

The Readers Read Us, but Can We Read Them?

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“What the text actually negotiates isn’t actually the text itself, but its functioning.”
(L. Papadima)

THE 80s were years of synthesis and overviews on most of the theoretical trends originating in the 60s and 70s. Of course, most of them were far from being exhausted, so no study laid claim to exhaustiveness or finality. With the emergence of new fields and focuses, with the dissemination and metamorphosis of the former ones, the end of the 80s represented a convenient time for those particular theories that focused on thresholds rather than on boundaries. With so many confluent directions in literary theory, a step ahead meant dealing with all of them and integrating bits and parts of them in a harmonious way. It is absolutely no surprise that Paul Cornea was the one to write an impressive introduction to reading theory, gathering more than three hundred bibliographic titles and more importantly, choosing them from a very wide range of fields. His previous works, outlining a systemic approach to the study of literature, focused not only on literary documents, archives, texts in a historical and monographic manner, but also on macrostructures such as literary ideas and ideologies, literary movements and periods. His theoretical cut is both horizontal, meaning

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structural, dealing with poetics, rhetoric and stylistics, and vertical, dealing with literature as an institution, with all the sociological and empirical issues involved. His early works focused on the historical and social sides of the literary institution. The impressive volume *Originile romantismului românesc* (The origins of Romanian Romanticism) (1972),¹ *Oamenii începutului de drum* (The people of the beginning) (1975), *Regula jocului* (The rule of the game) (1980), *Itinerariu printre clasici* (Itinerary among the classics) (1984) plus many other independent articles focused, in a nutshell, on integrating literature in history, society, culture and ideology. Reception has always been a constant support for Cornea's interdisciplinary approach, for his investigation of literary mechanisms within wider frames. His sympathy has explicitly been granted to the school of the aesthetics of reception, of course, not without further adjustments, critiques and detailing, precisely because they too were open to combining theoretical trends, disseminating concepts and methods as opposed to a theoretical closure in a particular system of ideas. They as well, as we know even from the so called manifesto of this school, Hans Robert Jauss' essay "Literaturgeschichte als Provokation des Literaturwissenschaft" (1967), regarded reception as the missing piece for the completion of the history of literature and its freeing from positivism, heading towards a new historical epistemology. What did happen with the new player in the theoretical field—the reader—is also a matter of common knowledge: apparently historians proceeded by differentiating semiotic approaches on the one side, hermeneutical and phenomenological ones on the other, in a perfect parallel with the "worlds" Paul Ricœur conceptualizes: the world of the text and the world of the reader. What they certainly have in common is not having been able to fulfil their first prerogative: that of going beyond theory and determining the emergence of a history of reading; having remained prevalently theoretical is their failure. In the spirit of relativity and conciliation that characterizes all of Paul Cornea's meditations, he too considers that progress in the theory of reading is possible only by associating the two approaches to the reader, the semiotic one (focused on the reader in the text) and the sociological one (focused on the empirical reader). That means combining the psycho-sociology of reading with the sociology of the literary institution.

Paul Cornea's now classic book *Introducere în teoria lecturii* (Introduction to a theory of reading) appeared in 1988 and included references to a large number of literary disciplines such as pragmatics, semiotics, sociology, psychology, communication sciences, theories of the text and so on. Enabling this dialogue between all the significant literary sciences of the moment the Romanian theorist follows the evolution of the aesthetics of reception to the sociology of mass communications and pragmatics. His approach is neither a descriptive nor a diachronic one, being instead synchronic and problematising. This grants his

endeavour more perspective and more reliability, since sides are taken only after a critical and argued process. After seeing the above guidelines concerning the main issues that remained unsolved in the theory of reading when Cornea conceived his study, let us proceed to describe his theoretical approach and underline how he tackles the most sensitive areas of the matter. As previously mentioned, this focus on reading is not in the least new in his studies and he had many times directly analysed reading and the reader and analogue themes and concepts, or implicitly grounded other approaches on sociologic or pragmatic structures. We have to agree that the key word for his main studies is *the public*.² It links all his studies concerning researches of the Romanian 19th century to his latest works, connected by a very high level of abstraction. Both *Introduction to a Theory of Reading* (first edition 1988, second edition 1998) and *Interpretare și raționalitate* (Interpretation and rationality) (2006) raise his discourse, otherwise and more commonly available in small interventions, either independent, in shorter studies, articles or woven in other books, to a more complex scale, where hypotheses and argumentations are fully detailed and ramified to their ultimate consequences. So is there a schism between his former studies, focusing on the literary institution and the latest ones, focusing on the complex processes of comprehending and interpreting? The answer is negative in essence because it is obvious that Paul Cornea had the subtlety to anticipate from the beginnings of his intellectual career that the point of intersection for the necessary connection of the divergent literary theories is the recipient, where synchronicity and diachronicity meet horizontality and verticality. And after following the mirroring of the institution of literature in the reactions and practices of the readers and other agents or patients, after discussing literary macrostructures, the Romanian theoretician purifies his approach in abstractness. It is an abstractness that communicates with concreteness, because both his cognitive and pragmatic approach to reading and his philosophical and psychological approach to interpretation and rationality end up being a balanced dialogue between hermeneutics and phenomenology. It is an abstractness that, strangely enough, frees individuals of any given theoretical predeterminations. Always standing on the intermediate ground between the text and the reader, always focusing on the process unfolding, rather than on one or the other side, always analysing their dialogue not one or the other's monologue, Paul Cornea manages to overcome narrowing solutions.

So if everyone agrees that the original purpose of reception theory is founding a history of reading, if Cornea himself urges a strengthened focus on the empiric reader, how does he sustain this idea by way of his book? It may appear as if his former studies, having a more pronounced sociological tone, better sustain his suggestion than the theoretical ones. The answer is, as usual, in the

book itself. Right at the beginning, in the “Preliminaries,” Cornea differentiates between reading and reception, stating that the former favours the configuration of the text, while the latter favours the reaction of the reader to the text, what Jauss determined as being *Wirkung*, the effect of the text, and *Rezeption*, the significance the reader gives to it. Cornea bluntly chooses to focus on reading rather than on reception.³ Later he discusses the two ways in which a theorist may focus on the act of reading: either by studying the generic behaviour of readers in front of texts and determining patterns of comprehension and interpretation, or focusing on the empirical reader, dealing with subjective variables such as psychology, sociology and axiology.⁴ However he never forgets to stress that although difficult to handle and grasp, the empirical reader is as necessary as the virtual one, and even more offering than the latter. So, I point out the question again: is Paul Cornea following his own recommendations? Is his study on the process of reading addressing both the virtual and the empirical reader? Yes it does, but not in a direct way, meaning that the virtual reader is indeed, as he put it, an empirical reader “in disguise.”⁵ He does not address quantitative or sociological issues regarding real flesh and blood readers, from a particular time and space. But neither does he limit himself to the virtual reader as a function of the text, like so many before him had done, from Wolfgang Iser to Michel Riffaterre. Even if he stated that he would favour the configurations of the text in the process of reading, that doesn’t actually translate into a semiotic approach. The frames of the textual configuration are always paralleled with the correspondent comprehension mechanisms. That means that whenever he describes a textual manifestation, he does it in relation to a particular mirroring of it in a potential reader. Favours the description of possible reactions to a text and the practices of reading and comprehending means that his main implicit prerogative is that the texts themselves are actually results of reading practices. It is trite to say that *poiesis* and *aiesthesis* are the sides of the same coin, but it is what comes to mind when seeing a theory of reading unfold. In his second introduction, the author himself reveals the theoretical grounds for his work: a hermeneutic and phenomenological approach to describe how we behave during reading, so that the textual configurations gain meaning. Wolfgang Iser and Roman Ingarden both privileged an interaction pattern for the description of reading, one in which neither the object, nor the subject are passive. Comprehension and interpretation are actually the two processes that activate the two poles, subject and object, and give them meaning. Paul Cornea had to resort to sciences tangent to the literary ones, such as cognitive psychology, structural cognitivism, in connection with more familiar ones such as textual grammar, non-linguistic theories of narrative structures and other recent developments in artificial intelligence research. This means that he overcame the temptation

to find programming and pre-determinations of understanding in the structure of the texts, moving to a more variable and slippery ground, somewhere in between the reader and the text.

A look at the structure of the chapters and, thus, at the edifice of the book reveals more precisely how Cornea understands to make his introduction to a theory of reading. The two big segments are entitled: “The Conditionings of Reading” and “Comprehension.” The first one is in a way a ground zero of the terms and the particularities that shape and determine all his coming arguments. It follows Roman Jakobson’s scheme of communication focusing on the four main parameters of the literary communication: the text, the reader, the code and the context. These instances needed to be clarified, in a synthesis, by choosing and harmonizing the many different approaches and meanings each of the terms had acquired in that period of intense theoretical thought. It is obvious how Paul Cornea distances himself both from the immanent and autonomist structuralist theories and from the radicalisms of relativity, such as they are professed by the deconstructionists. His fundamentally pragmatic approach means that he constantly keeps in mind the dialogue between text and reader, the unfolding negotiation of both their freedoms. The concept of “text” is firstly linked to a standard theory of comprehension, which Paul Cornea calls the “standard theory.” It makes the text an occurrence of meaning in an act of communication, grounded on several different theoretical directions, from *Tel Quel* to the American theories of Speech Acts. After discussing their inconsistencies step by step, Cornea shares the need to update the standard theory of the text, which isn’t wide enough to be practical in a theory of reading and devises a wider concept, one in accordance with the manners of actualizing a text—textualization. His starting hypothesis is that any speaker has the aptitude to produce and receive texts in three different ways, according to his intentions: one is the referential behaviour, involving a transitive relation with language, a focus on denotation, univocity, literality (TR); the second is a pseudo- and trans-referential behaviour, characterized by not transmitting factual information, simulating to be doing it. The object is not reality, but something possible, in a symbolic, non-literal language. This is, obviously the case of fictionality (TRR); the third one is a self-referential behaviour, magical, playful, narcissistic, non-functional, close to the avant-garde experiments.⁶ After presenting these details, Cornea proceeds to show the texts’s mechanism of generating meaning, always keeping in mind the three patterns and the differences between them. Structuralist analyses have proven their incapacity to really delineate literariness. Poststructuralist approaches focus on pragmatics because this implies seeing literature alive, as one side in a socio-communicative contract. Literariness is diachronically determined by two main conventions: expressivity and fictionality.⁷ These conventions determine the mechanisms of identifying and understanding texts. After estab-

lishing a new approach and considering even its limitations, Cornea proceeds to the reader, showing both the relevance and the limits of the focus on either the virtual or the empirical reader. The notion of code brings him again to the threshold between what the texts encompass as conventions and what conventions are for readers. The codes are abstract intermediaries for the making of meaning in any communication. For the literary encoding, which interests him here, Cornea delimits several systems of codes: genetic, inter-textual and trans-textual codes. The three are actualized in contact with the readers' communicative, cultural and literary competences. Following the Chomskyan idea about competence as the ability to produce and understand an infinite number of assertions, he too addresses the literary and cultural competences. Lastly, the context is tackled in both linguistic and extra-linguistic terms. The first one refers, of course, to the structuralist approaches, the second, to a wider, sociological and cultural frame of reference. Cornea chooses to link the two in a more complex definition of the context, as a sum of explicit and implicit systems of references that a reader uses to give meaning.⁸ These references are transmitted and administered by the literary system, as a subsystem of symbolic assets.

All these subtle entanglements of autonomist and relativist perspectives on the instances of literary communication end, naturally, in a statement of the freedom of the individual: "The human being is a product of a labyrinthine network of physiological and cultural determinations, crossed by numerous codes, but at the same time creative and himself capable of generating codes. This oscillation between limited determination and relative autonomy explains why every reading is personal although all readings are projected on a social background."⁹ Thus Cornea offers a satisfactory solution for the reconciliation between virtual and empirical readers in the theory of reading, by constantly oscillating from one to another, in a legitimate connectivity. No single reading or reader prescribed by the text is definite and irrevocable; no single subjective reader holds the truth of a text.

The logical outcome is a focus on the communication between comprehension mechanisms and textual configurations, which Cornea tackles in the second part of the book. He begins by granting the concept of "meaning" a dialogic feature, since the main issue of a theory of reading is how meaning is determined, how the reader adapts to the unfamiliarity of the texts. Another essential issue was to determine what the nature of the interaction between author and reader is: confrontation, cooperation, game. All previous possibilities seem to have in common, yet again, the dialogic feature, each of them aiming at getting a reciprocal feedback: the text needs the reader to understand it and the reader needs the text to tell him something. In the end, as Cornea himself puts it, it all comes to the relation with the Other.¹⁰ The rules of signifying within the comprehension process and within verbal structures give way to the real aim of this

part and actually of the entire book, meaning the study of reading as a process, from the visual contact with the graphic signs to the final shaping of meaning, through representation and “experience.”¹¹ The transition from perception to comprehension is followed by grasping both the cognitive and the emotional mechanisms. The itinerary of reading unfolds from simple to complex: pre-reading is the stage before the actual contact with the text, when the reader contextualizes the text within a genre, compares it, connects it, forms an impression following the information he has about it, from the title and, most importantly, from the many “escort discourses”¹² Cornea identifies; the stage of perception implies the concrete contact, followed by the comprehension at the level of words and phrases, then at the level of the text, which implies negotiating the meaning. This is certainly the most interesting part of the process of reading, because it involves strategies on both sides, the text and the reader, and a programming of both the signifying process and the encoding in the text, taking into consideration one another. The text is made of microstructures and macrostructures taken as “reading keys”:¹³ the genre, the structural patterns, the key words, the emphatic signals. These facilitate both processes: the coding of the text by the author and the decoding by the reader. They are more than mere instructions for reading, as they were considered in the reading theories focused on the effect of the text; they are negotiable and dependent of both author and reader. Memorizing and imagining are the two most subjective processes described in the book, but following Roman Ingarden’s fundamental suggestions concerning how a reader fills the blanks of a text and makes sense of its indetermination spots, Cornea also connects these cognitive-affective processes to what the texts and the literary code themselves grant as indetermined so that they may acquire meaning.¹⁴ These were processes concerning the surface level of comprehending a text. Next comes the dynamic of performing, meaning the constitution of the deep meaning, the thematic structures and their unfolding, from the initial sequence, the entrance into the literary text, continuing with the thematic progression and ending in interpretation. To interpret means to “reread” by adjusting the text to your own projection of it. Cornea doesn’t support the contemporary relativity of interpretation, solving matters by admitting the pluralism of interpretations, and, most importantly, the pluralism of truths in art. Yet again he neither shares the excess of pluralism, so as to consider meaning as an uncontrolled explosion of interpretations. He shows that “the indecisiveness of meaning doesn’t simply block any attempt to rationalize comprehension.”¹⁵

The edifice of this book, with its bricks of relativity and its mortar of dialogism, brings an open perspective to the theory of reading and makes it the starting point for further explorations. The necessary theoretical framing is hereby granted, the conciliation of so many divergent disciplines has been

found in the centre point of the reading process, a critical overview on so many perspectives purifies future approaches of any indeterminations and unsolved tensions between conflicts and ideas. And finally it suggests many possible paths to take, many ways to apply the reading theory, to transfer it to practice. The whole abstract approach actually suggests that the conceptualizing effort is exhausted and thus the time for practice has arrived. An introduction to a, maybe, future science prescribes a series of necessary practices. So, while Paul Cornea came from literary studies focused on the public and the literary institution to a high level of essentialising the main configurations of reading, his study actually requires applicability in investigations that may start from a theoretical framework and continue with concrete investigations.

Professor Cornea's book on the theory of reading and his other studies touching upon the issue of reading and reception couldn't remain without an echo. Besides being cited here and abroad, besides the huge popularity of his complex and apparently exhaustive works, the important test for a particular endeavour in literary studies is for it to turn into a school of discourses and practices. Fortunately, Cornea's works didn't remain in bibliographies and they actually fundamentally contributed to a number of studies that boldly tackle issues unsolved in the 80s. Liviu Papadima and Mircea Vasilescu, both Cornea's students at the University of Bucharest, are more than his official students, they are his followers, in the sense that they both published studies essentially grounded on the reading theory, making use of all the conceptual and theoretical apparatus this area of studies now provides. Published in 1999 and 2001 respectively, *Literaturii și comunicare: Relația autor-cititor în proza pașoptistă și postpașoptistă* (Literature and communication: The relation between author and reader in the 1848 and post 1848 prose) by the former and *"Iubite cetitoriule.." Lectură, public și comunicare în cultura română veche* (Reading, public and communication in old Romanian culture) by the latter, the two books, as noticeable from the titles, use the pragmatic approach to reading and, more importantly, return to the always unreachable aim of outlining a history of reading.

LIVIU PAPADIMA is more focused on "a poetics of communication,"¹⁶ on the transactions and cooperation between author and reader in 19th century Romanian literature. More precisely, the case studies deal with the public communication space, with all its agents. In this case, literary works aren't the only ones privileged, but they are seen as documents, not as events, documents relevant for communicational practices and strategies. Both reader and author "are re-enacted through the network of communication revealed by the textual and trans-textual analysis."¹⁷ How real are the authors and the readers Papadima re-enacts? He too admits, even ten years after Paul Cornea, that there are many

difficulties in grasping the real agents, because they need to be put in factual frameworks with concrete material evidence, which in most cases is completely inaccessible. Even further interpretations, if that evidence is provided, may be inaccurate because it employs a completely different measuring and evaluation system: reality is often pre-identified with the hypothesis. The solution is not to give in to the semiotic approach all over again and work only with empty shadows, but to consider the agents a sort of “*dramatis personae* embodied by modes of action, writing and reading strategies, which involve concrete agents, choices and rejections.”¹⁸ The other trap Papadima smartly escapes is giving in to defining meaning semantically. He defines it functionally: “What the text actually negotiates isn’t actually the text itself, but its functioning.”¹⁹ Before tackling the transactions themselves, the author professionally proceeds to delineate his corpus of texts, the period he chooses them from, the typologies, features and themes of the prose and even the concept of literature of that particular time and space, so that he may then have a wide and complex perspective on the contexts and the codes that intermediate the literary communication. All these preliminaries are essential not only to a valid philological approach, but particularly in this case, when the corpus of texts and the period they are chosen from is characterized by a very high degree confusion, blend, ambiguities and indecision. It is a period of transition, when literary discourses haven’t even been properly determined within the trio: formative, informative or communicational.²⁰ As we can see, all three types are defined in relation to the reader and to what the text communicates, and not in relation to rhetorical divisions in the traditional approach.

The next part of the book is the most substantial one, focusing on the types of transaction between text and reader: the transaction of the context, of the message and of the contact. The approach becomes less theoretical and more conceptual. Poetics, rhetoric, pragmatics and semiotics join hands in Papadima’s case studies. The first segment, dealing with the transaction of the context, tackles issues like the use of deictics (emitter, receiver, time and space) for shaping the represented world. The author shows examples of how the unfamiliar is converted into the familiar, how exotic or unknown territories are taken closer to what the audience reacted to. In historical prose, travel prose or private journals one can find what authors of the time considered to be the strategies they needed to make themselves understood and what they considered the readers reacted to. The main strategies are the focus on common places, reducing otherness, the unfamiliar or, on the contrary, making the common unfamiliar. The norm of fictionality itself is highly ambiguous at the time, so in the absence of a “strong” concept of fiction, the beginnings of our prose are clumsy, artificial, a mix of facts and fiction. The problem is that literary works are required not

only to be verisimilar but also veridical, hence the mix with documents and facts. The rhetorical and narrative effects are manifest through an intensely personalized author, an omnipotent one,²¹ and in terms of the edifice of the prose, through an effect of hyper-determining the development of the story. The second segment, focusing on the transaction of the message, reveals precisely these excesses of narrowing very much both the freedom of the story and the freedom of the reader. The prose of that period is highly predictable due to the informational oversaturation of the narrative,²² annihilating the reader's initiative. Finally, the most interesting part is the last segment, concerning the transactions of the contact, which rises the difficult question of whether a robot portrait of the readers of the time is possible or even desirable. That is, can we separate the empirical readers from the virtual ones detected up to now? Papadima's suggestion is that such an attempt is meant to fail due to ambiguities and variables and the already mentioned lack of dependable facts. However, the reader addressed by all the transactions he analyses interests possible studies on the sociology of reading, on the writers' expectations from their public or on the pedagogy of reading in that period.²³ The next step is to configure the presence of the reader in the text when he is textually summoned, when the text directly addresses him, what Gerald J. Prince calls "the signs of you." Papadima reveals the two most common cases of that phenomenon in the 1848 prose—the reader as a theme, a projection of the generic public of the time and the reader as a pragmatic component, the one who peruses the book.²⁴

While Liviu Papadima handled the very problematic corpus of the 1848 prose because there he found a very complex and polyphonic strain of interactions between codes and conventions in literary communication, Mircea Vasilescu chose the old period of Romanian culture to examine a broader phenomenon: the practice of reading. Although complementary, if the books were to be arranged in a Romanian history of reading, Vasilescu's study would have to come first. Chronologically and logically, while Papadima focuses on transactions, the latter focuses on the origins of the system of reception, of the idea of reader in Romanian culture. Vasilescu is even more aware of the relation between a study focused on the reader and the history of literature, and throughout the book he stresses many times the need to complete the history of the practices of writing with the ones of reading. His introduction to the matter is actually very consistent and problematic; with a well grounded critical position, the author discusses the main theoretical approaches he mines for concepts and ideas: reading theories, the patterns of the Ideal Author and Reader, the discovery of the *longue durée* with the Annales School, the study of the history of mentalities, focused on collective practices and representations. All of them are brought up and linked together by their functionalities for the subject matter. Vasilescu,

as Papadima earlier, chooses to reveal the reading practices through the relation of the agent of literary communication in the 14th–18th centuries. His analyses determine how “the author projects an idea of the reader inside his texts and how the reading practices are modified by cultural and social conventions.”²⁵ The so called “escort discourses” represent the perfect medium for determining how the author addresses the reader. The limit of the book, assumed by its author, is to present only the perspective of the writers. But still, it represents “a first page of a possible history of reading in the Romanian space.”²⁶ The object of study is, as with Liviu Papadima, very hard to handle coherently. But they both manage smartly. Mircea Vasilescu begins by making an inventory of the theoretical and historical perspectives on old Romanian literature and he also makes the necessary chronologies and typologies, discerns between events and documents and states the incompleteness of his material. The next segment of the study answers three essential issues for literary communication: who wrote, what was written and what the relation between orality, writing and reading was. As previously announced, the texts he analyses are mainly forewords, because there the writers openly exploit the situation of communication. The two revelatory approaches to forewords are either meant to reveal them as documents of mentality, providing information on writing and reading practices, defining the agents and the processes or revealing them as literary or meta-literary discourses, relatively autonomous from the actual Text they introduce, in which certain stylistic and cultural conventions are prominent.²⁷ The first approach indeed reveals a possible portrait of the empirical readers and their practices, since the forewords are so detailed when it comes to giving definitions for reading, books, and readers. Within the chosen time frame, Vasilescu is able to observe actual shifts in the reading practices from intensive to extensive reading, from a religious to a profane audience. Thus the authors’ discourses mirror the shift as it is applied in their protocol and rhetoric. Here the two approaches reveal that they are complementary, when shifts in mentality and collective practices are mirrored at the level of discourse. And this is precisely how Vasilescu demonstrates having fully acknowledged Paul Cornea’s lesson of keeping contraries in balance for a more complex perspective. His applied analyses actually reveal the strain of history within apparently static structures and conventions. What he showed by the end of the book is how writing and reading have become practices of everyday life in the space of several centuries.

IN CONCLUSION, this is how Jauss’ desideratum of a history of reading has evolved throughout four decades and numerous intersections with various theories. Disseminated in different areas and yet still a point of connection for so many sciences, the theory of reading is a highly productive one.

In our particular field of research, with endless literary studies on certain writers, periods, trends or typologies, with very few truly abstract works, Paul Cornea's influence and the theoretical foundation he provided is more than beneficial and stimulating for future studies, puzzles in a possible history of reading. Liviu Papadima and Mircea Vasilescu have coped with very problematic corpuses of texts and materials, thus making the head start along with their professor. What they did is certainly in accordance with the integrative point of view Paul Cornea has cultivated in all his theoretical endeavours and their approaches resonate with the balance required in any epistemological adventure: between the subject and the object.²⁸ Trying to "read" the readers reveals that their identities, whether they are real or virtual, are encrypted in the reading and writing practices, if not in numbers and figures. They are always somehow suspended, somewhat inaccessible. That is why the theory of reading seems inexhaustible and why it still offers, in its diversity, an open range of possibilities for literary studies. □

Notes

1. See also Maria Cristina Goje on P. Cornea's book in *Transylvanian Review* 18, 1 (Spring 2009): 156–158.
2. Paul Cernat, "Dialogismul pragmatic al profesorului Paul Cornea," *Observator cultural* (Bucharest), no. 250 (December 2004).
3. Paul Cornea, *Introducere în teoria lecturii* (Iași: Polirom, 1988), 16.
4. *Ibid.*, 68.
5. *Ibid.*, 72.
6. *Ibid.*, 33–35.
7. *Ibid.*, 52.
8. *Ibid.*, 94.
9. *Ibid.*, 102.
10. *Ibid.*, 113.
11. *Ibid.*, 103.
12. *Ibid.*, 133.
13. *Ibid.*, 158.
14. *Ibid.*, 181.
15. *Ibid.*, 207.
16. Liviu Papadima, *Literatură și comunicare: Relația autor-cititor în proza pașoptistă și post-pașoptistă* (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 5.
17. *Ibid.*, 7.
18. *Ibid.*, 37.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, 97.

21. Ibid., 152.
22. Ibid., 161.
23. Ibid., 210.
24. Ibid., 125.
25. Mircea Vasilescu, „*Iubite cetitoriule...*” *Lectură, public și comunicare în cultura română veche* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2001), 13.
26. Ibid., 14.
27. Ibid., 122.
28. Paul Cornea, “Despre istoria literaturii ca gen” (1979), in *Delimitări și ipoteze* (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 183.

Abstract

The Readers Read Us, but Can We Read Them?

Reading theory has come to cast a bridge between literary theory and literary history, as stated in the 1967 manifesto of Hans Robert Jauss, which marked the beginning of the reception theory school. Since then, despite many variations, the tension between the two aforementioned fields has remained present. Our study discusses the main coordinates of reading theory in the Romanian cultural space, paying special attention to the interdisciplinary approach cultivated by Professor Paul Cornea and his disciples. The position of the Romanian theorist is defined by the transition from the concept of *reception* to that of *reading*, and by the idea of a possible reconciliation between the mechanisms governing comprehension and those involved in the creation of the text. In their studies published in 1999 and 2001, respectively, Liviu Papadima and Mircea Vasilescu continued in the pragmatic and dialogical direction opened by Paul Cornea, seeking to outline a history of reading in modern Romanian culture.

Keywords

literary theory, reader response criticism, history of reading, pragmatics, comprehension, Paul Cornea