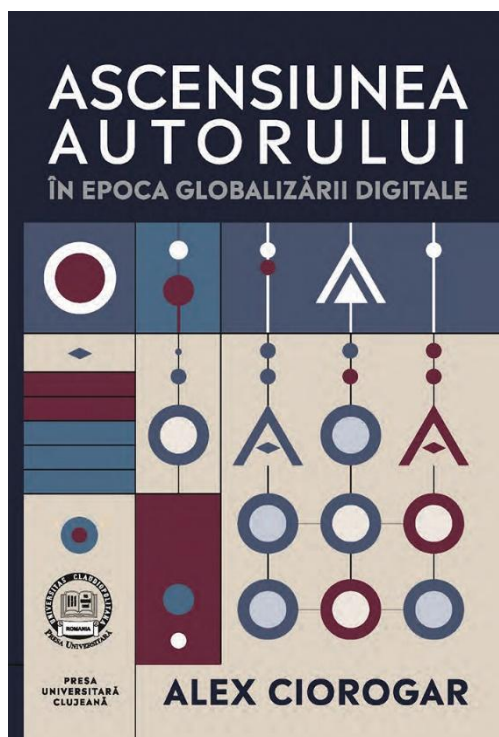


## BOOKS

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### Alex Ciorogar, *Ascensiunea autorului în epoca globalizării digitale*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2025, 418 p.

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Alex Ciorogar's book, published in 2025, takes on the complex task of sifting through theories of authorship that have emerged on the academic scene over the past fifty years. Ciorogar notices the strange place that the author occupies today in the literary field. After the death of the author, consecrated in the essays of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, the academic world seems to have gotten stuck, unable to go further and propose new theories. Although the two philosophers' works are crucial, they have been "more quoted than read" (2), Ciorogar says, arguing that a new approach is needed, which requires "the death of the myth of the author's return" (12).

The first chapter is an exploration of the controversies that the idea of the individual subject has gone through due to the radical changes registered by the humanist tradition. Ciorogar agrees with Romanian critic Mihaela Ursa's remarks that the author and subjectivity are tied to one another. He identifies here

multiple attitudes: critics who claim there is no way to ignore the speaker and their intention, even if we claim anonymity (Stanley Fish), critics who believe that anti-author readings are meant to validate interpretations (Sophie Rabau) and critics who believe that authorship is already complex enough and its nature allows for it to be interpreted (Richard Shusterman). Ciorogar validates Shusterman's ideas and appreciates the "fan-concept", which refers to ideas that are complex and interpretable. Another reason to contest authorship concerns, of course, its ties to ideology and structures

of power. He also mentions what Cheryl Walker names “persona criticism”, seeing and examining the author in relation with multiple study areas.

Chapter two is split into two parts. The first one looks at authorship theories that appeared in the wake of post-structuralism, posing the question of what happened between the death of the author and the return thereof. Right after the sixties, the author’s intention was no longer relevant as the focus shifted to the language used and its relationship to existent power structures. Another interesting perspective that Ciorogar investigates in this part is the idea that authorship does not belong to the author, but to discourse itself. As such, “the text constructs the figure of the author” (47). He specifies that after poststructuralism, authorship became easy to relativize and must be studied in relation to the new economic situation, global digitality and the new institutions. While some critics observe that the notion of the modern author is a result of capitalist ideology, several neomarxist thinkers note that the gifted author appeared exactly as a reaction to the emergence of the book market. Therefore, the author’s relationship with capitalism is conflicted. Regarding Barthes’ famous essay, Ciorogar argues that the French thinker was concerned not so much with hermeneutics, as people seem to believe, but with finding pleasure in the reading experience itself. That is why the concept of intertextuality should take the blame for any ‘suppression’ of the author. Andrew Bennet remarks that Barthes and others failed to notice that the romantic model of authorship was already complex; the creator is formed by ideas that appear during the process of creation. In the second part of this chapter, Ciorogar engages with methods of studying authorship, including epistemological ones. To begin with, there is no escaping the author. The reader tends to construct an image of the author, even while lacking any empirical knowledge. Julie Smith defines the author as a “rhetorical choir” (98) in the new digital age, but Ciorogar mentions that this term can be applied outside the field of technology. Still, the preferred methodological solution is Atsushi Akera’s ecology of knowledge, which he adapts to authorship studies while keeping in mind the social dimension of authorship, the information that makes up the field and an analysis of the phenomenon’s material practices.

The third chapter is also divided into two parts. It begins with examining the return of biographies in contemporary literary historiography. This debate unites the fields of aesthetic theories and literary studies due to their common involvement in aesthetics and the subsequent crisis. Looking at multiple definitions, Ciorogar arrives at Jean Marie Schaeffer, who defines the aesthetic experience as part of everyday life. Turning to biography, the author explains its evolution, from its honorary position in the Romantic period to its downfall at the time of modernism, when the power of the word itself prevailed. Nowadays, biography takes a central place in political readings which seek to prove why studying literature is still important and profitable in the modern capitalist landscape. According to Ciorogar, “biographical studies have the advantage of having been inspired from the long tradition of representing real life” (127).

The second part of this chapter is dedicated to the era of digital globalization. As authorship is tackled from multiple angles that have emerged due to globalization (ecological issues, eurocentrism critique, translation studies), Ciorogar believes this should not be the object of a single field of studies. Mads Rosendahl Thompson argues that societies are no longer restricted by geopolitical borders, and the only paths forward are either isolation or cosmopolitan states. The latter is preferable. In the era

of “cognitive capitalism” (MacKenzie Wark), immaterial products, like intellectual property, have become profitable. Therefore, the relevance of today’s author depends on the new means of production. Ciorogar explains that globalization is a polarizing topic among thinkers, whom he groups into “pessimists and optimists” (143). Optimist thinkers believe the new era has democratized cultural production, offering transparency, adaptability and alternative communities. Art becomes the trading coin of businesses, picturing the artist as the exemplary entrepreneur. Ciorogar notes that many critics seem to struggle with conceptualizing the global era, but he validates the perspective of German thinker Ulrich Beck. He distinguishes between globalism, which is the worldwide market, and globalization, which refers to the changes institutions must undergo on various levels. He desires a new, cosmopolitan methodology that can change the role of nations forever and combat the dangers of nationalism.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to French thinker Roland Barthes. Ciorogar begins with an interesting taxonomy of authorship studies, structured around the following categories: the Author and Text (for the mimetic, pragmatic and ideological approaches), the Author of the Text (for theories focused on the intention, hermeneutics, biography and psychoanalysis), the Author inside of the Text (for formalism), the Author as the Text (Ciorogar invokes Carla Benedetti here) and the Author together with the Text (for modern theories which rely on relations). Agreeing with Sarah Brouillette, who identifies the representatives of New Criticism and poststructuralism as assailants of the author, Ciorogar sets out to reread the famous Barthesian essay, proving that he was concerned with ethics, politics, and, most interestingly, inspired by Chomsky’s generative grammar. The Romanian critic explains that the goals of this essay were as much political as they were aesthetic. Barthes himself admitted that it was a strategic move, and quite the successful one, managing to “replace the sorbonards with the program of the May ’68 movement” (147). Barthes proved the author to be no hero, but a pawn that helped maintain the power structures already governing literature. The established literary institutions were therefore able to control the narratives of interpretation. The author, as a “modern scribe” (147), had to return to a Homeric state. In Ciorogar’s view, Barthes could be thought of as a pragmatic critic, due to his preoccupation with the moral duty of authors. The most interesting contribution of this chapter is the generative angle, grounded in the belief that there must be some inherent and independent literary rules inscribed within the human mind, dismantling the narrative of the genius.

The fifth chapter tackles the other player in the author’s demise, Michel Foucault. Ciorogar aims to prove that following several conflicts, a new definition of authorship began developing at the end of the sixties. With the author dead, something had to fill the function of authorship. This was Foucault’s interest, whilst also loosening the restrictions the author had upon interpretations. He understood that authors used performative strategies to construct themselves as subjects in relation to structures of power. For Ciorogar, Foucault is the founder of posturality, opening the analysis of authorship with his ideas regarding the author’s function. Here the chapter splits in two subdivisions, one dedicated to somaesthetics and another to the author’s function from a historical perspective. It is interesting how a connection is made between Richard Shusterman’s pragmatic project which became somaesthetics and Michel Foucault’s turn to pragmatic methodology in the last years of his career.

Chapter six begins with a critical overview of Dario Compagno. Ciorogar points out that his synthesis ends up disoriented and confusing. Continuing his discussion on the return of the author, he shows that during the nineties, the relationship between literature and ethics became important, shining a light on the creator's ethics. Critics like John Trimbur and Mihaela Ursa argue for the return of the author, with Trimbur supporting the idea because "the literary experience cannot be imagined outside dialogical theory" (223). Ursa remarks that there is no return to the pre-structuralist status of the author. As such, the answer could be "authorial markers" (225), a concept that can serve as the right tool to manage this complex phenomenon. Carla Bendetti questions the disappearance of the creator but is wrong to say that authorship has not changed. Moreover, Ciorogar critiques her confusion between the literary landscape and the book market. In her view, the existence of an author means the possibility of creating the new. Jane Gallop presents an interesting queer reading and a "necrophiliac" nuance, arguing for a new type of relationship between the reader, writer and author. Another important critic for Ciorogar is Sean Burke, who, like Gallop, adopts the method of close reading for theoretical discourse. For Burke, neither Barthes nor Foucault managed to create new forms of knowledge, despite their innovations. The return of the author means the transformation of the normative-transcendental subjectivity into a biological, material one. The way Burke reads Barthes and Foucault proves that the return was already anticipated by the two thinkers.

The final chapter, titled "The Ascension of the Author", investigates the role that the author's function needs to fulfill in the "extreme contemporaneity" (287). The author may become a tool to promote the book, and eventually a product in their own name. Following the statements of Andrew Wernick, Ciorogar warns that we should not confuse success on the literary market with canonization in literary criticism, although the latter influences the former. The academic world seems to be on a completely different path than the commercial market, which is another argument for what Ciorogar calls the "ecological theory of authorship" (302), a model which allows for the existence of previous contributions from various fields of study, without remaining restricted by them. Each exists in its context with its dynamics. Ciorogar prefers the term ascent rather than return, as it encompasses multiple nuances of current authorship: the verticality of relations, neoliberal economic ascension, or social ascendancy. Only an ecological structure can contain the complexities of the paradox of authorship.

In Ciorogar's own words, his book provides the academic world with a coherent image of metatheoretical theories and methodology, waiting for a case study. Without a doubt, the book is comprehensive, and as exhaustive as possible, with an impressive bibliography. Any prospective reader should be aware, though, that it is a book written for those who have already made forays into the field of authorship. For those readers, it does not only provide the solution to the crisis of the author nowadays, but it offers an inventory of theories, paired with a polemical approach resulting in analytical and evaluative commentary.

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