

## Literature as discursive interstice

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### Article info

#### History:

Received December 1, 2016

Accepted December 24, 2016

Published March 23, 2017

#### Key words:

literary pragmatics

poetics

literary theory

### Abstract

Starting with a famously popular case of literary genesis, which is the rewriting of the theatre play *English Without a Teacher* in the new variant of *The Bald Soprano*, this paper aims at analysing the complex relationship between textual objects of literary pretension and the literary space. The paper's assumed perspective derives from the pragmatics of literary discourse (cf. Maingueneau, 2007), while at the same time it is concerned with analysing the processual features of literary phenomena. It seems that these features can only be analysed in relation to the metamorphoses of the social and cultural imaginary. Emphasizing these relational features of the notion of literature across history and also emphasizing the capacity of literature to remain in a process of continual metamorphosis while being in close contact with the textual objects which seek to challenge its stability, and at the same time, emphasizing the status of literature as 'discursive interstice' or as 'self-constituting discourse', the paper sets out to show the fact that textual objects which aim at transgressing the 'literary space' are in fact the signals released from the pressure history and the cultural metamorphoses it has generated exercises on the literary phenomenon. This pressure seems to have offered literature a transgressive dimension.

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## 1. Introduction

In the recent history of literature (theatre), the change of the Romanian theatre play *English Without a Teacher* into the French play *La cantatrice chauve* [The Bald Soprano] represents a famous case of literary genesis, which can be a starting point for a clarifying discussion regarding the works of the Romanian-French playwright, but also for a discussion concerning the relationship between textual objects of literary pretension and the literary space.

Let us now remember the facts: just as the World War II had finished, Eugen Ionescu chose not to leave France and then he decided to reconnect with the literary space when his play *The Bald Soprano* had its world premiere in Théâtre des Noctambules, on May 11, 1950. As one of the most important voices of the generation of the '30s, the young playwright had been one of the iconoclast voices of the Romanian literary criticism in his Romanian period, although his 'creative' work (his volume of poems *Elegii pentru finte mici*) had not been an acclaimed 'literary event' in the period between the two world wars. His genuinely irreverent attitude present in *Nu* (1934) and in his chronicles published in the press<sup>1</sup> was targeting against the Romanian literary tradition and against the big names from the interwar literature, and also against a particular idea of 'literature', namely the one rooted in a cultural continuum, teeming with culture and rhetoric and lacking authenticity<sup>2</sup>. From this reason, the young Ionescu began to regard theatre as a completely false and inauthentic 'literary or 'artistic' form. However, Ionescu was about to become a famous playwright in his own right, but this happened as a result of an interesting experiment of literary iconoclasm and *theatrical self-pedagogy*. As he personally confessed in *Notes and Counternotes* (Ionescu,

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<sup>1</sup>These chronicles are published by Mariana Vartic and Aurel Sasu in *Război cu toată lumea* (Ionescu, 1992).

<sup>2</sup>As he used to seek forms of 'authenticity' in the writings of his contemporaries, the playwright regarded literature as closely linked to "the organic alliance of intuitive knowledge and innovative expression" (Tucan, 2015, p. 46).

1966), while he was trying to learn English using the *Assimil* course book, the writer would transcribe long sentences from the manual and would arrange them in a new form of experimental theatre, which became *English Without a Teacher*. Ionescu's first attempt at writing drama was mainly characterized by the transgression of the discursive and structural norms of theatre. By voicing evident dissonances which mark the dialogue and by refusing to give clear space and time coordinates or clear descriptions of characters, resulting in a number of logical inconsistencies at the level of the action, this play seems to violate the traditional theatre of coherently developed models and situations by an intentional use of fragmentation. What Ionescu actually creates is *innovation through rupture*, which becomes evident in the analysis of the final ending of the play—a typically Pirandellian ending (i.e. a metatheatrical ending; see Tucan, 2013, p. 450): in *English Without a Teacher*, Ionescu seems to dismantle the heavy machinery of theatre in order to better understand it and to make it work *otherwise*. At that moment this *otherwise* only showed a remote potentiality but it was about to become a reality soon after Ionescu rewrote his play in French.

*La cantatrice chauve* is almost entirely identical with its previous version. While analysing the new play, critics have identified a number of recently added details, which rather seem to indicate a typical process of re-theatralization, most likely required from the outside by Ionescu's theatre agents. To be more specific, *The Bald Soprano* is the new variant of *English Without a Teacher* without the final episode, supposedly too violent and too restrictive, while the director and the actors themselves who were trying to put the play on the stage made very strong claims about its ending.

On trouva cette fin trop polémique, et ne correspondant pas, d'ailleurs, avec la mise en scène stylisée e le jeu « très digne » voulu par les comédiens.

Et c'est parce que je ne trouvais pas une autre fin, que nous décidâmes de ne pas finir la pièce, et de recommencer. Pour marquer le caractère interchangeable des personnages, j'eus simplement l'idée de remplacer, dans le recommencement, les Smith par les Martins.

(Ionesco, 1966, p. 259)

In this way, under the pressure of the *theatre agents*, Ionescu's act of self-pedagogy became an innovative and a strikingly new theatrical or literary act which was going to resonate with his sympathetically responsive audience. All these points will be further developed. Ionescu's persistent attraction to acts of negation was not going to change but, with a bit of help from the outside, his attitude of denial was primarily channelled to develop new forms of theatre. Ionescu's metatheatrical final ending in his first play seemed to have manipulated, perhaps too explicitly, the meaning of the text and limited the overall message to a sterile polemical debate regarding the autonomy of theatre and the necessary separation between fiction and reality in theatre (see Tucan, 2014, p. 449). The ending of the play was therefore limiting the number of critical readings while only encouraging a metatheatrical type of reading. It is clear that texts, either theatrical or literary, may become artistic works if they are able to afford various forms of interpretive actualizations in particular cultural contexts. This means that literary texts need to be placed into a discursive interstice (i.e. literature); inside this interstice, such limiting contextualizations are generally abolished. Beginning with this example, in what follows I will discuss the relationship between textual objects of literary pretension and the literary space. Given this complex relationship, it is only possible to describe the idea of literature in relation to its processual character.

## 2. Literature as discursive interstice

The discursive interstice known as **Literature** in the Western culture is a phenomenon of extensive amplitude, but it nevertheless lacks a unitary definition. Across history, literature has been given a wide range of definitions, extensions and attributes. Analysing 'literature' as a discursive type and observing "the irreducible dispersal of 'literary' discourses" (my italics), Dominique Maingueneau is right when he claims that the term of literary discourse "is a label that does not denote a stable unit, but it allows the grouping of a corpus of phenomena that belong to different historical ages and societies" (Maingueneau, 2007, p. 19).

The notion of literature has received considerable attention indicating that literature itself has developed a diffuse and volatile character. Take for example the various perspectives on literature across historical ages, the brief history documenting literary fashions and models which have been opened up to contestations, or the short outline showing how the relationship between literature and the social and cultural space has been perceived in time.

The length of this paper does not allow a further debate, but if I wished to outline the potential of a historical analysis of both the literary phenomenon and of the metamorphoses of the idea about literature, I would have to assume a perspective that would be historical and typological at the same time. Beginning with the mainstream texts of the history of universal literature, but also with the founding texts of critical reflection on literature and culture, I could notice, even if in a brief and schematic manner, that the definitions of the literary phenomenon differ, sometimes in a strikingly radical manner, from one epoch to another or from one paradigm to another. While I am fully aware of this fact and of the risks of generalizations, I could nonetheless discuss a 'classical' definition of literature, rooted in the platonic considerations on poetry or literature—see *The Republic*—and in Aristotle's *Poetics*, a romantic definition of literature, fixedly rooted in the birth of the culture of the individual in the European context, a modern definition of literature, rooted in the crisis of the European culture from the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and a postmodern definition of literature showing a sort of sweetening of the experimental and contesting fervour of the modern aesthetics.

One of the main conclusions reached by such an analysis would be the one showing that *any approach to literature automatically starts a further discussion regarding the historical variations of the term itself as well as regarding the cultural and ideological contexts in which these definitions were generated*. Take for example Adrian Marino who has this exact approach to literature in most of his books and especially in his ample 'biography' analysing the idea of literature (Marino, 1991–2000). From this perspective, the concept of literature can be perceived as a relational concept<sup>3</sup> (see Bode, 1989) which receives meanings, extensions, attributes, and functions only in relation to a particular cultural context and in relation to its system of values.

Across historical ages, literature has been granted a nucleic aesthetic dimension and also a capacity of metamorphosis which has made possible paradoxical valorizations. Each of these historical ages has had a functional approach to this discursive and cultural phenomenon. Ever since its early beginnings, literature has been placed into the category of self-constituting discourses, which are discourses that colour the acts of the community (Maingueneau, 2007, p. 64). Thus, in all historical ages literature has interacted with the community's system of values. However, it was possible for this type of interaction to take place only inside the boundaries of a *fundamental ambivalence*: on the one hand, literature was able to refine the most innovative trends in the cultural space, and on the other hand, the same literature, in the most natural way, was an active facilitator which managed to introduce these cultural trends, to secure their place in the community, and finally to legitimize them as assets of value for the cultural imaginary. This is the reason why literature seems to be serving a dual functionality, apart from its metamorphic character. Ideal and transitory, spiritual and material, sacred and profane, atemporal in essence but subjected to historization, literature is able to establish permanent communication with the community's system of values, which is constantly supposed to send back messages to literature. Therefore, literature is able to be an active participant in the reconfiguration of the cultural space by undergoing a natural process of feedback. In the first place, this functional duality can be explained by the fact that, historically speaking, the specific vocabulary used to formulate subsequent theorizations of literature has always oscillated between these two antithetic dimensions, fact which has enabled the notion of literature to absorb, transform, and recycle all representations, images, and ways of thinking belonging to all historical ages. This explains why literature is characterized by a set of features which, at some point, can establish something similar to a category—a highly contested category, according to cognitive scientists (Kovecses, 2006, p. 51–61)—

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<sup>3</sup>Or a *functional concept* (Eagleton, 2008, p. 24).

in relation to the dynamic experiences of culture. In the end, this argument strengthens once again the idea that literature should be regarded as a relational concept or as a complex category which seems to be closely connected to the dynamics generated by the historical play involving individual and/ or cultural experiences.

However, having embraced such an approach to literature does not automatically deny the possibility that a great number of individual texts can be 'highly appreciated' and regarded as masterpieces across different ages. Such texts have been able to form the trans-historical literary canon across particular cultures or, more precisely, they are seen as identical with Harold Bloom's "literary art of memory" (Bloom, 1998, p. 17), a phrase he has coined with reference to the Western canon.

In fact, there are at least three possibilities of analysing the impact of individual literary texts on the canonical history of the European culture. The first possibility would be the one of a 'rapid' canonization which shows that a text has been present in the canon ever since its birth to this day. In this case, the Homeric epics are probably the best example, as they have been accompanying and modelling the European culture ever since the Antiquity, despite the fact that their origins and functionality in the old world are seen as rather problematic, complex and intrinsically connected to the history of the cultural space in which they emerged<sup>4</sup>. The second possibility would be the one of a 'contextual' canonization which may comprise all texts paradigmatic of a particular age or of a particular literary style. Here all literary texts rendering faithfully what can be called the epoch's literary doctrine can be given as examples; such texts are granted instantly the status of the canon, but they lose their potential of reference texts when the idea of literature becomes radically transformed, in spite of the typical inertia suffered by all literary objects which have been canonized. Racine's theatre can be a good example<sup>5</sup>. The third possibility would be the one of a 'subsequent' canonization, which means that the text enters the canon long after it begins to circulate. Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, William Shakespeare's theatre or François Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* best illustrate this case. Despite the fact that today the publication of Cervantes's novel is considered to mark the moment of the invention of the modern European novel (see Cascardi, 2002, p. 58–79), in its early 150 years of existence, the text was regarded just as highly humoristic writing, although it was already heavily translated (Beutell Gardner, 2015, p. 3). It is a fact that the age when this text was written, the genre of the novel was seen as marginal, so *Don Quixote* couldn't be perceived but as a strange and an unconventional oddity, placed at the periphery of literature and opposing the central poetic models of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Highly read for his irreverent images teeming with the folly of the carnivalesque laughter, Rabelais was firstly truly appreciated only by the Romantics, who constructed a new paradigm of permanent models which included Rabelais, Cervantes, and Shakespeare (Bahtin, 1974, p. 6–7).

The analysis of these three possibilities establishing a set of relationships between literary texts and the canonical history of literature indicates that 'literary objects' are always in close interaction with various historical contexts, and that they may allow or not to be revalorized by these contexts through which they have travelled. Some of these texts cannot deal with these processes of interaction, and so the interest drawn on such texts can only be purely documentary. Others, especially the ones preserved as cultural reference points, have a longer life due to the fact that they can firstly cope with contestations, and consequently they may allow a set of revalorizations which are opened up to new cultural and individual experiences. These textual 'objects' are in fact the closest to the processual character of the idea of literature. Among other things, the history of literature is the history of the revolutions taking place in the literary art. The reason for this is straightforward: *the obsession for originality is the engine for the continuous metamorphoses of literature as a form of expression and as cultural insertion*. The openness,

<sup>4</sup>This means that the Homeric epics have become central cultural elements of the Old Greek culture once a panhellenic consciousness has developed along with the culture of writing which had selected the canonical version of the Homeric epics from the previous oral tradition (see Nagy, 1989, p. 29–35).

<sup>5</sup>It is a good example especially if we remember that Stendhal gave it as a counter-example when he tried to explain the difference between Romanticism and Classicism in his essay *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823; see Stendhal, 1927).



the contesting spirit, the quest for new forms of expression and the relation to the cultural space are all reference points which have been accompanying, in one form or another, the entire history of the Western literature. But this obsession for creative originality has always been coupled with an obsession for interpretative originality. This happens because *trans-contextualization* seems to be the engine of the permanent valorization of literature; *more precisely, this seems to be the capacity of the cultural imaginary to value the texts that have been labelled as literary in various contexts through interpretation and rewriting.* In conclusion, *trans-contextualization* can be defined as an act of valorization used in relation to the texts that have been labelled as literary; across history, this act has involved the transfer of the defining elements of the literary text from one system of reference to another one<sup>6</sup>.

### 3. Literature as self-constituting discourse

If today the notion of literature has developed a relational sense and if the reality of literary facts only makes sense as part of a discursive interstice, it appears that the difference between literature and non-literature can be highly problematic. Traditionally speaking, the boundaries between literary and non-literary phenomena have remained in an area of stability. But the fact is that the literary discourse has never been kept in isolation; on the contrary, it has always enjoyed the interaction with other discursive types, present in different historical and cultural communities. This commonsensical observation can show the fact that there are several types of discourses to which we tend to attach intrinsic value and fundamental meanings, generated primarily from within one particular culture. These are, in fact, the types of discourses that attach “meaning to the acts of the community”: the religious discourse, the philosophical discourse, the scientific discourse, and the literary discourse. All such discourses are self-constituting discourses, i.e. discourses that ground the culture of a community in deeply rooted values while being responsible for the *archeion* of a culture<sup>7</sup>.

Although such self-constituting discourses are able to self-authorize or self-legitimize as fundamental and foundational discourses of origin, they are also able to interact with each other or with the community’s discursive types (see Maingueneau, 2007). Born in time immemorial, these types of discourses enter a constant competition in order to reach the foreground of the cultural space, while the tension generated between them forms particular features and paves their way to posterity.

One supporting example comes from the Ancient Greek culture. Plato’s negative perception of ‘poetry’ is a well known fact; the term of ‘poetry’ used to cover the meanings we now attach to literature. In Plato’s times, poetry used to have an educational aim as it was the most highly valued vehicle of tradition, built on two pillars: aesthetics and religion. In effect, Plato’s critical vision disapproves of poetry’s educational aim, while this classical instrument was generally supposed to be a repository of all wisdom. When the Greek philosopher tried to imagine the ideal city, Plato is famous for having banished poets from the city because of their illusions, false images, and their world of appearances which may lead us even further from the ‘truth’ (Plato, 1986, 596 e, p. 413). In fact, such antithetic images setting the stage for Plato’s scepticism about poetry (see Tucan, 2013) may reveal the conflict between poetry and philosophy, between the tradition manipulating the *doxa* and the truth, seen as the two main objects of philosophical thinking. This moment marking the tension between poetry and philosophy, which appeared in Plato’s

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<sup>6</sup>However, given the fact that in the modern and postmodern ages it was contested the spirit of literature as universal, atemporal, essentialist discourse, the act of trans-contextualization began to be used in relation to other types of texts (for instance, ‘documentary’ texts, scientific texts, etc.). For example, history in its traditional sense tries to understand the objective historical context of a document which has the role of recording a series of past real facts. Nevertheless, cultural anthropology would rather say that such a document does not record real facts, but realities of social, cultural, symbolic, ideological or institutional nature. Such a document would be perceived as a significant mark of the ideological structures of the times rather than an accurate record of historical ‘reality’. Trans-contextualization is therefore a common practice of current cultural studies that examines both literary and non-literary texts and regards them as valuable documents bearing the mark of the cultural structure of the space in which they were created.

<sup>7</sup>Maingueneau (2007, p. 64): *arché* – source of action, principle, sovereignty, power.

argument, was actually the moment when both philosophy and the critical reflection on poetry (including here the reflection on the utility of poetry) became separated, but ever since that moment they have not lived completely isolated one from the other. Half a century after Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle wrote *The Poetics*, which was later considered to be the first treatise of literary theory in the Western culture (Doležel, 1998, p. 17). In his *Poetics*, Aristotle uses the discourse of the philosopher who makes a careful analysis of an ordinary phenomenon, but also he uses the discourse of the thinker who, with a methodical temperament, tries to confer autonomy to the study of literature or poetry<sup>8</sup>, and by doing so, he tries to legitimize the idea of literature as relevant to culture, even when literature was highly rebelled against. However, in addition to its legitimizing function, Aristotle's poetics has also a formative function: having defined literature and having emphasized the need of literature to develop an analytical framework, Aristotle's treatise has remained for the course of two thousand years the milestone of a prescriptive poetics<sup>9</sup>, which was able to offer valid models for the writers and also models of evaluation and ways of address for the poetical phenomenon. In short, the treatise was able to offer the stability necessary for the self-constituting discourse. Whether we consider generic structural models, which have multiplied in time, or whether we consider the poetic language or any aesthetic effects, literature has gradually developed a powerful discursive tradition that owes a lot to the theoretical and analytical reflections from Aristotle's *Poetics*. In addition to being a catalyst for the discursive dimension, *The Poetics* has been committed to the formation of a tradition of appreciation of literature in the Western culture, which has enabled literature to remain at the core of the self-constituting discursivity, in spite of the various moments when it was highly contested.

The example mentioned above may be relevant from another viewpoint, i.e. the analysis of the phenomenon of 'constituency'. In the previous paragraphs, it has been noted that Plato disapproves of poetry's claims to 'wisdom'. In other words, it seems that Plato had been trying to place philosophy at the core of cultural constituency, which at that time was a phenomenon in search of achieving a sense of legitimization and a state of individuality. By doing so, Plato attempted to challengingly dislocate the truth, regarded as a highly valued asset of poetry, in order to further attach it to philosophy. This dislocation was nevertheless only partially achieved as the idea of 'truth' came to be a legitimizing factor for both philosophy and literature across centuries. However, what remains a fact is that this original act of dislocation was certainly meant to enable in the Western cultural history the interactions between philosophy and literature as they both seemed to share the same 'object of desire'. But probably more important is the fact that this highly disputed element of value was going to be one of the legitimizing concepts that defined the self-constituting character of both discourses, despite their evident differences, which can generate tensions, as shown in Plato's work. Whether in close collaboration or whether in open conflict, these two self-constituting discourses have been in fierce competition for trying to take possession over the elements of value belonging to different cultural areas, but each of them has fought with their own individual weapons. In the end, each self-constituting discourse is defined by a set of *generic cultural elements of value*, as it is the case with the one mentioned above, but eventually self-constituting discourses can only achieve stability and acquire particular features by means of *a set of individual elements* and *a corpus of particular discursive configurations*.

Such arguments are perfectly valid also in the case of literature. In order to take more advantage of the analysis of Aristotle's *Poetics*, I believe it would be interesting to consider the practical ways in which this philosophical text managed to share with literature the essential elements of its constituency: more

<sup>8</sup>"Besides the analytical character of Aristotle's own philosophical temperament, two major factors encouraged a more acute demarcation of poetry's domain than had previously existed in Greek culture or criticism. One was the rapid diversification, in the course of the fifth and fourth centuries, of regions of thought and activity which in retrospect came to be categorised in terms such as history, rhetoric, science, scholarship, and philosophy itself. [...] In addition to this cultural issue, there was the particular challenge of Plato's assault on poetic standards of truth and morality, posing for Aristotle the task of finding criteria which could do justice to poetry's intrinsic nature and values." (Halliwell, 1989, p. 152).

<sup>9</sup>Or 'essentialist poetics', according to Genette (1994, p. 93).

precisely, generic and specific elements of value and discursive configuration.

While he was writing his treatise, Aristotle used the poetical practices popular in his time in order to create a syncretical image of the literary phenomenon ('poesis'). In conclusion, Aristotle's *Poetics* does not only launch a series of clearly defined subjects which were going to be at the centre of the critical reflections on literature (see Tucan, 2007), but it also manages to describe in a theoretical manner the literary phenomena of his time. Clearly, Aristotle tries to pinpoint the specifics of poetry and its compositional features, while he was also interested in its functionality. But, besides all these, Aristotle implicitly wished to outline a model of poeiticity which was meant to be followed in the centuries to come. This becomes clear even from the very first paragraph:

The poietic [art] in itself (1) and the various kinds of it (2), and what [particular] effect each kind has (3), and how plots should be put together if the making is to prosper (4); and how many elements it has and of what kind (5); and likewise everything else that belongs in this area of inquiry – let us discuss all this, beginning in the natural way with first things.

(Aristotel, 1997, 1447 a, [s.n.]

Firstly, Aristotle addresses the issue of defining poetry: (1) the philosopher borrows this definition from Plato's *Republic*, but he appears to assign value to the term in a context of rationalist thinking: poetry is therefore an art of imitation which imitates by means of words only (1447 b). If Plato had not allowed poetry to have access to the 'truth', to his disciple this was a fundamental requirement. To Aristotle, the term of *mimesis* had the double meaning of both 'reality' and 'truth', combined in the general concept of 'natural verisimilitude'. If Aristotle is concerned with the concepts of 'poesis' (*creation*) and 'techné' (craft or art), it should be noted that, besides the truth as a generic element of value, the philosopher attaches to poetry another specific element of value: *beauty*.

Although Aristotle was not very interested in analysing 'types of poetry', and therefore (2) he only managed to briefly question the imitation process with its 'means, objects, and procedure' (1448 a: 20–25), describing only in general terms epic poetry, dithyrambs or comedy and anticipating a detailed analysis of tragedy, the Greek philosopher makes an indirect attempt at describing a corpus of structural configurations of literature. In other words, this is a theory of literary genres.

The phrase of "what [particular] effect each kind has" speaks of the issue of the functions of poetry. As expected, the basic function of poetry is *beauty*. However, the sense of beauty cannot be attained without a set of stylistic and compositional frameworks which are carefully described by Aristotle for tragedy, but he only briefly touches upon them for the other genres. Here one can find the particular features which are expected to generate the prescriptive character of classical poetry, which has been mentioned in the lines above. In effect, Aristotle's critical synthesis seems to have paved the way for a compositional system of literature, which was supposed to develop gradually together with the literary practices of the times, but which remained nevertheless deeply rooted in Aristotle's writings.

In addition to the above given example, it can be also noted that literature as self-constituting discourse is seen as a sort of reference framework that is meant to incorporate a number of generic reference points and discursive structures which have received their own legitimization by mirroring the existing values and the discursive tradition. But since both the discursive tradition and the system of values are subjected to metamorphoses, one can conclude that the literary space is permanently situated in interaction with a set of potential phenomena which, by forcing their way into the system, are able to generate transformations, dislocations or ruptures of the reference framework of literature.

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At this point, it is only sensible to question what exactly enables texts to belong or not to the self-constituting register of literature. Having previously analysed Ionescu's plays (i.e. *English Without a Teacher* / *The Bald Soprano*), I can now draw the conclusion that his texts are part of a discursive tradition, more precisely the tradition of drama. In Ionescu's case such a literary approach was possible due the fact that

the playwright showed a clear preference for organizing and structuring his texts in a strikingly dramatic manner. In other words, what the playwright did was to adjust the sentences he had extracted from the *Assimil* course book to the discursive register of drama, by introducing bits of dialogue and stage directions. It is true that Ionescu's creative act is caught in the game of hazard, as shown in his *Notes and Counternotes*. On the other hand, to some extent almost all creative acts are exposed to hazard. It appears that the original foundations of literary works are generally built on their need to break free from the literary tradition and change it in the sense of achieving a new reconfiguration and revalorization or in the sense of openly opposing to traditional literary practices. The views Ionescu takes in his writings put him in marked opposition to a long tradition of drama. However, regardless of the general views an individual literary work might use, literary works have to create a set of values which they are expected to passionately pursue and ultimately these values will be exposed for receiving validation. In the beginning it was difficult for Ionescu's addressees to identify precisely the set of values the playwright had created and so they mainly took notice of the tensed critical views generated by Ionescu's texts and examined their oddity teeming with insight and inspiration. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the playwright was going to achieve validation for his works from within the continuum of the theatrical tradition which Ionescu used to challenge from the outside in order to gain recognition as a fully accomplished writer in the theatrical continuum. In conclusion, it is evident that self-constituting discourses are expected to be formed neither in the core of tradition nor outside tradition. The place where they are born is a place of paradoxes, i.e. the symbolic place of the social and cultural space, or "a parasitic location which depends on its own impossibility to establish itself". In short, this is the *paratopy*<sup>10</sup>, according to Maingueneau (2007, p. 70). Paratopy is therefore more than a place. It is the gap widening in the course of the interactions that occur between literature, history (and implicitly the cultural imaginary in its historical sense), and the individual energies released by literary creativity. This is the place to situate a text with literary pretensions which already belongs to 'literature' but which is still striving to achieve the desired validation.

*The discourse community* is supposed to validate literary acts. The term of 'discourse community' was first coined by John Swales (1990) in his analyses of the written communication, which appears to be deeply rooted in the other two previous meanings attached to the notions of *speech community* from the sociolinguistics and the one of *interpretive communities* from the American poetics of the '80s (Fish, 1980). If the speech community gives voice to the consciousness of a group of people who share a set of linguistic norms with regard to their own communication (i.e. how their language should be used culturally and geographically), the interpretive community, on the other hand, provides a set of shared cultural strategies that are used for interpreting (literary) texts. The discourse community, however, is a combination of the other two discourses with the goal of understanding a new practice in communication and a new type of reception with far-reaching effects. According to John Swales, discourse communities are groups of people who use communication for specific goals and who share a set of strategies, values and instruments to achieve these goals: a set of broadly agreed values, a series of common rules and a corpus of discourse structures, a network of communication platforms, and a number of public figures who have the role of endorsing all these shared elements, etc. Discourse communities are groups of people who develop their own common practices and a series of shared norms. These groups of people are able to establish the network of values in a community and are able to change and adjust them accordingly. Such a network of values includes cultural symbols, structures of the social and cultural imaginary, cultural and institutional practices, a series of 'self-constituting discourses', and a number of generic artistic values (i.e. a list of agreed upon aesthetic paradigms) or individualized values, which may refer to various artistic figures belonging to the artistic and the literary canon. In addition, discourse communities have an *active* component and a *passive* one. If in the case of literature, the former component refers to those who are able to create symbolic acts or texts that are subjected to validation, performed by authors, and to those who organize these acts

<sup>10</sup> „The *paratopy* [italics in original] is not the absence of a place, but a difficult negotiation of a place and non-place, a parasitic location which depends on its own impossibility to establish itself.” (Maingueneau, 2007, p. 70).



of validation, performed by the literary criticism, editorial policies, or the system of education, etc., the latter component refers to those who receive these 'products' after they have used the signals coming from the elements of the first dimension. When the thin line separating the passive and active components is breached, the ones on the passive side have often attempted to become actors in the active dimension of the discourse community by producing 'literary works' or works associated to literature.

In order for a 'literary act' to be validated by a 'discourse community', the process of validation needs to be ready to break the rules of discourse and the symbolic structures of the discourse community, which means that such a validation act needs to own a *penetrating capacity*. Like other self-constituting discourses, literature has powerful textual structures "attributing to themselves the capacity of global significance and the capacity to speak of society, truth, beauty and existence" (Maingueneau, 2007, p. 71). Texts that tend to assume a literary capacity automatically need to assume this other capacity of transgressing the established limits of literature, together with its generic and specific values. As indicated above, when Eugen Ionescu wrote *English Without a Teacher* he seems to have experienced an act of theatrical self-pedagogy, but unfortunately he managed to give his new play a much too simple configuration, namely a too explicit type of meta-theatricality. When he asked for feedback from first validation agents (i.e. the director and the actors), they regarded the text as too restrictive in terms of its potentialities to penetrate the value register of theatre / literature, and therefore they recommended an alteration of the text by the elimination of the final ending which was too obedient to the rules of meta-theatricality and which was thus replaced with the first scene. The repetition of the first scene of the play resulted in the use of the new strategy of circular dynamics.

This strategy of circular dynamics was meant to generate further observations made by critics regarding the obvious correspondence between the play's isolated universe, but in fact extremely disarticulated, and the highly dissonant structure of the culture in the '50s. It must be admitted that the first critical and interpretive voices were now beginning to connect the absurdity of Ionescu's imagined world of theatre and the absurdity of the 'real' world in the post-war Europe:

Lacking any determination or logic, the absurd structural dimension of the new theatre came to be very similar to the equally absurd structural dimension of 'reality' lacking the same determination and logic. In the critical views of the times, the new theatre was likely to become an invitation in which reality, including the human reality, was encouraged to show its true monstrous features. Thus, the new theatre was generally perceived as a disturbingly shocking scene mirroring a world devastated by conflict and ideology, and consequently it was soon perceived as the 'Truth.'

(Tucan, 2015, p. 149)

As it can be seen from the example given above, the literary act appears to be born from within the discursive fields belonging to a community by making use of a series of processes: imitations, transformations, caricatures, disarticulating contestations, ironical contestations, etc. All such processes are in themselves true acts of *transgression of discursive norms*. In fact, it seems that the disarticulation of the conversational structures, as seen in the mirror of the final 'product', and the disarticulation of the dramatic structures are the foundation of Ionescu's theatre. The impact of the literary act on the discourse community varies therefore according to the manner in which the discursive norms are transgressed. In fact, this seems to be the creative reflex developed by the processual character of literature. The transgression of the discursive norms automatically involves a metamorphosis taking place at all levels of discourse (linguistic, inter-discursive, and cultural) in order to realize the intended discursivity. As shown by the history of Western literature, texts that seek to achieve validation in the region of the self-constituting discourse of literature are prepared to assume challenges leading to the metamorphosis of language (not only literary language, but also other related languages), to inter-discursive metamorphoses (the reinvention of generic and rhetoric structures), or to cultural metamorphoses (the reshaping of the social and cultural imaginary and the

reformulation of the networks of values belonging to various groups). All these potential challenges place the text into the 'discursive interstice', which is literature itself, while the text is expected to achieve the desired validation from the discourse community.

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"I will always remember with pleasure the moans of disappointment, the rising irritations, and the jokes that greeted the premiere of *The Bald Soprano* on the stage of Théâtre des Noctambules, on May 11, 1950," writes Jacques Lemarchand, chronicler for *Le Figaro Littéraire*<sup>11</sup>, and he continues: "I had enjoyed there a very pleasant evening which was even more delightful with the groans and ironic laughter from a part of the establishment who was present there". If Lemarchand was enthusiastic about Ionescu's theatre which he regarded as a 'theatre of adventure' (Lemarchand, 1973, p. 16), others were less impressed by the playwright's openly iconoclast gestures. For example, after attending the premiere of *The Bald Soprano*, J.B. Jeener wrote in *Le Monde*: "You laugh in the first five minutes of the play, but are these first five minutes worth the next tedious hour?" (*Le Monde*, May 13–14, 1950). Jean-Jacques Gautier, the influential chronicler of *Le Figaro*, was openly more critical of Ionescu's theatre, which at that time had already gained the recognition of a cultural phenomenon impossible to ignore: "I don't think Mr. Ionesco is an important writer. In the first place, I don't even think he is a playwright, I don't think he is a thinker either, he is not even a fool. In fact, I don't think Mr. Ionesco has anything to say... He is just an imposter whose activities may be summarized in the text of a telegram: 'The fake surrealism has not died. Stop. Ionesco is next'" (*Le Figaro*, Oct. 17, 1955)<sup>12</sup>.

In conclusion, the validation of a literary act involves the formulation of a set of questions by the validation agents (critics, the education system, and editorial policies):

- Is the text interesting enough? Why?
- Where exactly does the value lie in the text? What can the text offer to the community's network of value? What is the message of the text and what is the extent of the message?
- How relevant is the transgression of the discursive norms? Is this relevance generally acceptable? Is the transgression worth of legitimization?
- How can one discover the value of the text, its message, and its relevance for the community's network of value?

All these questions are supposed to lay the foundations of a *hermeneutic contract* with the text (Maingueneau, 2007, p. 73ff.) and also they are supposed to generate a *hermeneutic framework* that is expected to legitimize the literary character of a text. The hermeneutic contract states that "the text 'says' something else than it seems to suggest at first sight"; consequently, for this reason that 'something else' needs to be deciphered by 'exegesis'. On the other hand, the hermeneutic framework helps the text to establish relationships with one or more elements of value, which are significant for the symbolic network of the discourse community. This type of relationship legitimizes the transgression of the discursive norms, encourages the validation of the literary text, and generates the need of all readers to accept a hermeneutic reduction, i.e. the search for meaning.

Known for his innovative and provocative acts, Ionescu's theatre behaved in the same way as other similar acts in the sense that his theatre aroused strong reactions of disapproval (J.B. Jeener, J.P. Gautier), but it also aroused positive feelings of admiration (J. Lemarchand). Perhaps more important it is the fact that the iconoclast and critical nature of Ionescu's theatre, able to question realities, was going to resonate with the gaps widening in the discourse of a real discursive community, which was actually the main premise for its literary and theatrical validation. Although Ionescu's works were not able to generate a complete transmutation of all values circulating in the 'community', his texts were nonetheless capable to produce at least one major rupture in the cultural imaginary, and in this way they were able to question

<sup>11</sup>Jacques Lemarchand wrote the preface for Eugene Ionescu's first volume of drama, published by Gallimard in 1954, while he was also an enthusiastic critic of his plays.

<sup>12</sup>See more details about this dispute in Lamont (1993, p. 245–261) and in Tucan (2015, p. 91–93).

Is the text interesting enough? Why?	No: it is a tedious farce (Jeneer). No: it is just the repetition of an already used avangardist attitude (Gautier); Yes: as non-traditional theatre, Ionescu's theatre sends us on an adventure of the spirit (Lemarchand);
Where exactly does the value lie in the text? What can the text offer to the community's network of value? What is the message of the text and what is the extent of the message?	No value; Nothing: it is just a farce lacking substance; it is a gratuitous iconoclast act; Openness, problematization ('adventure');
How relevant is the transgression of the discursive norms? Is this relevance generally acceptable? Is the transgression worth of legitimization?	Irrelevant, unacceptable. No: uninteresting, boring, irritating; the inauthentic imitation of the iconoclast spirit of the avangarde, old fashioned literary mimesis; Its openness and problematization ('adventure') have something to say about our own world ('customized theatre' / un théâtre sur mesure);
How can one discover the value of the text, its message, and its relevance for the community's network of value?	There is no value... The aim is to find a relevant hermeneutic framework – the new theatre, the theatre of the absurd, the experimental theatre, etc; it is expected to connect with other self-constituting discourses (the philosophy of the absurd) and with the profound 'reality' of the times.

Table 1: Validation of Ionescu's 'challenging' literary act

the set of ordinary cultural practices (what Bourdieu, 1999 calls the 'doxa') and their relationship with the literary or theatrical space. It must be admitted that Ionescu began to question the specificity of the theatrical act itself. More specifically, first he questioned the existing theatre practices by refusing to portray his characters with deterministic substance, by creating intentional dissonances in the dramatic action, by leaving unexpected gaps between the acts performed by his characters on the stage and their verbal language, or by producing new and spectacular effects on the stage. In addition to these acts that are meant to transgress the whole tradition of theatre, there is the other act questioning the æsthetical, rhetorical and stylistic norms (the notion of 'doxa'): the anti-mimetic functions of Ionescu's plays, his disarticulated language, the disarticulation of the generic coherence of 'drama', and the entitlement conventions<sup>13</sup>.

Even though such questions tend to be more concerned with issues of a self-reflexive or metatheatrical nature, soon after Ionescu's first plays had been staged, it appeared the most influential critical approach to Ionescu's theatre identifying its universe with "the image of an absurd world" (Esslin, 1977). This meant that the disarticulated structure of Ionescu's theatre was believed to mirror the widespread perceptions of the postwar world – a world lacking moral landmarks and felt to be absurd in the interpretation of the philosophical and cultural 'elite'. In fact, this was precisely a matter of interpretation. It was the creation of an open *hermeneutic framework*, which was not only the starting point for the most influential readings of Ionescu's writings, but it was also going to legitimize the corpus of truly transgressive acts in Ionescu's works seen as literary creations capable to live in the world of *Literature*.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

Literary texts can achieve full validation in the literary system by exposing their linguistic, inter-discursive and cultural practices and by showing how these practices establish relationships with the general literary norms dominating the space of critical reception, i.e. the ordinary linguistic, inter-discursive and cultural practices of the historical context. Literary works can only become valuable if they are able to challenge

<sup>13</sup>See in this sense the explanation given for the choice of the title as *The Bald Soprano* (Ionesco, 1966).

artistic conventions and resonate with what essentially defines literature: its processuality and its metamorphic character.

By means of a 'hermeneutic framework', literary texts can be placed into a 'discursive interstice', generally known as literature, which is further expected to lead to the formulation of several hypotheses of meaning. This can be realized by establishing correspondences between the particular conventions of the literary text and at least one of the transversal norms marking the context of 'literature' as 'self-constituting discourse': the function of literature, the series of relations between language, world, individual experiences and culture, value, truth, and beauty, etc. Born in the obsession for originality, with a developed iconoclast attitude contradicting the previous ways of writing 'literature' or repeating with nostalgia traditional literary gestures but in new contexts of valorization, these *textual objects of literary pretension* are in themselves the signals released by the pressure history and the metamorphoses it has generated is meant to exercise on the circles surrounding this diffuse category which is *Literature*.

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