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**PHILOLOGY**

**PhD THESIS**

**GIB I. MIHĂESCU'S MODERNITY POETICS**  
**SUMMARY**

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## ARGUMENT

*Key words:* obsession, trauma, dork, crisis, passion, inter-war, imagination, the 48's, emergence, narrative speech, reception, continuity, interpretation, narrative art, prose, short story, novel, style, expressive model, source of inspiration.

A fragment with double intention, the argument intends to motivate an option also taking the pleading functionality of *captatio benevolentiae* by means of the starting speech, on one hand, and to represent a working field in a list of the work operational principle exposure, on the other hand.

*Motivation* presents the need, achievements and importance of this purpose.

A first purpose of this thesis, beyond the strict preparation, is a pronounced subjective one, the affective attachment positively contributing to the actual research by means of a formative-educational programme. On the other hand, all subjective motivations are based on a strictly scientific, PhD thesis intrinsic objective. The need to extrapolate the "curiosity" in the Romanian literature arose and the possibilities to approach the poetics of the modernity of Gib Mihăescu's writing perception in the Romanian cultural space caught contour.

The need to re-consider the research from a modernist perspective and, in particular, to set an image including the art significance of Gib Mihăescu in the Romanian literature represents an argument in the favour of the work being topical.

At the same time, the works is topical due to the constant interests of literary productions in the last decades regarding the controversial realm of the human psychic - a depository of obsessions or unaccomplished desires for obscure instincts or human subjectivity with the power to produce infinite

subjective universes, most time alienated, as well as for the tendency to clear subconscious processes by means of dreams and hallucinations often seen by the heroes in the prose analysed.

Besides all these motivations, the theme analysed is also topical due to the need to learn about Gib Mihăescu's language and about the world of meanings established by Gib Mihăescu, together with the constant interest as regards the importance of his works seen as one of the fundamentals of the Romanian literature. Gib Mihăescu's writing continues to be an access route to absolute language. A plural reading is always required in the complex area of Gib Mihăescu's language to update some levels, given that the depth provides the open piece with contemporary meanings.

At the same time, because particular monographic analyses were not realised in terms of Gib Mihăescu's modernity poetics, despite the issue being interesting, both in literary terms and in style terms (expressive), the subject of this paper is again topical. We believe the existing studies on the poetical language of Gib Mihăescu only touch the issues we aim to research. Such motivations are here to explain and support the opportunity of choosing the theme *Gib I. Mihăescu's poetics modernity* in the Romanian literature.

Therefore, the actuality of the theme analysed is determined by several factors: the existing studies on Gib Mihăescu's poetic language only touch the issues we aim to research, thus requiring the need to re-consider the research from a modernist perspective and the need to learn about Gib Mihăescu's language and about the world of meanings established by Gib Mihăescu.

*The scope of this work* is to analyse the evolution of Gib I. Mihăescu's literature in time and to identify its individual trend, to pursue the changes in the epic formula, the typology of artistic characters, to interpret it from a modern and post-modern perspective. The object of the research is represented by actual texts in the writer's creation.

*The poetics of the novel and short stories* – pursues the morphology of forms and heterogeneous functional elements composing the genre unit, supplemented by a historical poetics, concerned by the evolution of technical innovation. The category of the form held, along the time, a privileged place in the narrative, rhetoric, logics, semiotics or text studies intended to work together for a modernised presentation of literature, this being the *primary objective* of this thesis.

The new artistic ideal, based on the cult of form and text, questioned the creative potential of oral communication between the author-narrator-character-reader, discussing only their functionality as elements composing the literary text. The poetics of *the novel and short stories*, driven by the template of modern poetry or semiotics and text studies, alienates the novel / short story from the traditional structure, giving them an ever more experimental nature.

It had to be considered, however, that poetic and experimental novels / short stories could not completely eliminate the common laws of the genre, as they could not ignore the parallel existence in the last century of a significant number of recognised works maintaining the connection to the social traditions allowing at the same time the time technical innovation. Thus, the study of literary forms had to extend research, taking advantage of the methodology of the reading phenomenon, more receptive to the communicative structure of the literary work, to the context and the reader's expectations.

The actual object of this research is represented by the outline and systemic analysis of the main dimensions of Gib Mihăescu's works, received, taken over, transformed and assimilated during the 48's.

Ignoring that the attempt to synthesise the phenomenon of the reception regarding *Gib I. Mihăescu's modernity poetics* cannot exhaust the issues and matters because of some understandable scientific prudence, we aimed to realise a thorough and comprehensive study.

Besides the attempt to prepare the most adequate model for the research of modernity poetics of this big Romanian writer, the following are some of the main objectives aimed:

- To reveal the contribution of the author analysed to the value of the national cultural heritage during the bright period of the inter-war Romanian literature
- Analysis of the writer's vision from the perspective of modernity poetics
- Analysis of the elements constituting Gib I. Mihăescu's modernity poetics
- Investigation of the style particularities and their role in the establishment of Gib I. Mihăescu's modernity poetics
- Revealing the place of Gib I. Mihăescu's writing in the general background of contemporary literature, its relationship with modernity and post-modernity.

These objectives aim to realise a most comprehensive study connected to national, accessible, significant and recent references.

The research principles and methods used are a feature of the exegetic thesaurus of modern historiography, also including the psychological, sociological, philosophical approach of the subject studied. The theoretical base of the investigation was first cleared in the studies of some reputed literary historians and critics, sociologists, psychologists and philosophers, such as: Nicolae Balotă, Al. Protopopescu, Pompiliu Constantinescu, N. Manolescu, E. Lovinescu, G. Călinescu, Marian Papahagi, L. Ulici, Mircea Popa, Liviu Petrescu, Ion Simuț, Rene Girard, Mihai Ralea, Georges Bataille, Ion Biberi, etc., the works of whom contributed to the creation of a larger framework for the research subject.

In terms of the *research stage*, previous studies and research aimed to re-update the controversial epic universe in the short stories and novels of the writer under analysis, on one hand, the binder of which is represented by the theme of obsession in the various forms of manifestation, mirrored in the

conscience of some emblematic characters, often victims of an obscure instinct and especially of some extremely productive imagination.

On the other hand, these aimed to outline that the connection between the individual and society is not unilateral, some influence being present from both directions and to identify some typical and common features of the characters, starting from the social criterion.

Because a purely sociological approach is not possible and it would empty the writing of meaning, the social approach is combined with the psychological, psychoanalytical and sometimes even philosophical approach. Most researchers studied mainly the psychological conflicts of the characters, but the conflict with the society is, many times, the background of their drama influencing their behaviour and thinking. Gib I. Mihăescu presents the reality outside the heroes in strict dependency with their inner universe: the characters with their psychological life phenomena are directly subject to the issues of their social life after the first world war.

The research methodology contains traditional research methods including elements of historical, phenomenal, typological, sociological, psychoanalytical approaches, rethought from the perspective of literature modernity and based on the demands of modernist theory.

The materials of this thesis can serve both as starting point and as a supplement to the preparation of some chapters in works regarding either the process of Gib I. Mihăescu's modernity poetics in the Romanian literature, or the more detailed examination itself of some issues concerning various aspects of Gib I. Mihăescu's writing.

Trying to penetrate long debated segments from the Romanian novel in the inter-war period in general and in Gib Mihăescu's writing in particular is an initiative itself subject to risk. The entire paper subject to the reader's attention is the result of multiple inner conflicts leading, with the support of the professors



guiding me during the entire period of preparation, to the approach of Gib Mihăescu's modernity poetics from perspectives others than the initially proposed ones. I shall briefly present the chapters composing this paper.

The paper is structured on *five chapters*, each in its turn divided into sub-chapters, reflecting the outlook on the main levels concerning perception of the literary writing belonging to Gib I. Mihăescu in the Romanian cultural space. The last chapter is dedicated to the conclusions, the paper ending with the references.

As regards the first chapter, "Gib I. Mihăescu's Literary Personality", we see an interesting division between two completely different domains, respectively literature, journalism and law, the first two attended with an undeniable persuasion, the latter remaining in a second plan, as an unalienable family heritage, often cumbrous.

The profession of journalist practised by the writer for some time decisively marked the literary creation; the daily involvement of the journalist in the tumultuous social life of the period involved a complex process to know such, to penetrate the deepest mysteries of life in Bucharest or the province and to maintain the same in the present, approaching live subjects. Without claiming value judgements, I dare state that literature becomes, for many writers, the chance to correct the inevitable destiny of presenting the unusual vision of life which, starting from actual and real data creates a new universe where life itself escapes the intrinsic laws. As regards the writer, it is obvious that the data given by the direct experience of the attorney are the basis of his literary writing.

Bearing the stamp of modernity, permanently seduced by the deepest sub-layers of the human being, Gib I. Mihăescu finds consolation, as most "agonisers of the modern era"<sup>1</sup> in the fictitious and lucrative world of his own

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<sup>1</sup> Max Blecher, *Întâmplări în irealitatea imediată*, București, 1936, p. 6.

imagination, giving rise to an authentic, viable writing, running away from reality expressing not the exoneration of the life responsibilities, but an attempt, perhaps unconscious, but opportune, to "escape the absurd"<sup>2</sup>, from the traps of an easy existence, subject to mean compromises.

Sensible, reserved and in the fantastic, often isolated by the current preoccupations of the day, at the same time incapable of coping with the same, powerless to fight for the meaningless social ascend, Gib I. Mihăescu lived all the big soul and conscience disasters only the background of his inner life. It is the representative case of the introvert personality. A writer of real value, Gib I. Mihăescu ensured his place in the history of the Romanian literature especially due to the development of inter-war prose when the quality and quantity leap was remarkable.

The largest impediment for such a reconstitution in the case of Gib I. Mihăescu comes from the amazing divergence of his biography and writing themselves. The author's real image, naturally embedded in the events and consistently reported to his work contains some mirage. Far from consolidating it, the various documentary additions, suggestions and interpretations provided permanently change the writing, getting it farther and farther away.

His writing is, however, sufficient to place the writer amongst the large prose writers between the two wars. We therefore summarised in the second chapter some aspects related to the "*Romanian novel between wars*".

Theoretically, the aspects entailed by the process of the Romanian novel genesis can be reduced to three fundamental ones: *formation of audition; text genesis and author emergence*.

The second significant period in the history of the Romanian novel is the one of *consolidations*. It starts with the first local Romanian novel of actual

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<sup>2</sup> Alfred Heinrich, *Peregrinările căutătorului de ideal*, Editura Facla, Timișoara, 1984, p. 156.

value, *Ciocoi vechi și noi* by N. Filimon, and practically extends up to the first world war. If Nicolae Filimon can be considered the creator of the genre by imposing the first Romanian novel of actual value, the second great novel writer of the time, Duiliu Zamfirescu, goes even further, achieving a first major step in the process of synchronisation with the great European novel.

Unfortunately, even if already a certainty, the Romanian novel continues to face difficulties at the beginning of the 21st century. Moreover, despite the presence of some real value writings, the past, bucolic and especially the peasantry entail, during such period, the substitution of the aesthetic criterion by the ethical one. As regards the literary species approached, the writers prefer the shortest forms of prose where they easily succeed in supporting the theses submitted. Therefore, the Romanian novel is still a child, an artificial long term child, preventing, for the time being, the dialogue with the great European novel.

The situation changed radically between the wars, the period being equivalent to the emergence and consolidation of the modern Romanian novel. It is the age of full maturity and European transformation of a literary form which, from now on, captures the centre of interest and faces the most spectacular aesthetic forms. The extra-literary criteria used by the peasantry and populism currents are abandoned for good, focusing on evolution, meaning the synchronisation with the great European novel.

Within the dynamics of the literary forms, the Romanian novel represents a fabulous character, born late, with an artificially maintained long childhood. Later, in its attempt to recover the distance - in a similar way to Prince Charming in the stories - it starts to develop in some miraculous manner, skipping stages and going from childhood to the age of full maturity, without, however, touching the specific adolescence crises. A consequence of this skipping evolution is represented by the simultaneity of some aesthetic experiences which, in the European literature, manifested in diachronic plan.

Consequently, in the Romanian novel between the wars, the two epic models co-exist which, within the natural and organic evolution of the European literature represented as many distinct "ages" in the sinuous process of the modern novel emergence. There are: the narrative objective model (objectified) and the narrative experimental model, the 20th century Romanian novel proving the land of ongoing confrontations of these fundamental aesthetic experiences. It is worth mentioning that, in relation to the instances existing before in the Romanian prose, the objectified epic model (or Balzacian) represents an emblem of modernity. Unlike the European novel which, at that time (inter-war period) exhausted the innovative features. This explains why Liviu Rebreanu is considered as the creator of the modern Romanian novel when it is well known that the author of *Răscala* was the follower of the objective narrative perspective. The natural conclusion of these investigations is that the motion of prose from the traditional short stories and the short stories reaching the construction novel becomes an actual fact of the literary history after the first world war.

The investigation does not stop to the presentation of authentic value, but continues with the flagging of impostors. Thus, the inter-war epic production suffices to consecrate the genre, but impostors also arise owing them the impression of false abundance. Even value writers are imputed the abandon of "imaginary effort" for the sake of the ephemeral temptation of presenting the social event.

The third chapter, "Gib I. Mihăescu, short story writer" presents the writer's short stories. The début of the short story writer occurs in 1919 with the publication of the poem *Linia întâi* (The Front Line) in one of the issues of "Luceafărul" magazine. In essence, the short stories analysed in this modest study do not shock by their thematic diversity, given that most of them present troubling tones of the erotic feeling or insoluble soul drama, as much as by the

detailed analysis of some area of the human subconscious, the characters' instability caught at the limit moments of their regressive existence, threatened by the absurd. From this critical perspective, the manner in which the writer understand how to relate to the issue of time outlines connections with the short prose of the great drama writer of "O scrisoare pierduta" (The Lost Letter) where obvious naturalist influences are present.

Gib I. Mihăescu's short stories, especially those focusing on erotic issues, bring a unique and distinct world, the identity of which claimed the prose between the two world wars by deeply approaching the universe between dreams and reality. These aim especially some extreme cases and analyse the particularly agitated interior universe of some heroes with a predisposition towards dreams and imaginary creations. Permanently required as the sole mode of existence, imagination becomes a centrifugal force captivating the destiny of the heroes forever, isolating them to push them, eventually, in a tough zone of reality, more tragic than the one created by themselves in the long dream and day-dreaming escapes. The persistent focus on an idea, triggered by a memory or a real fact, can no longer be denied or terminated, the heroes can no longer escape its disastrous effects, abandon to the dream or return to an even more terrible and tormenting reality than the one they escape from. In such area between truth and fiction, the destiny of men is eventually fixed. They only get one dimension, defined only in relation to the intensity of their affective life, characterised by one single and defining feature, isolated, and insistently requested, brought to obsession. Anxious natures, bearers of traumas and moral complexes, such people are ready to start at the smallest contact a series of imagination resources which, together, cause an unpredictable and obsessive chain reaction. In their cases, reasoning is in an ongoing state of alarm, succeeding only seldom to win. Characteristic for their inner structure and the manner of manifestation is the almost sadistic lust to torture themselves,

reaching a troubling state of psychological dissociation where the reality and imaginary are not separated, but infused as a whole.

Gib I. Mihăescu succeeds in bringing by his short stories some unique and original contribution to the development and modernisation of the Romanian prose of psychological analysis and at the same time to anticipate the great Romanian creations.

The largest and most interesting section in Gib I Mihăescu's short stories revealing his true originality is the one of analytical prose, where the epic creation only forms the pretext to start some complicated conscience complexes or spiritual states. The short stories, excellent drilling in the hidden areas of the human soul, are largely focused on the erotic feeling, a feeling always placed in an extreme area, of love uncertainty, dilated to its most torturing jealousy forms. Jealousy, uncertainty and unfulfilled love, the terror of public opinion degrading even the most "cuckold" one, represent, individually or together in the same character, strong sources of spiritual crises and erotic obsessions.

Thus, even from the first stories, thematically anchored in the war campaign and experience or in the limited universe of the small provincial town, the short story writer was attracted by the diverse and profound exploration of Eros, in its complexity, evolving from the charm of the first love to obsession and a deep and disturbing spiritual terror.

. Heroes love intensely, up to violence, although keeping the nostalgia of the ideal love and the dream of moral purity deep in their souls. Such duality between the flesh lust and its denial by the idea of the ideal love creates the dramatic structure, the tension and violent ending of Gib I Mihăescu's short stories.

The fourth chapter in this paper describes "Gib I Mihăescu's novels between wars". In an era rich in values, such as the inter-war period, when prose and especially the novel evolve rapidly, Gib I Mihăescu marked a decisive

moment of great authenticity unquestionably placing him amongst the great values of the Romanian literature for the readers of the modern Romanian novel.

In his novel, Gib I Mihăescu resumes and details the analysis of spiritual states also approached in the short stories. It must be noted that, in the two large construction which made him popular, the best ones, so different and yet so close to each other, the Russian Girl (*Rusoaica*) și *Donna Alba*, the novelist proves to master the epic material just as well, stringently organising it according to the mystery novel technique, so as to obtain the maximum of tension.

Chapter 5 focuses on 5 major novels, respectively: „*Zilele și nopțile unui student întârziat*” (*Days and Nights of a Late Student*), „*Donna Alba*” „*Brațul Andromedei*” (*Andromeda's Arm*), *Femeia de ciocolată*” (*The Woman of Chocolate*) and the masterpiece „*Rusoaica*” (*The Russian Girl*).

Between the two greatest novels, containing sufficient points of connection, *Rusoaica* and *Donna Alba*, Gib I. Mihăescu wrote *Zilele și nopțile unui student întârziat*, started before *Rusoaica* and finished after the publication of the novel getting him celebrity. The book gave rise to many discussions and contradictions. This faces us with the question: is this novel truly a simple break for the author to become amused rendering a parody of his own characters or a sign of fatigue between *Rusoaica* and *Donna Alba*, the novels which, together with his short stories, ensure the author a place amongst the most honourable ones in the history of the Romanian literature between the two world wars?

*Zilele și nopțile unui student întârziat* gives us the first perfect novel of the author who, at the beginnings of his career proved a great short story writer and a tenacious worker capable of turning himself into a novelist.

*Donna Alba* is the novel of moral ambiguity in a soul tormented by an all-encompassing erotic obsession prohibiting the clear distinction of the well known pattern in Gib I. Mihăescu's writing between impression and reality,

between the moral and immoral. Of course, any thesis temptation from the author is excluded, all the novel interests being reduced to the ability of the epic structure, in this chase, on inner and outer unpredictable paths, to the goal.

For Gib I. Mihăescu's evolution, *Brațul Andromedei* however meant a lot. It is his first attempt to approach novel. And, without being a model of the species, *Brațul Andromedei* is an interesting book, marking the reader. For Gib I. Mihăescu's evolution, this is a victory. His entire power of creation is dedicated from now on to the novel.

The piece outlining the future meaning of Gib I. Mihăescu's activity as novelist and marking a deviation of interest from short story to novel is *Femeia de ciocolată* (The Woman of Chocolate), first published as short story and then amplified and published as a book in 1933, as novel.

The novel *Rusoaica* was well received by the time critics. At the very time of its release, greatest writers and critics flag the novel as a remarkable victory of the Romanian prose. Starting with 1933 and until these days, the critical references for the novel increased significantly.

The last chapter, "Gib I Mihăescu's posterity" presents some critical opinions fixing Gib I Mihăescu's place in the literary history and the proportions of his writing in the evolution of the 20th century Romanian prose. At the same time, the chapter analyses the specifics of Gib I Mihăescu's narrative speech.

The opinions expressed by critics and people who knew him on the man and writer Gib I Mihăescu, on his discretion and modesty, are unanimously. Such concordance of opinions, rarely seen with a creator, gives us the certainty of an objective feed-back, closer to the reality of life, to the proportions of the writing and to the unique and non-reproducible magic of his creation.

The prose and drama writer, relentless seeker of new paths in creation, the acid and intransigent journalist, almost daily present in newspapers, wrote and published massive amounts if we consider that his writing destiny ended



abruptly and surprisingly after approximately a decade and a half. His writing, prose, drama and journalism, includes over 6000 pages, without taking into account hundreds of projects for future creations, noted on astronomy and physics taking much of his time over the last years.

The existence of the writer and the unforeseen ending were tragic, but had meaning by creation, unique beauty by the fight with ghosts opposing the accomplishment of ideals, by the ongoing aspiration to self-improvement. In Gib I Mihăescu's creation, the desire of purity and absolute, the thirst for ideal and aspiration to perfection are the elements giving life its significance, opposing to and rejecting trivial existence, without an ideal, lingering in some sufficiency driving happiness.

Gib I Mihăescu's prose, especially the short stories, is great not because of the thematic variety and inclusion of social realities, but firstly by the detailed investigation of inner life, by means of some unpredictable and whimsical game of the jealousy entailing erotic feeling generating complex and obsessive spiritual dramas. The real element and the natural framework are only the starting point, abandoned, or better said amplified in a tree-like imagination, transformed in another "reality", richer and colourful, established between the dream and the fantastic imaginations and hallucinations of his heroes. Such tormenting state, with nothing from the initial reality, has the power to suggest another meaning of existence, to make it comply with the terrible creations imagined by a febrile imagination.

Apparently a whole, with preferences for analytical prose, Gib I Mihăescu's writing is presented to us as *diverse and varied in terms of formula and expressive means*, bouncing with almost equal artistic resources between creation and analysis, between objective and satirical observation of the social and moral environment and the picture of a profound and new spiritual reality. Not seldom, in the war short stories and the last novels, the writer combines the

two prose structures, apparently contradicting, in a new manner, complex and ever more comprehensive and real of spiritual life phenomena and the reality as a whole.

Amongst so many praises one more exciting and persistent than the other, explanatory analyses or drastic attempts to disapprove with the diverse writings of Gib I. Mihăescu, there is one constantly appearing conclusion, regardless of the evaluation perspective. When one or even more critics release a critical opinion, it is possible that they are wrong, no matter how deep their conviction is. But when all agree on one issue, it suddenly occurs in a special light and demands special attention. It is also the case of the issues raised by the style of Gib I. Mihăescu's writing. Thus, Gib. I. Mihăescu's language and style were the preferred subject of many analyses realised along the years, diverse and not always positive. The style deficiencies of his prose derive, amongst others, from the failure to strictly observe the composition. Gib I. Mihăescu fails, indeed, to always combine in harmony the constitutive parts of a short story or novel.

Let us not forget, however, that, in an era rich in values, such as the inter-war period, when prose and especially the novel evolve rapidly, Gib I Mihăescu marked a decisive moment of great authenticity unquestionably placing him amongst the great values of the Romanian literature for the readers of the modern Romanian novel, thanks to his unique style. His work is show of unique, fascinating creation inspired by the comprehensive respiration of reality caught in its diverse situations, many times reaching the borders of dream and fantastic by deepening the investigation in the "most profound, most unnaturally diverse" areas of the soul.

Despite Gib I. Mihăescu's prose being included in the direction of Lovinescu's modernism, especially by the omnipresent tendency to analyse the

mysterious sub-conscience, to lower in the "individual soul lassos"<sup>3</sup>, we do not find, in any writing, short story or novel, the type of absolute intellectual tormented by insoluble intellectual dramas or the incapacity to adapt to the social framework. Heroes moving around the epic universe of these fictions are rather prisoners of extreme feelings at biological level, rather than at intellectual level, thus making us agree with Pompiliu Constantinescu's opinion according to which the "human is a victim tormented by the libidinal cancer"<sup>4</sup>, or at least Gib Mihăescu's human can be so represented in most of the cases. From such perspective, the prose analysed has similarities with some of Felix Aderca's writings, another writer who places the creation „under the tutelary sign”<sup>5</sup> of eternal feminine. Therefore, Gib Mihăescu's prose remains, in our opinion, a benchmark bearing the mark of modernity, despite the style or aesthetics deficiencies originating, beyond doubt, in the artist's deficient literary knowledge.

Leaving such reduction in Gib I Mihăescu's writing aside, it is worth mentioning the prose writer's adhesion to the current of the literary modernism, not in theory or common laws, but in the meaning of directing the epic investigation on the mental and affective life terrain, the stake being the mirroring in imagination of complexes and obsessions tormenting his memorable characters. In other words, Gib I Mihăescu remains in the readers' memory as a relentless investigator of imagination triggered by the incoercible force of troubling obsessions.

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<sup>3</sup> Nicoale Manolescu, *Arca lui Noe*, Editura Gramar, București 2003, p. 18

<sup>4</sup> Pompiliu Constantinescu, *Romanul românesc interbelic*, Antologie, postfață și bibliografie de G. Gheorghică, Editura Minerva, București, 1977, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Valentin Chifor, *Caleidoscop critic*, Editura Cogito, Oradea 1996, p.110.

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