its extensions, avoiding common places and overcoming clichés often conveyed in discussions about the topic. In this sense, *The Monday Literary Circle. Life and Work* is—taking an idea that the critic introduces—a volume of “cross-references” and an important contribution for those interested in how the poetry of the 80’s developed in the Romanian space.

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