

My career profile as outlined here originates in two major directions of research. The first one commenced with my doctoral thesis, entitled “Decadence and Decadentism within Romanian Modernity (End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century – First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century)”, supervised by Prof. Sorin Alexandrescu and defended at the University of Bucharest in 2009. My pioneering doctoral research has opened up a new field of investigation in Romania: drawing on interdisciplinarity as all comparative studies do, I have studied on the one hand Decadentism as a literary movement which validated its aesthetics belatedly, and on the other decadence as a cultural and civilizational phenomenon within Romanian and European modernity. This approach has resulted in a robust comparative investigation, alongside a parallel study of art history concerning Symbolism within the Romanian fine arts relative to its European context; the latter topic is the subject matter of my *Symbolism and Decadentism in the Art of 1900* (Institutul European, 2011). The very close ties between Symbolism in the arts and in literature, as well as the many aesthetic affinities between Symbolism and Decadentism in both literature and the arts, have allowed me an ample and nuanced recovery of the different stages of Romanian modernity. During the six-year research for the completion of my thesis, I had the opportunity to expand one of my doctoral papers into a book-length study standing apart from the thesis proper. Devoted to the work of Mateiu I. Caragiale, the book analyzes his oeuvre as the epitome of a culture of decadence that embodies an entire identity complex. *Mateiu I. Caragiale: Decadent Physiognomies* (ICR, 2007) reads the works of Mateiu Caragiale from the perspective of decadence and Decadentism, yet also from that of art history as required by his countless references to the arts, with an unprecedented analytic focus on Mateiu Caragiale’s non-fictional texts: his Correspondence with N.A. Boicescu, his Diary, Agenda-Acta-Memoranda, Ephemera, including his annotations of Octav-George Lecca’s *Romanian Bojar Families*. The three volumes I have published drawing on my doctoral research should be regarded as a unitary whole insofar as they both analyze a cultural phenomenon unfolding along various discourses from literature to the arts, from the theatre to the cinema, from literary criticism to literary theory, and offer an outstanding case study.

The other major research area concerns the ideologically charged culture characteristic of communist Romania, and uses again an interdisciplinary approach which juxtaposes the history of ideas, the history of mentalities, literary history and criticism, art history, the history of the imaginary, myth-analysis, etc. This was from its inception a collaborative project where I worked together with another three distinguished researchers, Assoc. prof. Paul Cernat and Assoc. prof. Ion Manolescu, both of the Faculty of Letters, Bucharest University, and Prof. Ioan Stanomir of the Faculty of Political Sciences, Bucharest University. Our project has resulted in the publication of five volumes altogether: *In Search of Lost Communism* (Paralela 45, 2001), a three-volume study entitled *Explorations in Romanian Communism* (Polirom, 2004, 2005, 2008), and the volume of memoirs *A Bygone World: Four Personal Histories Followed by a Dialogue with Horia-Roman Patapievici* (Polirom, 2005). The novelty of our approach consists not so much in its interdisciplinarity as in the fact that we have studied literature proper alongside homage art, cinema, comics, tourist brochures, children’s almanacs and magazines, and so on. Besides, we did our best to choose literary pieces outside of mainstream fiction, “literature under communism”, which has enabled us to unearth an alternative canon generated by the totalitarian regime that includes as much children’s literature as the adventure novel, historical fiction and ideologically obsequious drama. Our findings reveal the existence of a communist culture and civilization as well as a communist man, a subject worthy of the cultural anthropological approach underpinning the series of studies which also features *L’Uomo romantico*, edited by François Furet.

My research on decadence and Decadentism entered a new stage with the 18-month-long post-doctoral project, “The Aestheticizing Imaginary of Romanian Identitary Constructs

in a European Context (1880–1947)”, which I undertook at Babeş-Bolyai University under the supervision of Prof. Ioana Both. I have examined the aestheticizing dimension of our identity theories at the intersection with the arts, the cinema and art theory in an interdisciplinary approach aimed to reveal the specific figuration of the nationalist imaginary as propounded by various theories of identity. My research has brought to the fore the concept of style, with its wide range of meanings from *lifestyle* (Richard Shusterman) to *political stylistics* (Pascale Gaitet) and national beauty subsequently associated with a series of charismatic personalities. A number of essays, such as “Art and Nation: Romanian Arts and Crafts”, “Nationalism as a Stylistics Issue in Interwar Romania”, “Bachelin, Art Nouveau and Neo-Byzantinism”, and “Caragiale and the Complexes of Romanian Identity between Stylistics and Rhetoric”, have confirmed the amplitude of my project, out of which two case studies have emerged. One of them, *Caragiale in the Aftermath of Caragiale. The Mysteries of Reading: Exaggerations, Deformations, Excesses*, has already been completed and is forthcoming at Cartea Românească publishing house. It studies those readings of Caragiale which use his oeuvre as the interpretant of a particular socio-politic context or as the guarantor of theories and fictions of identity, thereby also generating sometimes a stylistics of Romanian identity. My investigation has also aimed to identify those interpretative deformations and excesses which draw on the principle of exorbitance at work within Caragiale’s corpus. The other case study, *The Culture of the Fault Line and Romanian Modernity*, is forthcoming at Institutul European publishing house. It consists of a number of essays which undertake an explanation, through the metaphor in the title, of the particular metabolism of Romanian culture as a culture that comes to fruition belatedly, marked as it is by delaying drives, time lags, ruptures and abrupt recoveries.

My early interest in the theory of images and the imaginary, as well as my studies on the relation between Decadentism and the cinema alongside my systematic contributions to *România literară* as a film critic and historian having a permanent film review column, have converged on the publication of *Films That Have Changed Our Life* (Eikon, 2013). The book groups together academic essays, some of which draw on papers delivered at international conferences, and Romanian film reviews that circumscribe an aesthetics of the New Romanian Cinema.

The study of artefacts pertaining to a prolonged totalitarian regime has continued an ambitious project, viz. the analysis of travel literature about the Soviet Union, which focused on some of our great writers, such as Mihail Sadoveanu, George Călinescu, Geo Bogza, Tudor Arghezi, Petru Dumitriu, Panait Istrati, Zaharia Stancu, and Demostene Botez. My five-year research used a comparative approach to the travel writing of the Romanian authors and of the French authors mentioned by the former often in a polemical context. Published in 2011 at Humanitas, *The Shadows of Paradise: Romanian and French Writers in the Soviet Union* uses an interdisciplinary approach where the historical inquiry helps me to configure the politico-ideological background which frames the literary act. From the perspective of the literary historian, the study successfully reclaims a controversial and relatively obscure chapter of travel writing which, for good reasons, has been deliberately neglected due to its ideological burden. I identify a theoretical template of mentalities regarding this type of travel, which I call *hagialâk*<sup>1</sup>— here enjoying full conceptual dignity. Nevertheless, the most important aspect of my study, which the comparison with French travel writing has suggested, is the configuration of a grammar and geography of the imaginary peculiar to the travel into the Soviet Union.

I intend to further my professional career by continuing to do research along the two

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1 The Romanian term *hagialâk* retains the phonetic essence of *hajj*, the Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca/Makkah.

major directions of inquiry which have outlined my academic interests so far. Regarding the investigation of a culture of literary decadence and Decadentism I intend to pursue the following projects:

1. to undertake a study of the relationship between Decadentism and Naturalism, and how the former was influenced by degenerationist theories, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century episteme, so as to elaborate that part of the argument in my doctoral thesis which has remained unpublished;
2. to undertake an ample study of Emil Cioran as a philosopher and writer of decadence working along the illustrious line set by thinkers of decadence such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Otto Weininger, Oswald Spengler, and Ortega y Gasset; I started working on the documentation for the book during my second post-doctoral research stage in Paris;
3. to publish an anthology of Romanian decadent prose with an introductory study;
4. to write a book-length study which examines the continuity of decadent themes in Romanian literature after 1947;
5. to compile the first album of Romanian Symbolism in the arts: this is a collective project which will gather together outstanding art historians who have studied the topic;
6. to write a study on south-eastern European Symbolism and its peculiarities vis-à-vis the construction of national identity.

Regarding the second area of my research, an ongoing project examines transition as a dynamic force within the field of literature and literary ideas from interwar society to the totalitarian society spanning the years between 1945 and 1960.