

**”GEORGE EMIL PALADE” UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE, PHARMACY,
SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY OF TÂRGU MUREŞ**

**DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF LETTERS, HUMANITIES AND APPLIED SCIENCES
SPECIALIZATION: PHILOLOGY**

THESIS

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**PETRU CIMPOEŞU'S PROSE
ARGUMENT**

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The thesis Petru Cimpoeșu's Prose aims to explore the value and functions of storytelling through a detailed analysis of the work of Petru Cimpoeșu, one of the most representative prose writers of contemporary Romanian literature. The study seeks to demonstrate, through an interpretative reading, that Cimpoeșu's prose is more than a reflection of historical and social reality; it transcends mere representation by transforming it into a space of ontological inquiry, meditation on the human condition, and an exploration of the power of storytelling as a mode of knowledge, a means of reordering existential chaos, and a form of cultural and identity resistance. The objective of this research is not to exhaustively investigate the entirety of Cimpoeșu's prose but rather to highlight the significance of storytelling in accordance with the author's vision, which conceives literature not as a mere cultural ornament but as a form of "resistance through narrative." This is achieved through the analysis of several of his volumes, including *Amintiri din provincie*, *Firesc*, *Erou fără voie*, *Simion liftnicul*, *Roman cu îngeri și moldoveni*, *Celălalt Simion*, *Bărbați fără degete și alte amintiri penibile* și *Scrisori către Taisia*.

In Cimpoeșu's perspective, the writer's stake extends beyond the creative process itself, encompassing the social and cultural meanings of the stories they tell. By offering new perspectives or critiquing the current state of affairs, the writer contributes to the formation of the collective imagination. Stories thus become more than mere narratives; they serve as reflections of humanity confronting social, existential, or political challenges: "storytelling becomes a form of resistance through culture." (povestea devine o formă de rezistență prin cultură"¹). The writer asserts themselves not only as a witness but also as a guardian of collective identity and memory² in the face of a history marked by conflicts and controversies, insofar as "literature embodies the traumas of the society that produces it" („literatura are valoarea traumelor societății care o produce”³): "For Cimpoeșu, writing represents an opportunity to contemplate, question, and potentially reorder the world. He is convinced that through fiction, through an organizing literary construction, universal entropy can be mitigated, since in the fictional universe, unlike in worldly reality, there is always meaning - more or less clearly outlined - depending on the creator's talent. The data of reality are imbued with the signs of fiction, and fiction itself acquires the characteristics of reality, thus blurring the distinction between reality and fiction to near indistinction" („Pentru Cimpoeșu, scrisul reprezintă un prilej de a contempla, interoga și, eventual, de a re-ordona lumea.

¹ Petru Cimpoeșu, *Privirea îndrăgostitului (răspuns la ancheta „Cum se scrie un roman”)* în volumul *Bărbați fără degete și alte amintiri penibile*, ed. cit., p. 197.

² Mihnea Bălci observa că la începutul secolului al XXI-lea exista ca formulă prozaistică așa-zisa „proză a memoriei colective”, avându-i ca reprezentanți pe Petru Cimpoeșu, Dan Lungu, Radu Pavel Gheo, Florina Iliș sau Filip Florian, în articolul *Realismul etnografic. Obiect, Ideologie, formă*, în revista „Vatra”, nr. 5-6, 2021, p. 76.

³ Petru Cimpoeșu, *Tendențe în proza românească de azi*, în revista „România literară”, nr. 23-24, 2024.

El este convins că prin ficțiune, printr-o construcție livrescă ordonatoare, s-ar putea atenua entropia universală, întrucât, în universul ficțional, spre deosebire de realitatea lumii, există mereu un sens, mai mult sau mai puțin clar schițat, în funcție de talentul creatorului. Datele realului sunt investite cu însemnele ficțiunii, iar ficțiunea propriu-zisă dobândește caracteristicile realității și, astfel, diferența realitate-ficțiune se simte atenuată până la indistinție”⁴).

Therefore, the originality of this work lies in exploring Petru Cimpoeșu’s vision of the value of storytelling, as well as in the applied study of his writings that exemplify this particular vision. The thesis interprets several of the functions of storytelling - storytelling as an act of self-reconstruction, as a means of understanding trauma, as a form of negotiating the past, shaping meaning through speech, etc. - in which the relationship between reality and fiction, the narrative discourse itself, and the character play a fundamental role. These aspects are central to the structure and chapters of the thesis.

From a methodological standpoint, this thesis proposes to analyze the work of Petru Cimpoeșu through a hermeneutic approach grounded in close reading, which facilitates the interpretation of texts in order to reveal their meanings and highlight the functions of the storytelling act. The narratological analysis focuses on examining the narrative strategies and formal choices that define Cimpoeșu’s prose, with particular emphasis on the relationship between narrative instances and the mechanisms for constructing verisimilitude. Additionally, the thematic method aims to identify recurring motifs such as memory, time, the past, the human condition, death, solitude, provincialism, the act of writing, the condition of the writer, and the nature of art. The socio-historical contextualization frames Cimpoeșu’s prose as an expression of a specific historical and cultural context (Romania during the transition period), revealing critical insertions addressing society, social satire, mechanisms reflecting the collective mentality, as well as the relationship between history and literary imagination. Last but not least, to capture the inner life of characters, a cognitive and psychological approach is employed, connected to reader-response criticism⁵, which emphasizes the reader’s role in understanding characters. As the text is read - guided by the principle of “read for character”⁶ - the reader progressively collects information about the character and forms a “mental model of the character,” a kind of “mental file” for each character.

The structure of the thesis chapters follows the main themes addressed by Petru Cimpoeșu in his books, as well as ideas that indicate a sustained preoccupation in his meditations—essential issues that open reflective subjects within his works.

⁴ Vasile Spiridon, *Efectul de Imprinting*, în revista „Vatra”, nr. 1-2, 2018, p. 125.

⁵ Wolfgang Iser, *Actul lecturii. O teorie a efectului estetic*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești, 2006.

⁶ Uri Margolin, *Character*, în David Herman, *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, Editura Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 66-79.

Thus, the first chapter, *Biografie și literatură*, explores themes such as the relationship between the real and the fictional, between time and memory, the need for biography in literary works, the problem of authenticity, and the fictionalization of biography. These topics are approached both theoretically and analytically, with references to foreign writers, philosophers, critics, and theorists, as well as to a series of Romanian critics. All these conceptualizations and analytical openings examine Cimpoeșu's work in relation to the period during which his books were published - the post-communist transition era - the '80s generation, and the postmodernist movement.

In this regard, the subchapter *Petru Cimpoeșu: Literatura tranziției* proposes a bibliographic sketch alongside the perspectives of critics and peers regarding the categorization of the writer within a particular historical period, literary generation, or movement. Although the author does not programmatically affiliate himself with literary currents or trends - confessing that the ideology of the '80s generation, textualism, or Romanian postmodernism remain foreign to him - we cannot ignore the humor and irony with which he masterfully orchestrates intertextuality and the values of the parable, inevitably betraying the specific traits of a postmodernist. Nonetheless, Alex Goldiș classifies him as the "last '80s writer,"⁷ arguing that what distinguishes Cimpoeșu is his ability to transform philosophical and scientific intertexts into a formidable satirical weapon. Sanda Cordoș⁸ and Bianca Burța-Cernat⁹ regard him as a representative of the post-communist transition, his novels embodying a "literature of change,"¹⁰ while Cătălin Sturza recommends him as an author situated at the crossroads of paradigms who succeeds in surpassing postmodern eclecticism through parody, considering that "Petru Cimpoeșu's 'creative generation' is the 1990s generation" („«generația de creație» a lui Petru Cimpoeșu este generația 1990"¹¹).

The subchapter *Coeficient de biografie – amintiri aproape uitate* aims to explore the degree of biographical involvement in Petru Cimpoeșu's prose, starting from the author's explicit statements and his memoir-like writings. The analysis begins with the observation that personal reality constitutes a constant source of inspiration for Cimpoeșu, a fact confirmed both by his

⁷ Alex Goldiș, *Elegie pentru optzecism*, în revista „Cultura”, nr. 186, 14.08.2008.

⁸ Sanda Cordoș, *Lumi din cuvinte. Reprezentări și identități în literatura română postbelică*, Editura Cartea Românească, București, 2012, p. 133.

⁹ Bianca Burța-Cernat, *O tranziție devenită istorie, dar o temă de actualitate*, în revista „Observator cultural”, nr. 877, 2017.

¹⁰ Roxana Ghiță, *Poetica și poetica Revoluției. De la romantism german la anul 1989 în romanul din România și Germania*, Editura Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, București, 2013, p.83.

¹¹ Cătălin Sturza, *Două forme productive în anii 1990 și 2000: eclectismul postmodern și autoficțiunea*, în revista „Caiete critice”, nr. 11 (373), noiembrie 2018, p. 45.

declarations in interviews and prefaces, and by volumes such as *Amintiri uitate, amintiri deghizate*¹² și *Bărbați fără degete și alte amintiri penibile*.

The subchapter *Scrierea ca reconstrucție a biografiei. Jocul dintre memorie și ficțiune* centers on the novel *Erou fără voie*, which itself is based on a real accident that occurred during the period when the author was working as a teacher-engineer at the “George Bacovia” High School in Bacău (now the “Ferdinand” College). It is “a theorizing novel, relevant for understanding Cimpoeșu’s conception of writing [...] a deliberately intricate text, told through multiple voices, in which what truly matters is not the narrative itself but the passages with theoretical stakes” (un roman teoretizant, relevant pentru înțelegerea concepției lui Cimpoeșu despre scris [...] un text voit alambicat, pe mai multe voci, în care ceea ce contează cu adevărat nu e narațiunea propriu-zisă, ci pasajele cu miză teoretică”¹³).

Erou fără voie is a symbolic novel for the relationship between memory, fiction, and the act of writing, emphasizing how the literary process can become an instrument for distorting reality in the name of artistic expressiveness. It is a novel about the very nature of storytelling and fiction. The conflict between Boris and Sandu becomes emblematic of the tension between lived truth and literary aesthetics, between fragile memory and the temptation of fabrication, and the writer’s condition caught between the fascination of creation and the ethical constraint of truth. The framed narrative mechanism accentuates this metatextual reflection, questioning the authenticity status of any text.

The layered narrative construction includes a novel within a novel. The frame story is presented as an epistolary correspondence between two characters: the narrator-character C.N. and his addressee, Petru Cimpoeșu. The real author’s name, Petru Cimpoeșu, is subtly integrated into the fictional world, transgressing the boundaries between reality and text. Thus, the author becomes a character and, later, through a metanarrative play, also a narrator, assigned the role of a secondary creator who, significantly, works on writing his own novel. This intentional overlapping of roles marks the complexity of the relationship between creator, work, and fiction, as well as the identity play between author, narrator, and character.

The second chapter, *Narațiune. Narativitate. Naratologie*, aims to highlight certain peculiarities of narrative construction in Petru Cimpoeșu’s prose. The first section, titled *Fundamentări teoretice*, gathers the main contributions from narratology, clarifying concepts from narrative theory such as narration, character, narrative dynamics and tension, and the narrative arc.

¹² Petru Cimpoeșu, *Amintiri uitate, amintiri deghizate*, manuscris necomercializat, primit în format digital din partea autorului, p. 6.

¹³ Adrian Jicu, *Outsiderul – Revanșa provinciei*, în revista „Vatra”, nr.1-2, 2018, p. 99.

The second section, *Structuri și dinamici narrative în proza lui Petru Cimpoeșu*, examines the narrative particularities of the author's texts, revealing the ways in which storytelling becomes a form of cultural resistance, an exercise in self-knowledge, and often, a reflexive act concerning the writer's condition. Furthermore, the relationship between narrative instances (the presence of the author as a character), the dynamics of storytelling, as well as the special place of the short story within the corpus, will be analyzed.

The subchapter *Condiția scriitorului – rezistența prin poveste* presents the author's vision regarding the mission of the literary creator. The writer's condition is that of an amphibious being, made to live in another world but forced to endure in this one. In Petru Cimpoeșu's view, the writer's only way to survive the narrow space imposed by the boundaries of these two worlds is through "resistance by story." Falling in love proves to be the fundamental condition of writing, the gaze of the lover, in these terms, emerging from something far deeper than words. The writer is portrayed as a passionate creator for whom the act of writing is not merely a vocation, but a way of being shaped by Eros. Through the power of narrative, stories become a means of preserving authenticity and conferring meaning on existence, saving man not as a species but as an essence. Thus, the writer's role remains that of being the voice of a people's conscience and its moral compass, as long as the resistance through story continues.

This subchapter, along with the following one - *Scrierea ca nevoie de clarificare* - explores the volume *Bărbați fără degete și alte amintiri penibile*, which comprises narratives situated at the borderline between reality and fiction, possessing a hybrid literary identity. In this volume, a sample of the author's aesthetic maturity, the exploration of the inner life, and theoretical reflection on literature converge in a narrative form of remarkable inventiveness. The introductory text, titled *Cu inimă bună*, represents a testimony of his way of thinking as well as a path of revision, self-analysis, and clarification of his own conceptions and concerns regarding the writer's condition. It also elucidates some of the author's recurrent themes: memory, recourse to autobiography, and the orientation of stories towards the reconstruction of one's own past.

One of the texts in the volume, titled *Povestea vorbei – alta*, proposes a diachronic reflection on the destiny of the word and on the function of language, as well as on consciousness and thought rooted in logos. "The scholar in general, and the writer (if you will, in the sense of a scribe) in particular, have always had the role of custodian and repository of the value of word usage" („Cărturarul în general și scriitorul (dacă vreți, în sensul de scrib) în mod special au avut dintotdeauna rolul de custode și depozitar al valorii de întrebuințare a cuvintelor”¹⁴). The writer represents not only a creator of fictional worlds in the aesthetic sense but also a guarantor of

¹⁴ Petru Cimpoeșu, *Povestea vorbei – alta*, în volumul *Bărbați fără degete și alte amintiri penibile*, Editura Polirom, București, 2019, pp. 83-84.

meaningful continuity in a universe where meaning seems to be evacuated in favor of symbolic efficiency.

Another subchapter addresses the author's involvement as a character, highlighted in the novel *Erou fără voie*, where the author assumes a special role by transfiguring himself as a character within his own work. The author's intervention as a character transforms the text into a metanarrative in which the textual focal point shifts from the story itself to the narrative mechanisms through which it is constructed and reflected, including evident insertions of literary theory. Another way the author's presence manifests in the text is through autoreflexivity. Petru Cimpoeșu does not limit himself to the traditional role of the absent author but directly intervenes in the epilogue as a character-narrator, simultaneously assuming multiple narrative instances (author, narrator, character).

Chapter Three, *Arta și funcțiile povestirii*, shifts the research focus toward highlighting Petru Cimpoeșu's storyteller quality and the functions that the act of storytelling fulfills in his prose. The first two subchapters, *Povestea ca arhitectură a existenței și Dinspre haos spre poveste: Povestea ca simulare existențială*, present storytelling as the very essence of how we understand reality, since it provides a comprehensible framework for human experiences. The human mind functions narratively, unable to endure a lack of meaning. Thus, the brain "invents" stories to explain reality. Michael Gazzaniga names the neural mechanism that imposes a narrative thread where there is no order the "interpreter"¹⁵ — an insatiable storyteller incessantly seeking to explain, connect, and understand. Jonathan Gottschall identifies this process as the "Sherlock Holmes syndrome"¹⁶ — the detective model.

The subchapter *Povestașul: Depozitarul memoriei colective și liantul comunității* reveals the image of the authentic storyteller exemplified by the figure of the storyteller¹⁷, the most important member of the Los Machiguengas community. Fascinated by this cultural structure, Mario Vargas Llosa emphasizes that the povestaș transmits not only facts but also emotions, wisdom, and the mystery of existence through the spoken word. He is the figure of the wise narrator, the one who preserves collective memory and binds communities through stories.

Rostuire prin rostire sketches the manner in which Petru Cimpoeșu appears to revive what Walter Benjamin called "the storyteller's wisdom"¹⁸ - a capacity to give meaning to fragments, to

¹⁵ Michael Gazzaniga, "Forty-Five Years of Split-Brain Research and Still Going Strong", *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, Vol. 6, 2008, pp. 653-659.

¹⁶ Jonathan Gottschall, *Animalul povestitor. Cum ne fac poveștile oameni*, traducere din limba engleză de Smaranda Nistor, Editura Vellant, București, 2019.

¹⁷ Mario Vargas Llosa, *Povestașul*, traducere din spaniolă de Coman Lupu, Editura Humanitas Fiction, București, 2020.

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov*, in *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York, 1969.

render the specificity of the ephemeral without trivializing it. In this light, his narrator becomes more than an ironic chronicler of daily absurdities: he is an intermediary figure between author and reader, a narrative agent who creatively mediates between reality and text. In his prose, we witness the emergence of a hybridized narrative instance, close to what Mario Vargas Llosa termed the *povestă* — an autonomous fictional voice that combines the ability to tell stories with the capacity to live them from within, a “pleasure of speaking the world through/with words” (o „plăcere de a rost(u)i lumea în/ prin cuvânt”¹⁹).

The following subchapters present several functions of storytelling in Petru Cimpoeșu’s novels. The novel *Scrisori către Taisia* unveils storytelling as an act of self-reconstruction, as an understanding of trauma, and as a form of negotiating the past. In this novel, Cimpoeșu constructs an epistolary narrative in which storytelling becomes more than mere retrospective confession — it is a hermeneutic act, the protagonist’s effort to reconstruct an uncertain past, to negotiate between what was and what can be understood or reinvented through words. The entire narrative structure is supported by an epistolary form, situating the novel in an intersectional space between intimate journal, self-analysis, and storytelling or the art of narration.

Through his letters to Taisia, the narrator seems to find his own identity not only on lived events but, more importantly, through their narration, becoming a “storyteller” engaged in a continuous process of interpretation. Reflection on the past becomes an act of existential analysis, in which the protagonist not only recalls his experiences but attempts to decode, justify, and comprehend them through the lens of belated maturity.

This reinterpretation of the past constitutes a fundamental mechanism of storytelling, wherein the act of narrating becomes a process of (re)shaping the self. Thus, *Scrisori către Taisia* approaches the model of transformative confession, where personal experience acquires collective resonances, and the “telling of the story” equates to a reconstruction of the affective and moral self, touching upon “the problem of the mechanisms of memory and forgetting.” For Cimpoeșu, writing is “an anticipation of the past,” a form of negotiating one’s becoming across time („Pentru Cimpoeșu, scrisul este «o anticipare a trecutului», o formă de a-ți negocia devenirea de peste timp”²⁰). The protagonist is a storyteller who conveys, beyond mere events, an entire life experience formed within a historical context — a storyteller of his own existence and simultaneously a witness to a distinct historical epoch. As the narrative unfolds, the reader discovers not only fragments of a personal biography but also penetrates the dilemmas of an entire generation. Fear of life, the need for adaptation, passivity as a survival strategy, and the tense relationship to the idea of fate become recurring themes in the protagonist’s letters. The protagonist

¹⁹ Iulian Boldea, *Reinventarea ficțiunii*, în revista „Vatra”, nr. 1-2, 2018, p. 102.

²⁰ Adrian Jicu, *Petru Cimpoeșu – scrisori din comunism*, în revista „Vatra”, nr. 10-11, 2022, p. 146.

reevaluates his experiences, endowing them with an almost fictional character, where what truly happened matters less than the narrative structure he attributes to it. This perspective is similarly articulated by Jonathan Gottschall in *The Storytelling Animal*, where he argues that human beings are shaped by the stories they tell themselves. “It is therefore unclear whether the protagonist was assigned the vocation of unhappy mediocrity or created it himself” („Nu este limpede, deci, dacă *vocația de nefericit mediocru* i-a fost *atribuită* protagonistului sau și-a creat-o singur”²¹). Petru Cimpoeșu offers a literary embodiment of this view, suggesting that the past becomes intelligible only through the narrative act. In his novel, lived experience gains ontological consistency only when it is verbalized, transformed into retrospective discourse.

Another function of storytelling - to bring coherence to chaos - is highlighted in the novel *Fireșc*, where the writing process proves to be an instrument of self-knowledge. Through *Fireșc*, Cimpoeșu illustrates the symbiosis in which the individual lives with the chaos of their life, as if such existence were “natural.” The novel’s protagonist, the young Iunia Poenaru, struggles to bring coherence to her life, awkwardly creating a journal in which words fail to capture the depth of the idea. In an abject environment and amid a broken family, Iunia lacks the capacity to find her way, but the writing process, initiated by chance, grants her an unforeseen power to narrate a story which ultimately lends coherence to chaos.

We have titled this section of the thesis *Povestirea care dă coerență haosului* precisely because this struggle for expression, this sacrificial effort in writing, is not illusory; the act of writing has a formative effect on the writer, and initial ignorance is in fact the necessary first step toward self-knowledge. Constantin Noica chooses to call this phenomenon “the joy of not knowing,” while those whose minds are dominated by knowledge and certainty are marked by “the amnesia of sadness,” unaware that true joy arises from the journey toward knowledge through writing, that is, through storytelling: “How much sadness must dwell in the heart of those who, starting to write a book, already know everything they will say there! A person who learns nothing by doing is like a deaf man asking questions whose answers he already knows; like a modern tourist going to see landscapes with the same eyes with which he had seen their photographs at home” (Cîtă tristețe trebuie să fie în inima celor care, începînd să scrie o carte, știu tot ce vor spune acolo! Un om care nu învață nimic făptuind, e un surd punînd întrebări al căror răspuns îl știe; e un turist modern plecînd să vadă peisajele cu aceiași ochi cu care le văzuse acasă fotografiile”²²). Thus, through the recorded deeds, the person “accomplishes” themselves. In Noica’s words, by “doing,” a person learns and teaches themselves. By writing the book, the person situates themselves in “becoming,” and by telling their story, the person comes to know themselves.

²¹ Senida Poenaru, *Carpe diem*, în revista „Vatra”, nr. 10-11, 2022, p. 150.

²² Constantin Noica, *Jurnal Filozofic*, Editura Humanitas, București, 1990, p. 101.

Chapter Four, *Lumile personajului*, is dedicated to the exploration of the literary character in the prose of Petru Cimpoeșu and undertakes an investigation into how the author constructs, develops, and nuances his characters. Starting from the premise that the character is a “man of ink,” and that “to find an answer in the soul of people, literature must speak about people, must create people” („ca să găsească un răspuns în sufletul oamenilor, literatura trebuie să vorbească despre oameni, să creeze oameni”²³), the chapter proposes a study of the character as a symbolic bridge between the fictional universe and the authentic experience of the reader - a symbolic construct that transcends mere fiction and becomes a vehicle for exploring the human condition. The chapter’s title, *Lumile personajului*, intentionally echoes Vasile Popovici’s extensive study *Lumea personajului*, which behind the characters seeks and finds the human being²⁴.

The burden carried by these characters is to reflect real human psychological profiles, to be perceived as possible beings, thus offering readers the opportunity to recognize themselves and understand their various experiences. Thanks to the insights of reader-response criticism²⁵, which has been influential, the role of the reader in comprehending literary characters is emphasized.

Regarding the character conceived as a text-based construction or as a mental image in the reader’s mind, the cognitive-psychological approach views characters as textually grounded mental models of possible individuals, constructed in the reader’s mind during text processing. This process is guided by the principle of “reading for character”²⁶ and results in the formation of a “mental model of the character” - a kind of “mental file” for each character throughout the reading experience. Alan Palmer (*Fictional Minds*) offers a nuanced examination of the processes through which fictional minds are (re)configured and understood, providing an innovative re-reading of the relationship between action and character that reverses the traditional Aristotelian paradigm which privileged action over character. In Palmer’s vision, the character becomes the narrative gravitational center, and their interiority - expressed through thoughts, intentions, perceptions, and distributed mental networks - constitutes the structural and affective foundation of the narrative text²⁷.

²³ Hertha Perez, *Ipostaze ale personajelor în roman*, Editura Junimea, Iași, 1979, p. 8.

²⁴ Liviu Ciocârlie, în observația lui (pe coperta studiului) despre studiul lui Vasile Popovici, *Lumea personajului*, Editura Echinoc, Cluj-Napoca, 1997.

²⁵ Wolfgang Iser, *Actul lecturii. O teorie a efectului estetic*, Editura Paralela 45, Pitești, 2006.

²⁶ Uri Margolin, „Character”, în David Herman, *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, Editura Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, pp. 66-79.

²⁷ Alan Palmer, *Fictional Minds*, Editura University of Nebraska Press, United States of America, 2004, p. 5 (citatul original: „Narrative fiction is, in essence, the presentation of fictional mental functioning. [...] If I am right, then it follows that the study of the novel is the study of fictional mental functioning and also that the task of theorists is to make explicit the various means by which this phenomenon is studied and analyzed.”).

The subchapter *Tipologii existențiale în proza lui Petru Cimpoeșu* captures Cimpoeșu's characters as constructed through careful social observation, filtered by an often ruthless ironic gaze that reveals the grotesque, ridiculous, and absurd spectacle of post-(post)communist Romanian society. Although deeply rooted in local realities, these narrative figures subtly evoke a broader global horizon through implicit meditation on the human condition, where the post-totalitarian individual confronts the "axiological void" of the world before and after ideology. Dan Perșa recognizes in Cimpoeșu an author who carefully studies and tenderly loves his characters, for before being a writer, he is a human being, fully fulfilling the writer's mission - as Paul Vinicius put it - of "scanning the human soul." Therefore, the essence of Petru Cimpoeșu lies in his humanity, rather than his role as a writer, through which his oeuvre - with its "human-characters"²⁸ - acquires its value.

His characters - marked by inadequacy, confusion, marginality - are reflections of a society undergoing not only political but also ontological transition. Whether it is Iunia Poenaru, who lives the drama of the inability to find naturalness in her existence; Simion the elevator operator—a potential Messiah in an apartment block; or the narrator of *Scrisori către Taisia*, who seeks his affective past and meaning in a world of symbolic collapse - these characters become *vehicule ale detabuizării*²⁹. They not only demystify the communist past but also interrogate the present in all its religious, moral, and ideological ambiguity. "Beyond the stories of each protagonist in his novels, told with much humor and indulgence for failure, Petru Cimpoeșu explores the particular way in which they integrate into the world, how they interpret events, and the decisions they make" („Dincolo de poveștile fiecărui protagonist al romanelor sale, spuse cu mult umor și îngăduință pentru ratare, Petru Cimpoeșu explorează modul particular în care aceștia se integrează în lume, felul în care interpretează evenimentele și deciziile pe care le iau”³⁰).

The subchapter *Oameni mici în vremuri mari: personajul în fața istoriei* captures how Petru Cimpoeșu constructs seemingly banal characters in the novel *Simion liftnicul*, yet ones emblematic of an era marked by upheaval, social turmoil, and collective disorientation. The historical context of Romania does not merely intersect with the lives of these characters but profoundly reshapes their reference points, values, and behaviors. The tension between the anonymous micro-existence and the vast historical macro-context illustrates how the post-communist individual - alienated and disoriented - is often reduced to a mere survival function in the face of a reality slipping through their fingers. Cimpoeșu's characters - whether the old shoemaker turned spiritual leader, Pelaghia,

²⁸ Dan Perșa, *Povești cu P.C.*, în revista „Vatra”, nr. 1-2, 2018, p. 97.

²⁹ Sanda Cordoș, *România în romanul actual*, în volumul *Starea prozei. Zilele prozei la Cluj*, ediția a doua, 16-17 octombrie 2008, coordonator Irina Petraș, Editura Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2008, p. 130.

³⁰ Georgeta Moarcăș, *Miturile lumii postdecembriste*, în revista „Vatra”, nr.1-2, 2018, p. 125.

Vasile, or Mr. Ion - are caricatural figures, yet not devoid of tragedy, crystallizing in quotidian gestures the full anxiety of a society in transition.

Simion liftnicul offers an allegorical miniaturization of post-December Romania, where the apartment block becomes the stage for a collective drama, and the characters - representatives of an amorphous mass - are subjected both to the pressures of historical events and their own incapacity to adapt or truly understand the changes. Through this prism, the novel transcends the borders of national literature and attains universality, as evidenced by its favorable reception in the Czech cultural space, where readers identified with similar experiences of post-communist transition.

The same novel highlights *poziția personajului în fața spiritualității*. Beyond the characters' names - many borrowed from saints or drawn from the Bible—and scenes evoking the Old Testament, a Christian aura permeates the entire novel. Beneath the author's ironic style and playful intertextuality lies a vision and attitude towards a world unable to distinguish morality and values in an environment marked by moral deficiencies.

The apartment block housing the novel's characters is, in Sanda Cordoș's metaphor, a "staircase of sinners" („scară a păcătoșilor”³¹), where each tenant lives in reconciliation and acceptance of the sin that is their weakness, thus creating a false positive self-image: “This is where Simion starts from, the starting point of the book: the individual's relationship with God. [...] A somewhat attentive reading would show that the book's thesis is precisely this, even stated by a character: if saints lived in an apartment block, then the block would become a monastery. It is a spiritual solution to the crisis of contemporary society—the reminder that we owe something to God” („Simion de la asta a plecat, e punctul de pornire al cărții: relația omului individual cu Dumnezeu. [...] O lectură cât de cât atentă ar arăta că teza cărții este aceasta, chiar o spune un personaj: dacă sfinții ar trăi la bloc, atunci blocul ar deveni mănăstire. Este o soluție spirituală la criza societății contemporane, aceea de a ne aminti că suntem datori lui Dumnezeu cu ceva”³²).

The subchapter *Personajul în fața propriei conștiințe* centers on Adrian Doltu, protagonist of *Scrisori către Taisia*, a near-testamentary writing of late-stage self-examination, lucid and often painful. Cimpoeșu constructs a protagonist who views himself from the outside with a nearly destructive lucidity, exposing his own emotional limits, his relationship with desire and affection, his defense mechanisms and vulnerabilities, all traces of transgenerational trauma³³. The novel “brings to the fore the case of a man taking stock in old age and not faring well—neither he nor the era he lived through” („aduce în prim-plan cazul unui bărbat care-și face bilanțul la senectute

³¹ Sanda Cordoș, *Scara păcătoșilor*, în revista „Vatra”, nr. 11-12, 2003.

³² Un Cristian, *Petru Cimpoeșu: „Sînt un om de stînga, adică trăiesc din salariu”*. *Partea a doua din Formula 1 – chat cu scriitori români, organizată de Observator cultural*, în revista „Observator cultural”, nr. 431, 2008.

³³ Mihaela Vancea, *Traume transgeneraționale*, în revista „Vatra”, nr. 10-11, p. 155.

și nu iese prea bine. Nici el, nici epoca pe care a traversat-o”³⁴). Adrian Doltu emerges as a marginalized intellectual, nearing the twilight of his existence: a former Romanian language teacher in a provincial town, later turned journalist, recently retired, bearing the marks of a life more lived in registers of failure than fulfillment. He is a character on the brink of withdrawal—a mature man, retired, confronting the post-professional identity void, probing his inner inferno with disarming honesty. His biography is stigmatized by multiple forms of failure: an accident leaving him with a prosthetic leg (a recurrent motif in Cimpoeșu’s work, also found in characters from his youth novel *Erou fără voie*), failed loves, broken relationships, and the feeling of a life lived in vain, growing up in a family marked by system affiliation and an imposing paternal figure—a former party activist who built his identity on the fragile foundations of a deeply ideological era.

Throughout this story of self-reconstruction, Taisia becomes more than an epistolary addressee; she is a constant affective pole, a symbol of ideal alterity, of the possibility to reclaim a lost self, along with her, in one’s own past. She is the silent witness of the self’s attempt to accept its own past life: “I write to tame my past—then to forget it”; “I have become an old man nobody needs: sickly, sullen, suspicious, and justifiably disagreeable” („Îți scriu ca să-mi înlănțesc trecutul – apoi să-l uit”; „am ajuns un bătrân de care nimeni nu are nevoie beteag, mohorât, suspicios și pe bună dreptate antipatic”³⁵).

In the analytical approach to Petru Cimpoeșu’s prose, the inclusion of a chapter dedicated to critical reception was deemed necessary, providing an overview of how his prose has been received by literary critics and cultural institutions. Therefore, the final chapter, *Receptare critică*, structured into two sections, *Merite. Premii* and *Opinii critice* does not aim at an exhaustive inventory of all responses, appreciations, or distinctions awarded to the author, but rather seeks to highlight the most relevant moments, recognitions, and critical voices that have contributed to shaping Petru Cimpoeșu’s public and literary image within the Romanian cultural and literary space.

A prose writer, publicist, and member of the Romanian Writers’ Union, Bacău branch, since 1990, Petru Cimpoeșu has been actively involved after 1990 in journalism in Bacău as an editor for the weeklies *Moldova* and *Opinia băcăuană*, later collaborating with *Monitorul de Bacău*. In 1997, he became deputy director of the Municipal Theatre Bacovia, and between 1998 and 2006 he was employed by the PETROM company; from 2006 to 2017, he served as director of the Bacău County Directorate for Culture, Religious Affairs, and National Cultural Heritage³⁶.

³⁴ Bogdan Crețu, *Anul literar 2021 în proză*, în revista „Observator cultural”, nr. 1092, 2022.

³⁵ Petru Cimpoeșu, *Scrisori către Taisia*, ed. cit., p. 261.

³⁶ *Scriitori vasluieni de odinioară și de astăzi – membri ai Societății Scriitorilor Români/ Uniunii Scriitorilor din România* – Dicționar biobibliografic, coordonator Liliana Moga, Biblioteca Județeană „Nicolae Milescu Spătarul” Vaslui, p. 47 (https://www.bjvaslui.ro/files/publicatii/BT_Scriitori%20vasluieni_dictionar.pdf).

Cimpoeșu is also a regular contributor to prestigious Romanian literary magazines such as *Tribuna*, *Familia*, *Vatra*, *Vitraliu*, *Convorbiri literare*, *Contrapunct*, *Cartea*, *Arc*, *Apostrof*, *Ateneu*, *Aurora*, *Cronica*, *Deșteptarea*, *Caiete botoșănene*, *Discobolul*, *România literară*, *Sinteze*, *Suplimentul de cultură*, *Steagul roșu*, *Bucovina literară*, and *Tomis*, thus consolidating his significant presence within the national literary field.

Equally notable is the presence of his name in anthologies and dictionaries: *Generația '80 în proza scurtă*, Pitești, editura Paralela 45, 1998; *Bacăul literar*, dicționar, Eugen Budău, Iași, editura Universitas XXI, 2004; *Dicționarul general al literaturii române C/D*, coordonator general Eugen Simion, editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2004; *Univers cultural și literar vasluian*: Dicționar, Ioan Baban, Iași, PIM, 2008; *Ateneul scriitorilor*, Bacău, 2008; *Sub semnul lui Bacovia: antologie pentru „mâine și mai mâine”*, ediție îngrijită de Costin Calistrat, Bacău, among others.

From the author's testimonies, we learn that the first sign of appreciation for his creations coincides with his "debut" in the literary world, at the inaugural edition of the Mihail Sadoveanu Literary Festival in 1981, where he won a symbolic prize, and the following year of the festival, he was awarded the grand prize³⁷. Over the years, he has been honored with various awards and distinctions: Premiul Asociației Scriitorilor din Iași pentru volumul de debut *Amintiri din provincie* (1983); Premiul U.T.C. pentru romanul *Fireșc* (1985); Premiul Asociației Scriitorilor din Iași pentru *Erou fără voie* (1994); Premiul revistei „Cuvântul”, Premiul pentru proză al Uniunii Scriitorilor din România și Premiul Magnesia Litera – cartea anului în Cehia și cea mai bună traducere în limba cehă a romanului *Simion liftnicul. Roman cu îngeri și moldoveni* (2001); Premiul pentru proză al revistei „Observator cultural” (2006), Premiul pentru proză al Uniunii Scriitorilor din România (2006).

In 2007, he was awarded the National Prose Prize Ziarul de Iași for the novels *Christina Domestica și Vânătorii de suflete*. An important landmark in validating the literary value of his work was the Prose Prize awarded during the Zilele Culturii Călinesciene (Călinescu Cultural Days) in Onești in 2012. Moreover, an Excellence Award was granted to Petru Cimpoeșu at the Galei Premiilor Revistei „Ateneu”³⁸, held at Teatru Fain in Bacău, an event taking place in 2022 under the auspices of Bac-Fest. The esteem of exegetes for the writer was further demonstrated in 2023, when he received the National Prose Prize Ion Creangă, Opera Omnia. A significant moment in the reception trajectory of Petru Cimpoeșu's work is represented by the cinematic adaptation of the novel *Fireșc* (1985). The film adaptation, directed by Hadrian Marcu and titled *Un om la locul*

³⁷ În plan literar, cred că am primit mai mult decât meritam, interviu consemnat de Violeta Moșu, în revista „Apostolul”, martie 2023 (<https://www.slineamt.ro/apostolul/cronica-literara/in-plan-literar-cred-ca-am-primit-mai-mult-decat-meritam/>).

³⁸ Colocviile și Premiile Revistei Ateneu – 2022, în revista „Ateneu”, Anul 59, nr. 637, septembrie 2022, p. 12.

*lui*³⁹ (2018), marks a confirmation of the narrative and symbolic potential of Cimpoeșu's writing beyond the boundaries of literature.

This chapter presents the reception by numerous commentators, among them: Nicolae Manolescu, Radu G. Țeposu, Paul Cernat, Daniel Cristea-Enache, Mircea Iorgulescu, Iulian Boldea, Alexandru Cistelean, Alex Goldiș, Andrei Terian, Bogdan Crețu, Vasile Dan, Victor Munteanu, Val Condurache, Ioan Holban, Radu-Ilarion Munteanu, Cosmin Borza, Eugen Budău, Sanda Cordoș, Luminița Marcu, Bianca Burța-Cernat, Cătălin Sturza, Carmen Mușat, Claudiu Turcuș, Marius Miheț, Adrian Jicu, Adrian G. Romila, Nicoleta Cliveț, and others. The rich reception and the attention Cimpoeșu's prose has attracted from a considerable number of literary critics contribute to shaping his distinct literary profile and confirm the relevance and vitality of a body of work that continues to generate interest in the landscape of contemporary Romanian literature.

In conclusion, this study has sought to highlight the value and functions of narrative art through the vision of Petru Cimpoeșu's work, an author who offers not only a fresco of post-communist Romanian society but also a reflection on the human condition and the role of storytelling in constructing meaning. Reading his texts reveals a literature where the real and the imaginary coexist fruitfully, where humor intertwines with gravity, and fiction becomes a form of spiritual and cultural resistance.

In this regard, we consider that Petru Cimpoeșu's prose powerfully exemplifies an apologia of narration, in harmony with his artistic credo, clearly and expressively formulated in a revealing passage that synthesizes both the premises of this research and the profound conviction that literature and implicitly narrative is a form of knowledge and salvation: "Although, Petru Cimpoeșu believes, there are more novelists than novel readers, and although the social status of literature has dramatically declined, the writer's role remains essential: he is a 'guardian of the collective imaginary,' a 'messenger of that reality which neither mathematical formulas nor philosophical speculation will ever reach.' Despite his skepticism, which is not dramatized, the author believes that life without literature is impossible, that fiction explains the world, that it gives meaning to reality. Hence, 'resistance through storytelling' is not only saving but also obligatory. Even if it does not seem so, the world needs exemplary fictions" („deși avem, crede Petru Cimpoeșu, mai mulți autori de roman decât cititori de romane, deși statutul social al literaturii a căzut dramatic, rolul scriitorului continua să rămână esențial: el este un «custode al imaginarului colectiv», un «mesager al acelei realități la care nici formulele matematice și nici speculația filozofică nu vor reuși vreodată să ajungă». Cu tot scepticismul său, nedramatizat însă, autorul

³⁹ *Film: Un om la locul lui la Festivalul de la San Sebastian*, articol publicat pe pagina Institutului Cultural Român (<https://www.icr.ro/roma/film-un-om-la-locul-lui-la-festivalul-de-la-san-sebastian-8836>).

crede că fără literatură nu se poate, că ficțiunea explică lumea, că ea dă semnificație realității. De aceea, «rezistența prin poveste» nu este doar salvatoare, ci și obligatorie. Chiar dacă nu pare, lumea are nevoie de ficțiuni exemplare⁴⁰). Thus, Cimpoeșu's prose foregrounds a vision of literature as an essential form of knowledge and transmission of a collective experience. The author remains faithful to the idea that the story is indispensable: it orders chaos, mediates reality, and offers a chance for authentic and profound understanding and cognition of the world.

⁴⁰ Bogdan Crețu, *Libertatea „provincialului”*, în revista „Observator cultural”, nr. 970, 2019.