A Journey through Today's Romanian Literature

ROMANIAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE

TPS20 SUPPORT FOR TRANSLATION AND PUBLICATION

CONTENTS

A Maximalist Year

By Alina Purcaru

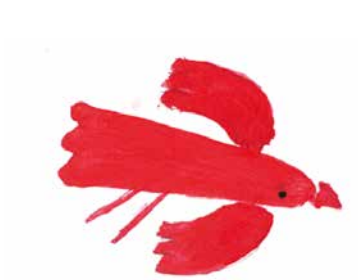
A maximalist year – that is how I would characterize the literary year of 2025. On one hand, we see an abundance of titles, in spite of the crises undermining the life of the book even here; on the other, there are proposals for massive, ambitious novels that aim to cover all levels of reality. Last but not least, we have landmark releases in both fiction and memoirs, signed by important names in Romanian literature. From Ion Manolescu's mammoth novel, who is coming back to the arena 19 years after his last published book, *Skidding Off* (2006), to Gabriela Adameșteanu's memoirs, *Jobs Unsuitable for Women* – one of the most anticipated titles – and to the new chunk of Mircea Cărtărescu's diary, *Seven Strange Years*, which maintains his seven-year periodicity between publications, 2025 has offered titles that will remain unmistakable landmarks in literary history**.** Because the territories of fiction, memoirs, docufiction, and diary writing have reached unmissable peaks – books that transcend local stakes – the selection for this catalogue could not be limited to fiction alone. This is especially true since these works, subsumed under a hybrid literature that combines fiction with documentary and history with personal recollections, blurring the rigid boundaries between genres, come from writers with an indelible mark on Romanian literature.

The selection for this catalogue was based on several cross-referenced criteria, with the ultimate goal of honestly reflecting – beyond inevitable omissions and personal tastes – the fiction offering of 2025, as well as the diversity of its directions, voices, and styles. It was important to include works by established and translated authors, such as Radu Vancu or Tatiana Țîbuleac, alongside those of promising debutants with bold proposals and a clearly defined stylistic approach (Andrei Gogu or Andreea Ionescu-Berechet, for instance).

It was equally important for short stories to find their place here, too, in line with their recent upward trajectory. Female and male authors are represented side by side, reflecting both their presence on the literary scene

and the intrinsic value of their writing. Last but not least, the selection includes proposals from the most diverse areas of contemporary fiction; that is why fantasy and historical novels stand alongside works investigating the deep crises of the present, such as Lavinia Braniște's *Camping* – a brilliant book in its austerity, exploring the traumas of migration. Balance was the underlying objective that guided the entire selection process.

This catalogue aims to bring visibility to directions within domestic prose writing that are as diverse as they are fruitful – whether through fiction**,** docufiction or memoirs – and to reunite different and valuable creative generations, worldviews, and literary goals. Within its pages, one can discern both the established territories of our literature and its future directions, alongside various perspectives on the present and the past, including the literary past. It is a rich landscape, full of countless surprises, and this selection is merely an invitation to explore it with confidence. ■

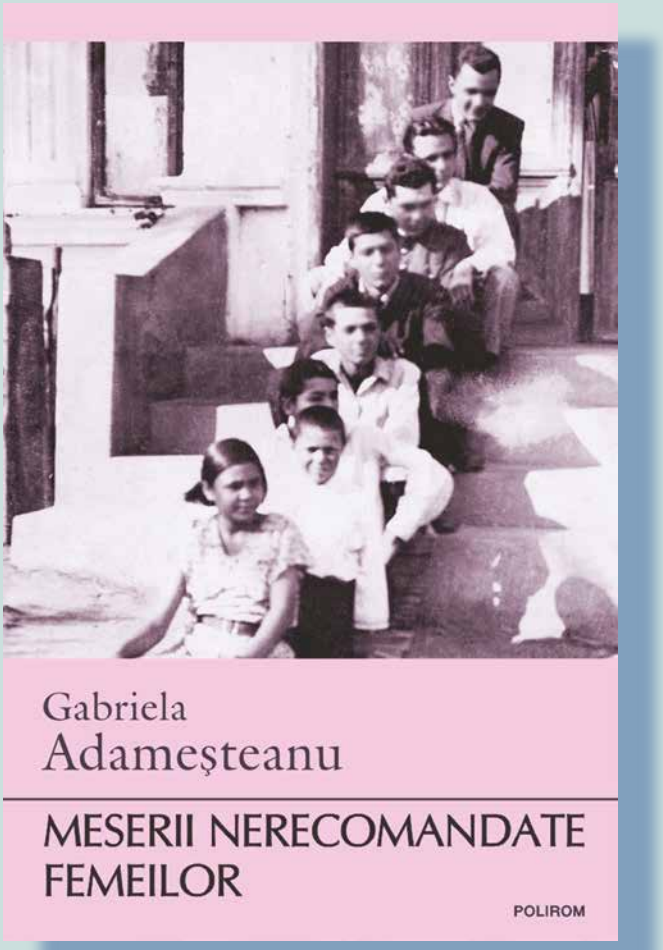


GABRIELA ADAMEȘTEANU

GABRIELA ADAMEȘTEANU (born 1942, Târgu Ocna) is a reference name in Romanian fiction, a paragon of an accomplished intellectual, a person for whom civic involvement and the creation of environments for debating various ideas was as important as her own writing activity. She was born in a family of intellectuals and after graduating from the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bucharest, in 1965, she worked as an editor at the Encyclopaedic Publishing House (1965-1984) and a reader at Cartea Românească Publishing House (1985-1989). She led the *22* weekly of the Group for Social Dialogue (1991-2005) and then its literary supplement, *Cultural Bucharest* (2005-2013).

She published several volumes of short stories – *Gift Yourself a Holiday* (Cartea Românească Publishing House, 1979) and *Summer-Spring*, Cartea Românească Publishing House, 1989); novels – *The Constant Pace of Every Day* (Cartea Românească Publishing House, 1975), *Wasted Morning* (Cartea Românească Publishing House, 1984), *The Meeting* (Polirom Publishing House, 2003), *Provisional State* (Polirom Publishing House, 2010), *Fontana di Trevi* (Polirom Publishing House, 2018), *Distant Voices* (Polirom Publishing House, 2022), which have all been reedited many times; memoirs – *The Romantic Years* (Polirom Publishing House, 2014) and *Jobs Unsuitable for Women* (Polirom Publishing House, 2025) as well as collections of journalistic pieces: *The Obsession of Politics* (interviews, Clavis Publishing House,1995), *The Two Romanias* (contributions from the press, The Publishing House of the European Institute, 2000) or *Growing up between Two Nostalgics* (Nona & Crigarux Publishers, 2023). All her writings have been reedited and published as part of the series of volumes dedicated to her by Polirom Publishing House.

She was awarded the Hellman-Hammett Prize for bravery in journalism by the Human Rights Watch (2002) and the title of Chevalier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (2013). She was the vice-president (2000-2004) and president (2004-2006) of PEN Centre Romania. Her books were awarded numerous prizes and were published by well-known foreign publishers (Gallimard, Acantilado, Penguin, Random House, Aufbau etc.) from 18 countries; they were favourably reviewed in prestigious international periodicals (*Le Monde*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *El País* etc.). ■



GABRIELA ADAMEȘTEANU,
MESERII NERECOMANDATE FEMEILOR
[JOBS UNSUITABLE FOR WOMEN],
MEMOIRS

POLIROM PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 420 P.
ISBN: 9786303442181

Synopsis

Jobs Unsuitable for Women is a remarkable volume of memoirs that follows the formative years and the personal struggle of an outstanding intellectual while it indirectly presents the entire Romanian society and the changes that have affected it so far. Born into a family of intellectuals, some of her uncles leaving an indelible mark in their respective fields of activity – Ion Adameşteanu was one of the founders of the Romanian school of veterinarian medical pathology, Dinu Adameşteanu was a famous Italian archaeologist and Cornel Adamești was a prestigious surgeon – Gabriela Adameşteanu unreels before our eyes the film of her own intellectual evolution in a climate of exigence marked by prejudice and often hostile to women. As she analyses her own journey, the moments, the contexts and the readings that shaped her personality, Gabriela Adameșteanu writes about an entire world: literary and cultural institutions, their life in the communist era and during the transition period, her relations with other personalities of the Romanian literary, cultural and political spheres, turning points and decisions that shaped her life and her writing. The book makes a captivating read, as a documentary on a literary as well as a political biography; it has an appropriate amount of anecdote, of *extim* notations, including comments on bare existence, mainly during the communist times, on the status of women writers, the nature of writing in relation to gender or the conditions in which the value of a woman's writing was defined and negotiated. *Jobs Unsuitable for Women* is, to the same extent, a story of an individual and the recovery of a more complex past that concerns us all. ■

Excerpt

No, there is no point in fretting about alternative possible lives (a narrative strategy that was used both before and after Paul Auster's *4321*). No religion gives you a second chance to start life from the beginning in the same rejuvenated body. You can only accept the bright side of what you experienced and not allow your final steps in life to be embittered by devastating remorse, useless longings, burning envy and last minute thoughts of revenge. And yet, how many of us actually match the deceivingly reassuring stereotype of genial, wise and forgiving grandparents?

Now you can see what was wrong in the way you led your life. But you can't know if otherwise things would have been better. You are (also) the events and deeds of your life, which might be contradictory but are connected by unpremeditated lines. Any different move would have carried you along a different path. The weird thing is that you don't care too much whereto.

This is not a book where I draw the line at the end of the day, even if it refers to my own experiences rather than those of other people. I only try to show how I got to embrace the job of a writer without necessarily willing to, though it now seems to me that it was the only one suitable to me. Very much like with almost all my books I somehow lost control of this one, too and allowed it to overflow the limits of the initial project. *Jobs Unsuitable for Women* also became a book about my parents, about the unknown memory of the vanished world in which they lived.

When I had already written parts of this book I took the risk of making public the title I wanted to give it: *Jobs Unsuitable for Women*. One day, however, as I arranged the books in my library I found the 1972 thriller *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* by P.D. James. Meanwhile *Jobs Unsuitable for Women* had become *my* title and I decided to keep it.

It is not a feminist title, but it is not antifeminist either. It is only ambiguous, as were the experiences that enriched me, hurt me, which I tried not to remember, as I avoided reading malicious reviews. It is even less a guide for existence, a collection of advice for women that will write literature or will lead media institutions in a world that will be entirely different (I do not rule out, however, the possibility for them to go through some of my experiences, as technology evolves rapidly, but people hardly do). If I happened to come back to situations and characters that were present in *The Romantic Years* (as throughout this book I let myself carried away by involuntary memory), I also tried to add some new facts or at least to adopt a different perspective.

I will not insist on the collateral damage I suffered from both my jobs – an editor-in-chief and a writer: ruined close relationships, personal disillusionments, the pressure of public exposure. Maybe I will do it some other time.

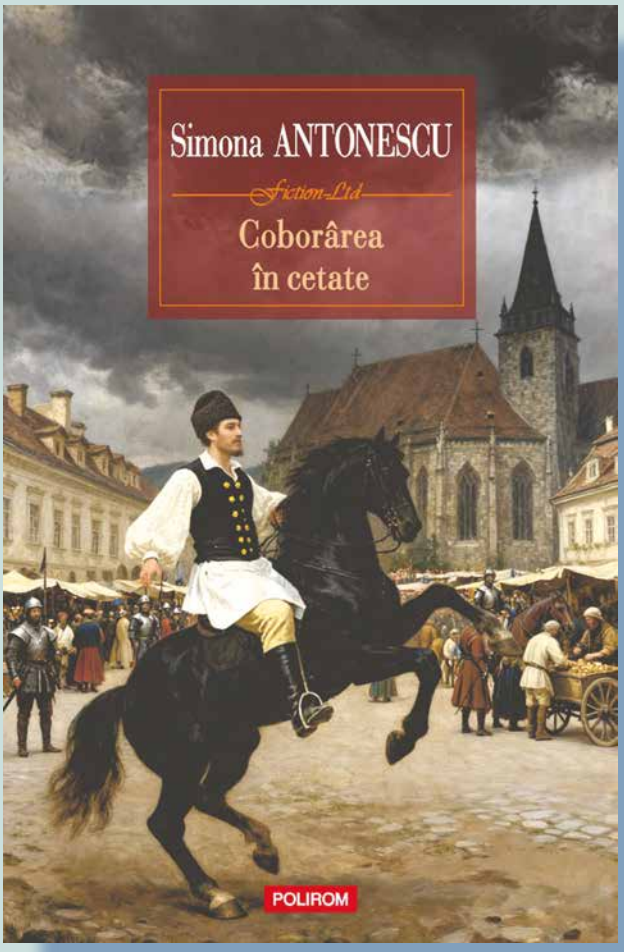
✶

The toxic nature of the press is well-known, but literature itself ("spying on your own" as Amos Oz put it) is toxic in its own right. It gives you a double personality, if you were not born with it already. Maybe that's why I tried to avoid it? Anyway, I am trying to sincerely show how difficult it was for me to take on the burden of being a professional writer.

How sincere can be a writer, though? As far as I could, I tried not to fictionalize my memories, which is something that can prove disastrous in memoir writing. I happened to fail to recognize myself in the memoirs written by some of my fellow writers of either gender; unfortunately, there is no way in which one can fix that. What is certain is that we see other things than people next to us do and we only hear a part of what they tell us: we infer the rest, depending on our own suppositions. ■

SIMONA ANTONESCU

SIMONA ANTONESCU (born 1969, Galați) is a multiple award-winning fiction writer, whose writings are very popular and were very well received by literary critics; she published mostly novels inspired by history that are thoroughly documented. Her debut novel was *The Photographer of the Royal Court*, published in 2015; it was awarded the Debut Prize of the Writers' Union of Romania and was a finalist at the Festival du Premier Roman de Chambéry. There followed the novels *Serafim's Gift* (2016, 2020), *Manuc's Inn* (2017, 2018), *The Last Crusade* (2019), *In Her Shadow* (2021, 2024) and *Chiajna of the Mușatins' Princely House* (2023), which was awarded many prizes, among which the National Fiction Prize of Ziarul de Iași in 2024, the Radio Romania Cultural Award for Fiction, the Book of the Year Prize, awarded by the Brașov Branch of the Writers' Union of Romania. All her books were published by Polirom, where she also published a series of books dedicated to young readers, "History narrated to children," which has reached four volumes. ■



SIMONA ANTONESCU,
COBORÂREA ÎN CETATE
[THE DESCENT INTO THE CITY],
HISTORICAL NOVEL

POLIROM PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 288 P.
ISBN: 9786303443058

Synopsis

In this historical novel, the main character is a collective one: a group of soldiers with a long military experience, these youngsters from Șcheii Brașovului are presented in a crucial historical moment: Michael the Brave had crossed the Carpathians and had conquered Transylvania and Moldavia, becoming, in 1600, the first prince who reigned, though briefly, in all three Romanian principalities: Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania. The plot unfolds against the backdrop of the Long Turkish War (1593-1606), a conflict between the Habsburg Monarchy, supported by the Holy League, and the Ottoman Empire; a conflict that also involved these three principalities that form today's Romania. In this context, on the thrones of Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia, the Ottomans often placed princes that served their interests. Michael the Brave's undertaking was meant to bring Moldavia and Transylvania into the camp of the Holy League and to remove the princes who were faithful to the Ottoman Porte. The novel, in which Michael the Brave is a character, focuses however on some ordinary people, the young men from Șcheii Brașovului, on their lives and stories, in a volatile period and in a context defined by mentalities that are specific to this community only. The young men of Șcheii Brașovului are horse regiments organised following ancient military patterns. Michael the Brave met them when he crossed the mountains, and this is one of the significant events revived in the novel. In memory of the events of 1600, every year, on Saint Thomas' Day (the First Sunday after Easter), the young men from Șcheii Braşovului descend into the city on horseback and enact an event that is meant to keep the tradition and the memory of the past alive. This ceremony is called the Descent into the city and gave the title to the novel. The book is the result of thorough documenting and sheds light not only on a number of stories related to an important historical event, but also an entire world that has long disappeared: the city of Brașov in the 17th century, a place in Transylvania with a long history, with customs and traditions that are presented in a realistic atmosphere that is masterfully revived The historical background thus becomes the framework for alert fiction, where everyday life follows its course, with its dramas, losses and joys in the whirlwind of decisive historical moments. ■

Excerpt

The thought that he was a few steps away from Prince Michael of Wallachia who was on his way trying to depose the prince of Transylvania had pushed him for a moment into that comforting void that he always experienced on the eve of major decisions, when the whole world seemed to move apart and he could clearly see what had to be done, the only right and good thing to do. He had pulled the reins and stopped the caravan. He had left the whip in its place on the pole of the car and had jumped off the coachman's seat followed by Neacşu, who stopped right behind him. Two Zaporozhian Cossacks and two moustached longhaired Wallachians came out of the tent. Their eyes squinted from under their big brow ridges. Behind them came a Romanian captain who motioned to the wall of mercenaries to make way. From the fifteen-foot tent out came the prince.

He was bareheaded and bald, taller than them both. At least, that's how Grama felt as neither of them looked him in the eye but looked down, focusing on one of the buttons of his jacket. The tops of his boots were folded down, the width of a palm and covered in dust from the road, but the shanks of the spurs ended in rowels and shone in the sunlight. The sheath of his sword was on his right side, which meant that he fought with his left hand. Grama could feel the nervousness of Neacşu standing next to him; the latter could hardly refrain from greeting the prince and giving him a broad smile; this would have been impolite, though, as the prince had not said a word yet.

"What's the matter, folks? Who stopped you?" Prince Michael had finally asked, and his voice sounded like the choppers of the butcher in the Council Square, when he sharpened them one against the other, giving goosebumps to the women who happened to be selling stuff at the market nearby.

He had spoken slowly, breathing through his mouth between the words he uttered and that made him look like a bull that did not make a full display of its power as it could not see any opponent that could match his force anywhere nearby. There was a sense of relief among the mercenaries.

"We are two young men from Şcheii Braşovului," Your Highness, Grama said, and then he looked up just for one moment in Prince Michael's eyes and said emphatically, as if those were essential words: "You are welcome, Your Highness!"

Neacşu was still controlling himself and Grama understood that even he was worried that if he finally let some words come out of his mouth his excitement would burst unfettered and he would make a fool of himself in front of the prince.

"It's good you are young men from Şchei," the prince said, bursting into uncontrolled satisfied laughter that sounded as had sounded earlier the trotting of the horses on the old Roman stone road. "Are you many?"

"The whole village, Your Highness, as those who are married now used to be young before, and we never forget what we learn when we were young."

Prince Michael eyed him up and down once more, cast a glance behind them at the weapons that hung in full view at all the joints of the carts so that they be at hand. He looked at the Romanian captain and gave him a meaningful look. The captain whistled sharply using two fingers and the distant cart that was blocking the road was pulled aside. The cows grazing on the slope signalled they were moving as the sound of their bells was heard. Two Zaporozhe Cossacks came back from the forest, whistling; they had relieved themselves.

The people started again to gather around Grama and his senses were attacked by smells, sounds and feelings, a sure sign for him that he had to turn on his heels and leave instantly.

"We are *exploratores* for the judge of Braşov, Your Highness," he said, walking backwards to the cart.

"Tell him I'm coming," the prince said, his face brightening up.

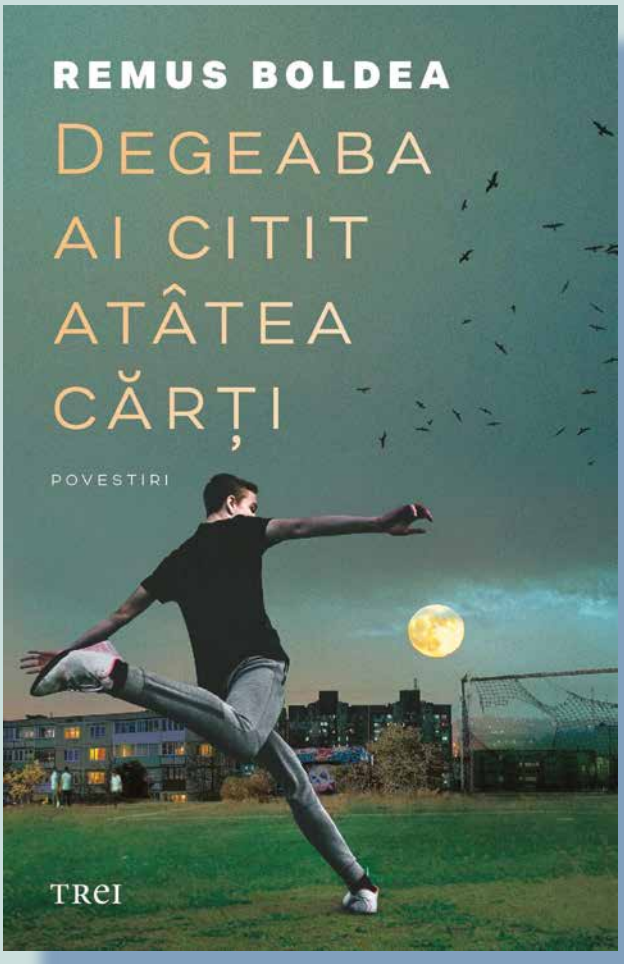
"Let him open the gates, or he'll be in great trouble!"

Neacşu and Grama climbed into their coachmen's seats smiling. They went through the rest of the gorge to the other end, in Vama Buzăului, where they stopped at the customs to account for the merchandise and have their barrels marked. They travelled among the thousands of soldiers looking only forward, at the road, homewards. At home, Neacşu knew there were a little more than 4000 mercenaries, whom twice as many were going to join; the latter were Baba Novac's haiduks and the Romanian troops of the Buzescu boyars, whom the caravans of the young men had met when they had crossed the mountains on the other road, along the River Olt Valley. Neacşu had counted 18 cannons on that day. Grama, on the other hand, also knew that all the 4000 troops on the Buzău Road were Cossacks and Poles as he had noticed the shaven heads and huge moustaches of the former and the Brandenburgs and aiguillettes that proudly adorned the chests of the military uniforms of the latter. He knew that this was a costly army as they were all battle-hardened in fights they had survived unscathed; this meant they were expensive mercenaries. Those that had not yet killed anybody could be recognized by Grama from a distance. He had noticed that they sought each other's company, they stuck together, they avoided spending too much time in the proximity of the others for fear of being discovered. For a mercenary this was some sort of disgraceful virginity which might have changed them into the laughing stock of all their comrades. He had only discovered about a dozen of

such soldiers, cheap mercenaries. He also knew they were fed quality food, the whole gorge smelt of roasted meat, he had even detected the scent of pepper, an expensive spice. This could only mean two things: first, that Prince Michael had enough money for his undertaking and second, that the soldiers had not received any money so far, therefore the deal must have been that they would be paid for a victory; to this several thalers were usually added for each slain enemy. Well fed mercenaries that were promised the pay at the end of the battle are difficult to conquer. Besides, the cart with women was placed aside, far away, next to the edge of the forest, in a sheltered spot. No woman had been allowed to get down and there was no soldier around the cart; the idea was to keep them tense as bows. ■

REMUS BOLDEA

REMUS BOLDEA (born 1993, Motru) is a young fiction writer who won the confidence of literary critics and the appreciation of those who love short stories with the very first volume he published, *My Dad Laughed, Too* (Trei Publishing House). He is a graduate of the Faculty of Philosophy, Bucharest. His educational background is obvious in his fiction, as he often hints at the atmosphere in that faculty and on the other hand his literature obviously has a speculative proclivity. He published short fiction in several magazines and on various online platforms and in 2020 he participated in a script writing camp under the supervision of Igor Cobileanski, a film director from Bessarabia. He co-wrote (with Marius Aldea) the script for a feature film that is still waiting to be produced. Since 2022 (together with Iulian Tănase, Constantin Bojog and Mihai Laurențiu Fuiorea) he has co-authored the podcast RSS Reloaded. ■



REMUS BOLDEA,
DEGEABA AI CITIT ATÂTEA CĂRȚI
[YOU'VE READ SO MANY BOOKS IN VAIN],
SHORT STORIES

TREI PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 176 P.
ISBN: 9786064025791

Synopsis

You've Read So Many Books in Vain puts together ten short stories that have in common the continuous misplacement of a young man who is contemplating a rough world and would not adopt, as far as he is concerned, the mask of cynicism, no matter how safe it might seem to do it. His glance in search of comprehension beyond comfort is what underlies the various scenarios that inform the narratives that the author proposes here. We are generally in a claustrophobic universe, little provincial towns – Motru, a miners' town in which the main character of the stories grows up like Remus Boldea himself –, small, dirty bars, tiny flats where unhappy families or violent bachelors live. One of the main topics is the broken relation with the father, a tough, absent figure, disconnected from the others and from his own feelings. This fracture and this longing for a tough and elusive father is to be found in the relations with other men, which represent another major point of reference in the book. His fascination with the macho universe in which he feels a misfit is balanced by an inner radar that suggests to him, even though subtly, another type of perspective. Yet, something of the savagery of the environment in which he grows up inhabits the main character, who gets in his turn to hurt others (his friends or potential lovers). There always subsists, however, in a subtle manner, in these texts, an impulse towards analysis and self-analysis, often filtered by reading or by philosophy. *You've Read So Many Books in Vain* offers us clearly written, compelling prose where realism is carefully measured out with a lot of knack and where the violence of inheritance – be it related to family, society or mind – is processed and interrogated in a very plausible manner. ■

Excerpt

"Sorry for barging in," says Ely, "but how can you care about someone who pretended they didn't know you each time you went to speak with them? And I hope you will not deny that you often joined him for a drink at the pub, I know it too well. Not to mention the fact that he kept coming on to me in the most lecherous manner possible all the while I worked there."

Then she stares at her lover, her eyes like the flashlight of a policeman focused on a suspect.

"Just like your dad."

"I know, that's why the last time I touched him I fucking punched him in his bloody chops," he retorts.

I breathe in. I feel my stomach sticking to my spine. It's a weird feeling to be so plump and to feel so empty inside, nevertheless.

I am studying Ely for the hundredth time. I understand why my father teased her inappropriately, I understand why Ado's father slapped her over the buttocks when she was changing the ashtray, I understand why Ado hit his father.

What I do not understand, though, is that my father's absence gave me the time to develop a number of powerful fantasies. I had to fill in that void with something. I guess many people who become monks miss their fathers. And thus, they get to replace their real father with God. God is the only father who never paid child support.

"Hey, are you still here?" yells Ado, flapping his arms as if warming up for a series of push-ups.

I am so thirsty that I would give all the money I could get from Miron for my father's body to buy myself a cold beer.

Miron was the first man to believe that the body of a dead man could have an aesthetic value. I wonder how well he might succeed to make my father look like colonel Aureliano Buendia. Wealthy people would pay a lot to see his work. Plasticised bodies exhibited in displays of various scenes from world literature.

Dad could never understand why I read books. In the very brief moments in which he chose to ask me what I was doing I told him I was reading. He once told me:

"You'll take off one day from so much reading."

"I am too fat for that," I would have liked to tell him, but I was not prompt enough.

That's what I am thinking of while I watch Ado and Ely kissing.

I envy them. Not for their love, but because the spit of their kiss reduces the dryness in their mouths.

"We need to take off, I'm dying with thirst."

"No chance, they stole the bridge."

"How come, they stole the bridge?"

"Just like that, when I got to the river only the stone pillars were left. Not even those looked untouched, though. They must have carved them until they realised there was no iron left inside and then they fucked off."

Ely disengages from Ado's hands and stretches her arms. Her shadow looks like a frail cross.

She is cracking her neck and I feel the hair on my back bristle. The sound of cracking bones reminds me of the first beating I got. I can hardly fight this memory and ask Ado:

"Well, what now?"

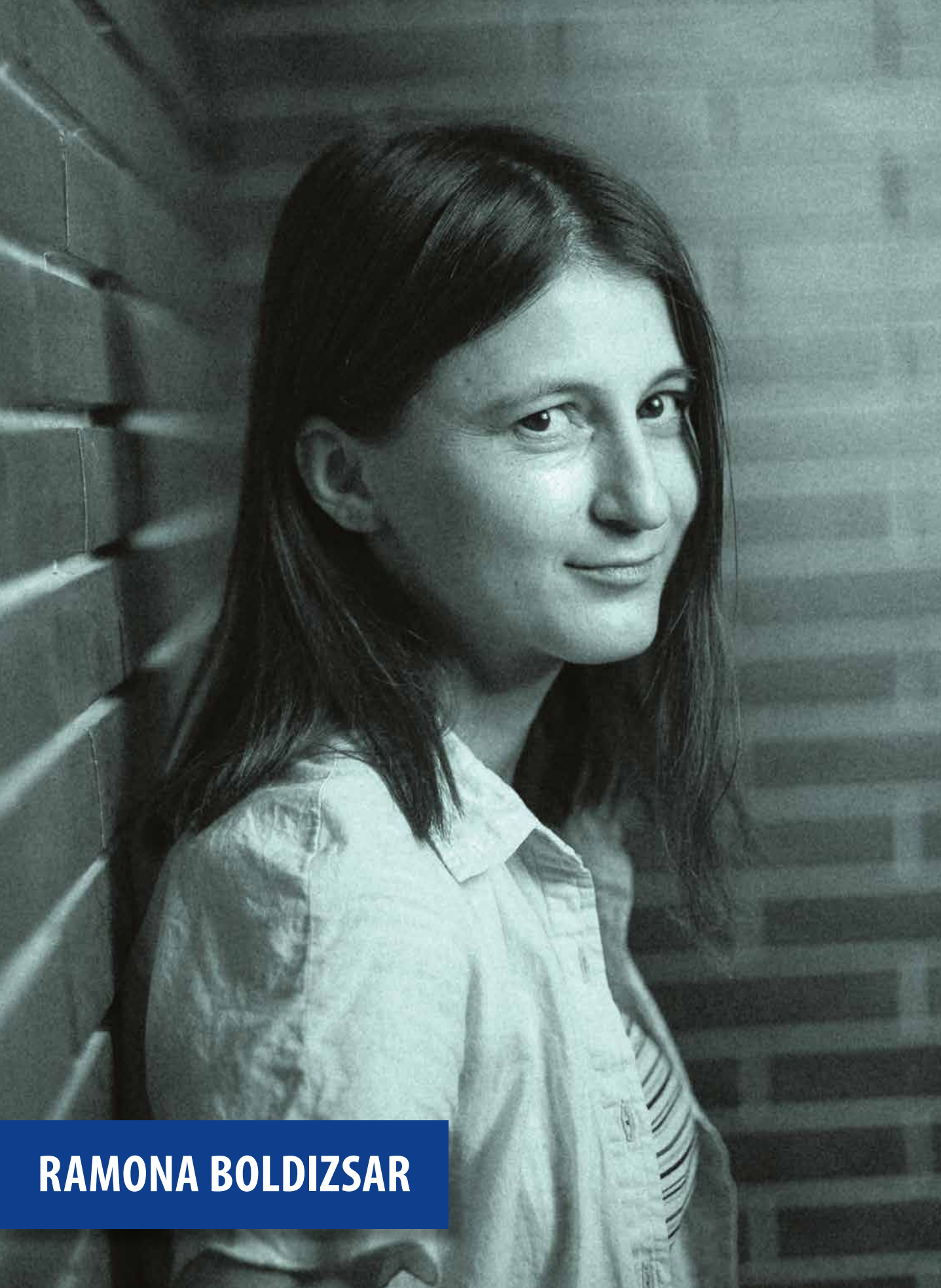
"We open those chests and let the birds eat them and then we go home and drink a beer and forget everything."

"How about the money?"

"I'll find a solution."

"If you want to let your father be eaten by birds, be my guest, but I am not going to open any chest until I get to Miron's." Ado shrugs his shoulders. He gets on the cart, steps on the chest and jumps. The birds are hovering in circles again, coming closer to the ground.

With another jump he springs away from the chest and while still in the air he pulls up his torso, then hits the wood vigorously. The wood creaks. This is one of those moments when being corpulent is useful. I could have cracked that chest by simply dropping onto it. But I suppose that using my arse to do it would have been a lack of respect that no dead man deserves. ■



RAMONA BOLDIZSAR

RAMONA BOLDIZSAR (born 1993) is a writer who has a taste for literary exploration and bookish curiosities which she materializes as a hostess of the literary podcast Perfectly Contemporary. She graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Bucharest, she participated in workshops of creative writing and she is currently coordinating the collection of poetry "Amaterasu" of the Cartex Publishing House. Her debut volume, entitled *Nothing Is Wrong with Me* was one of poetry and was published in 2021 by Casa de Pariuri Literare; in 2024 her second volume of poetry, *Tell Me Where to Press Harder*, was published by Cartex. Her central topics are identity, feminism and maternity. ■

RAMONA BOLDIZSAR,
FETE BUNE, FETE CUMINȚI
[GOOD GIRLS, DECENT GIRLS],
SHORT STORIES

HUMANITAS PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 184 P.
ISBN: 9789735089948

Synopsis

Good Girls, Decent Girls is a collection of short fiction that opens many windows into the lives of women and young girls. The main characters are all women, little girls or young women, presented in apparently common situations, which reveal, nevertheless, a lot about their lives, often marked by prejudice, the weight of roles that are unfit for them, but which have been chosen by their families and by society for them to be cast in. Yet, her heroines are not at all idealised and the cruelty that can sometimes define the dynamics of the relations between girls or even between daughters and their mothers is being investigated here directly, in connection to the patriarchal relations supporting it. A typical element for the atmosphere of these stories is that the heroines are often described or introduced to the readers either while they are cooking or from the perspective of the relation they have with food, and this viewpoint gets to reveal essential elements about their evolution, their traumas, their subordination or their acts of revolt, whether they are more or less significant. This is a book that explores feminism through fiction, focusing on narrow spaces where the vital relations of an existence can be seen in all their most dramatic and painful details. ■

Excerpt

She opens the kitchen window and lights a cigarette, she lets it burn for a long while, she hates inhaling the smoke but she loves keeping the cigarette between her fingers. Her mother had always smoked gracefully, if she hadn't known her she might have said that she didn't care at all about those cigarettes. Nevertheless, she knew, she had actually long realized that everything was about an almost unnatural self control. In fact, she smoke like a Turk, the pleasure she drew from that cigarette was awesomely unusual for her. She would take a drag and enjoy that smoke she would not release it for a while. She smoked though it yellowed her teeth, though she was the kind of person for whom physical appearance was everything, she would exercise everyday, even now she went to yoga sessions with women of her age and was in a better shape than her. Short and pretty, that's how her mother had always been.

She finishes her cigarette and puts it out thoroughly in the ashtray. She casts another glance at the phone. I'm an idiot, I know, and she actually knows it but she still sends another message to Alex. It doesn't matter what she wrote, the guy will never answer anyway. They hadn't even had so much of a shag. They hadn't even spent too much time together. She felt terribly lonely, though.

The alarm of the oven woke her from her dreams.

She carefully pulls out the tray to avoid burning her fingers and inhales the smell of freshly baked bread, an awesome, fluctuating, enticing smell. If the essence of life had a particular smell it should be that of bread freshly taken out of the oven, appropriately and plentifully spread with honey and a mixture of seeds thar are now baked too and are exquisitely roasted, just as she likes them. She is going to cut a slice of it while it is still hot and spread it with butter, maybe with some strawberry jam, too that will trickle down her chin, she will wipe it with her fingers that she will then suck, nothing can pe wasted, you can't spare a drop of it. She can picture her mother's little eyes, *Jesus, Aura, how can you eat so much, you are going to burst, stop stuffing yourself like that!* Her hand is placed on her flat belly that seems to be curved inward, her cheek bones jutting out, that body seems to break but is able to break mountain rocks and if not really mountain rocks, at least her six-foot, fat plump daughter, a glutton completely out of control.

Aura is going to rub the grease off the tray after she lets it soak for a while, she will flush it in hot water until it shines, she will wipe it thoroughly with a clean towel before she puts it back in the cupboard and this gesture alone will enable her to see the hands of her mother who would never leave anything dirty;

this will make her realize that there is something of her in Aura and she will take the tray out of the cupboard and will fling it away. Not for good, anyway. Not violently enough to make it break. How could metal break, after all?

"How about that boyfriend of yours?"

"What about him? We split up."

"How so?"

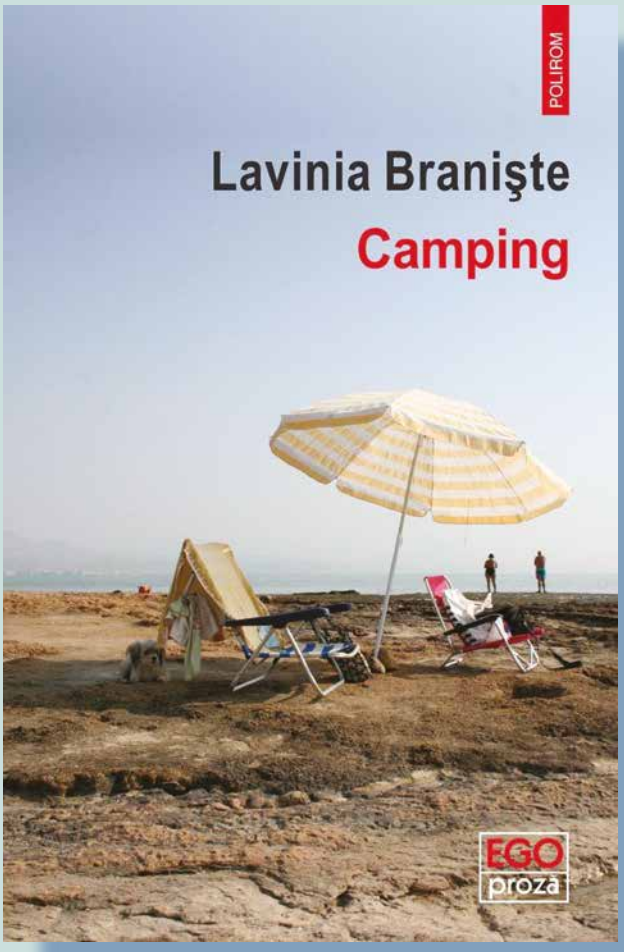
"Just so."

"I see. I hope you didn't stuff yourself out of bitterness, you must do something about those kilos, Aura, You cannot continue like that. How can anyone stay with you?"

She will have the last laugh later, on a Friday, the year is irrelevant, she will meet Alex at a market, he will be bald, big-bellied and unshaven and will try to flirt with her. She will pretend she doesn't know him and she will buy the most expensive and most fragrant apples, she will bake herself a soft apple pie and she will eat it all by herself. ■

LAVINIA BRANIȘTE

LAVINIA BRANIȘTE is one of the top-rated award-winning authors; she is also among the best-selling writers in Romania. She writes poetry, fiction and children's books; all her writings, irrespective of the genre, have enjoyed a very favourable reception . She was born in Brăila, in 1983, and read literature and foreign languages at the universities of Cluj and Bucharest. She published several volumes of short fiction, *Five Minutes per Day* (Casa de Pariuri literare Publishing House, 2011) and *Escapada* (Polirom Publishing House, 2014, 2021), the novels *Interior zero* (Polirom Publishing House, 2016, 2018, which was awarded the "Nepotu' lui Thoreau" Prize), *Sonia Raises Her Hand* (2019, 2021, a book that was awarded three important literary prizes: the Prize "Nepotu' lui Thoreau," the Prize for Fiction of the Ateneu Magazine, the Sofia Nădejde Prize for women's fiction, 2020), and *You Can Find Me Whenever You Want* (Polirom Publishing House, 2021, 2023, a novel that won the Sofia Nădejde Prize for women's fiction, 2022). In 2024 she published a volume of prose poems, *The Human Watch* (Dezarticulat Publishing House). ■



LAVINIA BRANIȘTE,
CAMPING,
NOVEL

POLIROM PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 248 P.
ISBN: 9786303441504

Synopsis

To put it simply, *Camping* is a story about migration with the constraints, weariness and identity changes that it involves over a longer period. The novel's main character is Sofia, a woman close to retiring age after 20 years of having menial jobs abroad, who is now considering returning to Romania. The title of the novel primarily refers to Sofia's workplace: the reception of a camping in Spain, where more than half of the residents are retirees from Europe, who live in trailers on the seashore. The camping, which is an environment for a comfortable transition for most people there, is for Sofia a workplace of exhausting effort and also an improvised residence. She lives in an old trailer, overloaded with objects that might be of use to her, maybe in Romania, after she returns there. Collecting things and planning the journey back, with details about costs, logistics and the stages of her relocation represent an important part of the plot which tacitly dramatizes the way in which Sofia is divided between the two spaces, the conflict between duty, self sacrifice, guilt and the few wishes she finds comfort in. The tension increases as her son Robert, who is 24, arrives; Sofia feels guilty for having left him behind, in Romania, to be raised by his grandfather. *Camping* is a striking story about loss and delusion that concentrates a whole range of feelings and experiences that originate in the condition of a migrant woman from Eastern Europe who is exhausted by toiling and worries. Motherhood and the ever complex family relations are central topics in the novel, to which we should add distance from home, hardships and the tough reality of working abroad, all subjects that are impossible to discuss with those who are left home. The style lacks any rhetorical flourishes and is chosen so as to make the drama of this woman's existence become palpable in the context of the dullest everyday life imaginable, with all its alienating routines; an existence that fostered illusions and postponed any personal joy and which seems to have grown strong enough to overcome a last, crushing disappointment, one that is generated by her own son. ■

Excerpt

Robert looks at the sealed tent. He knows from his previous visits that each time his mother left she placed marks to check if anybody got in to rake through her place in her absence, though nobody around rakes through other people's places and she is all too aware that she typically forgets where she left the marks. He would not disturb anything, though. Opening the tenda and getting into her secret universe flooded with small objects is a ritual that only his mother is able to perform accurately.

The boy sits on a worn-out beach chair and takes off his mask now that he is inside the private area of their lot. The trailer is surrounded by pots with giant ferns, different types of hoya, some of them in blossom, a sturdy laurel, with a genuine wooden trunk and very many objects that Sofia calls the profit of the house, though it is rather the money-bearing tree.

Air plants are hanging from metal hooks at the corners of the tenda; they feed on light and water from the air. There are significant differences in temperature between day time and night, and in the morning their thorny leaves are covered in dew. She took some of them home when she last came to visit and presented them to Robert, for his new apartment. They withered right away, the boy didn't take the trouble to water them.

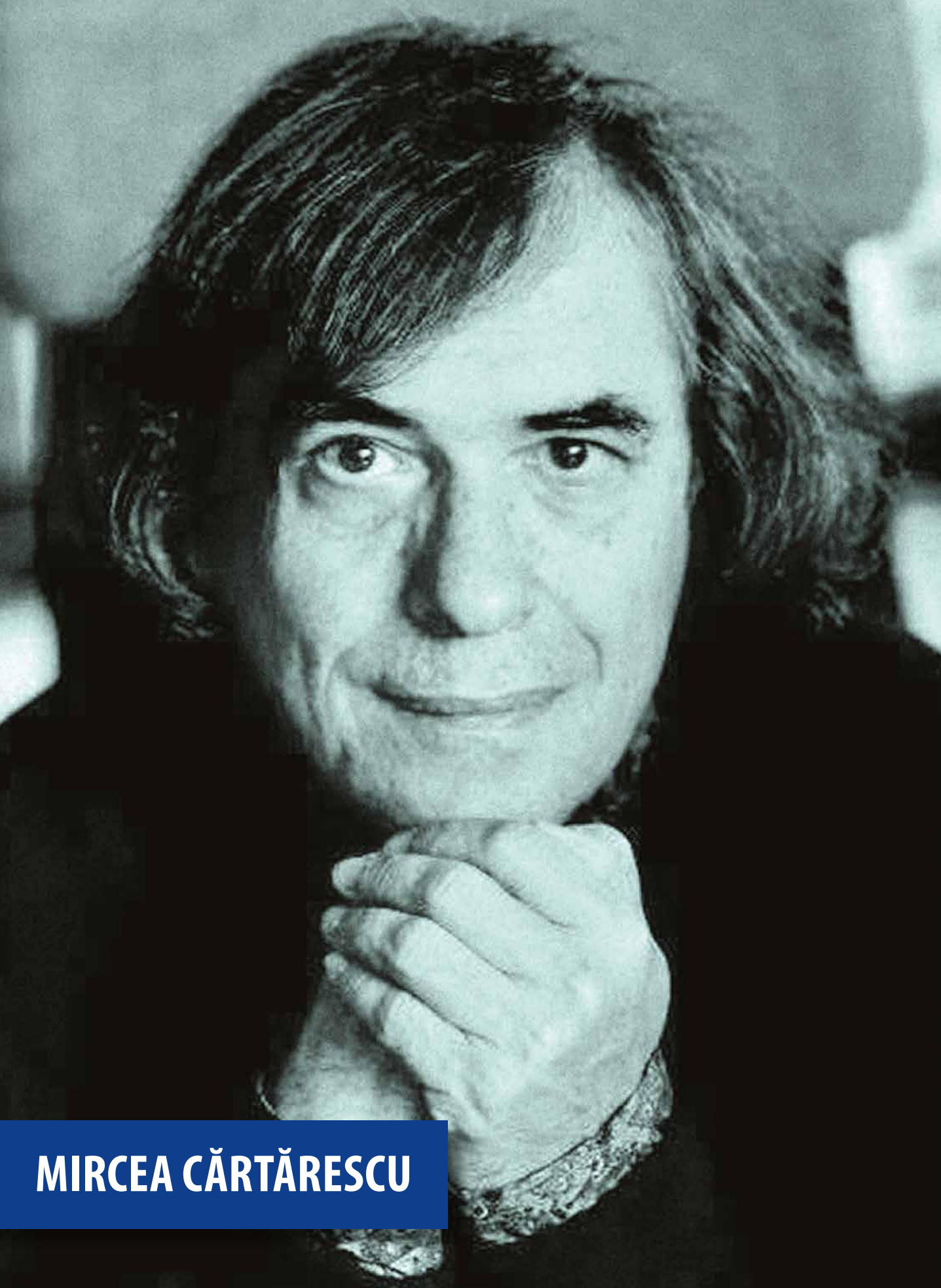
Sofia had spent all the savings she had managed to make here, all the money to the very last cent, to purchase a flat for Robert, which she put in his name. She did that for her peace of mind, for eventually coming to terms with her choices, and also for her family to see that she had not been wrong when she left, that she had managed to achieve something. The money she made was the achievement.

She waited for her husband for a very long while, she loved him deeply and didn't enjoy their relationship for long. They were both married for the first time at an old age and one day, when Robert was three months old, his father heard a whizz, lay down a little to recover, closed his eyes and never opened them again. Sofia instantly fell into a deep depression, she could no longer breastfeed her child, and her father – the only parent she still had – started to take care of the baby's bottles.

Later, when she heard that Robert was ill or could see for herself that he was listless, pale and lacked energy, when he would talk nonsense or didn't talk at all, she blamed herself for not breastfeeding him, for not helping him build an

immune system, for being unable to control her emotions and not suffer, to bear everything and keep her body healthy for the sake of the child. She also blamed herself for his teenage headaches, though he had had those headaches between 15 and 16 when he had grown to 6.5 feet. When her parental leave finished, her position of economist at the dairy factory – or what was left of the factory in the early 2000s – was no longer available. This was followed by several months of unemployment and then by the despair with which she literally looked for a job from house to house. She even asked for a job at various churches.

Her high-school friend, Gabi, had been in Spain for a while, she had brought there family and neighbours, they were all illegal immigrants and worked off the books, lived in crammed rooms, barely having enough space to move. Gabi had told her to take her slippers, as after three days and two nights spent on the coach her shoes would no longer fit her swollen feet. Sofia went to live with them. She thought it was only going to be for a couple of months. That's how she accepted the idea of leaving. Only for as long as her visa would allow her, to see how things were going to unfold, she had to try this, too, after all. She called her home from the locutorio, a combination of post office and internet café. At the end of the call she paid a fistful of money and she soon developed a panic associated with the cost of her credits. She assessed the value of coins in the number of seconds they allowed her to talk, equated them to the duration of calls, they would soon vanish, you had to communicate efficiently and this was something she hadn't managed to do at all in those months or even years of the beginnings, when their conversations were formal and they lied to each other that everything was ok. ■



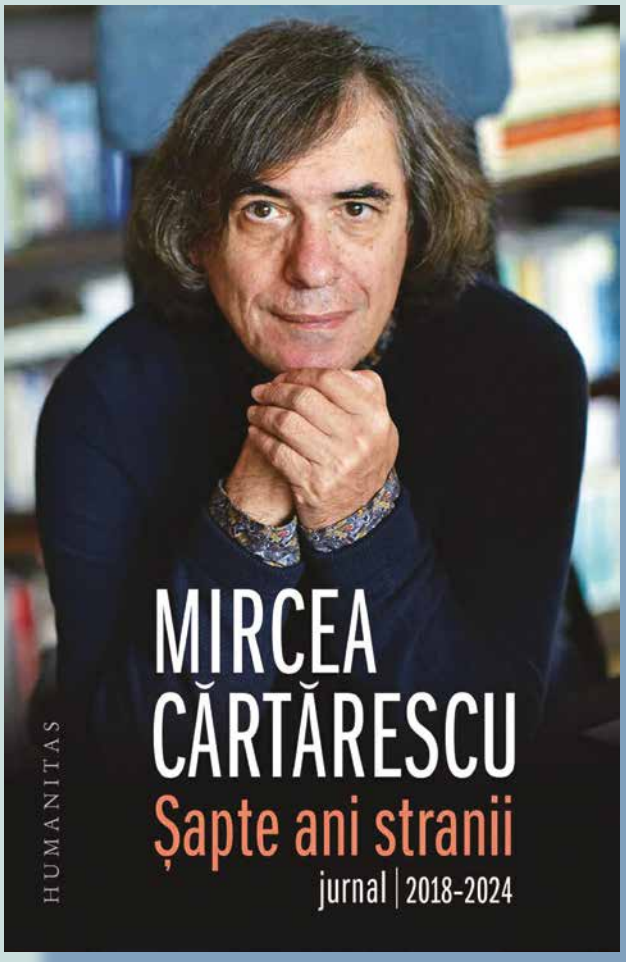
MIRCEA CĂRTĂRESCU

MIRCEA CĂRTĂRESCU (born 1956, Bucharest) is the best known and internationally renowned Romanian author, an accomplished writer with a clearly recognizable stylistic individuality and an undeniable influence on our literature. He is a poet, a fiction writer, an essay writer, a literary critic and a journalist, one of the most dedicated and consistent diarists in the Romanian literature.

The list of volumes he has published since the 1980s is impressive and here is a selection of the most important titles: *Front Lights, Shop Windows, Photographs* (poems, Cartea Românească, 1980), *Love Poems* (Cartea Românească, 1982), *Everything* (poems, Cartea Românească, 1984), *The Dream* (in subsequent editions it was published with the title *Nostalgia*, short stories, Cartea Românească, 1989, Humanitas, 1993), *The Levant* (epic poem, Cartea Românească, 1990, Humanitas, 1998), *The Chimeric Dream* (critical study, Litera, 1991, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2011), *Travesti* (novel, Humanitas, 1994; it became a graphic novel in French), *Love* (poems, Humanitas, 1994), *Blinding. The Left Wing* (novel, Humanitas, 1996), *Double CD* (poems, Humanitas, Bucharest, 1998), *Romanian Postmodernism* (critical study, Humanitas, 1999), five diaries published at intervals of seven years, starting in 2001, *Blinding. The Body* (novel, Humanitas, 2002), *The Encyclopaedia of Dragons* (children's book, Humanitas, 2002), *Forever Young, Folded in Pixels* (journalistic writings, Humanitas, 2003), *Plurivers* vol. I and II (poems, Humanitas, 2003), *Fifty Sonnets* (poems, Brumar, 2003), *Why We Love Women* (stories and audiobook, Humanitas, 2004), *Baron!* (Humanitas, 2005), *Blinding. The Right Wing*, (novel, Humanitas, 2007), *Double Album* (Humanitas, 2009), *Nothing* (Humanitas, 2010), *The Beautiful Strangers* (stories, Humanitas, 2010), *Poetry* (Humanitas, 2015), *Solenoid* (novel, Humanitas, 2015), *Melancholy* (Humanitas, 2019), *The Carpenter's Pencil* (Humanitas, 2020), *Never Cry for Help* (Humanitas, 2020), *Theodoros* (novel, Humanitas, 2022).

His books were translated into English, German, Italian, French, Swedish, Spanish, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese, Hungarian, Hebrew, Norwegian, Bulgarian, Slovenian, Danish, Basque, Russian, Greek, Turkish, Croatian, Serbian, Catalan, etc. The list of national and international awards is remarkable; among the most important such awards we mention: the International Prize for Literature "Haus der Kulturen der Welt," Berlin (2012), the International Prize for Literature, Berlin (2012), the Great Prize of the International Festival of Poetry in Novi Sad (2013), the Euskadi de Plata Prize, San Sebastian (2014), the Prize of Books for European Cooperation of the City of Leipzig (2015), the State Prize of Austria for European Literature, 2015, the Leteo Prize, Spain (2017), Premio Formentor de las Letras (2018), Prix Transfuge, Paris, 2019, Prix Millepages, Vincennes, 2019, the FIL Prize for Literature in Romance Languages, Guadalajara, 2022, Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Fiction, 2023, the International Dublin Literary Award, 2024. The novel *Solenoid* was nominated for the International Booker Prize (2025).

Mircea Cărtărescu is currently an emeritus professor at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bucharest. ■



MIRCEA CĂRTĂRESCU,
ȘAPTE ANI STRANII (2018-2024)
[SEVEN STRANGE YEARS (2018-2024)],
DIARY

HUMANITAS PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 680 P.
ISBN: 9789735088422

Synopsis

Seven Strange Years is the fifth diary published by Mircea Cărtărescu and it covers the time of the pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, the major events that involved us collectively; it is also a period of consequential travels, triggered by the international success that his novels have enjoyed lately. The notes that he made during these years record a wide range of emotions but they also include, as his previous diaries, reading notes, details about the making of his own books (*Theodoros* has a privileged position in this respect), literary comments, analyses of his own aesthetic and ethical choices as well as of the literary influence of various reference authors for Cărtărescu and his literary creed: Kafka, Thomas Pynchon or Salinger. Everything is recorded in the diary: from dreams to a journey through countless cultural spaces which generate rich pages of travelling diary, to numerous notes about his readings, comments on the art of the novel and the trends in today's literature, to meditations on crises of all kinds, including those caused by aging. Mircea Cărtărescu's lifelong obsessions, among which the obsession with literature stands out as a governing principle of his existence, are reasserted in these pages among considerations on his own writing, his literary trajectory, his recognition and position in the literary world one day after another, one book after another. However, the diary is not only a universe of self contemplation, it also offers genuine sketches and dynamic scenes as it processes and comments both the writer's inner world and the one he discovers along his countless daily journeys, at home, in his country or during the numberless travels for promoting his books that were translated and awarded prizes all over the world. ■

Excerpt

21 Sept. I have surprisingly finished "Theodoros". I don't know what to say, I really don't. I am no longer able to think very clearly. What should a book be like? How should it be, what about? I am afraid to read it again, I am afraid to publish it. I have never finished a book in such terrible circumstances. At least it is not a book without rhyme and reason, ha-ha! I will read everything again and make adjustments, if possible, and then I'll give it to Humanitas Publishers and I'll wash my hands of it. Period!

The people from Bonniers (Lina) let me know that next year – from January on – they will publish both *Nostalgia* (in their classics collection) and *Melancholy*.

27 Sept. I completely forgot about "Theodoros" – anyway my mind was not really at it even when I was writing it. I wonder if I haven't done it to get rid of the depression and of the consequences of the pandemic. I handed it over to Lidia now, so the ball is no longer in my court. I don't regret having written this book, though, a book I had abandoned for decades precisely for such difficult times when you must spend your time in some way. Many will put it down anyway after several dozen pages as the book actually begins like (and unlike) Solenoid, after the first 200 de pages or so. I read it again very fast, racing through its pages and only hunting typing mistakes so that I couldn't get a clear image (the more so that I know it very well). I know that I burst into tears several times – mainly reading the scenes with Solomon and Makeda – and I also had fun several times, but I didn't laugh, as you cannot chuckle to yourself. I also know that the last pages can be improved. I haven't got the slightest idea about what really matters: is it going to be well received? Will it be loved? Can it be translated felicitously? I don't know, I really don't. It remains to be seen in the years to come.

I'm breathing more freely the cold autumn season that I have been granted. I am living peacefully, sometimes elatedly, sometimes voluptuously, sometimes even melancholically – yet, this is no longer the acid, invalidating, killing melancholy of a couple of months ago, it is a light, misty one –, in our house and in our garden that is still full of flowers, I'm living extremely gratefully with Ioana and (sometimes) with Gabriel. It feels good, it is cool, I am at peace deep down, though every now and then I am struck by panic as by a giant wave hitting me in the back which, however, doesn't drag me to the bottom. I'm fine, though, I'm fine, as I thought that I'd never be again.

This year only six translations of my books have been published, half the number of those published last year, but the year 2021 was exceptional. However, the increase in my notoriety is huge, my books have conquered (sentimentally,

not militarily, I hope) tremendously extensive areas in the world and even in this country I rose in the esteem of my countrymen, mainly since they learnt how much money the FIL Prize came with. Maybe the American Solenoid will finally be the breakthrough I expect it to be as far as the indifference and ignorance of the Anglo-Saxon world to my writings is concerned. Or maybe not, since so far I haven't got any sign of appreciation or any kind of interest from the publishers. They will release the beast from its cage without any warning. What do I care, after all? They did the same with Nostalgia and Blinding and they missed opportunities and lost money. I am not going to teach them their trade.

The translations have already had very good reviews, even *Melancholy*, which is so underrated in our country. Not to mention the so much deprecated and hated – by almost all our critics – *The Right Wing*, already considered a masterpiece in the Hispanic world. ■

CĂTĂLIN CEAUȘOGLU

CĂTĂLIN CEAUȘOGLU (born 1973, Râmnicu Vâlcea) made his debut in fiction in 2019, in the *Iocan* magazine, a periodical dedicated to publishing short fiction, and in 2022 he published a volume of short stories, *Seven Stories that Do Not End Well for Everybody* (Nemira) that was awarded the prize for the Inconspicuous Book of the Year. He also published fiction in the collective volume *The Great Romantic Debacle* and on his own site: nowherenation.club. He lives in Bucharest where he studied at the Faculty of Electronics and Telecommunications. *The Uprooted* is his fist novel. ■

CĂTĂLIN CEAUȘOGLU,
DEZRĂDĂCINAȚII
[THE UPROOTED],
NOVEL

TREI PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 680 P.
ISBN: 9786064026095

Synopsis

The Uprooted is a polyphonic novel with a detective plot that probes the 1980s in Communist Romania, starting from the complex investigation of a disappearance. In 1984, in Govora – a Romanian spa resort – a 13-year-old girl, Ana Decu, vanishes. Ana is the prize-winning daughter of Angelica, a reclusive librarian whose husband died under suspicious circumstances in prison, hunted for political reasons: in his youth, he had participated in an anti-communist demonstration. The case is investigated by a passionate and dedicated young lieutenant, Sebastian Popa, and brought back to light fifteen years later by the research of a French journalist, Sophie Tobrouk – the creator of a successful show, *Histoire en détail*, who is herself linked to Romania through a complex story. The past is thus explored both from a distance and from the perspective of a different social order, following the collapse of Communism, as well as from an external angle – that of a spectator from an entirely different culture, with different knowledge and stakes. The investigations triggered by Ana's disappearance set in motion a layered story, full of suspense and mystery, propelled by brisk dialogues and a gripping atmosphere. With an action unfolding across multiple planes, the novel – written with great attention to style and detail – probes an entire universe preserved in a time capsule: intricate family relationships, the life of public institutions, the interactions between acquaintances from whose scrutinising eyes nothing escapes in an isolated small town: secrets, betrayals. In short, the novel depicts an entire social dynamic as it was possible in the 80s, when political intrusion into everyone's privacy tainted every interaction with suspicion and anxiety. Beyond the inner workings of a perfectly constructed thriller, *The Uprooted* is also a meditation on a past that constantly eludes us and inserts itself into the present with all that remains unresolved and misunderstood. ■

Excerpt

The wine Corina is bringing, though a little bit sweet for her taste, is really good; anyway, much better than anything she had tried before in Romania. She cannot understand how a country with such a tremendous potential manages to produce so bad wines. Actually, there is nothing surprising about that: Communism ruined everything that could be ruined, from the solid stone walls to the frail minds of the people; why would be wines different from that?

Yet, in thirty years from now this country will successfully compete with France and Italy. I should move here and start making wine.

Before working for the TV station Sophie had studied at Institut Agro Montpellier.

I guess we might buy a vineyard for nothing.

She realizes that she has used the plural but Ileana breaks her train of thoughts.

"You must be wondering how I know who you are."

"Not at all. I grew up in a place not much bigger than this. Except the forest."

"I met someone who believed the forest is to blame for all evil."

"How's that?" Sophie flinches.

"As it seems easy to use it as a closet where you can hide your skeletons. However, that is not at all true."

Seems to be a pretty widespread theory.

"Did anything bad happen to that person?"

"They ran away. If that was bad or good, I cannot say. For me it was certainly not good."

She shrugs off the bitter trace lingering in her smile.

"What I actually meant is... that Sebastian Popa is the person who was most familiar with the case of Ana Decu as he worked for the communist police from '83 to '89. Here, in Govora."

"And where can we find Mr. Popa?"

"If I only knew..."

The same smile, the same trace.

"However, I can put you in touch with the person who was very close to him during those years."

"That is you."

Ileana nods.

"Sebastian was obsessed with the idea of finding Ana Decu. She was his fata morgana."

"And he could only get rid of this obsession by running away."

"I hope so. He ran away anyway. We were lovers for as long as he stayed, though. It was not at all comfortable to love such a man… I was, however, the only person he confided his obsession to. I was naive enough to believe that, if I knew more about what he did and what was troubling him I could cure him. Looking back I realize now how stupid I was."

"Young sounds better," Sophie corrects her.

She is still young. And beautiful. Time had only made her body a little curvier and just two fine wrinkles that start from the corners of each of her eyes and go to her temples. *A few hours at the hair stylist and the beauty salon plus a little bit of shopping and nobody could recognize her.* Suddenly she feels like hugging her. She seems to hear Antoine: "Come on, Sophie, we've been working on these issues of yours for five years now."

So she changes her mind and says:

"If that comforts you in any way, I understand you very well. One day, my brother Henri decided to join the army and I haven't heard a word from him since. And, even worse, I have no idea why he did it."

"Let bygones be bygones."

She wipes away an imaginary past with a gesture of her hand. Sophie gets to the point:

"Tell me, please, how do you reckon we should proceed?"

Ileana takes a piece of paper out of her handbag.

"Well, I'll tell you all I know and I've also drawn this list. These are people who were involved in this business at some point or another. They are still alive and I know where we can find them. I am sure that through them we can get to other people, too. I cannot guarantee that they will be willing to talk, but I think we can persuade them to. Some of them used to be my patients, we are on good terms, you know how it is…"

"Do you think they would agree to be filmed?"

"I doubt it. The people from Govora are reticent. Some might not even agree to talk to you. To a stranger, I mean. But they would talk to me."

"I see. What if we... you asked them to write down everything they remembered?"

"As long as they don't have to sign that..."

Sophie extends her hand. She could not have hoped for a better *fixeur*.

"I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Ileana is smiling.

She is happy like a child.

Though she is not quite sure how she could use some anonymous recollections.

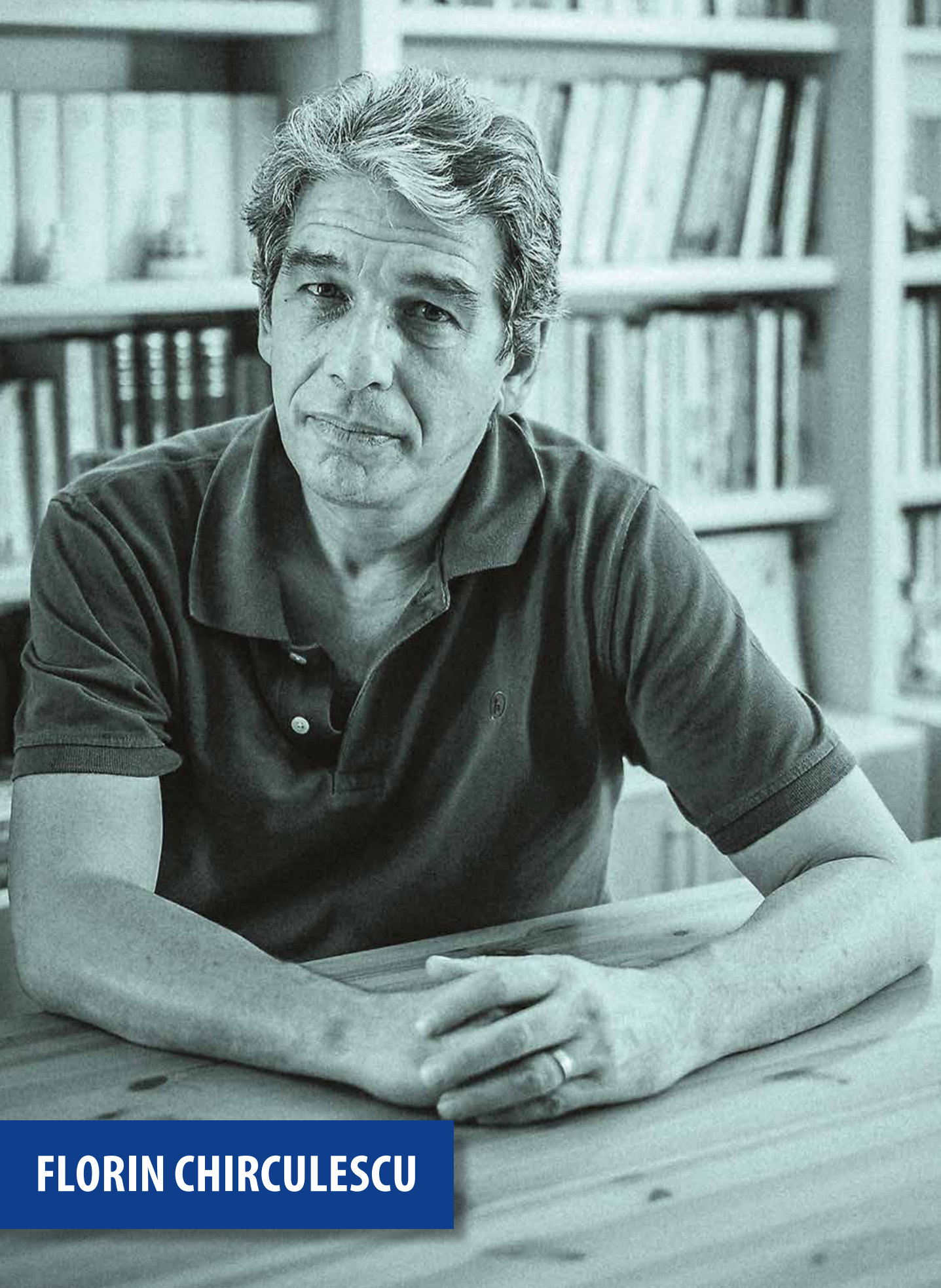
What if I gave up my TV show and I wrote a book instead?

The notoriety of her name would guarantee a certain audience, but it would not be enough.

I could, however, publish a book based on my TV show.

This seems to her a really good idea and the TV station would not have any reason to oppose it.

Corina shows up with the food and they both rush for the vegetable soup, which is a little bit sour and only slightly sweetened with a teaspoon of sour cream. She likes the taste of Romanian soups and the idea with the vineyard doesn't seem crazy at all to her. She is going to go to the forest, too, one of the following days. According to Thierry, this is a must. ■



FLORIN CHIRCULESCU

FLORIN CHIRCULESCU (born 1960, Bucharest) is a vaunted fiction writer and a renowned specialist in chest surgery. He first published a volume of short fiction that won the Prize for European Debut at the Glasgow Eurocon in 1995. He signed nine volume of SF under the name of Sebastian A. Corn. They represent reference points in Romanian science fiction. *The Strike of the Sinners or the Apocryphal Writing of a Jew* (Nemira, 2017) is the first literary fiction that he published under his real name and it was a success with both the public and the critics. In 2022 he published *The Weather Wizard* (N'autor Collection, Nemira) followed by *North through South-West* (Tritonic, 2025), *The Orphans* and *The Brawl* (both published in the N'autor Collection, Nemira, 2025). His novels have vast, labyrinthic plots, the characters being involved in complex dynamic situations with unexpected ramifications. ■

FLORIN CHIRCULESCU,
ORFANII
[THE ORPHANS],
NOVEL

NEMIRA PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 400 P.
ISBN: 9786064320544

Synopsis

The Orphans is a vivid picaresque novel whose plot connects the Bucharest of our times to sinuous roads that lead to Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Israel, Ukraine and Afghanistan. The story has two main plotlines, each of them starting from the two narrative poles, respectively: the Occident and the Orient. The beginning of the book focuses on Octav Mavru, a famous lawyer from Bucharest, an uncomfortable character holding reactionary views and dangerous connections in very many circles. Mavru flees the country together with Beguma, his client in a divorce case when he comes to be suspected of having shot Beguma's husband, a very rich and influential man. They are joined by Beguma's daughter, the teenager Lia, whom they cannot leave alone, and in order for the plot to look more like a Tarantino movie, the three of them are looking for the missing son of Octav, Andrei, who, in defiance of his father and in agreement with his Marxist convictions, had fled the country years before, together with Beguma's daughter, Mihaela. All of them seem to be on Interpol's wanted list. From the other pole we watch the odyssey of a young Afghan woman, Malalai, who travels from the Orient to Europe, in the opposite direction to the journey undertaken by the Eurosceptic Octav. The stories, the dilemmas, the pursuits of the characters converge in an *on the road* kind of narrative that gradually reveals its stakes and the real driving forces behind the protagonists. Beyond the level that revolves around a vivid epic story, the novel combines various historical strata and insights into the mentalities that confer identity to the spaces traversed by the escapees, presenting a territory of historical, political and mentality questioning. It is a false adventure novel with Rocambolesque pursuits and twists. *The Orphans* opens a wider universe of meditation, both at an individual and a collective level, on inheritance, choices and opportunities. ■

Excerpt

The Gültekins live close by, a stone's throw from a *cemevi*. Their house has a view to the mosque across an apricot orchard that lies between two walls hiding it from the people in the street. *Dede* stays in the shop while Irfan accompanies us, as unfriendly as before. When we are about to enter the house, a tall, middle-aged woman whispers something to him and his face grows even darker. The young man entrusts us to her care and vanishes.

The woman heaves a deep sigh – is it of pity, of fear, of anger? In a few moments her face relaxes: she tells us her name is Damla, takes Lia by the arm and leads us upstairs into a room with large windows, which open to the bazaar. There are sophas along the walls, the floor is covered by a carpet and the bathroom is next to the entrance.

Lia, as soon as we are alone:

"Are you saying that we are going to take off to Lebanon?"

"It's none of your business," Beguma cuts her off.

"The hell it isn't! Are you taking me to those nutcases and their bombs? Why didn't we flee to the West? *You* came up with this plan?" She shoots me a piercing look.

"I didn't come up with any plan, that's how it came out."

"So somebody shot my dad in the knee and we are running after my sister not really knowing where she is. Is that what I am to understand?"

"Shut up!" Beguma jolts her. "We had no idea that it would come to this."

"Shit!" the girl gnashes her teeth in disgust, "it won't be long until you'll place me in a whorehouse, what the fuck! Not even those loser scouts did get me into such stinking holes!"

"Never mind, it will do you good. You seemed to believe that life was a bed of roses!"

"Is this why you are taking me to Lebanon? To teach me a lesson? I don't know my sister, no idea why she ran away with Andrei and you are dragging me after them! Stupid that I was, I should have got off your cart!" she turns to me.

"Shut up, don't you get it?" Beguma snarls.

Lia doesn't give up:

"I don't even know what happened to dad! If I only had had the phone, I could have checked the news," she adds flopping down on the sofa.

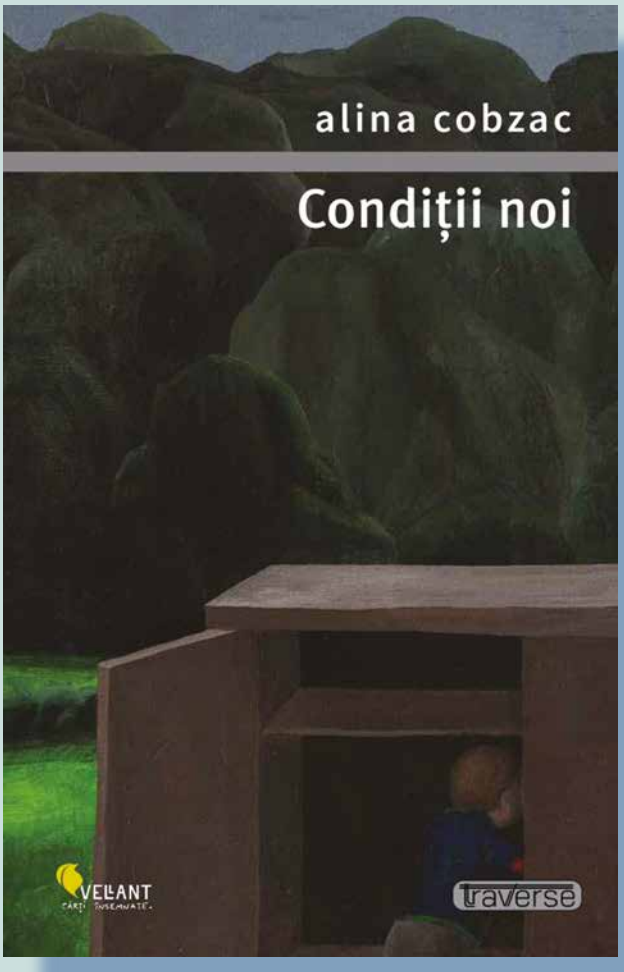
I pull out the map. Where shall we cross Syria? And if we manage to go beyond Syria, will we find these two in Lebanon or maybe we'll need to go even further? As Lia puts it, Andrei and Miha ran out in the sticks and we don't know

why. I haven't the slightest idea what Beguma's daughter was thinking, but my son had run away out of spite: he had lost it, he kept saying the world was falling apart, he complained about the distribution of money, you would have said he had been born with Marx and Lenin's works in his hand. In vain did I tell him about the lines for food during the socialist years, or that they cut off the power and shut us up, he would play me by the book, telling me about big capital: what kind of freedom was this when the rich got even richer plundering the poor? You are a lawyer, you have all you want, and yet you don't sit at the same table as the big shots! Are you Vanguard perchance? Or Blackrock, Monsanto? Far from it, you are nobody, but you think that money makes you somebody; you kiss the arse of these scoundrels, you smile at them like a loser, you are the slave of every old fart! Well, I definitely don't feel like eating all this crap like you.

And he disappeared. We tried to get track of him with the help of intelligence services and of the underground world, we couldn't find him. Some people claimed to have seen him at the Szeged rock festival, or in a colony of hippies from Genoa, or working in a bar in Boston, we were even told he had taken the holy vows at a monastery in Kiev. As far as Andrei was concerned, he didn't send me a word, he was punishing me. It's true, however, that he let me know every now and then that he was all right, but he did it spilling accusations: you are completely out of touch with reality, you trampled over me, you cunningly tried to influence me, you kept me in luxury in that oversized house that you didn't deserve! Somehow, I didn't care any longer that he was a crazy Marxist, if you think what a mess has the world of today become, you can be anything provided you make it messier! And now I get this bloody pillow from him on which he wrote Dad! Come, please! Is he afraid of something, is this a cry for help maybe a way of saying he is sorry? Besides, what about this smell the pillow has, it must have a significance, too, as this is how Andrei acts: he is never straightforward, he doesn't look you in the eye, he is always evasive, that's how he has been since he was very young. Why does his pillow smell different from the rest of Gültekin's pillows? Could this be a message, too? There's no point talking about Boulbinet and the ray fish: it's his way of making me aware that it was he who sent the pillow, not anybody else; it hinted at my father's African stories, the father I threw into the frozen waters of the Neva. ■

ALINA COBZAC

ALINA COBZAC (born 1981) was a student at the Faculty of Letters of Bucharest. She worked as a TV producer for a number of studios while also attending workshops and creative writing classes. Her texts were published in a number of periodicals and on platforms dedicated to short fiction: the magazine *Iocan*, *The Short Story Magazine*, *Unsigned* and *Liternautica*. *New conditions* is her debut book, published by Vellant Publishing House. ■



ALINA COBZAC,
CONDIȚII NOI
[NEW CONDITIONS],
SHORT STORIES

VELLANT PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 208 P.
ISBN: 9786069802120

Synopsis

The stories in this volume are deeply anchored in the convention of realism but they gradually veer to the unnatural or to alternative realities, starting from the traditional question *what if?* For instance, what if all the people from a Romanian village migrated to Italy and the only persons left behind were a couple who took care of all the funerary rituals required for the deceased of the families that left the village? The topics are often treated humorously and are selected from those that have left an indelible mark on our society today; they cover both political and individual problems: the relationship crises, the dysfunctional work patterns, the problems families face, most of them being concealed or avoided, corruption in society, presented both in a serious and a comical register, the innocence preceding the first disillusions, the need for giving and receiving affection – the impulse that defines us as humans and is visible at any age. The scrutinising eye of the writer accurately focuses on a subtle range of details, keeping a viewpoint where harmony, empathy, justice, balance and hope are the main lines of escape. Migration, downshifting, environmental challenges and the entire ethos deriving from here complete the scope of interests that Alina Cobzac explores fictionally, in a clear and refreshing manner. ■

Excerpt

The deacon and his wife stayed in the village, they were in charge with watching over the ancestors' eternal rest. He would read Memory Eternal – the priest had authorized him –, she would make kolyvas on All Souls' Day and kept the candles burning. Previously, when just a few people from the village were working in Italy, nobody bothered about the ancestors and their remains. Yet, the more the community of Pipirigele was reconfiguring itself in foreign lands, the more the living had started to be haunted by the thought of the departed. That's how they reached the conclusion that somebody needed to sacrifice themselves in the name of their relatives that had long been turned to dust. And to this purpose, *gli italiani* sent provisions to the last inhabitants of the village. So that they be happy and well provided for and that in their turn make happy the parents and grandparents of those who had left.

Dan turned off the light and went to sleep. His bent back touches her and she can feel his irregular breath. The woman cannot sleep. She first counts the sheep then her dead parents march before her eyes followed by her two children who failed to develop and be born. Her mind is wandering, making her dizzy, exhausting her. She removes the duvet and puts on the worn out galoshes of the priest's wife. She wraps the black scarf round her shoulders and, walking on tiptoes, opens the door of the balcony.

It had snowed for three days on end but the village had frozen still for some hours now. Tudora is contemplating the graveyard as she is holding the scarf against her chest; she is breathing out frozen plumes. She looks at the hundreds of flickering candles. Only once had she complained that the LED ones were no good: either they went out, or they glimmered too faintly; *gli italiani* came up instantly with a solution. The following week Cargus Delivery unloaded, outside the parish house, packages of red, 16-inch candles, fitted with supports and covers.

The woman took Dan's dictionary from the library and translated what was written on the label in bold letters: designed to burn one hundred and forty hours. If anyone had the curiosity to cross the graveyard from one end to the other, they couldn't find even a single cross that didn't have a burning candle next to it. Even the oldest inhabitants enjoyed the same treatment. It was a peaceful spot and everybody rested in peace in a genuine place of light, of repose, but no refreshment, covered in a thick layer of snow.

The graveyard would certainly win any beauty contest if anybody thought of running one. Teodora had no doubt that it would beat even the famous Săpânța

one. A board chaired by the priest's wife decided – after meticulously studying the design and architecture of other graveyards in Italy – that a single colour should be used. Red candles, red wreaths hanging from each cross, poinsettias. Red goes with anything, they told her on the phone, it goes with the green of summer grass but also with the white of winter snow. Simple and inconspicuous.

Tudora looks once again in the direction of the graveyard. She makes sure that everything is sorted out for the following day and gets back to bed. She presses her back to her husband's and pulls the duvet over her shoulders.

In blessed repose, grant eternal rest, Oh Lord, to the souls of Thy departed servants who are now remembered, and make their memory eternal.

The chant of Memory Eternal bursts out in dozens of voices.

"Dan, are you with me? I think I've lost the connection."

"Yes, father, I am here."

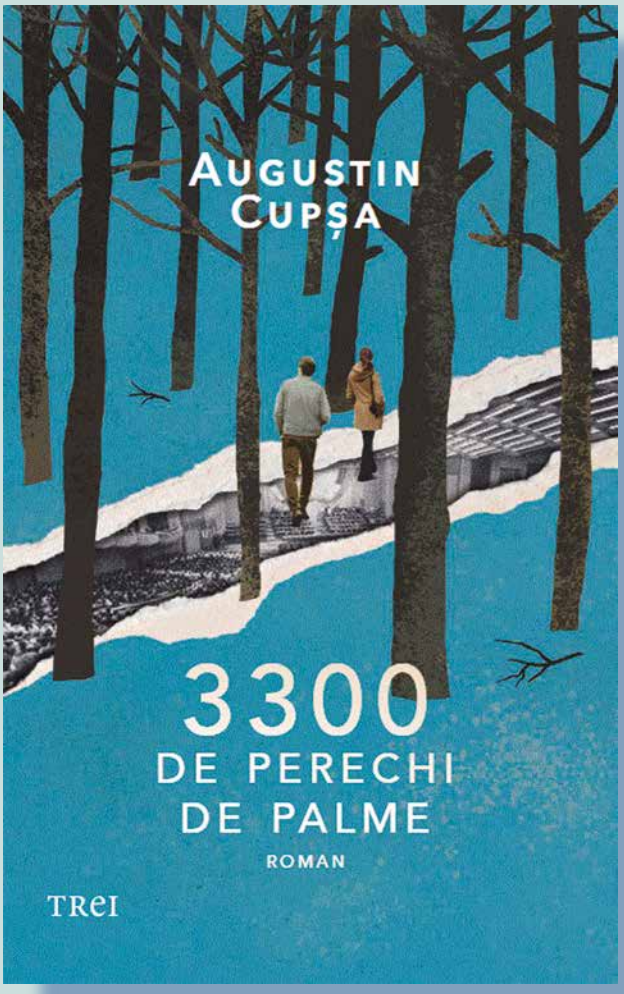
"Turn the tablet to the grave, so that Ana can see it. Hold the tablet in your left hand and the bottle in the right one." Dan comes closer to the white mound. He sprinkles it with a few drops of wine and moves the tablet along the grave so that *gli italiani* should not miss any of his movements. Tudora is standing next to him with the censer and the plate with the kolyva.

"Can you see that, father?" the deacon asks.

"Yes, that's perfect!" ■

AUGUSTIN CUPȘA

AUGUSTIN CUPȘA (born 1980, Craiova) is one of the Romanian fiction writers with an unmistakable stylistic footprint – a realist author for whom the story matters just as much as the form of expression it takes. He studied Medicine and worked as a psychiatrist in Bucharest and Paris. Later, he earned his Master's degree from the Center of Excellence in Image Studies (CESI) at the University of Bucharest, with a research thesis focused on the "selfie" and the photography of Friedl Kubelka. His works include screenplays, short stories, essays, novels, and children's books. He made his literary debut in 2006 with the experimental novel *Punchers,* which received awards from two prominent literary magazines, *Ramuri* and *Mozaicul*. He went on writing short fiction and scripts, and he returned to the novel in 2017 with *May the Grass Grow Over Us* (Humanitas). This work earned him nominations for the "Nepotul lu' Thoreau" Reading Club Award, the Cărturești Bookstores' "The Reader is Always Right" campaign, the PEN Romania Award, and the European Union Prize for Literature. Also published by Humanitas are his short story collections *The Great Joys and the Great Sorrows* (2021) and *Foreign Lands* (2022). The latter was nominated for the Romanian Writers' Union Prize and won the ARIEL Prize. ■



AUGUSTIN CUPȘA,
3300 DE PERECHI DE PALME
[3300 PAIRS OF SLAPS IN THE FACE],
NOVEL

TREI PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 368 P.
ISBN: 9786064028389

Synopsis

3300 Pairs of Slaps in the Face is a novel as vast, complex and ambitious as it is reader-friendly. Stories from different eras, with protagonists bound by threads that withstand the passage of time, seamlessly pass the baton to one another. The stories are set in motion by a project involving two central characters: a journalist and a female photographer ten years his junior, who set out to find a subject for a nationwide reportage during Romania's Centennial year, 2018. Meanwhile, she is searching for her mother, who has fled the hospital, while he engages in conversations about the past with his own mother – a process that brings to light traumas, often passed down through generations, but also the possibility of human connection despite the ways people have been hurt. Within the magma of this novel – which, starting from small, kitchen-table history, manages through carefully calibrated leaps to cover an entire century and complex social phenomena – lie key moments and realities that have marked the destinies of whole generations: the ravages of World War I and the facilities granted to war orphans; the plight of Romanian troops caught on the wrong side of history during the Battle of Stalingrad; the years of Romanian Communism; the 1989 Revolution and the harshness of the transition as well as the protests and demonstrations that followed leading up to the novel›s present day. It is a book where the care for style, factual accuracy, and the coherence of a large-scale epic construction is a major ingredient. Social observation, inquiries into the past and the dilemmas of the present – explored by the two protagonists in their journalistic adventure – define the major coordinates of the novel. ■

Excerpt

In an apartment building stairway you can see how the world has changed, he told her.

The world? How do you mean? she said while looking at the painted walls divided in half by a horizontal brown line above which you could see yellowish lime while underneath oil paint, the colour of malachite.

I mean us, what we were, he said pointing to a rubber mat as my mother used to say. History is conspicuous in blocks of flats.

The girl stood in front of the building noticeboard and looked at the list of names of the people living there, the sums they had to pay for the maintenance fund, the number of people in each flat, who owed money to the fund and how much they had to pay. After the district heating stations were wrecked as they were old and unprofitable, hot water came to just trickle through the pipes while radiators became as cold as they had been before the Revolution; the transition years trotted like horses led by the bridle upstairs in the buildings and people were forced to run away where they could; some went back to the countryside, others went abroad, while the luckiest of them all moved to the new buildings of the capitalist society, where the slightest element of comfort was strictly measured by heating and water metres. The maintenance list read: one person, one person, two persons, one person, none, none in two or three bedroom flats.

The woman they were looking for lived on the top floor; the girl tilted her head back and looked up the shaft formed by the staircase that was going up along the AAC walls; they looked like vertical frames with their light green ebonite railings that were interrupted every now and then by broad pieces of rusty iron where the coating had cracked and fallen off.

Most of the tenants moved in in the 1970s-1980s, they typically worked in the same factory, they were pretty much the same age, their kids played together in the staircase entrance hall, the small buildings looked like small families.

He scraped a blob of paint off the cream-coloured frame of a door.

These are first generation door frames, you can only find them at the garbage chute or at the basement door or the laundry room if the building has one, I mean. The plywood doors with wide curved handles. Then came the carpentry doors, made of cracking fir wood. They were decorated in lozenges or rectangles. Then followed the metal doors.

The metal doors of the 1990s.

There you go!

This would have been a still photo story showing the moments of change in a society that had passed from the years of dictatorship straight into the gallop of a consumer society. All in still frames when nobody is climbing the stairs.

The 2000s... the double-pane windows, the internet cables, the pizza ad stickers, home delivery.

Our building got a red dot.

The red dots actually date back to 1990, when they planned to create a fund for refurbishment, but hey didn't have too much money so they had to establish an order of priority based on the seismic risk ranking; consequently, the heads of the associations fought to have their buildings ranked on top of the list.

The evaluations had been made by one architect alone, dozens of files daily, a person who had not checked once with the real buildings; anyway, whether they were marked by the red dot or not, the more and more dilapidated buildings formed a maze like an escape room in Bucharest. Warning, falling plaster! You could see written in small letters on A4 sheets of paper that were put into plastic sheaths attached by sticky tape to the rough plastered surface; old people had to come quite close so that they could read it, running the real risk of debris from an ornament above falling suddenly on their heads.

Look, he pointed to the flat ceiling lamp with a plastic shade, then to the table at the entrance, a narrow piece of furniture covered in an embroidered cloth with tassels; then to the power saving sensor staircase lights, a great deal for the unit managers in the 2010s. The table where maintenance fees were collected and from which community meetings were chaired in the 1980s-1990s.

He held the end of the staircase railing.

Are you coming or what?

The girl stood mesmerized in front of a cardboard sheet, framed in sculpted wood laths; they were calendar pages showing winter or summer landscapes. She carefully removed the cover of her camera lens as if she were afraid that the slightest noise or quiver could blur the picture and stepped back slowly. Click, click, click, click went the shutter: Băile Govora, Herculane, Babele and the seaside. (...) ■

PAULA ERIZANU

PAULA ERIZANU (born 1992) is a highly active and versatile writer and journalist who navigates seamlessly between poetry, prose and docufiction. She read history and literature at the New College of the Humanities in London, followed by a Master's Degree in Journalism at City University, London. She wrote about the 2009 protests in the Republic of Moldova in *This Is My First Revolution. Steal It from Me* (Cartier, 2011, trilingual edition). The book earned her the Debut Prize from the Moldovan Writers› Union and the Most Popular Book Award from the «Ion Creangă" National Library and was also nominated for the *Observator Cultural* Debut Awards. It also got the UNESCO Germany international prize for the most beautiful book production of 2011 at the Leipzig Book Fair. This was followed by the poetry collection *Take Care of Yourself* (Charmides, 2016). Since 2019, together with Alina Purcaru, she has coordinated the three-volume anthology *A Century of Romanian Poetry Written by Women* (Cartier). In 2021, she published the historical novel *The Woods Are Burning* (Cartier), written with the support of a Central European Initiative grant. The book was nominated for the «Sofia Nădejde" Awards and the *Festival du Premier Roman* in Chambery, France. Her journalism has appeared in the *BBC World Service, The Guardian, London Review of Books, Libertatea, Observator Cultural, Dilema Veche,* and *Scena9* as well as in other publications. In 2019, she was nominated for the Culture Journalist of the Year at the British *Words by Women* awards. ■

PAULA ERIZANU,
AICEA-I ȘI RAIUL, ȘI IADUL
[THIS IS HEAVEN AND HELL TOGETHER],
DOCUFICTION

CARTIER PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 322P.
ISBN: 9789975868839

Synopsis

By means of individual stories, meticulously assembled within a docufictional framework, *This is Heaven and Hell Together* offers a cosmopolitan and polyphonic history of the last century in the Republic of Moldova. Paula Erizanu has met and interviewed individuals of diverse ethnicities and ages, with varying political leanings and from a multitude of social backgrounds, creating a gallery of minorities from every walk of life. Yet, what has been gathered in this volume far exceeds the limited scope of a mere collection of testimonies about Moldova's distant or recent past. These are complex narratives of survival and coexistence in a perpetually tried territory, with a turbulent history that has swept Moldovans, Jews, Ukrainians, Roma, Russians, and Gagauzians into its vortex – not infrequently as members of the same family. The stories unfold in a sequence that highlights the profoundly cosmopolitan nature of this space, defined over time by the dynamics of vastly different identity, mental, and ethnic heritages. Furthermore, they are assembled in an implicit dialogue with one another, a choice that offers a refreshing multi-perspectivism as a way of viewing the past. Additionally, the entire material takes on an autofictional frame through the invocation of the author's own experiences and inquiries; she inserts her maternal grandmother's memoirs into the volume, alongside prose in which real-life episodes have seamlessly melted. By blending fiction with actual documents, Paula Erizanu provides a compelling panorama of the Republic of Moldova's past, always in close connection with global history, through the stories of trauma, emotion and dignity she revisits. From deportations, persecutions and discrimination to migration, poverty, violence and human trafficking, the map of suffering in this region covers a vast spectrum. However, a map of fulfilment and joys found in solidarity completes the picture. *This Is Heaven and Hell Together* can be read both as a massive, multi-voiced historical novel and as a stirring document that bears witness, with their lights and shadows, to both past and present. ■

Excerpt

The pogrom was carried out by the Russian butchers on Ismail Street or somewhere around. That's what old people used to tell me. Parents and grandparents. When they arrived at my grandpa's place (my mother's father) – 'cause they lived downtown and everybody knew they were Jews – they came for his family. They were quite poor people. They sold mackerels, salt, groceries of all sorts at the market...

They could hardly make ends meet. My grandpa's brother was only sixteen back then. What could he do? He had his mother behind him. He took the axe and hit a couple of them... he mangled them really bad. His folks realized that nothing good could ensue from that and they made a collective effort and raised some money and bought him a *shefskarta* – a boat ticket – and sent him to America. Later, he managed to improve his fate quite well. His son was an admiral during the war. And then we lost trace of him.

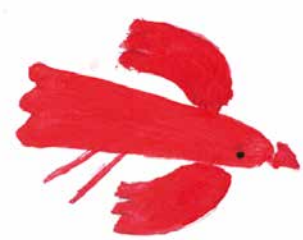
Years later, in 1962, I guess, I was playing with the children on the road around my grandpa's house. I now understand how poorly we were dressed back then. An elderly man wearing an overcoat came to us, however, and asked: kids, do you happen to know if Pinea Pătlăjan lived around? That was my grandpa's name. He had died three months before. I told him: wait here! And I ran home, several blocks away, at the crossroads of *Tolstoi* and *31 August*. I tell my parents that a guy from abroad came and was looking for grandpa. However, my parents were afraid of the Russians, the year 1949 was still fresh in their minds, when they had arrested people and sent them to Siberia, and my dad was from Romania and they could not live in peace, they were constantly terrified that they might arrest them as they were *inostranti* (foreigners), or I don't know what. Listen, boy, stay home this is none of your business, this is off limits, that's what they told me. How old was I, back then? Eleven or twelve years.

My father was from Huși, his name was Zambilă, but the Russians changed it to Zambilovici. His mother was a refugee from Ukraine, she came to Huși when they started the pogroms there. My grandpa had four boys and a girl.

At home, we were involved in counterrevolutionary activities. My father's voice was quite remarkable... When he was a child he would go and sing in the choir at the church, at the synagogue, at the wedding receptions, everywhere, to turn an honest penny for the family. And when they gathered at our place with refugees from Romania, they would close the windows, have fifty grams of spirits each, and sing Romanian and Jewish romances from the shtetls, from the small towns… *Play for me, lutenist*… Grandma would play the panpipes for

me. This was conspiracy against the government. I was about five years old and they gave me candies and sent me out to see if there was someone coming and sound the alarm.

I would speak with mom in Russian, with pa (my dad) in Romanian, with granma in Yiddish; however, with the maid, who had recently returned from the evacuation, I spoke in French as she was educated and had finished high school. I lived close to all my cousins. Granpa, though he had only gone to school for two years, could speak nine languages. I had the accent of a Bucharester from the Old Kingdom when I was a child as I had picked it up from him. I learned how to read in Romanian and Russian at the same time. I learned that from a green, torn book of stories by Ion Creangă, printed in Romania, it was called Harap Alb. One of grandpa's books. That was my ABC book. Can you understand, Miss Paula, what a mess I had in my head? When I went to school, the teachers would ask me: what language is that, Ioșca, you are not speaking Russian, are you not ashamed of yourself? I was so offended that for years on end I did not speak at all. After many years, Ana Saulovna, a French teacher who had graduated from the Sorbonne and was herself from a family that had been deported by the Russians, helped me brush up my French and speak it more confidently. I spoke Yiddish as long as all my relatives were still alive. I have both Moldavians and Jews in my family, we are quite cosmopolitan people. ■



ANDREI GOGU

ANDREI GOGU (born 1995) graduated from the Faculty of Letters and holds a Master's degree in Literary Studies from the University of Bucharest. He is a teacher of Romanian literature and English. His short stories have appeared in various literary magazines and platforms, including *Revista de Povestiri*, *Familia* Magazine, and *Cod de Poveste*. He made his literary debut with the novel *My Father Who Art on Earth*, 2025, published by Litera, which was met with widespread critical acclaim. ■

ANDREI GOGU,
TATĂL MEU CARE EȘTI PE PĂMÂNT
[MY FATHER WHO ART ON EARTH],
NOVEL

LITERA PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 528 P.
ISBN: 9786303425290

Synopsis

By following the trajectories of its two main characters, Iulian and Magda – two troubled young souls who eventually become lovers – Andrei Gogu sketches a map of the taboo issues that plague Romanian society: alcoholism, racism, discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, violence against women, misogyny, and the proliferation of pseudoscientific practices that promise to heal traumas within an environment that constantly produces and denies them. Iulian is a struggling young bookseller, a Geography graduate raised in a family shattered by his father's alcoholism and deeply affected by the death of his mother. Magda is a teacher of Romanian and English, fighting a mountain of prejudices and her own family demons: the absence of her biological father, her mother's racism, her adoptive father's violence, and the discovery of the truth regarding her own ethnic heritage as the daughter of a Roma man. The two characters interact with a plethora of other protagonists from various social strata. They comment on ideas, criticize religious dogmatism and patriarchal educational models, and process profound traumas – abortion being a major one, alongside poverty and racial discrimination. Gradually, they draw closer to one another through understanding and forgiveness. This is an ambitious novel – a fresco of rebellious youth that looks critically at the roles and schemes imposed by family and society. It is a collage of very different types of orality and a lucid depiction of a society that, in its blind pursuit of profit and status, sacrifices its subjects while constantly generating new forms of consumption, concealment, and alienation. ■

Excerpt

Mom never judged me for not being a believer and the little cross she gave me has never had a religious significance for me; just as giving it to a native from the Amazonian forest would be interpreted by him as a token of your appreciation (or the tip of an arrow) and not as a symbol of Christ. As any Romanian family, we kept the usual icon on the washing machine; in front of it an icon lamp was burning, where mother would cook something quite special.

To me, religion has always had a strictly gastronomical importance. I could even say that this makes me feel Christ closer to me than is the case with many Christians. Few people mention the fact that that piece of bread and that spoonful of wine that the priest shoves down your throat used to be a genuine feast before the year 364. It was called *agape* (love), and Christians would gather to drink wine and eat lamb and unleavened bread. They too had realized that you can only care about other people's needs after you fill your stomach. Those who are fed are also receptive to ideas. After the practice turned into excess, the early Church banned the agape and forced the faithful to have their Sunday meal at home. We still have the memorial feasts, at least.

The few memories that I have from my childhood in Jegălia are kept alive by the waves of enthusiasm that seized me when somebody died and the daily menu was changed. Ours was a pretty big village. Not everyone knew everybody else so that my family were not invited to many memorial meals. We were so poor that we measured time by the poultry grandma sacrificed: a chicken – that meant a week had gone, a duck – a full month, a goose – the weather had changed, a turkey – somebody had died, a swan – it had been run over by the mayor in her Lada car. After my mother, meat was my second most important love and a chicken leg per week teased me, making me dream of the distant moment when I would feel again the taste that no vegetable could replace.

It was Cristinuța who interrupted my dreaming when she took my hand and said: *Come with me and we'll search.* That could mean a hundred different things: fruits, nuts, mushrooms or toys dumped into the rubbish tip of the village, snails, limaces, bottle caps, coins, nests with eggs, mounds of sand where we dug galleries, mice, serpents, toads, tadpoles and earthworms, bumblebees that we tied with thread, resin, moths, butterflies, bugs that we harnessed to matchboxes, wild ducks.

I didn't even ask what we were searching for. I would have been pleased with anything from the list above, but the choice she made on that day made me happy for the rest of my village existence. We started searching for people who had died.

Several times per week we combed the streets of the village and listened intently for any sign that might betray a funeral gathering. When we found it we climbed the fence, propped up our heads and waited. If the fence was too tall we stood in front of the gate that was always open. Before long, someone invited us in the garden, asked us whose kids we were – then I retorted grandpa's – laughed and had us sit at the table, made sure that we said loudly and clearly *voda prosti*, and then they treated us to a poultry feast and they would also give us a cup of kolyva sprinkled with Cip candies, bags of puffed wheat cereals, Eugenia biscuits, corn puffs, toffees and croissants; the latter hardly had any chocolate, but they were better than nothing.

Sometimes they were not at table when we popped up; they were having the service before, so that we had to be patient and witness the whole ritual. At first, I was stunned by the ease with which the women in the village passed from a stoic expression to a weeping one, by the manner in which they were wailing, they held their scarves and swayed like black waves to the tune of *Memory Eternal*. After a while, I got a Pavlovian reflex and I felt my mouth watering when somebody was crying. Only years later, when I moved to town and I heard my mother crying many times I managed to stop thinking of food.

I don't know how a woman that had had her traumas could find the power to not seek refuge in the church and to not judge the others. She had believed in my father and in me and life had proven to her that one of these gods was not a genuine one, while the other could do nothing to save her. ■

ANDREEA IONESCU-BERECHET

ANDREEA IONESCU-BERECHET is a screenwriter by training, a graduate of UNATC (The National University of Theatre and Film), Department of Film Studies and Screenwriting, and holds a PhD in Cinema and Media. For 20 years (1993-2013), she worked in television as a reporter, producer, screenwriter, and Head of Content & Research. Currently, she is an associate professor at the University of Bucharest and the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA). She has published two non-fiction books: *Stalin's Divas: From the Clay Idols to the Soviet Star System* and *The Socialist Diva: Female Models in East-European Cinema*, both released in 2020 by Tritonic Publishing. She has written scripts for feature-length, medium, and short films, with her early works from her student years winning significant awards. She makes her literary debut with the novel *Up There is My Name, Ila*, published this year by Corint Publishing House in the Corint Fiction collection. ■

ANDREEA IONESCU-BERECHET,
SUS E NUMELE MEU, ILA !
[UP THERE IS MY NAME, ILA],
NOVEL

CORINT PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 320 P.
ISBN: 9786303611129

Synopsis

Up There is My Name, Ila follows the coming-of-age journey of a young girl, Ileana Iordăchescu, beginning with the death of her father, a World War I officer. After his passing, her mother sends her to an institution for war orphans. The narrative traces her path until she is admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts, embracing her vocation as a painter and experiencing her first adventures in her native Constanța and the multi-ethnic Southern Dobruja during the interwar period. This is a complex novel, written in a fluid and clear prose that, alongside the protagonist's individual destiny, offers a realistic and merciless portrait of life in interwar Romania. The story organically weaves in observations on gender prejudice, antisemitism, and intolerance, as well as the vast class divides, the obsession with status, and the desperate struggle to maintain appearances in bourgeois households. The first part of the book is focused on the years Ila spends at the orphanage – an institution born of a charitable impulse and patronized by the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women. In reality, the girls were subjected to extreme deprivation, daily humiliations, rigid control, and violence. The wound of abandonment and the coldness of a mother who finds noble justifications for casting her daughters aside – sending three to the orphanage and marrying off the fourth to a wealthy, violent, and much older man – fuel Ila's ambition. These humiliating experiences drive her to forge her own path at any cost and to refuse a life of servitude. The second part follows her self-discovery as a burgeoning artist. Inspired by the author's own grandmother, the painter Constanța Stratulat, the novel is a vivid and hopeful story of a woman's road to emancipation within a society hostile both to her and to any category that did not fit the strict, often more intolerant than we generally imagine, templates of the time. A Bildungsroman with a feisty protagonist, a meticulously researched historical novel, and a fresco of the mentalities, inequities and social dynamics of interwar Romania, this novel is one of the most coherent and incisive works of fiction of the year. ■

Excerpt

Many events that happened at the "orphans' boarding school," as our teachers would call it, have got mixed up in our memory as our wet socks do after we leave them in front of the stove in the evening. What is left are shards of punishment, slivers of Drawing, Maths or French classes, the frowning expressions of the supervisors, completely cut off from the contexts, just their faces, like those of frogs in lab bottles, scaring you with their grin.

Of all the little events of the beginnings, I will always remember my first Christmas. And I am not talking here about a story with a fir tree or songs hummed in the light of flickering candles, far from that. It's about the great struggle and everything that came after it! Everything started with Madam Maior – the Principal of the institution and the chair of various female committees, a leading member of the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women – "Lard" in one word. She first gave us a speech from the balcony about the birth of Baby Jesus and the manger and Mary and the Magi. At the end, in full Christian spirit, she said *Take and enjoy* and she threw two fistfuls of candies wrapped in shining paper, from the first floor balcony, the one that led to the teachers' room, down to us, the girls who were gathered in the schoolyard. That took everybody by surprise. What followed was a genuine slaughter, down there! As we stood there, crammed together, we froze for a couple of seconds. Then each of us bent, trying to grab a sweet, shining bead. We were like crazy chickens! Stooping or on all fours, stepping on other girls' hands, biting each other, tripping over our too long scarves, snatching the rustling treasures from each other's clenched fists. Yet, as it often happens after long days of abstinence and illusions and starvation, we felt inside a boiling energy that finally blew up. I came to fight so fiercely that in the end, trying to throw something into the face of another girl and having nothing at hand, I ended up throwing the very precious candy I had so painfully picked up. I was in such a fit of fury that, out of spite, I started kicking and punching in all directions, with no regard for anything. I was both out of candies and out of control. After I pulled one girl by the hair until I almost knocked her head to the ground, two other girls, who were older than us, too, and were her friends, cornered me. One of them held my hands behind, the other stood right in front of me and slapped me over the face and kicked me in the belly. It was thus that Agatha caught sight of me and quickly passed behind the girl who was kicking me in the stomach. As she was pretty tall, she placed her arm on the assailant's neck from above and, pushing with the elbow, knocked her down;

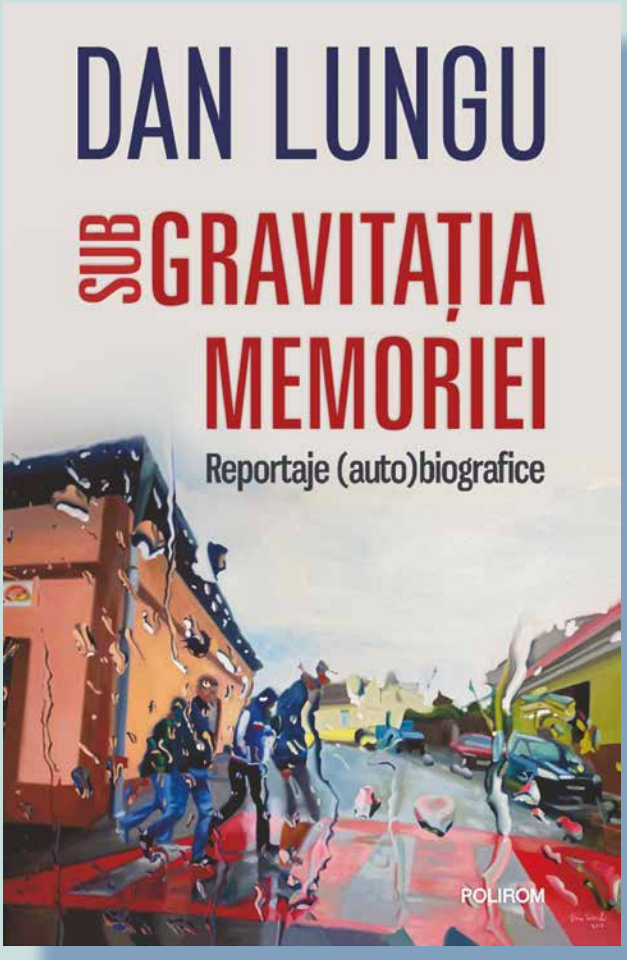
she fell flatly, legs in the air. The one holding me was so amazed that she let me go and was about to lunge at Agatha, but the whistle of the principal put an end to everything.

Of all the girls, just we two were punished: we had to sweep the sand in the yard flat. A cold December drizzle had started, I would say it was rather sleet. The sand was wet and heavy, the wicker basket was completely useless. Bent over, we were levelling the wide area of the yard using a stick and the rain was slowly falling on our backs and waists, like the fingers of a dead pianist. We no longer felt anything, we were wet and frozen, when finally a janitor came out and took us in.

We were shivering under the blankets but we could not go to sleep. ■

DAN LUNGU

DAN LUNGU (born 1969) is one of the most highly acclaimed Romanian writers, his books having been translated into numerous languages. Since the early 2000s, he has consistently published short story collections, including *Good Fellows* (2005; second edition 2013), *Retail Prose* (second edition, 2008) and *Hair Matters Tremendously* (2019). His novels include *Hens' Heaven* (2004; second edition, 2007; third edition, 2010; fourth edition, 2012), *I'm an Old Communist Hag!* (2007; second edition, 2010; third edition, 2011; fourth edition, 2013 – which was adapted into a 2013 feature film directed by Stere Gulea; fifth edition, 2017; sixth edition, 2022, a 15th anniversary edition), *How to Forget a Woman* (2009; second edition, 2010; third edition, 2011), *In Hell All the Light Bulbs Are Burnt Out* (2011; second edition, 2014), *The Little Girl Who Played God* (2014; second edition, 2016; third edition, 2018), *Flickers* (2018), and *The Driver of Oz* (2022). He has also authored children's books, such as *Vlogger at 13* (2021), *The Cook with Weird Goodies* (2021, 2022), *The Principle of Communicating Vessels or Vlogger at about 14* (2024). All of his works have been published by Polirom Publishing House. He has also coordinated for the same publisher several collective volumes, including *Road Companions: The Female Experience in Communism* (2008, in collab.), *89, Revolution Street* (2009, in collab.), *Books, Films, Songs and other Pastimes in Communism* (2014, in collab.) and *The Book of Childhoods* (2016, in collab.). In 2011, the French Republic awarded him the title of Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres for his contributions to the enrichment of French cultural heritage. ■



DAN LUNGU,
SUB GRAVITAȚIA MEMORIEI.
REPORTAJE (AUTO)BIOGRAFICE
[UNDER THE GRAVITY OF MEMORY.
(AUTO)BIOGRAPHICAL REPORTAGES],
DOCUFICTION

POLIROM PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 232 P.
ISBN: 9786303442907

Synopsis

Under the Gravity of Memory is the kind of publication that defies standard categorization, successfully managing to blend elements from related genres: prose, memoir, essay, history and reportage. The book originates from personal elements that serve as triggers or pretexts for exploring subjects with a broad appeal – both for local readers and for those seeking unique insights into Romania's past and present realities. Writing, for instance, about the history of a sugar factory founded by a French entrepreneur in a 19th-century Moldavian village, the author shows how the profits from this business financed the Romanian avant-garde and how Jewish writers opened up and connected Romanian culture with the outside world, particularly with French culture. The narrative shifts from the story of a prince converted to avant-garde literature and Communism – Scarlat Callimachi – to commentaries on games and toys in Communist Romania, or the monumental role played by a specific cookbook (Sanda Marin's), whose various editions reflect the social changes that succeeded one another over the years. The book also explores the remarkable mobility of local Jewish figures, such as the painter Eren Eyüboğlu (born Ernestine Leibovici in Iași), who, after studying in Paris, settled and married in Turkey, becoming a landmark of Turkish modernism in the visual arts. Written in a fresh and accessible style, the book is filled with engaging stories, humour, and rare details that reveal essential elements about mentalities, political transformations, and the countless links between the local landscape and global history. ■

Excerpt

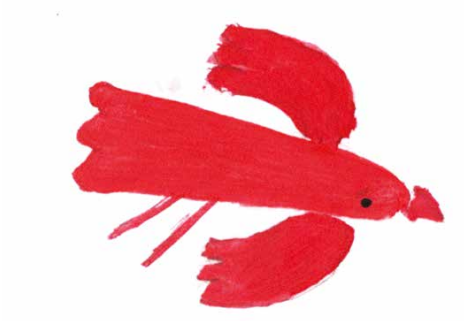
It is worth noticing that in spite of the radical change of political regime, Sanda Marin's book continues to be a bestseller, in spite of all the ideological adjustments that the dictatorship had enforced. People eat and get dressed no matter how restrictive or prosperous are the times they live in, and they try to do it as creatively as their context allows them to.

The new people's regime, anti-bourgeois and atheist, eagerly proceeded to expropriations, purges and censorship. Many books were burned or banned, moved to the restricted collections. Sanda Marin's cookbook gets off quite lightly, we could say, in these times of revolutionary and ideological fervour. The four editions in the 1950s are poorer in recipes (from 1300 to 850), the ingredients or names considered to be bourgeois are eliminated or adapted, and the label "for fasting" is removed from dedicated recipes to avoid any reference to religious obscurantism. The vigilant eye of censorship would not leave to chance the proletarian cuisine: gone are the "black caviar salad, turkey galantine, Chateaubriand and bouillabaisse, the soup served in cups (consommé), the soufflé surprise and the famous Moldavian *cozonac* (100 eggs for ten pounds of flour)," as Oana Bârna notices. Then "the hollandaise sauce and the French sauce lost their classical names, the former becoming a butter sauce and the latter a flour and egg sauce; the béchamel sauce, the white sauce ("based on French recipes") or green peas prepared à la française vanished completely; the rice *à l'impératrice* or the English green peas were renamed; Studentenbrot changed into breadcrumb cake". Instead, Russian *piroshkas* and *vatrushkas* are introduced; they will be withdrawn in the 1960s editions with the resurgence of Romanian nationalism at top political level.

The years of liberalization and relative prosperity witness the publication of expanded editions of the book, more closely resembling the interwar editions; the latest was printed in 1969, eight years after the demise of the author. Afterwards, a syncope follows. Amidst the deprivations of the 1980s – which witnessed endless queues for food, frozen homes and the omnipresence of the political police – Sanda Marin's cookbook was handed around, like an underground publication. Given the level of interference and accuracy the censorship had managed to reach (they banned in volumes of poetry words like "light", "darkness", "radiator", "meat", "sugar", "oil", "flour" or "bread", a new edition should have been drastically expurgated. That was the age of healthy eating, based on soy and ocean fish, the time of manuals that

taught you how to make a sandwich and how to prepare compotes, jams or homemade preserves, the focus was rather on a cuisine of survival.

All the ups and downs of the political regime can be read in the fate of Sanda Marin's book as in an electrocardiogram ending in a long, continuous line. ■



ION MANOLESCU

ION MANOLESCU (born 1968) is a writer and Reader at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest, where he teaches 20th and 21st-century Romanian literature. He had a New Europe College (NEC, 1996-1997) scholarship at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (NIAS, 1998), and New Europe College-LINK (NEC-LINK, 2005–2006). He has published several robust theoretical volumes, with research interests focusing on hypertext, videology, and the comics canon, including: *Notions for the Study of Virtual Textuality* (2002), *Videology: A Techno-Cultural Theory of the Global Image* (Polirom, 2003), *A Vanished World: Four Personal Histories followed by a Dialogue with H.-R. Patapievici* (co-author, Polirom, 2004), and *Explorations in Romanian Communism* (co-author, Vols. I-II, 2004–2005). Beside his latest novel, *The Others* (Nemira, 2025), he has authored two other novels: *Alexandru* (Univers, 1998) and *Skidding* (2006). ■

ION MANOLESCU,
CEILALȚI
[THE OTHERS],
NOVEL

NEMIRA PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 880 P.
ISBN: 9786064320506

Synopsis

The Others is a massive fictional continent, one that defies easy categorization into any strict genre. Its epic scope, proliferating with an almost all-encompassing excess, is nevertheless subsumed by philosophical inquiries into the nature of reality and the human mind's capacity to perceive or even generate it. By reflexively blending a robust epic core with avant-garde references from science and speculative literature – neuroscience, physics, cyber-lit, and multiverse theories – *The Others* becomes a deceptive kaleidoscope, whose ambition is to encompass as much as possible of what we designate as «consensual reality»: fissures from the past, glimpses into the life of an unreliable narrator (Alexandru Robe, a professor of cognitive neurology), four tangled love stories and a myriad of references, ranging from the abstruse to pop culture. The platoon of characters populating this novel is held together not only by concrete interactions but also by an expansive web of references spanning literature, music (from Armin van Buuren to Costanzo Antegnati), comic books, and cutting-edge scientific theories. *The Others* is a baroque continuum of events, theories, and citations, where the primary field of interest remains the reality of the mind, the relationship between consciousness and its biological substrate, and its capacity to generate games, hope, desire, or traps – in short, reality itself. Bucharest serves as the main realistic stage of the novel, amalgamating – much like a grand avant-garde poem – fragments of prose written in a Balzacian style with Pynchonesque passages and intertextual membranes. This creates a multi-faceted reality that pulses in layers. Both an experiment and a fictional remix where encyclopaedic literary knowledge dissolves, *The Others* is one of the most ambitious, innovative, and complex fictional projects of recent years. ■

Excerpt

"The more you advance into the future, the more you go back into the past."

"Why would you do that?" Sarina's face shows concern. And a germ of discontent. Rough gear and suspicious organic circuits. I've already warned you about who my partner was.

"To retrieve the closest chunk. *N - 1*. Precisely what you enjoy: Corelli, Lully, Fibonacci, Macaroni." I was quickly unloading names of composers that I had picked up on Wiki, names that were running in flower patterns on the screens of my mind.

"Enjoy, my foot... You should live with someone that has no present," Sarina burst out. She turned her back on me, so that I couldn't see her tears.

I knew what consequences my words had. However, I couldn't lie to her. I only lied to those I loved. To the others, I would always tell the truth. It was more important to me to extract my intensity from the intricate folds of the past than to project myself into the future with my eyes closed, ready to get my happiness through oblivion. *The others* were sufficiently involved in my future for me to need to bother to plan it.

The present, I felt like telling her, is worthless anyway. It's already gone before you can live it. I had the feeling that I was explaining to my first year students how the cells in charge of temporal perception work. The neurons with temporal receptors in multiple versions. I knew what I was talking about. After all, it was me who had discovered them, starting from the equations of a friend of mine in the States, Polchinsky.

Let me explain.

Have you noticed that nothing is happening now? That's right, *nothing*. Things have either happened or are going to. The present moment does not exist. The ancient Greeks and the Romans were well aware of that, too. So were Bergson and Sfinţescu.

Therefore, what was the point of saying "I am undressing Chris. My hand is slipping under the band of her briefs."? Or: "I want you, Laura. You are the only one I want." Why would I utter such commonplaces when the events corresponding to them faded out like the weak flame of a match? Already said, already experienced. Nothing new, nothing fresh.

"I will love you to the end of the world!" Seriously?! Where? When? Maybe in a different universe, with other rules. Clothed in other quantic bands. Not our universe. Not in *this* moment, which has just vanished with its sounds and letters floating in the air. Dead butterflies of reality, carried by winds like dead leaves.

Everything that is happening has already happened. Or is going to. The students looked at me in amazement, stifling with heat and boredom. Why was I fussing over that paradox? Because Max kept reminding it to me? "Yuki-San's eighty-fifth principle. Pay close attention to it!"

Was I trying to solve it by myself? Did I keep covering the blackboards with non-linear equations and the A4 sheets with quantum topological graphs during the day? Did I draw Mandelbrot graphs over Sierpinski graphs on the bright screen of my MacBook? No way.

I had help. Research requires teamwork.

Who? How do you mean, *who?* Is their any doubt about that? Ovidiu, Sophie and The Masked Cucumber. The zany hero of Kalkus was the first on the list of the three authors of the ISI study... He deserved the Nobel, the Turing and the Yellow Kid Award. He had long found the solution to the paradox. More precisely, from *Vaillant* nr. 1174/12 November 1974, p. 21: "*I am silent now...* To say this is utterly stupid since while you are saying it you are talking. Therefore, you are *not* silent."

I warned you. There is no point in continuing like this.

But the world does. Whether we like it or not it keeps going on. Or back. Or both on and back. With me swept up and hurled in billions of variants. With *you*, too (don't delude yourselves). Do we have a choice? Is there any way out? Let me know if you solve *this* problem.

No emotion, no twitch. Either $N - 1$ or $N + 1$. Never just N. A life jumping between past and future. What occurred could occur. No present, no anchors immersed in flickering memories and variable projections.

I am too tired to count them, too bored to write them down. The biology of thinking is fluctuating. So are the bulb and its metallic shade in the ceiling. Light, darkness, light again. Dimmer and dimmer. Suddenly blinding. The changes made by *the others* in the fabric of years is beyond my control. Also beyond *theirs*, though. I am not sure, it seems to me that's the case.

"I think so" and *"It seems to me that"* are not valid arguments. Yuki-San's eighty-ninth principle. I had reminded my students of it countless times...

Somewhere nearby I heard the voice of Sarina. She was rather resigned than angry. Rather disappointed than indignant:

"Damn it, Alex… How did we get here? I don't have a future with you." ■

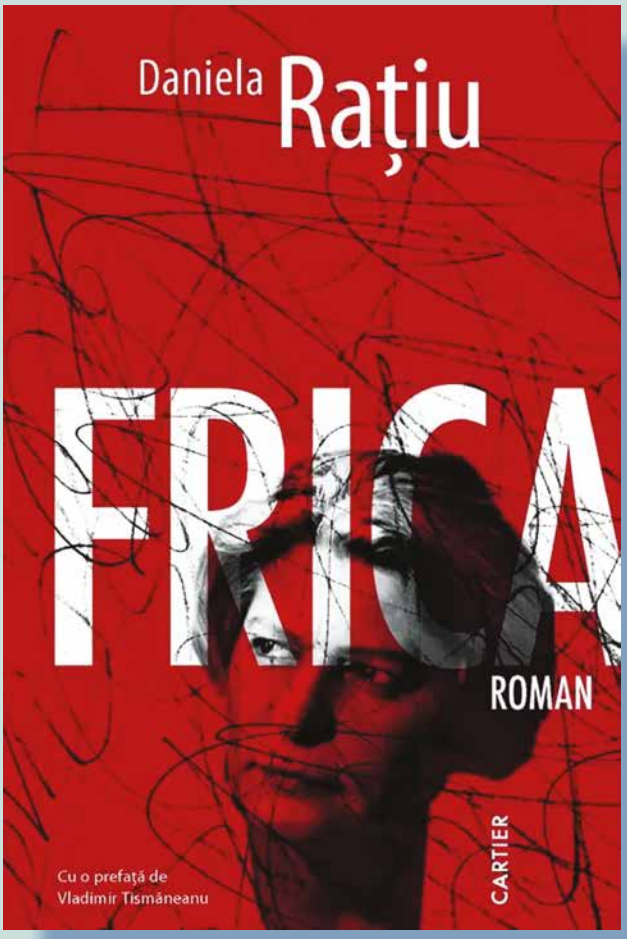
DANIELA RAȚIU

DANIELA RAȚIU (born 1968) is a versatile writer who has published prose, poetry, drama and essays. In recent years, her work has focused on investigating the devastation caused by the Communist regime, particularly in the period following the end of World War II. She holds degrees from the Faculty of Political Science, Philosophy and Communication Sciences – Journalism at the West University of Timișoara, and from the Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences at "Tibiscus" University.

She made her literary debut with the poetry collection *A Ladder in the Stocking* (2005). While continuing to write poetry – *Staniol* (*Tinfoil*, 2018) and *Anaesthesia. A Single Poem,* (2022) – she has primarily focused on the novel. Her published prose includes *Women's Glasses* (2005), *In Vitro* (2007), *The Last Year with Ceaușescu* (2022), *The End of the World is a Train* (Cartier Publishing House, 2023) and *Fear* (published by the same publisher in 2025). An excerpt from *The Last Year with Ceaușescu* was published in France by Magellan Publishing in a collective volume, translated by Florica Courriol. Her novel *The End of the World is a Train* is set to be published in France by Grasset (translated by Florica Courriol), in Germany by Suhrkamp, and in Norway by Bonnier Norsk Forlag.

In 2015, Daniela Rațiu was a finalist in the HBO Screenwriting Competition as co-author of the script *Pauker,* detailing the fall of Ana Pauker – a project that served as the foundation for her novel *Fear.* In 2016, she published the play *The Butcher Used to Read the Russians* (Tracus Arte Publishing) and in 2022 the chronicle-journal *Five Months That Saved Romania. Matryoshka. The Hybrid War and Dragnea's War against Romania* (Casa de Pariuri Literare Publishing).

She is a member of PEN Romania and the Romanian Writers' Union, Timișoara Branch. She also maintains an active career as a journalist, contributing to major platforms and daily newspapers. ■



DANIELA RAȚIU,
FRICA
[FEAR],
NOVEL

CARTIER PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 432 P.
ISBN: 9789975868655

Synopsis

In *Fear*, Daniela Rațiu offers a meticulously researched fictionalization of the years when Ana Pauker (born Hana Rabinson) – the most powerful woman in the Communist nomenclature installed in Romania immediately after World War II – was ostracized and persecuted by the leaders of her own party. The man who engineered Pauker's downfall and her removal from the political stage of the 1950s was Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the General Secretary of the Romanian Workers' Party and the most powerful man in the state. Driven by a profound hatred for everything Ana Pauker represented – her internationalism, her Jewish identity, and last but not least her status as a recognized combatant far beyond Romania's border – Gheorghiu-Dej, a sycophantic admirer of Stalin, undermined her position before the Generalissimo and had her thrown into the Malmaison political prison. The novel focuses on the years of her imprisonment and her subsequent release following Stalin›s death, when, already ill, she was placed under house arrest and kept under constant surveillance by the Securitate. The narrative weaves in references to Pauker's past: her persecutions as an underground Communist operative, her harrowing personal experiences with antisemitism in interwar Romania and her political comrades and close associates. Set primarily between 1952 and 1956, the book pits two profiles against each other – that of Ana Pauker and that of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, whom she profoundly despised. Ultimately, the novel dramatizes the confrontation between the crushing power of a system that eventually annihilates its own subjects and the idealism of its most loyal followers. *Fear* is an overt reference to a political system built on terror and control – a system devised by Stalin, a towering figure in this novel, before it was exported to the peripheries of the Eastern Bloc. ■

Excerpt

Face to face, eye to eye. Ana Pauker and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. Red-faced, looking at her defiantly, his eyes are blazing; he is sweating , his bald head is glistening, he is filled with the political importance of the moment. The power dynamics: he is high up, she is far below. Political power, that is all that matters, the power itself embodied by himself, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the secretary general of the Romanian Workers' Party, prime minister, deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Romanian People's Republic; Ana Pauker standing in front of him is nobody now. The dirty Jewess, he managed to bring the bitch to heel. What are you looking at, bitch? Tremble, fawn, cry, whine, beg for pity, Yid. You've lost your voice? You've lost your power? Is it too much for you to beg for mercy? Still acting tough? If I put a bullet into your head now, nobody would do anything to me. Nobody. Anything. A-ny-thing. The official and industrial crime empowers him absolutely. He feels powerful, in full glory, invincible.

All these lights, the comrades, the drinks that gurgle down their hot throats; he is surrounded by Soviet officials, by the power that is embodied by himself because he, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, decides on every matter. Who is going to live and who is going to die. Dej is sweating through every pore, his sweat is running down his spine, just like back then, bitch, when we were in Moscow. It took him some time, but he managed to bring the bitch to heel. His face is bursting with political fulfilment. Dej is like a predator that filled its stomach.

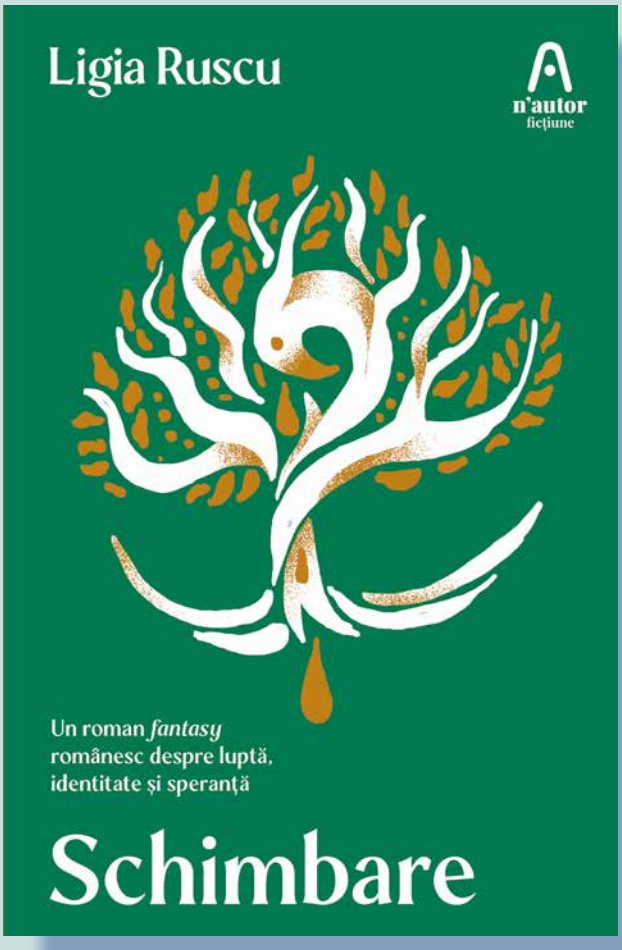
There is nothing left of the awkwardness of the railroad worker that reached the top of the tree. The ability to commit crimes, the right to kill anybody he chooses to, even Ana Pauker, in spite of Molotov, Togliatti, Thores, Manuilski, any of them, name whoever you want. Power is descending on him, that's what he feels, all power is descending on him. He is thrilled from head to toes. The power descended on him stirs him inside, his chest is swelling with pride, he is Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. He is Power embodied for he has all the power. Look, the bloody Jewess is standing in front of him. It was he, Dej, that allowed her to go out, to show her face around, among comrades, at the Atheneum. Look at them, none of them has the guts to address the Jewess a word. Not a single one of them. They are all scared of him. Let them be. Nobody dares to step out of line in front of him...

He is Dej. What would Molotov do to me if I kill you? What? What? Nothing. Ghiță, dear Ghiță, I know who you are, grovelling toad, you were sucking up to the Generalissimo, the Supreme Executioner. This is Ana Pauker standing here in front of you, Ghiță, you toad, low life, maggot. This is the war of Ana Pauker

against Dej. *Svadba*. There is no winner, yet. No decisive victory was obtained. History is watching, history will crucify you, you Jew killer, murderer of the Revolution. Ana Pauker is not giving up Lenin, Marx, Engels. No way, Ghiță. Dej and Stalin, the two of you have betrayed the Revolution, you betrayed Lenin and Marx. In black and white did Lenin write that if the Revolution ends with a decisive victory, then we'll settle scores with the Tsar's regime in a Jacobine manner or in a plebeian one, we will mercilessly crush the enemies of freedom wiping their resistance by brute force and making no con-ces-sion to the cursed heritage of serfdom, of Asiatic brutality, of the humiliation of the individual. Ghiță, you wretched worm. You petty bourgeois. Lenin hater. Petty bourgeois. ■

LIGIA RUSCU

LIGIA RUSCU (born 1967, Timişoara) is, by training, a historian and researcher specializing in Hellenism and ancient history. She studied at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj, where she currently teaches ancient history and publishes specialized academic works, such as *The Foreign Relations of Greek Cities on the Romanian Black Sea Coast* (2002). She writes historical fiction that is as meticulously documented as it is clear and engaging, with suspense serving as a major ingredient in her works. To date, she has published the following titles: *A Morning Hunt* (Polirom Publishing House, 2014), *A Quest* (Polirom Publishing House, 2017) and *Cantemir. The Unicorn in the Labyrinth of Ignorance* (Polirom Publishing House, 2023). She is also the author of a children's book, *The Adventures of Aleodor* (Curs Publishing, 2023), illustrated by Raluca Ionaș. ■



LIGIA RUSCU,
SCHIMBARE
[CHANGE],
NOVEL

NEMIRA PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 480 P.
ISBN: 9786064320278

Synopsis

Change is a lush, homegrown fantasy novel, brimming with suspense and meticulously crafted details – a complex fictional universe. Populated by a diverse cast of characters, it features customs and challenges that ignite the reader's interest and maintain a vivid tension. The whole story unfolds in the invented world of Dasos, a self-sufficient and nearly isolated land that prospers from a highly precious natural resource: *rud*. This resin is produced by the inhabitants of Dasos by scoring the bark of trees so that the valuable substance can be harvested continuously. The change begins to take hold when something entirely unusual and inexplicable occurs: the trees heal themselves, the gashes close, and the *rud* ceases to flow. From this point on, the entire social order starts to crumble. Dasos relied on the peaceful coexistence of two major, opposing social classes: the *famous* and the *petty*. However, a series of grievances lead to the emergence of rebel figures who no longer tolerate the control of the powerful, the rigid rules, and the injustice masked as peaceful neighbourliness – which was, in essence, the exploitation of the *petty* by the *famous*. Local mythology infuses the aesthetics of this intricate universe, where battles for a new order and for identities liberated from old rigours are about to erupt. Figures of brave and defiant women, such as Anni or Sevasta, become memorable characters in the gallery of rebels, standing alongside fearless men like Atanas from Palaga and Felip, a navigator who likewise defies custom. *Change* is a fantasy with a unique stylistic imprint, nourished by local mythologies, dramatizing – within the fantastic genre – clashes and tensions that mark today's reality everywhere. ■

Excerpt

When she reckoned the right time had come, she put down her bundle where she stood and retraced her steps to the place where she had come in, returning to the crossroads outside the big inn. Few people were still walking in the street. Sevasta had expected to see revellers and streetwalkers but everybody she could see seemed to be quiet townspeople on their way home, though through the open door of the inn light was coming out and the sound of voices as well as the tempting aromas of food. Her stomach rumbled miserably, but Sevasta turned her back to the inn and set out in search of a quieter, more secluded place. She wandered around for a while until she stopped outside of a small bakery; they were about to close. She bought the last loaf from the shopkeeper and paid him with some copper small change that filled her purse now and then she set off back. She couldn't wait to get to the bathroom and she took a hungry bite of bread, thinking that though the Dasos country was poor in grains, they still managed to sell bread at lower prices than in River Crown. She hesitated a moment at the juncture of two small lanes, as she could not remember which one had she come by. Just when she was thinking that the less dark road looked more tempting, she heard a kind of stifled moan coming from the other.

She dodged to the right and flattened herself against the wall; she walked stealthily forward to the corner of the street. Now she could hear more clearly rustles and muffled thuds as in a fight. She carefully cast a look round the corner of the house and at that very moment someone in the house across the street opened a glazed window and a streak of light fell before her, revealing the two shadows clenched together a few steps from her. One of them, shorter, was a woman. The man who had pinned her against the wall held her by the throat with one hand, while with the other he was trying to lift her closefitting tunic. His back was turned to Sevasta, but she would have recognized Brudan's back in any circumstances. The glazed windows closed, plunging everybody into darkness. Yet, Sevasta did not need the light any longer. She stepped forward into the middle of the road. She dropped the bread, obliviously.

The fever started from her forehead, went down to her chest and belly and stopped in her palms. She had not felt it for a long while now and she paused for a moment to fully enjoy it. Then she raised both her hands. Brudan froze standing there. With slow, puppet-like movements, he turned around and released the woman, leaned his back against the wall, spread his arms wide and remained like that, crucified. Only his eyes moved frantically. The woman, a young girl, collapsed, dazed.

"Run! Run, quickly!" Sevasta ordered her in a deep voice, which sounded like a church bell.

The girl stood up staggering and took to her heels as fast as she could. Sevasta waited until she disappeared and slowly came close to Brudan. She lit her face for a moment and saw the shiver of recognition in his eyes. His terror filled her with delight, but she had to finish before somebody else showed up. She snatched his knife from his belt – she had to surrender hers to the guards, as everybody else, actually, but Brudan was the kind of guy that always took care to have a weapon on him even before taking care to have something to eat –, she unbuckled his belt and cut the strings of his pants. She drew the knife close to his belly, moving slowly on purpose as she knew what he must be thinking of. And, indeed, the only thing that the spell did not prevent Brudan from doing was to wet his pants. Sevasta stepped aside until he was done and then turned back to her business. She cut his pants into pieces, cut off the lap of his shirt, too and looked at him for a second – the darkness didn't bother her any longer – as he was standing there, his back against the wall, in rags, his member hanging ridiculously. She put the knife down and cupped her hands. When she felt they were full of water, she threw it into Brudan's face and onto his head, again and again, until his beard and hair got really wet. She picked up the knife again and cut off half of his beard, on the right side, then shaved his hair on the other side of his head. The water was cold, as for soap, even if she had had some, she wouldn't have wasted it on him, so that, when she was done, a little streak of blood was added to the moisture on his face.

She stepped back and contemplated her work. She looked around to see what else she could do, but the people of Dasos were too careful to leave manure in the streets in the heart of the city. She heard the sound of voices in the distance and decided that it was enough. The spell would last to sunrise and until then many were going to see Brudan in this awful mess and laugh at him or be scared. With a bit of luck the ephors were going to reckon that the country of Dasos didn't need a guy who had obvious connections with dark powers to live there.

She turned her back on him and walked away at a brisk pace down the neighbouring road. So much time had gone by! She had not felt so full of life for a long time, she felt young, strong, invincible. She was walking on air...

NO!

The fever left her body and left her drained of all strength. She could barely drag her feet to the bathroom, then only just managed to jump over the wall and climb to the window. She spent the rest of the night sitting on the settle, her head buried in her hands, unable to sleep, her body shivering with horror, with cold; she had almost forgotten about Brudan. Before dawn, she was already in the street and, when the north gate of the city was opened at sunrise, Sevasta was among the first people to step through it. ■

TATIANA ȚÎBULEAC

© Nădejda Roșcovan

TATIANA ȚÎBULEAC (born 1978, Chișinău, Republic of Moldova) is one of the leading contemporary novelists, her works being award-winning, widely translated, and highly acclaimed by both critics and readers. She holds a degree from the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Sciences at the Moldova State University and first became known to the public in 1995 as the creator of the "True Stories" column in the daily newspaper *Flux*. Starting in 1999, she was part of the PRO-TV Chișinău team, working as a reporter, editor, and news anchor. She currently lives in Paris. She made her literary debut in 2014 with *Modern Fables* (Urma Ta Publishers, Chișinău; second edition, Libris Editorial, Brașov, 2016). However, her major breakthrough and international recognition came with her second book, the novel *The Summer in Which My Mother Had Green Eyes* (Cartier Publishing House, 2017). The novel earned her numerous accolades, including the Prize of the Writers› Union of Moldova (2017) and the Prize of the *Observator cultural* magazine and the "*Observator Lyceum*" Prize (2018). It has been published in French, Spanish, Norwegian, German, Slovenian, Slovak, Galician, Catalan, Polish and Finnish. Her second novel, *The Glass Garden*, published in 2018, was awarded the European Union Prize for Literature (2019). It has been translated into French, German, Spanish, Bulgarian, Norwegian, Slovenian, Polish, Greek, Croatian, Albanian, Czech and Dutch. ■

TATIANA ȚÎBULEAC,
CÂND EȘTI FERICIT, LOVEȘTE PRIMUL
[WHEN YOU ARE HAPPY, STRIKE FIRST],
NOVEL

CARTIER PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 184 P.
ISBN: 9789975868822

Synopsis

When You Are Happy, Strike First is a novel about failure, memory and exile, centred on Mila, an immigrant from the Republic of Moldova, and the trials – both past and present – that have shaped her. The narrative weaves between the present and the past, attempting to reconstruct a journey in which her old values and dreams have proven bankrupt. The daughter of a philologist as demanding as he was bohemian and negligent toward his own family, Mila studies hard and eventually becomes a teacher of French at the University of Chișinău. Driven by the desire for a better life and the wish to remain close to her two friends who moved to France, she emigrates as well. However, instead of a career dedicated to literature, she finds herself holding the most exhausting and menial jobs: cleaning and caregiving. Years later, battling alcoholism, she re-examines her past: her childhood in Chișinău, her mother's death, the figure of her father and her childhood friendship with Malik, her first love. The arrival of another girl binds the three of them in an impossible triangle, reminiscent of Bertolucci's *The Dreamers*. The book has harsh undertones, particularly when focusing on the violence of the 1990s in Moldova and the humiliating life of a young intellectual in Paris, where she works as a caregiver. Yet, there are also luminous moments – glimpses of a world where generosity was possible despite poverty, where principles could illuminate a lifetime of hardships, and where nobility was a reality guaranteed by one's own craft and knowledge. The figure of the father, whose tragic destiny radiates through every fold of the story, stands firmly at the centre of this novel about lost illusions, impossible loves, and forgiveness. ■

Excerpt

I see the old woman who is drinking water and I long for a glass of wine. I see the pregnant woman's belly and it seems to me it is full of wine. I see that the train is not arriving and I want it to arrive. Last night I summoned up the courage to tell Fima about all this. I wasn't expecting advice, of course, I only wanted other people to know about that. Fima cannot understand me anyway, and nothing she says makes sense to me. Afterlife, public outcry, sin. A falling angel pouring hot tar down the throats of drunkards. As she is a believer she sees herself already living in another world with her saints, with their chants, basking in the reward of the good deeds she has not done yet. I, for a change, will never have another life and I don't even expect to have one.

I want to live this life as I deserve. To do what I learned to do, to eat fine food and to be able to sleep on Sundays at least, till midday at least. I'd like to have, too, long weekends and holidays. To paint my nails crimson and go to the seaside with a healthy man who doesn't need to be pushed around in a wheelchair and to be hit between his shoulder blades. A man who would see me and want what he sees. Yet, since I had nothing of what I should have possessed, I had at least alcohol that carried me through all this darkness as across a long bridge, towards some small lit windows, where I had my parents with me, Malik was mine, the two of us called each other by the name; now, I don't even have that.

"Slap yourself over the face and you'll get over it", Fima advised me. "That's how my mother died, and my sister, and my aunt, that's how all women die who drink and try to conceal it. They die alone in their piss, toothless and with no family around, buried by strangers who take their house in exchange for the coffin, their dresses for the charity food, who take even the eggs from under the hen, remember that, even the eggs from under the hen."

After my mother died, father managed to get a studio apartment with the support of the editorial office and we both moved to the edge of the city. Until then, we had lived in a family hostel; I don't remember many things about our life there. Her dresses, his ties, my angina fits and the last New Year's Eve with a firtree that was so thick that it blocked the only window in the room for three months. We decorated the tree in turns. I hung the baubles, mother shaped the cotton wool into a garland and hung it in a tree. We couldn't find a star, but we found a plastic wreath from one of my morning shows, placed it on top and it was quite all right.

Father had just returned from an away assignment. A kolkhoz or a forest range, something like that. He brought pig's ears, nuts and dried plums. I don't

know when exactly they started to fight, I only know that they talked about impossibilities and done deals, then they went out in the corridor, where mother flooded him with reproaches. She blamed him for not doing anything in the house, as if we didn't even exist. "You are only hanging out with your pals, a bunch of losers, curse on you all!", she cried. "Opportunity, a wife's conduct, your buffoon," he retorted. And they carried on like that until he ran out of patience and the tone of his voice changed. It was the voice of a man forced to marry a tramp: "Stop it, please, there is no need for us to upset our neighbours".

When they came back into the room mother took the ears and went to the communal kitchen to boil them and he pretended he was suddenly enthusiastic and told me we should design Christmas tree decorations made of nuts and dried plums. We tied them in pairs using thread from the spool and called them plumnuts and hung them to the available branches. I remember that while we were decorating the tree he recited a lot from Eminescu, from Blok and a poem by Rilke, which he couldn't remember by heart so he had to look for it and check among his books printed on cigarette paper. I could see he was unhappy. He would have liked to be somewhere else, doing something else. But you could say that about anybody in our family. ■

RADU VANCU

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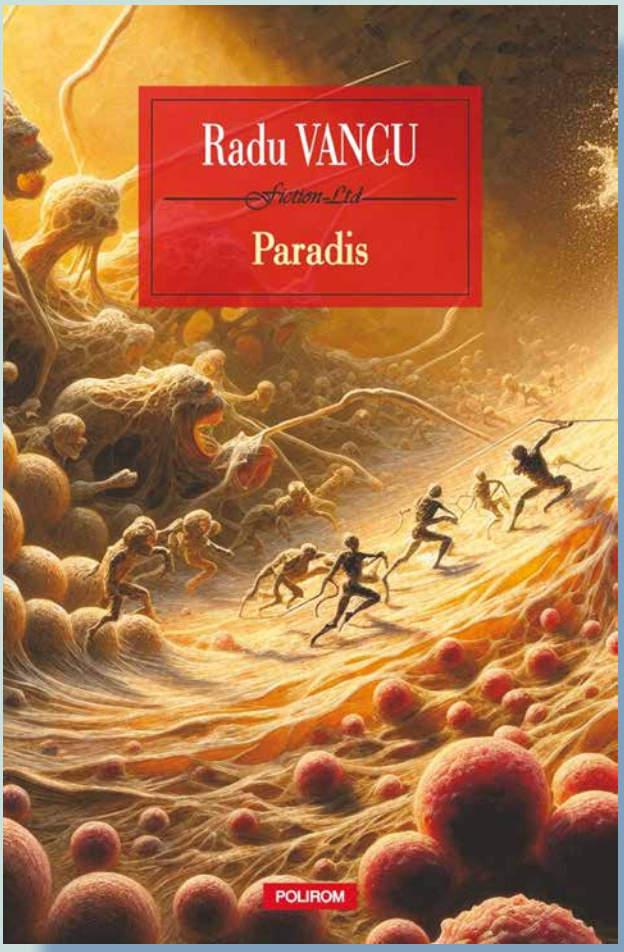
RADU VANCU (born 1978, Sibiu) is a Professor at the Faculty of Letters and Arts of the "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, the Editor-in-Chief of *Transilvania* magazine, and an editor for *Poesis International*. Between 2019 and 2023, he served as the President of PEN Romania. He also coordinated the Romanian section of the *Poetry International* website. Since 2002, he has published nine volumes of poetry, for which he has received numerous awards. His poetry has been translated into approximately 20 languages, appearing in anthologies, magazines, and standalone volumes. His prose work includes the novels *Transparency* (Humanitas Publishing House, 2018; winner of the National Prose Award from *Ziarul de Iaşi* and the High School Students› Choice Award at FILIT, 2019) and *Paradise* (Polirom Publishing House, 2025). He has also published three volumes of diaries (2017, 2021, 2024), two children's books – *The Tiny King* and *The Brother of Wandering Brothers*, both at Cartier Publishing House – and a collection of civic essays. He translated the Ezra Pound edition coordinated by H.-R. Patapievici at Humanitas Publishing House. His academic publications include essay-books on Mihai Eminescu and Mircea Ivănescu, as well as a volume exploring the relationship between poetic modernity and the human condition, *Elegy for the Human* (Humanitas Publishing House, 2016). He has curated several poetry anthologies, both independently and in collaboration with Mircea Ivănescu, Claudiu Komartin, or Marius Chivu. Since 2013, he has been the President of the Poets in Transylvania International Poetry Festival in Sibiu. ■



RADU VANCU,
PARADIS
[PARADISE],
NOVEL

POLIROM PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 736 P.
ISBN: 9786303441634

Synopsis

Paradise is an expansive, multi-layered novel whose title functions antiphrastically: in place of the Dantean paradise, Radu Vancu's book proposes a descent into a dystopian universe – a technological hell at whose entrance the survivors of a shattered world are forced to "abandon all hope". The year is 2039 and Musk's satellites illuminate the sky over a world frozen in a continuous present inside a high-tech "Paradise", the sole capsule where humanity's last survivors can live on, provided that they give up hope, nostalgia and any form of tactile contact. This reality emerged after humanity was decimated by a Coronavirus pandemic, leaving those alive condemned to a blind repetition without any horizon, other than the perpetuation of life through bio-tech "angels" that replaced their diseased organs. The narrative of this world's end is voiced by the protagonist, university professor Alexandru Tarcea (Ducu). He meditates on human nature and its vanished habitat while reminiscing about his lost love, Camille Suzay – a charming Frenchwoman, editor-in-chief at Radio France Internationale Sibiu and French lecturer at the Faculty of Letters. From one chapter to the next – the chapters are titled *cantos*, in a succession of references to Dante Alighieri and Ezra Pound – Ducu's voice reveals the beauty of a vanished world where love still "moved the sun and the other stars," the atrocities of that same world, the mourning for a lost lover, the crucial role of memory in defining the human, and the impossibility of a survival mechanics in the absence of hope. The book is simultaneously a dystopian novel, a love story, a campus novel and speculative literature on cyberspace – a meditation on the countless ends of worlds inscribed in the palimpsest of history and a massive hypertext saturated with scholarly commentary and literary references. The nucleus that binds this entire novelistic construction is the notion of the human and that which grants it continuity, despite being expelled into a form of infernal immortality controlled by Artificial Intelligence. ■

Excerpt

Those who survived were those who stayed put. It is utterly counterintuitive, but that is what happened. As far as I was concerned, the reason I didn't leave was because I wanted to die. After I hung up on the priest who had called me from beside your coffin, I knew I had to die as soon as possible. There was no better place that could guarantee my demise than that of a quarantine camp. And there was no death more appropriate than your death. So that I patiently waited for it to come back for me. Nobody came there any more, everybody avoided Cisnădioara – as they avoided all the quarantine camps. Death made an exception, of course. It did not avoid them, but it avoided me.

It refused to re-enter the house which you exited.

It refused to kill anybody else after it killed you.

15

Humanity Enhancement Project.

"We will build a better humanity if we have better bodies."

When he sent us this message, Musk was the first of us who had permanently waxed his hair; his skull was shining in a messianic and comforting way.

"We'll have better bodies, maybe immortal ones. We'll build, when the time comes, a better humanity – even an immortal one maybe."

The bio-tech angels had Musk's presents descend on us: cyber prosthetics, artificial organs, cytoplasmic transfer, gene therapy, neural implants, 3D bioprinting, nanomedicine, nootropics.

"We'll have brains through which we will be able to connect to one another, we will be capable of transferring feelings and memories."

He was wrong here – and he honestly admitted, in another message, that he had been wrong: uploading the mind proved to be impossible. Or, more accurately, "didn't prove to be possible for the moment". Similarly, the fitting in of exocortexes – "we noticed that, for the moment, it doesn't prove to be possible even in lab conditions".

"We have our old brains in immortal bodies."

16

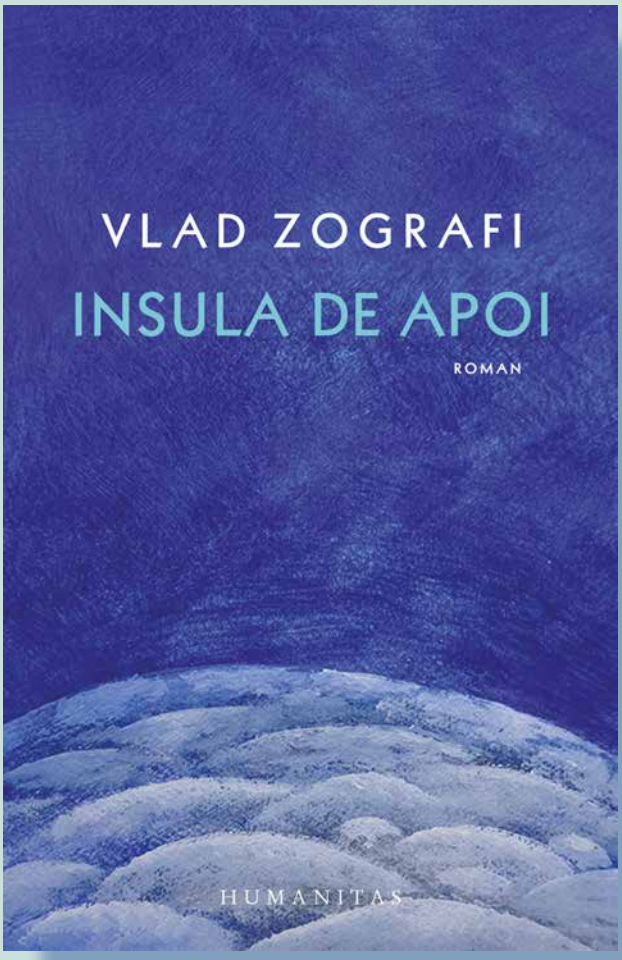
Humanity Enhancement Project. HEP. I didn't like the acronym – it looked too much like Lenin's NEP or the LEP of the Geneva CERN, failed experiments

that had tried, each in its own way, to radically change the world. I was afraid that HEP might be just another name added to this list of failures. Besides, it looked like a scientistic form of disguising hope – the capital sin in Musk's New World. I kept these considerations to myself, however, locked up in my brain that had been improved by nootropics. To Teuța, no reference to the Old World would have meant anything, to Tetea, any sarcasm directed at the New World might have meant no less than crime, in a technical sense.

NHN sent us each year a report on the changes that had been operated in our bodies. When I first realized that the composition of my new body, beside plastic and platinum, included stuff like gold, silver, bronze and ceramics, I smiled – I remembered the composition of Dante's old man from Crete who, hidden in a huge cave inside the Mountain Ida on the island of Crete, ceaselessly cries and thus feeds with his tears the rivers in the Inferno. Il Veglio di Creta, that's how Dante calls him; he has a gold head, silver arms and chest, a bronze belly, and an iron leg, while the other is made of clay; for the medieval reader, this meant that the body of the old man is the very body of History, in its continuous decay from the Golden Age to the Iron Age. The Inferno was made up of the tears of History, from the uninterrupted accumulation of past sufferings; which was an indirect way of saying that we were the Inferno. ■

VLAD ZOGRAFI

VLAD ZOGRAFI (born 1960) is a reference name for Romanian contemporary fiction and drama, a particularly distinct writer, benefitting from a highest level training in exact sciences. He read physics at the University of Bucharest and in 1994 he earned a PhD degree in atomic physics at Paris XI University, Orsay. Since 1990, the year of his literary debut, he published fiction (*The Left Knee or the Right Knee*, 1993 and *The New Man*, 1994), then drama: *Isabela, My Love* (1996, the Writers' Union Prize), *Oedipus in Delphi* (1997), *The King and the Corpse* (1998), *The Future is Trash* (1999, the Writers' Union Prize), *America and Acoustics* (2007, the Writers' Union Prize), *Petru* (2007, a collection of revised versions of the previously published plays), *All Your Minds* (2011). *Petru* was the first Romanian play staged after 1989 at the Bulandra Theatre and the show (stage director Cătălina Buzoianu) was invited to the Biennial in Bonn in 1998. In 2012 he published the essay *The Infinite Inside. Six Stories about Man, Society and History*. In 2016 he published the novel *The Secondary Effects of Life* that was awarded the Observator Lyceum Prize in 2017; it was subsequently published in Czech (translated by Jiři Našinec, Havran Publishing House, Prague, 2019) and Serbian (translated by Đura Miočinović, Knjževna radionica Rašić Publishing House, Belgrade, 2020). He then published three other novels: *October 7* (2018), *Survival* (2021) and *The Island After* (2025). ■



VLAD ZOGRAFI,
INSULA DE APOI
[THE ISLAND AFTER],
NOVEL

HUMANITAS PUBLISHING HOUSE, 2025, 372 P.
ISBN: 9789735087821

Synopsis

The Island of After is a novel where the stakes of realism compete with those of speculative fiction and philosophical inquiry. The major question that each protagonist of this polyphonic narrative eventually poses concerns the existence of meaning and a saving continuity, ultimately framed as life after death. This possibility is what both the title and the vision shared by a group of characters – a sort of sect of "illuminati" with paranormal powers – point to. Gathered from various social strata, the members of this group share a unique ability: they can see an island hidden from the others' eyes, a place where souls arrive after death on their journey toward eternity. The novel is set in contemporary Bucharest, featuring a wide array of diverse individuals who interact at various points, though the narrative primarily follows their distinct individual paths. Distinguished among the gallery of characters are Paul Fabian, a former history teacher turned demotivated copywriter at the Crocodil advertising agency; Elena, the refined and estranged wife of a former football star turned TV celebrity, Costel Duță; Elena's mother, a former set designer and current owner of an antique shop; the colleagues from Crocodil; and, of course, the members of the sect who visualize the island and attempt to uncover everything possible about the life of souls after death. The narrative, in which invasive realism alternates with plunges into the fantastic, makes room for social observation, irony, philosophical commentary and humour, as well as a love story and speculations on the nature of paradox, which emerges as the dominant substance of the world imagined by Vlad Zografi. ■

Excerpt

"We are living in hard times, sir, that's the truth. Crooked politicians, always ready to sell their own mothers, they keep pouring out lies, they got immensely rich, they build palaces for themselves, feign to fight each other, dog does not eat dogs and no dog ever walked away from a bone as they say, ain't that right? of course it is. Not to mention the judges, I know a restitution case, if you only knew, you would be appalled; and how about the crooks at the city hall or the government officials. Thieves, sir, that's what they are. Not to mention the police who are in league with the mob. Who can you trust now?" The barber sighed, combining his disappointment with the effort of rising on his tiptoes: "Besides, things are not rosy at all abroad either. I have a son who lives in France, he works all day long poor soul, he can barely save a penny, prices have soared there too; besides, they have problems with the immigrants. To say nothing of America, my brother-in-law is a taxi driver in Chicago, what do you know? He told me the crisis is even stronger there. Of course it is, for America is stronger. In what country can you have a good life, sir? Where? Nowhere. The end of the world is coming, trust me, the Apocalypse, it's all written in the Bible, word for word; who wrote that was not stupid, he knew everything beforehand, but we weren't able to read the signs. What can we do now?" Paul raised his eyebrows instead of answering, he continued to review his grimaces in the mirror. Eventually, bored to look at his own face, he started to watch the street – only in the mirror, giving up comparing it to the real street, he didn't want to turn his head. Finishing the haircut, the barber sighed again: "It's coming, sir, what am I talking about, it's already here, all the signs are here, you must be blind not to see them." When the barber untied the towel tightly knotted around his neck, Paul caught a glimpse of his face reflected in the mirror: for an instant he had unconsciously achieved the expression that was difficult to reproduce. The haircut was neither brilliant nor terrible, he must have looked as usual when he abandoned himself to the barbers, yet, unwilling to disappoint the harbinger of the Apocalypse that was now giving the towel a shake, he said he was satisfied. He went to pay for it at the counter then he slipped thirty lei into the pocket of the barber's gown. Walking to the door, he wondered if it was not too little, so he went back and shoved two more ten lei notes into his pocket. He looked at the locks of hair scattered on the floor, his grey hair, a kind of dark blond hair; he discovered among them a few light-coloured hairs. "Anything else, sir?" "Nothing," Paul said. And he went out into the real street.

His meditations focused on universal cacophony. Strident ads, visual bombardment, noise, turmoil, chaos, infantilization, confusion, fantasy and horror movies, the obsession with the natural, the obsession with artificial intelligence, the obsession with self-esteem, the dissonant choruses of psychotherapists and dietitians, aggressiveness, manipulation, disinformation, the onslaught of the conspiracy theories, people that have no clue about the world they live in, people that believe the earth is flat, the diversification of the varieties of crackpots, collective delusion – the evidence was overwhelming. Yet, precisely because it was overwhelming, the demon of contradiction woke up inside Paul. There should be some meaning in all this mess, the demon whispered to him, something unexpected, unsuspected, basic, a light explosion, a lightning out of the blue, a pure sound. And then he saw a woman walking in the distance, ahead of him, wearing a burgundy dress and having long hair. As he could see her, from behind, it seemed to him that she might be Camelia. Forgetting about all his meditations on the universal cacophony and a possible meaning, which he no longer knew if it came from the demon of contradiction or was a naive hope, Paul set out in pursuit of the woman in a burgundy dress. ■

VLAD ZOGRAFI

TRANSLATION AND PUBLICATION SUPPORT PROGRAMME (TPS) & PUBLISHING ROMANIA

Translation and Publication Support Programme (TPS)

Launched in 2006, the **Translation and Publication Support Programme (TPS)** aims at facilitating the access of foreign audiences to Romanian culture and supporting the presence of Romanian authors on the international book markets, by financing the translation costs (and a part of the production costs, as the case may be).

TPS supports the translation and publication abroad of relevant fiction and non-fiction works belonging to Romanian authors in the fields of literature, arts, social sciences and the humanities.

OBJECTIVES:

- promoting the cultural dialogue and dissemination of Romanian culture and civilization around the world;
- supporting the translation of relevant Romanian works in the European and international cultural space.

ELIGIBLE COSTS

Only applications submitted by publishing houses (private or public) headquartered outside the territory of the Romanian state are considered eligible for the programme.

A single project can receive a maximum of 15,000 EUR, in the following manner: TPS can cover translation costs **up to 100% (but not exceeding 12,000 EUR) and, in certain cases, production costs (printing, proof-reading, layout, graphic design and binding) up to 50% (but not exceeding 3,000 EUR).** For applications requesting only production costs, TPS will cover an amount not exceeding **9,000 EUR** of the eligible costs.

Payments made by the publisher prior to the conclusion of the grant contract with the Romanian Cultural Institute shall not be supported through the Translation and Publication Support Programme.

TPS will NOT support the following:

- works not belonging to Romanian authors;
- copyright;
- promotion and distribution expenses;
- text books, collections of papers or proceedings of meetings or conferences;
- books distributed free of charge;
- magazines and journals;
- books published before requesting the TPS support;
- guidebooks;
- print-runs under 500 copies;
- institutional costs including maintenance, payments made as a result of budget deficits, salaries, and other day-to-day expenses of the publisher.

The evaluation will take into consideration the following: the quality of the work; the background of the publishing house, the distribution plan and promotion strategy; the previous experience of the translator; the requested amount in relation to the overall costs of the operation and the proposed print-run of the book.

Application deadlines

For more information on submitting applications, see the website:
www.cennac.ro

PUBLISHING ROMANIA

The **PUBLISHING ROMANIA** financing programme was launched in 2007 to support publishing projects aimed at promoting Romanian culture abroad. The programme has two sections, each having specific project-selection objectives and criteria.

Section 1. Publishing albums and books devoted to Romanian culture and civilization

The programme offers foreign publishers financial support for publishing albums and books showcasing Romanian culture with a view to stimulating their interest for representative Romanian cultural topics.

General eligibility terms

Financial support may be applied for by foreign publishers and cultural institutions intending to publish albums and books on Romanian cultural topics in the following fields: history, philosophy, the history of arts and culture, literary history, cultural heritage, linguistics, monographs on Romanian authors.

Eligible costs

Financial support may cover up to **75% of the total amount comprising the fees due to copyright owners and translators and the related production costs** (layout, graphic design, cover design, proofreading, paper and printing). However, the total amount granted will not exceed **15,000 EUR/proposal for albums** or **7,500 EUR/proposal for books.**

The Romanian Cultural Institute will not reimburse publishers for any payments made prior to the conclusion of the grant contract with the Romanian Cultural Institute.

PUBLISHING ROMANIA will not be supporting:

- print-runs under 500 copies;
- publishers applying for financial support in order to publish the same book in separate volumes translated into different languages;
- second editions of books previously granted financial support by RCI;
- publishers not complying with the conditions listed under the heading **"General eligibility terms"**;
- institutional costs including administrative costs, payments to the budget deficit account, salaries, current payments of the publisher;
- promotion and distribution expenses;
- politically or religiously militant books;
- books fostering sexual, racial and ideological discrimination liable to infringe on human rights policies.

Financial support will be granted on an evaluation and selection basis and taking into consideration the following criteria:

- the topicality of the theme/subject, the quality of the proposed work;
- the prestige and experience of the publishing house;
- the distribution plan and the promotion strategy;
- the amount requested as financial support in relation to the total budget necessary for publishing the work and to the proposed print-run.

Section 2. Publishing supplements, thematic issues or journals of studies on Romanian culture and civilization

A programme granting financial support for the publication of supplements, thematic issues or journals of studies on Romanian culture and civilization aimed at stimulating the interest of foreign publications for Romanian culture.

General eligibility terms

Financial support may be applied for by cultural, art and scientific magazines, as well as by Romanian studies journals from abroad appearing in foreign languages.

Eligible costs

Financial support may cover up to **75% of the total amount comprising the fees due to copyright owners and translators and the related production costs** (layout, graphic design, cover, proofreading, paper and printing). However, the total amount granted will not exceed **6,000 EUR.**

The Romanian Cultural Institute will not reimburse publishers for any payments made prior to the conclusion of the grant contract with the Romanian Cultural Institute.

PUBLISHING ROMANIA will not be supporting:

- supplements or special issues not complying with the conditions listed under the heading **"General eligibility terms"**;
- institutional costs including administrative costs, payments to the budget deficit account, salaries, current payments of the publisher;
- promotion and distribution expenses;
- politically or religiously militant publications;
- publications fostering sexual, racial and ideological discrimination liable to infringe on human rights policies.

Financial support will be granted on an evaluation and selection basis and will take into consideration:

- the quality of the publication (national and international visibility and prestige, experience, editorial coherence and pertinence);
- the relevance of the contents of the special issue/supplement towards the international promotion of Romanian culture (quality of selected topic/subject, quality of contents, relevance of featured authors);
- the distribution plan and the promotion strategy;
- the amount requested as financial support in relation to the total budget necessary for publishing the issue.

Application deadlines

For more information on submitting applications, see the website:
www.cennac.ro

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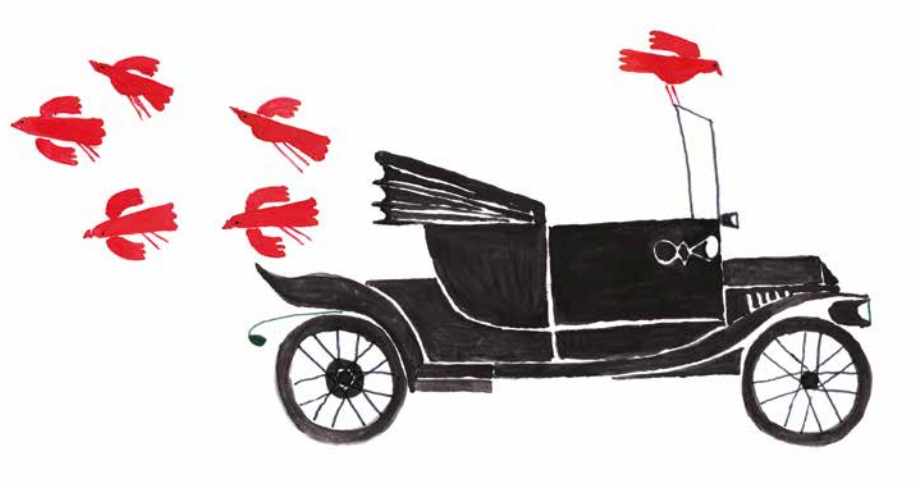

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