

Delia Ungureanu

Et Verbum caro factum est
**De la teoria literaturii și literatura comparată
la literatura mondială ca disciplină și obiect de studiu**

TEZĂ DE ABILITARE
Domeniul Filologie

Abstract

My academic career spans seventeen years – fourteen teaching at the University of Bucharest and three at Harvard University – and an intellectual trajectory that evolved from teaching and doing research in the field of literary theory to teaching and doing research in the fields of comparative and world literature. While the discipline of world literature is rather recent (the late 1990s in the USA) and seems to be the product of the Western Anglo-American world, its object of study has a much deeper history of about three millennia. Born from the comparative literature practiced by European comparatists of Jewish origin who emigrated to the USA following WWII, world literature as a discipline is tied into a history of exile, loss, and the need to belong to the most comprehensive form of community imaginable: humankind.

My own intellectual story has a deeper past than the seventeen years since I entered the academic system. It goes back to my family's past – a mixed Romanian and Jewish family connected to the major historical events of the 20th century: the Holocaust, the Gulag, WWII – and my own upbringing in the 1980s, the worst decade of the Romanian communist regime. The way my academic trajectory evolved from literary theory to world literature is an organic growth of my own moral, inner being. Many of my academic choices revealed themselves in time to configure a very clear, logical, and organic trajectory. They were not merely academic choices, but also biographically conditioned. For me, to teach, read and write is a *vocation*, so my choices – what to read, teach, and write about – imposed themselves on me as intuitive moral imperatives whose true meaning was revealed to me only retrospectively. The writers, filmmakers, artists, and ideas I wrote about always *chose* me rather than the other way around.

Being brought up in a small bourgeois family, with parents belonging to a much older generation (they were both born in 1943) and who rarely spoke about their own past and history – my Jewish maternal side of the family was either killed in the 1941 Iași pogrom or survived the pogrom in Dorohoi, as my grandmother –, with an impressive library that

included literature and art from all over the world in the 1980s, I grew up in what I now call a School of Suspicion, doubting the reality around me and the apparent, verbalized nature of things. This feeling fed into a powerful need and desire to know the *hidden* nature of things, both in my own family and in the art and literature that kept me company in my solitary childhood. Therefore, I trained myself at a School of Doubt and Suspicion toward the reality around me, a school that became the most powerful all-encompassing idea that guided both my life and my approach to art and literature. So, when I spent a long time translating Harold Bloom's *Western Canon* into Romanian, its main directing idea – the anxiety of influence understood as a conscious negation, but hidden, of an artist's true models – spoke to me intimately. It remained the most powerful, overarching idea of my moral and intellectual preoccupations.

This idea lies behind the main themes that cross all my publications, classes taught, and talks given over the past seventeen years: there is a deeper history of surrealism that goes beyond the historical borders of the movement as acknowledged by literary histories – both into the past and into the future; sometimes major canonical works have secret sources beyond the creator's (declared) intention; the arts share a structural and organic relation that remains obscured if looked at only from the point of view of a single field of study. These ideas have organized my three books – *Time Regained: World Literature and Cinema* (Bloomsbury, 2023 paperback and 2021 hardcover), *From Paris to Tlön: Surrealism as World Literature* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), and *Poetica Apocalipsei. Războiul cultural în revistele literare românești (1944-1947)* (Editura Universității București, 2012) – as well as the 30 articles and essays I've published, the classes I taught both at the University of Bucharest, in Harvard's Department of Comparative Literature, and at the Harvard Institute for World Literature, and the 30 invited talks I've given from Torshavn to Tel Aviv and from Toronto to Tokyo.

The awards and distinctions my research and teaching have received – from the University of Bucharest and Romanian institutions to the Harvard Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning and Harvard College –, as well as the impact of my discoveries on the fields of comparative and world literature were for me always a blank check, a form of credit and belief invested in me by people. This belief was never for me past oriented, as a reward for something I've already accomplished, but rather future oriented. This blank check had an invisible value, one I was yet to rise to. A proof of the generosity of people whom I didn't want to disappoint. In time, I discovered this was the key to staying young: to be an eternal

student of life and learning, one who wakes up every morning thinking of Socrates' words: *I know I know nothing.*

When I started my academic career in 2007, Mircea Martin, who remained one of my intellectual and moral mentors, told me something that stayed with me all these years. Literary theory affords you the best possible position: you can be a literary critic, a cultural analyst, a moralist, a thinker, even a writer. So I never really left literary theory behind, but rather took it with me as a self-reflective moral consciousness for the work I have done and will continue to do in the fields of comparative literature and world literature. This is how a 2020 essay was born, *The Value of Solitude*, perhaps my most openly autobiographical writing yet. And from it, the idea for my future book, *The Undiscovered Country: Visionaries of Another World*. To reveal the hidden structures that underlie our notion of the world and that make up the invisible reality that transcends time, as well as our modest human existence has been my sole preoccupation. Its moral and spiritual meaning has always been the true motivation and scope of my life and work. This motivation and scope I owe to my family who no longer is and to those who give meaning to my life, especially my sister, Lavinia, my niece, Teodora, and my husband, Michael, the greatest friend and intellectual partner of never-ending conversations that always bring a sense of completion and of things falling into place, including the title of my habilitation thesis.

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