IV. ÉVÉNEMENTS

ON ROMANIAN CULTURE IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Roxana-Magdalena BÂRLEA
Academia de Studii Economice București, Romania
Université Aix-Marseille, France
The Institute for Romanian Language, Bucharest
roxanabarlea@gmail.com

Abstract:
The following lines are dedicated to an event-book, *Cultura română, cultură europeană*, written by the researcher and academic Ileana Mihăilă and published within the collection "Multilingvism și culturi în dialog" by the Publishing House of "România de Mâine" Foundation. The book is a selection of studies on European, French/Francophone, English, German, Spanish, Romanian and Bessarabian linguistic, cultural and literary – modern and postmodern – phenomena, conducted by the researcher over several decades in terms of multilingualism and interculturality.

Key words: Romanian culture, European culture, multilingualism, interculturality.

1. IIleana Mihăilă is a Professor, Ph.D. Habil., at the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Department of French Language and Literature, and head of the Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies within this faculty. She is, at the same time, a principal research scientist with the Romanian Academy, "G. Călinescu" Institute of Literary History and Theory in Bucharest. She is also a member of the National Council for the Attestation of Academic Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates (CNADTCU) and of several international scientific and professional bodies, such as "The International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies" etc.

Her fields of competence include the international literary and cultural relations, particularly focusing on the Romanian-French ones, women's literature,

BDD-A31581 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:46 UTC)

the history of great cultural currents, such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Romanticism – all seen from a modern and postmodern perspective.

The books authored by the industrious researcher reflect these concerns: *Statutul artistului în epoca barocă* (1998); *Renașterea și modernitatea* (1998); *De la Renaissance à l'epoque moderne* (2010); she has collaborated on major Romanian editorial projects, such as *Bibliografia relațiilor literaturii române cu literaturile străine* (10 vol. 1997- 2009); *Dicționar General al Literaturii Române* (7 vol., 2004- 2009; second edition 2018- 2020); *Dicționar de scriitori francezi* (București, 2012); *Eriger une République. Mémoires de Charles-Léopold Andreu de Bilistein sur la Moldavie et la Valachie au XVIII-e siècle* (2010).

Furthermore, she was part of multinational research teams that completed such collective works as *Les Rôles transfrontaliers joués par les femmes dans la construction de l'Europe* (Paris, 2012); *Women Telling Nations* (Amsterdam/Rodopi 2014); *European Francophonie: The Social, Political and Cultural History of an International Prestige Language* (Oxford, 2014).

Ileana Mihăilă is also an astute editor of old and modern texts, carrying out an extremely demanding work which is as much useful as it is less spectacular to the uninitiated. One should mention here G. Călinescu – *Opera lui Mihai Eminescu* (București, 1999-2000) and Ioan Inocențiu Micu-Klein, *Illustrium poetorum Flores*. Edition by F. Firicu and B. Hâncu. Translations, notes and critical apparatus by Bogdan Hâncu, (București, 1992) – the latter being in complete and admirable discretion and devotion, as we shall further see. Some of Ileana Mihăilă's editorial achievements – individual studies, collaborations on collective volumes or text editions – have been crowned with prestigious awards granted by the Romanian Academy.

2. We have briefly presented this overall image of Ileana Mihăilă's activity so that one should better understand the particularities of approach of the themes and topics that are the object of the volume we are currently reviewing[1].

It was expected that a volume dedicated to multiculturalism and plurilingualism should privilege interdisciplinarity as the main methodological approach. The essential organizing factor of the volume

[1] Ileana Mihăilă, 2015, *Cultura română, cultura Europeană*, București: Editura Fundației "România de Mâine".

BDD-A31581 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:46 UTC)

might be called "unity in diversity", both thematically and methodically. Speaking about people of culture and politicians, about writers, philosophers, poets, journalists, theologians, literary critics and historians, researchers in various fields, such as mythology, linguistics, literature in all ages, feminism etc., speaking about books with extremely different topics, the author finds the strength to place them all within a unitary vision. She employs, first and foremost, the chronological criterion, the ordering factor being that of topics dealt with in various books and only secondarily that of the authors of those particular studies. On the other hand, Ileana Mihăilă makes use of the principles, methods of scientific investigations and working tools of very distinct fields: history of culture, literary criticism, theory of mentalities, linguistics, traductology, sociology, psychology, social history, geocriticism and myth criticism. All are coherently placed under the dome of cultural anthropology.

Compositionally, the volume consists of two large parts. One is called *Contribuții la Istoria literaturii române* and the other – *Interviuri*. Apparently, there is a big difference in style and structure between the two, as the latter is rather related to journalistic techniques. In fact, the interviews are genuine debates on cultural, social, educational, philosophic etc. topics. The reader should note that Ileana Mihăilă's questions are included in vast excursions into the history of ideas and entail similar developments from the respondent. Ultimately, the so-called "interview" forms a real case study or a genuine essay on approachable topics.

The first part, overtly dedicated to the Romanian literature in diachrony, starts – in effect – from the achievements of various Romanian personalities, but also aims at the European (and sometimes international) dimension of several cultural achievements. Basically, the author studies patterns, filiations, cultural dialogues, similarities due to the internationally widespread social, political and spiritual context or simply to the universals of human thought.

Thus, a parallel between the Romanian Prince Neagoe Basarab's *Teachings to his son, Theodosie* (a philosophico-moral and educational work) and Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il Principe*, J.J. Rousseau's *Emile, or On Education* or Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* emphasizes the collage and mosaic techniques, which are specific to the European Renaissance and to the Baroque alike. Similarly, Romanian writings in the Age of Enlightenment show the same concern for education and teaching, for trust in reason as a

BDD-A31581 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:46 UTC)

factor of social progress, for the struggle against superstitions and interests of all kinds, for the promotion of individual and collective rights and liberties etc. as the works written in Western Europe. In the Romanian Principalities (Wallachia, Transylvania, Moldavia), as in all South-Eastern European countries, the preoccupations for the political and social life, for cultural identity and people's liberties in relation to the state etc. are much more accentuated. The Romanian representatives are Dimitrie Cantemir (for a while Prince of Moldavia in 1711), Mihai Cantacuzino and especially Ioan Inocențiu Micu-Klein, whereas among the Western scholars – Maupertuis, Montesquieu, Voltaire or the less known Ch.L. Andreu Baron de Bilistein. Spiritual relationships are complicated and Ileana Mihăilă treats them accordingly.

The 18th century remains, at any rate, the researcher's great passion – and this is plainly obvious.

Moving on to the next century, of the Romantic era, Ileana Mihăilă relates the works of M. Eminescu, the most brilliant representative of the Romanian literature and spirituality, to those of the Spanish Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer or of the French-speaking Romanian Dora d'Istria (Princess Elena Ghica). The Romanian national poet shares, with the former, the theme of the young genius living in a hostile society – typical of the Romanticism – as well as an unbelievably similar biographical path. As regards Dora d'Istria, the Romanian Romantic has the same interest in the history of the Ottoman Empire. Il. Mihăilă dedicates other interesting and useful studies to the double cultural identity of the Romanian-French writer and journalist B. Fundoianu, to G. Călinescu's theoretical study *Universul poeziei* and to the myth analyses of I. P. Culianu, M. Eliade's apprentice.

In terms of comparatism and current identity theories, the analyses undertaken by Ileana Mihăilă aim at the local-regional-continental-universal relationship. Ideas and styles circulate in both directions, enriching one another. The general conclusion is that great spirits know how to assimilate and process the particular and the general, giving them back to humanity, as intellectual acquisitions with an added value.

3. As previously said, the second part of the book, the interviews, actually consists of real essays with two authors, for the writer's contributions are much more than mere questions. In a very concentrated style, Il. Mihăilă establishes the history of the issue she intends to discuss with the interlocutor, then places the topic in the broader cultural context, eliciting the interviewee's

BDD-A31581 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:46 UTC)

amazement at the multitude and depth of information she sets forth. Obviously, such a strategy entails similar involvement and exciting, amusing, plastically and, at the same time, rigorously formulated answers.

The issues discussed are more or less the same as in the first part of the volume. The history of culture, with emphasis on the 18th century, the dialogue between cultures and between generations, the relationship of culture with the social-political system etc. Practical aspects of education, of international scientific collaboration, of the philosophy of culture and philosophy of language are dealt with here even more pregnantly than in the first part. Five of the seven interviewed personalities are Romanian academicians: Al. Rosetti, Al. Graur, D. M. Pippidi, Z. Dumitrescu-Bușulenga, G. Mihăiță. The other two, R. Desné and R. Darnton, are renowned French academics and researchers, prominent figures in European culture, leaders of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, of prestigious academic journals and authors of influential scientific treatises. One understands from the genuine debates in which Il. Mihăilă involved them that both specialists have played a significant part in integrating experts from South-Eastern European countries and from other continents into the academic humanist research and in actually supporting young researchers from all over the world, beyond the light spread through their books and articles. Face-to-face dialogue reproduces, so to speak, on a small scale, the cultural dialogue, so necessary for the evolution of the human species.

The lucid analysis, dominated by the objectivity and rigor of scientific investigation, as well as the pertinent, practical dialogue employed by the author of this volume are doubled by a feeling of warmth that instils sensitivity and deeply human meanings into these pages – which are nevertheless dedicated to humanism. In her research, as well as in the dialogue with the major representatives of Romanian and European philology, Ileana Mihăilă invokes acquaintances, colleagues, friends, teachers and episodes lived directly in the educational-scientific act, against the background of multiculturalism and modern globalization.

4. Meaningful events in the life of some "characters" known to us only by the names on the covers of the books written and read by one "with the pencil in one's hand", such as Julia Kristeva etc., establish a solid balance with the reconstructions of the age, with the histories of such families as Cantemir, Cantacuzino and so on, to refer only to Romanians.

BDD-A31581 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:46 UTC)

But Ileana Mihăilă goes further, summoning up no less than three generations of her own family. When dealing with old Romanian literature, with the Slavo-Romanian and, generally, South-East European linguistic and cultural interferences, she invokes the prominent contributions of her father, the academician Gheorghe Mihăilă. When it comes to the academic editions of *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son, Theodosie* and the studies on the mediaeval age and on the Romanian national culture, the landmark is the industrious and original scholar Dan Zamfirescu, a disciple of Gh. Mihăilă in Slavic philology (coming, however, from the field of Orthodox theology), who, for almost a quarter of a century, has been the husband of the author under discussion. When referring to the bishop Ioan Inocențiu Micu-Klein, in studies and reconstructions occupying a large part in the economy of the interesting and consistent chapter on the Romanian Enlightenment, the figure patronizing from heaven the lines written by Ileana Mihăilă is that of the late classicist Bogdan Hâncu, son of the classicist and translator Radu Hâncu. The young, erudite, delicate Bogdan Hâncu[2] was, as it is known and stated in this book, the editor of that florilegium of Latin poetry due to I.I. Micu-Klein, which had long remained in manuscript and was discovered providentially for our culture. One finds that the editor and translator of that manuscript invested many years of hard work and passion in this project but, unfortunately, died when he was only 35, two days after the then-completed text had been submitted to the Editura Științifică in Bucharest.

It just so happened that the young widow took over this project. Ileana Mihăilă's book also evokes events regarding the destiny of famous personalities or cultural facts – which seem to tell that this is how Destiny works with those who live their life passionately and responsibly. As a few pages from the typescript submitted by B. Hâncu had got lost in the editorial office, the head of the publishing house, the philologist Nicolae Gheran (the editor of Liviu Rebreanu, among others), asked the wife of the untimely deceased researcher, only two days after the funeral, to search the family archive for the preserved copy of those pages. Hence, the decision for a

[2] It is from my father, the classicist P. Gh. Bârlea, that I know they started their doctoral studies together in the autumn of 1990, alongside of Cristina Jalbă Halichias, also a classicist, and Nadia Vișan, a distinguished sinologist – in the first class of doctoral students – in classical philology and in general and comparative linguistics – of Professor Lucia Wald – "a golden class", we should say if we were not somewhat biographically involved …

BDD-A31581 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:46 UTC)

general collation, a re-visitation of some philological operations, the addition of an essential bibliography, in short, work had to be resumed on about two thousand pages of manuscript, half of which in Latin. Out of respect for the work of her classicist husband and out of love for him, Ileana Mihăilă refused all proposals of having her name mentioned on the massive resulting book. Everything she did points out the subtle personal/scientifically rigorous balance of the author's personality: a) Ileana Mihăilă stepped up to the podium, two-three years later, on 8 May 1994 to receive, on behalf of her dead husband, the "B. P. Hasdeu" Award granted by the Romanian Academy; b) she continued the research dedicated to I.I. Micu-Klein, including a scholarship in Rome, where the Romanian bishop lived and studied in exile for the last 24 years of his life.

Finally, when one reaches the subchapter G. Mihăilă – "Cum am devenit lingvist"[3] (i.e. 'How I became a linguist') of the book *Cultura română – cultură europeană*, one finds out that the material has been accomplished following the attempts of Ileana Mihăilă and her son Mihai-George Hâncu. Initially a classicist by training, the latter continued his studies in comparative Slavic philology, accumulating, as one might say, the heritages from his grandfather and father. Therefore, three generations of scholars: Slavists, Romanists (Ileana Mihăilă studied French and Spanish), classicists – and all of them good Romanians and great experts on Romanian studies. Good comparatists, excellent literary and cultural historians. A family that, beyond the trials of Destiny, reflect, at the level of their microcosm, what they value and cultivate at the macrocosmic level: multiculturality plurilingualism.

[3] Those pages – later written as a personal testimony – were requested for and published in the homage volume *Marius Sala – De ce am devenit lingvist?*, Bucureşti: Editura Univers Enciclopedic Gold, 2012, on pp. 259-269.

BDD-A31581 © 2020 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:46 UTC)