



„Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași
Faculty of Letters
Philological Doctoral Studies School

**Mircea Ivănescu – searching for the bookish
paradise**

Summary of thesis

Scientific Coordinator,

Professor, Ph.D. LĂCRĂMIOARA PETRESCU

Ph.D. Student,

ANCA-NARCISA LEIZERIUC

Iași, 2012

Argument

The choice of a research monograph dedicated to Mircea Ivănescu is based on a threefold motivation. Firstly, the epistemic changes occurred starting with postmodernism as a social phenomenon have affected also the aesthetic field, leading to a reconsideration of symbolic and rhetorical value systems. Secondly, the fact that Romanian poetry in the last three decades seeks its poetic origins in the poetry of Mircea Ivănescu demands both a theoretical comparative analysis of the Romanian and universal postmodernism, and a practical analysis of the existence or non-existence of these features in Ivănescu's poetry. Thirdly, the recovery and upgrading of Ivănescu's importance involves a holistic analysis of his poetry and also of the others cultural activities which he was involved in.

The object of this research is unique but it has many aspects, because it seeks the detailed analysis of Mircea Ivănescu's idea about art and of the philosophy of life, as it is shown, explicitly or implicitly, in his poetical works, in the volumes he conceived as literary games, written in collaboration with other writers, or in the articles that he writes as editor of magazines such as "Transilvania" or "Lumea", in the memorialistic literature (interviews, discussions, discourses), in the aesthetic attachment to certain writers whom he translated (James Joyce, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Truman Capote, Friedrich Nietzsche, Rainer Maria Rilke, Franz Kafka, Robert Musil etc.).

The existence of some critical reception studies or reception articles of some volumes do not provide a unitary view of the whole work of Ivănescu, but a fragmentary perspective focused either on the particular aspects of a single volume of poetry, or on most

prominent themes. The other studies which claim to be monographs it only carries out a review of Ivănescu's poetry, excluding other cultural concerns of Mircea Ivănescu. The need for a relevant global assessment of Ivănescu's whole literary activity and not only of the poetry or some aspects in his work emerges as being imperative for getting him out of the shadow of the secondary writers of the '60s, decade dominated by the euphoric rhetoric of late modernism, or for discharge him of a stereotypical perception as precursor of the '80s, and to reevaluate the innovative role of the language and poetic vision that he has in Romanian culture.

The paper is structured in four chapters, attended by an introduction and a final section reserved to general conclusions, and of course, the bibliography divided into several levels.

The research's objectives

The main objective of this paper aims to reconsider the importance of Ivănescu's creative formula from a marginal state, in the context of the '60s lyrical effusion, in the state of an initiator of Romanian postmodernism, which inferred the directions of the new age of poetic expression, due to the opening towards foreign literature (T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Rainer Maria Rilke, John Berryman). Since European and American theoretical studies from the second half of the twentieth century until today signalled an epistemic change in the society and in the aesthetic systems towards postmodernism, we analysed how the postmodernist ideas infiltrates in Mircea Ivanescu's poetry, for the first time in Romanian literature, through readings and translations of foreign authors.

In addition to the main objective of this paper, a subordinate objective is to identify and analyse the particular features that would qualify Ivănescu as a precursor of postmodernism, such as the diffuse biographism, the intertextuality, the bookish style, the metapoetic, but also points of divergence. The comparative study, theoretical and applied, of the Anglo-American and Romanian postmodernism will help to identify the specific differences of Ivănescu's style in the context of Romanian culture.

CHAPTER I – A personal mythology

Defining the poetry not as a way to transmit a vision or a personality, but as a way to extend a certain sensibility towards life, Mircea Ivănescu presents the creation as an act of mediation, of subjective knowledge of the outside and of the inner world, as well. Therefore, the first chapter aims to accomplish a “personal mythology” where the facts of the exterior biography, especially the cultural one, are correlated with those of the profound ego, as they appear in the poet’s poems and confessions, and where the stages of creation, the evolution of the creative labor, the people or writers that influenced the manner in which he wrote can be seen.

The insertion of certain biographical details in our scientific approach is motivated by the fact that they illuminate the process of becoming a writer. Firstly, we analysed and compared the work of Mircea Ivănescu and Emil Ivănescu to highlight those techniques and Bergsonian influences taken from his brother and to explain the theatricality of his poems. Secondly, we watched the interviews of Mircea Ivanescu which shows how the friendship with Al. George and Matei Călinescu opened a new horizon for the modern Romanian and foreign literature, instilled confidence in his own creative potential and introduced him in the cultural atmosphere of the ’60s.

Even if he is contemporary with the 60’s generation, there stands a whole poetics between Mircea Ivănescu and his generation, or rather a lyrical episteme (*cf.* Al. Cistelean) because of his openness to modern writers and to his Anglo-American, French and German contemporaries from whom he guesses the epistemological transformations of humanity and the new lyrical direction beyond the fashion of the creative cheer, of the metaphors and of the expansive poetic ego.

CHAPTER II – The paradox of Mircea Ivănescu’s poetry: between distance and ultrapersonal

Beginning with the problem of postmodernism or non-postmodernism of Ivănescu’s poetry as it is formulated by Ion Bogdan Lefter, Mircea Cărtărescu, Radu Vancu, in the second chapter a comparative analysis of the personism manifesto of Frank O’Hara and Mircea Ivănescu’s poetry was achieved. The understanding of the biografism just as a way to insert the writer’s social elements in the poetry is a minimalist one and cannot be considered an argument to face the postmodernist influences of some poets like: Frank O’Hara, Robert Frost, Robert Lowell, as Mircea Ivănescu himself confessed. We can assert that the Ivanescian biografism is not an “extreme” one, as Cărtărescu sustained, but a diffuse one, meaning that there is not a lack of biographical facts but these are mixed with the values hidden behind the masks of the lyrical characters.

By analyzing *Personism: A Manifesto* we notice that the personism does not mean only the act of revealing the intimacy to a state of complete nudity, but it refers to the liberation of the traditional rhetorics, of rhythm, rhyme, and auditive procedures, at a formal level, and in what concerns the contents it implies the elimination of the poetry abstraction, that is a spontaneous reaction to common daily events. A comparison between O’Hara’s and Ivănescu’s poems underlines the fact that, despite the existence of similar points regarding the previously mentioned aspects, in the American writer’s poems the cultural references have a personal character while Ivănescu transforms himself in the proliferation of the intertext and of the bookish technique.

The obsession of searching the authenticity is limited by the discretion of the retractile temperament of the poet. But, instead

of falling in one of these extremes he chooses the solution of their cohabitation, oscillating between an ultrapersonal lyricism (*cf.* Matei Călinescu) and the use of the distancing strategies. If Jean Starobinski imagined the dynamic relation between text and interpreter by using the “living eye” metaphor, the mechanism can be also applied to the relation between the texts of Ivănescu and their creator, because the most profound lyricism is complementary to the detachment assured by masks, ironies and bookish pretexts.

CHAPTER III – The revitalization of bookish, the intertextual constellations and the glissade to metapoetic in the work of Mircea Ivănescu

The third chapter presents the stages of bookish phenomenon from the safe paradise of the models to the hell imagery of literature and then to the revitalization of the bookish (*cf.* Cornel Moraru), revitalization made through the thematization of conventions, through the excessive use of literary techniques, through intertextual references, cultural allusions and a poetics based on using quotations.

Admitting that he is a “bookish spirit”, Mircea Ivănescu uses the stimulating pretext of a text to write his own poems. Inspired by the already famous writers or by writers on the verge of becoming successful from the Anglo-American literature, the German representatives or the French writers, Mircea Ivănescu develops an unusual literary vision for the Romanian cultural area. If in the initial stage of creation the bookish style is obvious, having an ontological function, later on this invades the deep layers of the poem and the others’ literature becomes threatening to his own sensibility.

Initially, the bookish style represented a paradise in which the human beings could escape from the secluded reality. The excess of conventionalism, of too much literature produces a change of perception because the poet becomes captive even in this imaginary space that he feels as a hell (*cf.* Al. Cistelean). The passage from the vision of literature as a paradise to that of seeing literature as a hell appeared due to a “process of educating the sensibility” which determined a double “frustration” (*cf.* Al. Cistelean): an ontological one, generated by the insubstantiality of the real and an esthetic one, produced by the insubstantiality of the conventional bookish style. On the diachronic axe, the bookish style is in a moment in which it

does not only represent a passive “process of intellection” (*cf.* Al. Cistelean) but an active one, a process of resuscitating, first of all the bookish and secondly the real, only after literature will have been endoscopically presented its mechanisms and construction procedures, after it will have been drawn the society’s attention to its lack of truthfulness.

An innovative direction is opened starting with Ivănescu which does not only violates and undermines the traditional poetic conventions but it also includes a critical comment concerning the process of articulation of the fiction, a comment through which it expresses the breakage with the exterior world, its own linguistic nature and it exposes the knots of textual fabric. In Mircea Ivănescu’s poems the most relevant examples of metapoetry, of textual self-consciousness in the Romanian literature of that period can be noticed. These do not only draw the attention to the esthetic construction, to the verbal autonomy of common use during modernism but they systematically prove their condition of artifices. The contemporary auto-reflexivity involves the fact of becoming aware of poetry as a language, but also as a metalanguage, as a writing product but also as a foundation process of a universe made of words. The metafictional strategies of the American literary theory concerning the postmodernist phenomena are to be found in the Ivănescian poems, for example: the exposing of the creator, the explicit addressing to a reader, the Chinese box structure, the infinite involution, the double parody, the self-reflexive images, the explicit irony on the literary or non-literary anterior texts (*cf.* Patricia Waugh).

As opposed to the reflexivity in the extra-textual reality, but also to the modern reflexivity, the self-reflexivity in metafiction refers to “any reference to literature, or art in general, to its production, or factors related to its production, in a literary text” (*cf.*

Christina Hofmann). There are two types of self-reflexivity depending on the context where they appear: a primary one referring to the metatextual comment from the very interior of the poem in which it occurs related to the poem in itself or referring to the act of writing the poem, denouncing or emphasizing the construction and the rhetorical techniques, and the secondary one represented by the mere utterance of other writers or critics regarding them. Besides these two theorized types, the analysis of Mircea Ivănescu's work will determine a new type which emphasizes not only the fictional aspect of his own creation, either in the poems, or in the essays or interviews, that is the bookish aspect or the aspect of fictional reality in itself which is so similar to the books becoming, in this way, insubstantial. The metafictional techniques and strategies which can be found in Ivănescu's poems have different functions (*cf.* Christina Hofmann) as for example the presentation of the image of a creative mind, the explanation of the theme, the anticipation of the criticism, the act of revealing the fictional nature of literature, the fact of praising the poet and his roles, challenging the reader in order to reestablish the creative process but also to enrich the meanings, the fact of being aware of the difficult relation between art and reality.

CHAPTER IV – The restoration of Mircea Ivănescu as a precursor of Romanian postmodernism and of the contemporary orientation of the autochthon poetry

We chose in the first chapters, to do a comparative and hermeneutics analysis of Ivănescu's poetry, for then to offer in this final chapter, an excursus on American and European theories of postmodernism, including Romanian, to confirm the existence or absence of postmodern features. Clarifying the concept of postmodernism in relation to modernism, establishing the moment and context in which it appears in Romanian literature are very important aspects that will reinforce firstly the idea that Romanian postmodernism is due to a need of renewal felt in the autochthone literature, and secondly the fact that the work of Ivănescu contains *in nuce* the roots of Romanian postmodernism.

By analyzing the four postulations of the Romanian postmodernism suggested by Liviu Petrescu it becomes clear that these are present in Ivănescu's work in a particular way, different from the features of the 1980's texts. We affiliate to Borges idea that precursors are created retrospectively, and we consider that, even if Ivănescu just felt the new lyricism that was crystallizing in Anglo-American poetry, he becomes a road opener in Romanian literature who has found a new direction of poetic language by his own means.

We insist on a structural postmodernism theory of Mircea Ivănescu's work that arises as an individual and independent evolution towards the new episteme based on the innovative spirit that he becomes so fond of due to his readings and translations not only from the great Anglo-American, French and German literature which prefigured the emergence of this new poetic, theory that eliminates the purity postmodern theory and that of non-postmodernism and advances a new lyrical direction.

Without being aware in a theoretic way of the new episteme of postmodernism which was developing in European and American literature and without having a favourable social context (postmodernism without speaking legitimacy of Jean-François Lyotard), Ivănescu revolutionizes the lyric language by a narrative discourse, by inserting bookish allusions and intertextual guise under the most trivial utterances, by emancipating from conventionalism, by exposure of the process and construction techniques of the poem. The revaluation of Mircea Ivănescu poetry, considered a unique poet, can mean his consecration as the generative core of postmodernism and the immediate precursor of poetry which succeeds him in Romanian literature.

Selective critical bibliography

a) Monographs:

Cistelecan, Alexandru, *Mircea Ivănescu. Monografie, antologie comentată, receptare critică*, Editura Aula, Braşov, 2003.

Vancu, Radu, *Mircea Ivănescu. Poezia discreţiei absolute*, Universitatea „Lucian Blaga”, Biblioteca Centrală, Sibiu, 2005.

Deleanu, Daniel, *Poezia lui Mircea Ivănescu*, Universitatea „Lucian Blaga”, Biblioteca Centrală, Sibiu, 2003.

b) Studies in volumes; articles and studies in journals:

Călinescu, Matei, *Profil poetic: M. Ivănescu*, in *Fragmentarium*, Editura Dacia, Cluj, 1973.

Călinescu, Matei, „Poezia lui Mircea Ivănescu”, Preface to Mircea Ivănescu, *Versuri poeme poesii altele aceleaşi vechi nouă*, Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 2003.

Călinescu, Matei, *Citatul ca inocenţă regăsită*, „România literară”, 2006, nr. 20, p. 15.

Cernat, Paul, *Apărarea şi ilustrarea lui Mircea Ivănescu*, “Bucureştiul cultural”, 2008, nr. 69, p. 3.

Cistelecan, Al., *Poezie şi livresc. Către o tipologie*, Editura Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1987.

Gheorghe Crăciun, „O generaţie incomodă”, in *Competiţia continuă. Generaţia '80 în texte teoretice*, Editura Vlasie, Piteşti, 1994.

Doinaş, Ştefan Aug., *Sol major şi la minor*, in *Lampa lui Diogene*, Editura Eminescu, Bucureşti, 1970.

Dună, Raluca, *Poezia lui Mircea Ivănescu*, „Viaţa românească”, 2004, nr. 6-7, p. 37-41.

Grigurcu, Gheorghe, *Mircea Ivănescu: 1. Versuri, 2. Poeme*, in *Teritoriu liric*, Editura Eminescu, Bucureşti, 1972.

Lefter, Ion Bogdan, *Mircea Ivănescu – poetul care nu încapă într-o antologie*, Postfață la antologia *Versuri*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1996.

Leizeriuc, Anca-Narcisa, *Apariția postmodernismului în literatura americană și română*, in *Crossing boundaries in culture and communication. Journal of the Department of Foreign Languages, Romanian – American University*, vol. II, nr. 1, Editura Universitară, București, 2011, pp. 136-143.

Leizeriuc, Anca-Narcisa, *Biografismul difuz și poezia lui Mircea Ivănescu*, in „Vatra”, 2011, nr. 11, Târgu-Mureș, 2011, pp. 24-30.

Leizeriuc, Anca-Narcisa, *Cristalizarea postmodernismului românesc și poezia lui Mircea Ivănescu*, in Parpală, Emilia, Popescu, Carmen, *Postmodernismul. Creație și interpretare*, Editura Universitaria, Craiova, 2011, pp. 45-56.

Leizeriuc, Anca-Narcisa, *La théâtralité postmoderne et les voix du psychisme*, in *Studii si cercetari filologice. Seria limbi romanice*, vol. 1, nr. 11, Editura Universității din Pitești, 2012, pp. 57-72.

Leizeriuc, Anca-Narcisa, *Livrescul între izbăvire și tortură. Mircea Ivănescu*, in *The Scientific Journal of Humanistic Studies, (Re)orientări*, vol. 12, editor Grațian Cormoș, Editura Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, 2012, p. 110-120.

Leizeriuc, Anca-Narcisa, *The epistemic categories of postmodernism and the alienation of human being [Categoriile epistemice ale postmodernismului și alienarea ființei umane]*, in *Lumen International Scientific Conference 2012, Logos, Universality, Mentality, Education, Novelty. Book of Abstracts*, Editor Simona Ușurelu, Lumen Publishing House, Iasi, 2012, pp. 204-205.

Lesovici, Mircea Doru, *Jocul mediat sau nevoia discreției*, „Dialog (Iași)”, 1978, nr. 62, p. 5.

Mironescu, Doris, *„Tinerețea ciudată” a lui Emil Ivănescu*, „Suplimentul de cultură”, 2006, nr. 95, p. 6.

Mincu, Marin, *Livreștii ironici*, in *Poezie și generație*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1975.

Moraru, Cornel, *Vitalitatea livrescului*, „România literară”, 1991, nr. 13, p. 5.

Negoïțescu, I., *Poezia în alb-negru*, *Alte însemnări critice*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 1980.

Tomuș, Mircea, *Un poet bacovian*, in *Istorie literară și poezie*, Editura Facla, Timișoara, 1974.

Ungureanu, Delia, *Requiem pentru Emil Ivănescu*, „Observator Cultural”, 2007, nr. 98 (355), p. 17.

Vancu, Radu, *Mircea Ivănescu, poet postmodern?*, „Timpul (Iași)”, 2005, nr. 2, p. 6.

c) Theoretic general studies, literary histories, anthologies:

Abel, Lionel, *Metatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1963.

Barth, John, *The Literature of Exhaustion*, in *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction*, The Hopkins University Press, London, 1984.

Barthes, Roland, *Littérature et méta-language*, in *Essais critiques*, Seuil, Paris, 1964.

Bergson, Henri, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, Neuvième édition, Librairie Félix Alcan et Guillaumin Réunies, Paris, 1911.

Călinescu, Matei, *Cinci fețe ale modernității. Modernism, avangardă, decadență, kitsch, postmodernism*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2005.

Cărtărescu, Mircea, *Postmodernismul românesc*, Postfață de Paul Cornea, Editura Humanitas, București, 1999.

Cârnelci, Magda, *Arta anilor '80. Texte despre postmodernism*, Editura Litera, București, 1995.

Frye, Northrop, *The educated imagination*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1967.

Gass, William H., *Philosophy and the Form of Fiction*, în *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, Published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1970.

Genette, Gérard, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Seuil, Paris, 1982.

Hassan, Ihab, *The postmodern Turn. Essay in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, Ohio State Univ. Press, 1987.

Hăulică, Cristina, *Textul ca intertextualitate. Pornind de la Borges*, Editura Eminescu, București, 1981.

Henke, Christoph, *Text & Theorie. Self Reflexivity in Literature*, Königshausen & Neuman, Würzburg, 2005.

Hofmann, Christina, *Self-reflexivity and Reflexivity on the Act of Writing in English. Poetry: Meta-Poetry in the romantic and Contemporary Periods*, Diplomarbeit, Fachbibliothek für Anglistik und Americanistik an der Universität Wien, 1999.

Kristeva, Julia, *Problèmes de la structuration du texte*, in *Tel quel. Théorie d'ensemble*, Seuil, Paris, 1968.

Lakoff, George; Johnson, Mark, *Metaphors We Live By*, The University of Chicago Press Ltd., London, 1980.

Lefter, Ion Bogdan, *Postmodernism. Din dosarul unei „bătălii” culturale*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești, 2000.

Lyotard, Jean-François, *Condiția postmodernă. Raport asupra cunoașterii*, București, Editura Babel, 1993.

Manolache, Gheorghe, *Degradarea lui Proteu. (Experiențe postmoderne în proza românească a anilor '80)*, Sibiu, Editura Universității „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu, 2004.

Idem, *Regula lui Doi (registre duale în dezvoltarea postmodernismului românesc)*, Sibiu, Editura Universității „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu, 2004.

O'Hara, Frank, *Personism: A Manifesto, The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995.

Ommundsen, Wenche, *Metafictions? Reflexivity in Contemporary Texts*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993.

Petrescu, Liviu, *Poetica postmodernismului*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești, 1998.

Ricoeur, Paul, *Despre traducere*, Traducere de Magda Jeanrenaud, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2005.

Scholes, Robert, *Fabulation and Metafiction*, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1979.

Starobinski, Jean, *Textul și interpretul*, Traducere și prefață de Ion Pop, Editura Univers, București, 1985.

Toffler, Alvin, *Al treilea val*, Traducere din limba engleză de Georgeta Bolomey și Drăgan Stoianovici, Editura Politică, București, 1983.

Ubersfeld, Anne, *Reading theatre*, University of Toronto Press Incorporated, Toronto, 1999.

Vattimo, Gianni, *Sfârșitul modernității*, Editura Pontica, Constanța, 1993.

Waugh, Patricia, *Metafiction. The theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Routledge Publishing House, London, 2003.

Keywords: biographism, bookish, intertextuality, metapoetic, postmodern, Mircea Ivănescu

Contents

Introduction.....	4
I. A personal mythology.....	11
I. 1. The chronotope of Ivănescu or born to fill in an emptiness.....	12
I. 2. The education and the personality's development.....	20
I. 3. Sketches of youth.....	31
I. 3. 1. Discovering the vocation of writing.....	31
I. 3. 2. The „taming” and the writing.....	42
I. 4. A controversial debut.....	50
I. 5. The value of the translation – between mediation and modelling.....	56
II. The paradox of Mircea Ivănescu's poetry: between distance and ultrapersonal.....	64
II.1. The evolution of critical reception.....	65
II. 2. From objective correlative to biographism.....	74
II. 3. The diffuse biographism – between vital and bookish.....	83
II. 4. The camouflage of lyricism and textual masks.....	95

III. The revitalization of bookish, the intertextual constellations and the glissade to metapoetic in the work of Mircea Ivănescu.....	110
III. 1. From bookish paradise to literary hell.....	111
III. 2. The intertextuality – tyranny of models or confirming his one value.....	131
III. 3. The thematization of conventions and the metapoetry..	139
IV. The restoration of Mircea Ivănescu as a precursor of Romanian postmodernism and of the contemporary orientation of the autochthon poetry.....	167
IV. 1. The crystallization of postmodernism: from mental concept to the artistic one.....	168
IV. 2. The Romanian postmodern aesthetics.....	178
IV. 3. Is the postmodernism synonymous with the eighties?.....	184
IV. 4. The postulate of authenticity and non-mimetism.....	190
Conclusions.....	210
Bibliography.....	214