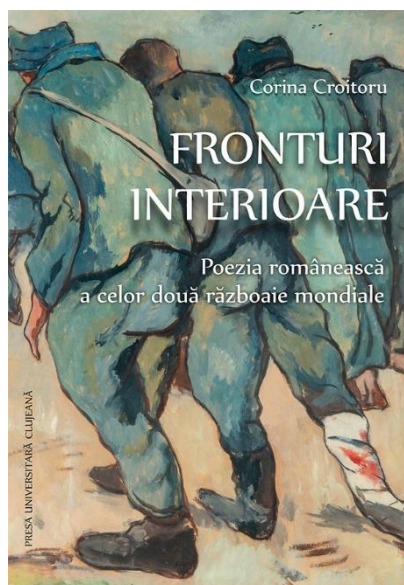


BOOKS

Corina Croitoru, *Fronturi interioare. Poezia românească a celor două războaie mondiale*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2024, 273 p.



Corina Croitoru's *Fronturi interioare* is a most welcome addition to Romanian literary history and criticism, as evidenced by its receipt of the 2024-2025 Bac-Fest Award for Poetry Criticism. Just like the author's first book, *Politica ironiei în poezia românească sub comunism* (*The Politics of Irony in Romanian Poetry under Communism*), this volume examines the complex interplay between literary expression and historical reality. *Fronturi interioare* looks into an area of Romanian literature that has benefited from little scholarly attention, namely the poetry of the two World Wars. The volume, as clearly set forth in the introduction, revisits the poetry inspired by the war experience with a view to offering a critical perspective on how poetic expression, conceived as a *lieu de memoire* (via Pierre Nora), grapples with historical events while teasing the boundaries of its own aesthetic potential (21).

The first section of the volume is dedicated to World War I, with its ironic (via Paul Fussell) or cynical (Peter Sloterdijk) view of the world. After engaging with key scholarship on the distinctiveness of this war and its representations, the author provides a thoughtful addition by pointing out that "[t]he First World War is not about death [...], but about the *act of dying*, about the exploration of the various modern ways in which human life comes to an end"¹ (30-31). The new forms of dying, characteristic of this war (with its introduction of a new weapon, the shell, that disintegrates the body; with its impact on the soldiers' minds, disintegrating them on the inside) extend, Croitoru argues, beyond

¹ In the original: „Primul Război Mondial nu este unul al morții [...] ci al *muririi*, al explorării multiplelor forme moderne ale dispariției umane” (31-32).



the individual, triggering “the spiritual disintegration of society as a whole”, which is, in her view, “the inevitable consequence of the bodily and psychological disintegration of the human being in modern warfare”² (32-33). A similarly interesting point, albeit on a different issue, is made later in the chapter. Croitoru reflects on the neglect of war poetry in Romanian literary histories, suggesting that its cause is not *amnesia*, but rather *aphasia*, understood as the inability to articulate something that is actually remembered. The author claims that “the fading of war poetry into oblivion is, in fact, a form of *silence*”³ (142).

This first chapter acknowledges the plurality of voices that make the eclecticism of the Romanian poetry of WWI (42-43). It highlights the particularly complicated ways in which Romanians experienced the war, shaped by a historical context that divided them among three different armies and made them fight on opposite sides. It further analyzes the extent to which political and ideological divides influenced the Romanian poetic discourse about the war.

The chapter examines verses written by conscripts (particularly the conscription songs of Transylvanian soldiers, which reflect their conflicted feelings about fighting fellow Romanians on behalf of a foreign emperor), alongside poetry by career soldiers, often influenced by the tradition of earlier patriotic poetry that evokes the memory of past wars and contributes to the consolidation of past notions of heroism. It also includes works by established poets who were enlisted and sent to the frontlines (such as Vasile Voiculescu, Ion Pillat, Demostene Botez, George Topîrceanu, Camil Petrescu, Perpessicius and others), as well as poems by civilian poets who experienced the war either from home (Nicolae Iorga, Alexandru Vlahuță, George Coșbuc, Alexandru Obedenaru, George Ranetti) or from self-exile (Tristan Tzara). The lucid critical analysis of each author's literary contribution is often accompanied by colorful or bizarre anecdotes from their wartime experiences. We thus learn, for instance, that career officer Nicolae Vulovici was killed in exactly the manner he had described in one of his poems, by a bullet to the forehead, or that the enlisted writer Camil Petrescu went through the war wearing shoes because the military boots caused him discomfort. For all its diversity, Romanian poetry of the Great War seems to largely subscribe to the irony and cynicism theses discussed in the introduction to this chapter.

The poetic representation of the experience of the Second World War, as the author observes, is considerably different from that of The Great War. There is a qualitative shift, due primarily to the fact that “the most significant poetic achievements shaped by the atmosphere of the Second World War were authored by the civilian poets of the *war generation*”⁴ (212). Whereas World War I poetry retains the lyrical and meditative qualities of the 19th century poetic tradition, the Second World War brings forth an anti-lyrical, transitive form of representation (176).

² In the original: „dezagregarea spirituală a întregii societăți nefiind decât consecința inevitabilă a dezintegrării corporale și psihologice a ființei umane în războiul modern” (32-33).

³ In the original: „uitarea care atinge poezia de război nu este, de fapt, decât o formă de *tăcere*” (143).

⁴ In the original: „cele mai mari reușite poetice marcate de atmosfera celei de-a doua conflagrații sunt semnate de poeții civili ai *generației războiului*” (212).

Continuing the approach adopted in the chapter on the First World War, the author distinguishes between the poetry written by established poets who were enlisted – either as a form of disciplinary punishment for ideological transgressions (Radu Gyr, Sergiu Filerot, Al. Cerna-Rădulescu), or because they had completed military service or were career soldiers (Mihnea Gheorghiu, Ion Șugariu, Călin Gruia, Horia Agarici, Ion Petrache, Mircea Popovici, George Dan) – and the civilian poets of the *war generation*, who experienced the war far from the front lines (Geo Bogza, Dimitrie Stelaru, Ion Caraion, Constant Tonegaru, Mihail Crama, Ben Corlaci, Victor Tornyopol). A special section is dedicated to the group of Romanian avant-garde poets of Jewish origin who self-exiled in France and joined the efforts of the French Resistance (Tristan Tzara, B Fundoianu, Ilarie Voronca, Mihail Cosma). The discussion on the poetry of World War II examines how the trauma of war shapes aesthetics, memory, and forms of engagement. It emphasizes the tension between ethical and aesthetic concerns, between forms of silence and forms of engagement.

The experience of the war, the author shows, is rewritten after the establishment of the communist regime with a view to supporting governmental propaganda. Thus, poetic engagement turns toward glorifying the Soviet liberator soldier and the peace ensured by communist rule. Two authors are the focus of the case study for this category: Mihai Beniuc and Eugen Jebeleanu.

The last chapter of the book is dedicated to women poets who contributed to the inscription of the war experience into literary memory. The work of poets such as Carmen Sylva, Matilda Cugler-Poni, Maria Cunțan, Elena Văcărescu, Ana de Noailles, Livia Rebreanu-Hulea (World War I), Anișoara Odeanu, Magda Isanos, Maria Banuș, Veronica Porumbacu, or Nina Cassian (World War II) is used by the author to dismantle the reductionist patriarchal prejudices that have consigned women writers to neglect for far too long. Although the plea for peace – with its propagandistic engagement after World War II – seems to guide the writing of these women authors, Croitoru notes that their work is more complex and varied than that. Elena Văcărescu, for instance, argues for entering the war to achieve national unification, Livia Rebreanu-Hulea reworks the epistolary form to bridge the emotional distance between home and the frontline, and Anișoara Odeanu explores love, both romantic and fraternal, in times of war. The nuanced readings in this chapter effectively invite further scholarly engagement with women's literary productions, extending beyond war poetry.

Grounded in conceptually rich reflections and a well-established scholarly bibliography, the volume stands out through the author's sharp critical voice and subtle, well-articulated irony. *Fronturi Interioare* is both insightful and informative and will offer a most interesting and delightful reading experience to a wide readership.

Amelia PRECUP 

Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania
E-mail: amelia.precup@ubbcluj.ro