Mapping Romania - notes for a journey

To enter into the subjective life of another culture – its symbolic codes, its overt beliefs and implicit assumptions – requires, as any immigrant or nomad can tell you, a considerable effort of consciousness and imagination; a kind of stretching of self towards the other- and a gradual grasp of differences which are sometimes imperceptible and subtle. …..
Cultures are neither static nor monolithic organisms – they are complex, changeable and internally diverse. What is considered healthily assertive in one culture may be seen as aggressive or hostile in another; certain kinds of personal disclosure which may seem quite unproblematic in one society may be seen as embarrassing or entirely unacceptable elsewhere……

We live in a world in which various kinds of cross-national movement – migrations, travel, various kinds of both enforced and voluntary nomadism – are ever on the rise…
If we are to meet with each other on the basis of trust rather than tension or insidious indifference, we need to have ways of getting acquainted with each other which are more than cursory, or purely instrumental. But how can this be accomplished?
What kind of knowledge is needed to feed meaningful cross-cultural contacts?

Inner Lives of Cultures (2011) ed Eva Hoffman

Ronald G Young
2014; Sirnea,

Dedicated to Daniela - whose love and help has given me a certain understanding of Romania

And also to Maritsa and Viciu…….

The best of neighbours and friends!

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

This little guide is what they call „a labour of love" – freely available for family, friends and others on my website.

Because the readers of blogs and personal websites are generally numbered in the low hundreds, we bloggers often forget that the text we so casually type and send into the ether is subject to national and international legislation – whether relating to intellectual rights or to slander.
This is particularly the case for extensive quotations or reproductions of articles.

Readers of my blog - *Balkan and Carpathian Musings* - will know that one of its distinctive features is its use of links to other sources. We are rarely aware of the influence which others have on our thinking – and I am always very grateful to come across good writing and therefore happy to acknowledge it. For this briefing note, I have used a lot of material I found on the internet. I have assumed that this poses no problems of intellectual property. But I have been careful to attribute the various extractions and would certainly want to place on record my appreciation in particular to-

- The Counterpoint organization (London) - for permission to quote from "The Inner lives of Cultures" ed Eva Hoffman
- The "New York Review of Books" - for use of the 2 book reviews which form annexes 2 and 3
- Christopher Lawson - for his review of Tom Gallagher's 2010 book on "Romania and the EU"
- The Nicholas Breasley publishers - for the excerpt at annex 4 from RD Lewis' "When Cultures Collide"
- The website "SibiWeb"- for use of text on the history of
- Carmen Fimen - for use of sections of her chapter "Surrealism and Survival in Romania" in "The Inner lives of Cultures" ed Eva Hoffman
- Lorna Fox and "The Nation" - for an excerpt from this book review
- AO Scott and "The New York Times" - for use of his review of contemporary Romanian cinema
- The "Sarah in Romania" blog - for extensive use of her posts in the sections on "beliefs" and "music"
- City Compass Guide and Ronnie Smith – for his piece in "Romania, Bucharest and Beyond 2013"
- Prof Carmen Aida Huţu – for excerpts from "A Romanian Cultural Perspective"
- M Dawson and Left Field Cinema for their extensive post on the Romanian New Wave

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of Guide?

How do we begin to get a handle on a country – let alone try to penetrate its soul?
As a nomad for the past 25 years who has lived, for extended periods of time, in eleven countries during those years this is a question which I find of increasing fascination. For the past few years "I have been commuting" – as they say in all the best book blurbs -.between homes in…… the Carpathian Mountains, Bucharest and Sofia
This little guide started as a ten-part series of blogposts I did, at the turn of the year, on things Romanian - which can be accessed at *Balkan and Carpathian Musings.* These had been triggered by an account of a recent walk which an ex-pat Irishman did in mid-winter from the northern part of Maramures (just at the border with Ukraine) down to Bucharest. I wanted to set his book in the wider context of what other foreigners had written over the years about Romania – since I've had an apartment and house here for the past decade - and then realized that, having blogged extensively about Bulgaria and Germany in the past year (and produced a little book about Bulgarian painting), the accounts needed to be evened a bit…..

One of my daughters will be visiting me here in Romania in the summer for the first time and has asked for some advance reading. A "know-it-all" father is a real bore but fortunately she is an experienced traveller with a mind of her own. Hopefully it will be useful to all readers for dipping into..

Romania is not one of the most visited countries in the world! Go to any of the huge sections in a European bookshop which deal with travel (German bookshops seem to have the largest – they are serious travellers!) and you will be lucky to find even there more than 3-4 titles about the country.
But good material about Romania can be found in other sections and places. Indeed I have been surprised ,as I explored the net for these posts, by the amount of relevant material – except that I shouldn't be surprised….it's a big country after all - 20-odd million people – a lot of whom are (and have been) very highly educated. Indeed you could argue that the Romanian intellectual is so clever as to be almost off the planet!

So let me guide you through what's available – recognizing that there are different ways to find out about a country. I had originally sub-titled this intro as "Under the Skin" but realize that this could be misunderstood – not least because of the recent film of that name (ironically enough, shot in Glasgow)
And don't worry – my own scribbles are only about 40 pages – the rest of the booklet is clearly marked excerpts, hyperlinks and annexes for dipping into!

*My purpose, in these pages, is to act as a **guide** to what is available in the various fields you can encounter in Romania – using all the senses at your disposal.*
It is for the reader to click the various hyperlinks and decide what to follow through – what books excerpts to read; what paintings, pictures and landscapes to view; what music to listen to……

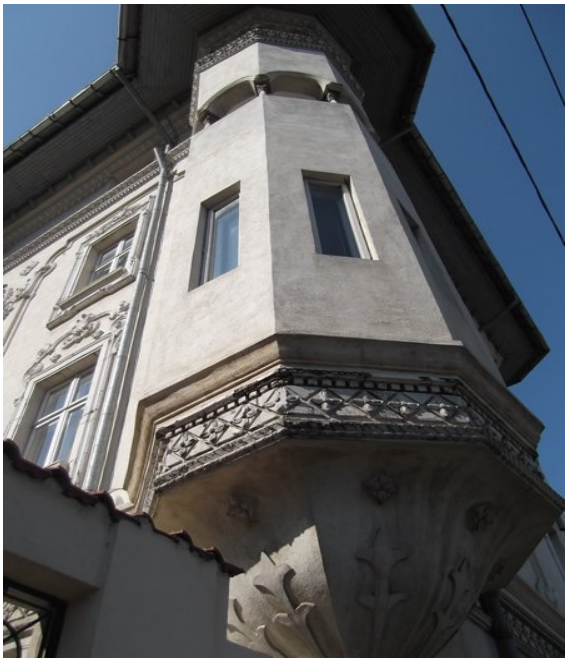
1.2 Sixteen different ways to ……

If you are a reasonably conscientious visitor - relying on the written word for your exploration of Romania - you will start looking at -

- Travel guides
- Travelogues – which can be divided into the serious or the (sadly increasing number of) tongue-in-cheek type
- histories - which deal with what are considered to be the key events in the shaping of a nation
- novels;
- social and cultural histories (including jokes) – which give insights into how ordinary people lived their lives
- memoirs and diaries – dealing with those who were more "distinguished"
- blogs
- magazines

But there are an equal number of other generally non-verbal ways of trying to enter the spirit of a country-

- television, films and plays
- photographs
- paintings and caricatures
- buildings
- conversations and encounters
- friendships
- music
- food and wine



That's actually 16 different perspectives – no wonder we get confused! And I forgot the most important – "walking and exploring"……I don't say anything about that, however, since it well covered in other books – or blogs…But I have added some sites…….
The Guide which follows has separate sections on most of the genres in the list – but first let me

say something about the selection of topics and the order in which they appear….

1.3 What you will find – and what not

This is most decidedly not a travel guide. These are easily obtained - I'm told (by the travel group Beyond the Forest) that *The Rough Guide to Romania* (5th edition) is "the must-have general guide for anybody travelling to or interested in Romania" although I have never actually seen it. I have relied upon Caroline Juler's quite excellent Blue Guide to Romania; (2000) – now, be warned, difficult to buy. It covers cultural and historical aspects rather than the logistical.
That same site also has an interesting list of books for the discriminating visitor (the Blue Guide lists 4 pages of cultural and historical titles you won't find in other guide books).

Apart from the Rough and Blue Guides, the other books I would recommend for the visitor are -

- Romania, Bucharest and Beyond – City Compass 2013 is a well-produced and useful booklet of more than 200 pages. It has become an annual event incorporating therefore the most up-to-date advice on what's worth seeing…

- "A Cultural Journey" produced by the Culture Ministry has stunning photographs of Romanian monuments and useful material on prominent Romanians

- The Pallas Guide to Romania (2009); edited by John Villiers is a cultural treatment of the country and not a travel guide – devoting space to such topics as the wooden and painted churches, glass icons, music, wildlife and Bucharest architecture. As with all Pallas Guides, it has superb old black and white graphics and photos – and rates in my collection of "beautiful books". It also has almost 100 book references (mainly histories). I have several copies….

- Mountains of Romania is a lovely guide for the hill-walker and is generally in print. For those who want to explore the countryside, there are some particular maps I would recommend – not easy to find eg a "Panorama" map of Southern Transylvania from here.

The Complete Insider's Guide to Romania 2013 is a basic guide to the country for those wanting to move around, find out about bus, train and taxi systems and, generally, negotiate eating, disco and other habits…..but don't expect anything cultural……Its intro and 30 page section on "People in Romania" make it, however, worth looking at.

I have tried to be logical in the order of the sections – or rather to put myself in the mind of a cultured person who will be coming to the country and wants to do a bit of homework in advance.

Starting with *a list of blogs* may be unusual – but what easier way to get a sense of a country than seeing it through the eyes of someone (whether ex-pat or local) who has been sufficiently enthused about a country that they themselves then try to catch and convey some impressions? By the way, be aware that "pat" means "bed" in Romanian! I've been rather lazy about trying to learn the language – but it's not a difficult one and you should certainly try to pick up a few phrases….

As a nomad, based variously in central Europe, the Balkans, Central Asia and the Caucasus with about 30 different homes, it's hardly surprising that I am drawn to *travel literature* – the scribbles of those who seek to give us a sense of life in other places – mixing land- (or town-) scapes, portraits, the serendipidy of encounters and history. An article which listed a few of the greats suggested that travel writing is a neglected genre – although it has attracted some great literary talent eg Patrick Leigh-Fermour whose books start that section here.

Sections on literature, histories and memoirs follow – before turning to painting, photography and cinema. I have also included small sections on walking and exploring – in both Bucharest and the countryside.
There is no section on politics although I have put into the Annexes some useful political and social essays - two which first appeared in the New York Review of Books. The first, an overview in 2000 by Tony Judt; the second, an émigré's harrowing description of Romania in the 1980s.
The political system here is a joke – with similarities to (but worse than) the Italian. Generally I try to resist such cultural jibes and hope that those parts of the Annex which deal with that aspect of culture will not cause offence to my Romanian friends…..

1.4 A Word about prisms – and preconceptions

Language is one of the most obvious prisms through which our impressions as readers are (twice) filtered – first the language skills of the writer and then of our own as readers, limiting most us (if only for reasons of accessibility and time) to those books written in English.

I have, for example, a copy of a delightful 1998 book produced by a Frenchman (with photos by an Italian) – Rhapsodie Roumaine – which I've just discovered in English and accessible on google The Romanian Rhapsody; an overlooked corner of Europe by D. Fernandez and F Ferranti (2000); and also copies of a couple of German Travel Guides on Rumanien - Dumont's (2008) and Baedeker's (2009) – both very impressive compared with their British equivalents (I learned, for example, from a casual dip that the famous French photographer Brassai was Transylvanian - which is not noted in the British Guides). Curiously, although there is a French bookshop in Bucharest, there is no German bookshop – and the Brasov one restricts itself to books on the Saxons in Transylvania.

But it is the language barrier which makes most novels, social histories and memoirs inaccessible. So commercial practices are the second prism – for example my old neighbours still get a lot of French visitors because they are (quite rightly!) listed in one of the French Guide Books (les Routiers I think) as offering a quite lovely and typical traditional rural experience.

The prejudice of authors, of course, is the final and perhaps most important prism we have to be aware of…….not just individual but collective – as various accounts of this genre about British travel in the Balkans in the last century have shown me recently. One, complete with about 500 bibliographical references, is a PhD thesis - The Debated Lands - which looks first at the motifs of discord, savagery, backwardness and obfuscation which characterise the 19th century books about the area.
In the approach to the First World War all of at changed; specific countries were embraced by economic and military alliances and some countries acquired what has been called a "pet state" status. Todorova sums up as the pet state approach to south-east Europe: "*the choosing from amongst the Balkan states a people whose predicaments to abhor, whose history and indigenous leaders to commend, whose political grievances to air, and whose national aspirations to advocate*". In this way Montenegrins, Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians and Albanians were all, at different times, picked out for laudatory comment.

Until reading these books, I had not realised, for example, how many British women volunteered for duty in the Serbian field hospitals and how media and literary coverage of this phenomenon brought that country into the British consciousness - and how positively. That was followed by a strand of writing in the late 1920s which took the romanticisation into deeper territory – with a revolt against western modernity and mass society –

From the end of the First World War until the outbreak of the Second, travelers were finding in this previously depraved corner of Europe…. " *a peace, harmony, vivacity and pastoral beauty in utmost contrast to the perceived barrenness of the West, and which produced benefits for those weary of modernity that ranged from personal rejuvenation to outright revelation*".
According to this alternative balkanism, violence had disappeared from the region, savagery became tamed, obfuscation turned to honesty and clarity, and the extreme backwardness that had formerly been the gauge of Balkan shortcoming was now the very measure by which it was extolled. For many travelers, any mystery that did remain around the geographical object became less the marker of a befuddled and dishonest culture than a vital indication of spiritual depth…….

Andras Carmen has a good "take" on foreign perceptions of Romania over the years - as reflected in novels.

Two good examples which you can actually read in full online are –

- this 19th century book "Land Beyond the Forest" (1888) ; about Transylvania and
- "Danubian Principalities; the frontier lands of the Christian and of the Turk" (1854)

2. Blogs about Romania

Let's start with some great Romanian blogs (generally in English) about the beauty of landscape, buildings and art which you can find in this country.

- A Patriot's Guide to Romania is a blog which gives good detail (and pics) about various famous Romanian buildings and sites.
- My Heart to your Heart is a painting blog which contains an important section with selection of some 70 Romanian painters of the old school
- Historical Houses of Romania is an excellent site maintained by Valentin Mandache – who also organises walks around the architectural jewels of Bucharest (and sometimes Tirgovishte).
- Bucharestian is an impressive site maintained by Alexandru Dumitru. Try his archives
- Bukres "a blog about a city we all love to hate" is not so much a blog these days as a resource
- Monuments is a great site presenting superb photographs of castles and other Romanian monuments.
- True Romania was a regular blog which gives useful information about historical Romanians and sites - operated by a teacher and pupils at Ludus secondary school. Sadly the blog stopped posting in 2011 – but the archives go back 4 years and offer a great source
- Expat in Romania is a fairly infrequent blog of a Romanian whom lived in Canada for many years and has now returned to Cluj

Apart from my own blog – Balkan and Carpathian Musings - I know of at least four other Brits who blog from a Romanian base –

- Bucharest Life is an ex-pat site run by Craig Turp dealing with issues of everyday life in the city. His blog updates that and has a special section giving examples of the highly annoying habit of parking on the pavements! He also publishes the annual Bucharest In Your Pocket
- PVE Wood writes A Political Refugee from the global village - the sort of idiosyncratic blog which befits a self-confessed High Tory. He's an "Englishman in love with Bucharest's blowsy charms" who apparently came to live here in 1998; works as a "headhunter"; and blogs regularly. His posts in 2010 are good on various aspects of Romanian history and the disappearing charm of Bucharest

- Peter Fogarty has apparently been blogging about life here for the past decade on pictures of romania - and has collected his various comments together on such topics as "bringing up children", "weddings" and "chatting up women". But the last activity on the site seems to have been January 2013.
- Andy Hockley's blog has the catchy title Csikszreda Musings - that being the Hungarian name for Miercurea Ciuc – which, to me, always sounds like "Wednesday beer" (Ciuc being one of the big beers here). He's been here since 2004 and some of the early entries are good – but, understandably, his blogposts have fallen off in the last 2 years. His posts about English politics suggest that he too is a Conservative.

An American in Cluj has a blog which used to be called "I'm more Romanian than you" but now seems to be called, more modestly, "Eye on Romania". He's a more recent arrival; is chatty; and gives the reader some Romanian words. He has also produced a Complete Insiders' Guide to Romania which is fairly basic but with a few interesting points.
The rather sad end of one Englishman's blog (and life here) is told at Transylvanian Horseman

Finally three bloggers who focus on Romania – but from abroad

- Sarah in Romania is probably the best blogger about Romania. She is actually based (still I think) in Paris. Her posts (which go back to 2007) are always instructive and opinionated – whether for example about the rapacious behavior of city mayor Oprescu and other political scandals; or about historical characters. This post, on the superb Mogosoira Palace on the outskirts of Bucharest, shows the positive side of her blog. The site has "diaporamas" on all the main cities eg Brasov here
- The Bucharest Lounge is written from Sweden and has been operating for a couple of years. It is a sweet window on the more spiritual side of the country
- Carpathian Sheep Walk may not frequently post – but is always worth reading since it comes from Caroline Juler, the author of the excellent Blue Guide to Romania – for my money far and away the best guide to the country. One post gave very useful background on how the EU farm policy affects the country

Romania has millions of small-holdings which are not considered commercially viable but which support the people who run them. Calling them subsistence farmers implies that they are unable to support themselves in any way, which isn't necessarily the case.
A lot of 'subsistence' farms produce food for the families who work on them, and in Romania the coldly bureaucratic notion of a subsistence farm is so alien to the character of a small, working family farm that it's laughable.
Romanians use the term gospodarie, which means home, hearth, the centre of the family, a spiritual haven, a place where people grow real food rather than the processed muck that global corporations want everyone to buy, they embody self-reliance and self-sufficiency, and encompass hundreds of years of tradition and history... If the world had more gospodarii, we might have less starvation.

Juler's blog is part of a larger website which encompasses her other interests.
Her post reminded me of this article on Traditional farming in Transylvania which appeared recently in the National Geographic magazine

3. Travelogues

Romania is a large country – but remote - several days of driving are required before travellers from northern Europe will reach Bucharest in its south. Despite this, some have chosen to walk or cycle!

I have identified at least twenty Travelogues which take in Romania – about half of them having the larger scope of the Danube, with the rest focusing on Romania.

A very few predate the war – but most of those currently available understandably cover the post Ceaucescu period.

3.1 Interwar years

Undoubtedly the most famous travel writer for this part of the world was Patrick Leigh Fermour (generally known as Paddy) whose trilogy about his walk from the English Channel to Istanbul in 1933 was finished only last year.

- A Time of Gifts (1977) covered mainly his experience of Nazi Germany;
- Between the Woods and the Water (1986) of Hungarian aristocratic houses in Transylvania; and, after a 25-year gap,
- The Broken Road (2013) dealt mainly with the Bulgarian and Greek sections of his trip.

Paddy's writing is quite exquisite. He led a very full life – a website is devoted to his memory; and a great biography came out quite recently.

At about the same time that teenager Leigh Fermour was walking through Romania, aristocratic Sacharverell Sitwell was motoring and gave us Romanian Journey (1938)

"*Romania Revisited – on the trail of English travellers 1602-1941*" was published by 1999 Alan Ogden but the same author also edited an Englishman's description of Romanian villages in the 1930s – "*Romanian Furrow - Colourful Experiences of Village Life*"; Donald Hall (Author) and Alan Ogden (Editor) (2007). Sadly neither of these books is currently available.

3.2 The Communist Era

"*Stealing from a deep place*" by Brian Hall (1985) recounts experiences touring by bicycle through Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary, a two-year trip (1982-1984) made possible by a travel fellowship. "He focuses", the blurb tells us, "*on the political milieu which has led to food shortages and inadequate housing for a growing proportion of the population. Among the private citizens of the countries visited, he found great warmth and curiosity coexisting with an avarice and mistrust brought about by necessity*".

Claudio Magris' Danube (1989) is the most scholarly and is "*neither a travel book, nor vast prose poem, nor a history, nor philosophy, nor voyage of discovery, but often all at once*" – using the river to muse on the history and literature of central Europe.

3.3 The first decade after 1989

Clearly travel was easier after the Wall fell– although I know of only 5 books covering the 1990s -

- In another Europe - a journey to Romania Georgina Harding (1991) – who managed to cycle across Hungary and Romania in 1988! See also part 2 of this post (novels)
- Transylvania and Beyond (1992); another bicycle trip, this time by the indefatigable and great Irish writer, Dervla Murphy as she ventures into a country whose borders were open for the first time for 50 years
- Looking for Gheorge; Love and Death in Romania; by Helena Drysdale (1992), Travelling with friends through Romania in 1979, Helena Drysdale met George Cupar, an Orthodox priest-poet. They drank wine in Transylvanian forests and, avoiding the secret police, camped together beneath the Carpathian moon. When she returned home, George wrote her letters full of criticism of the Romanian regime, and asked her to marry him and to help him escape. Abruptly the letters stopped. After the revolution in 1989 Helena Drysdale returned to Romania, a country trapped in a labyrinth of post-Communist paranoia, in search of George.
- Clear Waters Arising by Nicolas Crane (1997) was actually a walk over the mountains which stretch from Spain to Romania.
- The Romanian Rhapsody; an overlooked corner of Europe; by D. Fernandez and F Ferranti (2000). A delightful mix of opinionated) text and black and white photographs – based on 4 visits made in the 1990s

3.4 The Past Decade

Recent years have seen a little more interest – with two superb photo texts heading the list in more senses than one -

- The Color of Hay – the peasants of Maramures by Katherine McLaughlin (2003) is a photographic account of a two-year stay in the Maramures area
- Transylvania by Bronwen Riley and photographer Dan Dinescu (2007).
- "Moons and Aurochs; a Romanian Journey"; Alan Ogden (2007) is out of print
- *Blue River; Black Sea – a journey along the Danube into the heart of the New Europe;* Andrew Eames (2009)

> *The catalyst for the book was a trip I made to Transylvania, where I stumbled into an almost medieval landscape that I never dreamed still existed in Europe, of scything farmers and their fruit-collecting children, of horses and carts, of wells in the villages, wolves in the woods and bears in the hills. The storybook detail was captivating. The storks on the chimney stacks, clapping their beaks when their youngsters stood up. The chicks in homemade chicken runs on the roadside verges. the little smoking huts in every yard, breadmaking ovens for summer use. And the daily cow parade, when all the villagers' cattle brought themselves back from the fields punctually at milking time and wandered down the main street until they reached their owners' houses, where the gates would be standing open to welcome them home. Transylvania seemed a mythical place, one where you literally didn't count your chickens until they hatched, and one where you made sure you made hay while the sun shone*

- Along the Enchanted Way by William Blacker (2010) an upper-class Englishmen who chose to live first in Maramures and then in Transylvania for a few years, conducting a couple (openly admitted) of love affairs with gypsies in the course of the latter - but writing beautifully before disappearing to Italian and English country houses
- To Romania, with Love by Tessa Dunlop (2012) is written by a woman who now broadcasts and writes for the BBC

- Never Mind the Balkans – here's Romania by Mike Ormsby (2012) is difficult to categorise - amusing sketches of contemporary life in Romania written by an ex-pat
- The Way of the Crosses; Peter Hurley (2013) who made a snowy pilgrimage from Sapanta on the border with Ukraine arriving in mid December in Bucharest, overnighting mostly in village houses on the rural tracks he was using. Hurley has been resident in the country for almost 20 years and has developed a variety of musical and rural networks from his work - some of whom are tapped for hospitality. Most of his overnight stays, however, are made in houses he chances upon late in the evenings as he finishes his daily treks and whose impecunious residents clearly take to this eccentric visitor.....The book's descriptions of the landscape make it a charming read and it contains several positive stories of (sadly rare) cooperative work in some villages for the production of milk and apple juice; of those practising craft skills which are (also sadly) disappearing; and of at least one good priest doing (very) good work (interestingly in Cristian near my own village).
- Nick Hunt's Walking the Woods and the Water (2014) retraces the steps which Leigh-Fermour took in 1933. He kept a blog while he was doing it – and has some great entries eg here
- Times New Romanian – voices and narrative from Romania by Nigel Shakespear (2014) which tells the tales ofsome 15 ex-pats in Romania…

Bronwen Riley has this to say about her book on Transylvania –

Throughout its history, Transylvania held a distinct position as a frontier zone on the border between East and West. The Carpathian Mountains form a natural boundary between the old principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia that, together with Transylvania, now make up modern-day Romania. Transylvania's architecture and its mixture of people are a product of its history as precarious border country. The Transylvanians absorbed eastern and western influences, creating something original out of them. Many people have claimed Transylvania as their own, feeling strongly that it belonged to them. The Italian academic and writer Claudio Magris describes its tangled history as 'an intricate web of disagreements, cross-purposes and clashes'.

It is almost impossible to find a neutral history of Transylvania, and accounts of the origin of its inhabitants and political events vary widely according to the author's nationality.
For most of its recorded history, Transylvania was Hungarian territory and became part of the Habsburg Empire in 1691. Its fortunes were bound up closely to those of Central Europe. Following the Austro-Hungarian Empire's collapse in 1918, it was surrendered to Romania. Romanians regard Transylvania as the 'cradle' of their culture, claiming their descent as a nation from Roman colonists and native Dacians, a branch of the Thracians, whose capital, Sarmizegetusa Regia, was in the heart of Transylvania. The Hungarians still revere Transylvania as the place where the purest forms of their culture are preserved. Faced with such a rich array of peoples and histories, this book is selective and focuses on the Saxon towns and villages, the isolated settlements of the Apuseni and the rich traditions of Maramureş. This subjective viewpoint will no doubt be controversial—in a country that has been fought over for so long, everything is potentially contentious. The region known as Maramureş is included, which, although historically under Hungarian rule, was officially never part of Transylvania.

Transylvania is unique now in Europe, for here can be found a primal life in the forests and mountains alongside wild animals. This way of life was once common to all Europeans but is now completely lost. The region, on the very edge of Europe, seems also to be on the edge of time. It contains a link with a remote history that stretches back well into pagan times. The past hangs heavily over the land. There is something about this country that makes people yearn for it, for lost nations and empires, for a rural innocence that may never have existed.
This book portrays a way of life, miraculously preserved into the twenty-first century, that is fast disappearing. The country presented in these pages is one of rural loveliness: there are no ugly apartment blocks, polluting factories or distressing orphanages. Romania receives much negative press, and one rarely hears anything but its worst aspects.

One of the greatest surprises for the visitor to Transylvania is this sense of a place that is remarkably different, that is somehow set outside time and preserves a life and a landscape lost to the rest of Europe. This is not a recent phenomenon but one that travellers have remarked on for centuries - travellers to Transylvania expressed amazement at a country that seemed not just old-fashioned but of another world. Jules Verne set his gothic novel, A Castle in the Carpathians, here in 1895. Emily Gerard, whose accounts of life in Transylvania in the 1880s provided inspirational background material to Bram Stoker'sDracula, described it as a hiding place for the supernatural, untouched by the advance of science.

Max Weber, the German sociologist, wrote about the disenchantment of the world, by which he meant that people once saw the world in which they lived as enchanted and this belief has been in decline ever since. Romania is the last place in Europe that despite, or perhaps because of, its recent past still retains some of that magic.
There is only a hint of it now, in remote villages and in the mountains and forests. Visitors saw this magical, fragile world already under threat a century ago, warning that the traditions, superstitions and even parts of the population itself were in danger of extinction.
Somehow that world struggled on through two World Wars. It was kept artificially alive by the great economic failure of Communism. Now capitalism and membership of the European Union will wipe out in a handful of years what Communism failed to do in nearly 50.

The disappearance of the Saxon population has been one of Transylvania's great losses. Less than a year after the Romanian revolution of December 1989, three-quarters of the Transylvanian Saxons returned to Germany, almost 900 years after their arrival. Right up to that time, they had preserved dress, customs and a dialect that would have been more familiar to Hans Holbein in the sixteenth century than to a modern-day German. It was no wonder that some people thought the Pied Piper had spirited away the children of Hamelin to Transylvania.
Now mainly the old are left and the sight of anyone in traditional dress is rare, although a visitor to a Saxon church may still hear the occasional greeting of Grüss Gott from a Saxon who chose to stay behind. Although so many have gone, their extraordinary fortified churches and villages remain, as does the surrounding countryside with a rich diversity of wildflowers, birds, insects and animals that was lost in Western Europe years ago. The dilemma now is what to do with a precious European landscape largely untouched by the modern age.

A book which is difficult to classify is *Mai romani decat romanii? De ce strainii se indragostesc de Romania* (*More Romanian than the Romanians? Why foreigners fall in love with Romania*) ed by Sandra Pralong (Polirom 2013); it's a 400 page book (only in Romanian) of expat tales of life in Romania and contains a collection of stories written by expats on their experiences of their adopted home. There some high profile names among the authors: starting with the founder of the emergency ambulance service Raed Arafat.
A few years back someone had the bright idea of interviewing a few ex-pats here about their lives – quite substantial chats, in one case more than hour – can still be seen at Romania Through their Eyes. Sadly they managed only about 8 interviews.

3.5 Some Videos

A three-part documentary called Wild Carpathians is worth watching – provided you can stomach the upper-class accent of the presenter (one Charles Oatley) and his bloody helicopter with which the first episode starts. Episode Two is here - and three here.

Rosia Montana in Transylvania is currently the site of an intense environmental struggle (against a foreign gold-mining operation). Town on the brink is a powerful documentary about it - more than an hour's viewing – with some great aerial shots of the area

And here is a presentation of the Szekely. (Hungarian-speaking) part of Transylvania. Also some "diaporamas" of the larger Romanian cities.

4. Literature – Home and Away

4.1 The classics

Romania is a very literary nation – more so than most of its neighbours. Best known are -

- Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889); poet
- Ion Luca Cariagale (1852-1912) dramatist and writer. The Wikipedia entry is a very full one and gives a great sense of his life and times. Still a beloved figure for the gentle humour with which he portrays social roles and human foibles.
- Lucian Blaga (1895-1961); philosopher and poet
- Mircea Eliade (1907-1986); writer on myths and religion
- Eugen Ionescu (1909-1994) dramatist – and great exponent of the "ridiculous". He spent most of his life in France (with 16 years in total in Romania during the period 1925-1942). Paris Review had a good interview with him. Emil Cioran (1911-1995) essayist who lived in poverty in Paris from 1937 and whose work has been called "*a philosophical romance on the modern themes of alienation, absurdity, boredom, futility, decay, the tyranny of history, the vulgarities of change, awareness as agony, reason as disease*".

An excellent book Romanian writers on writing (2011) edited by Norman Manea gives us the brief details of the lives of almost 100 Romanian writers since Eminescu – and a short extract from each. The discussion thread of this blogpost from Bucharest Life also gives some good suggestions and the "comments" section of this bookblog a few years' back gave more than 50 suggestions.

And the books mentioned on

- World Literature Forum - and
- Good Reads

show the amazing depth of Romanian literature.

Three names, however, occur to foreigners when they are asked about Romanian literature – Bram Stoker, Miklos Banffy and (perhaps) Gregor von Rezzori - but none are actually considered to be Romanian by the locals.
The first – Bram Stoker – should be buried with his literary victims for the damage he did to the image of Romania with the novel – Dracula. Needless to say, he never set foot in the country….

At least the other two spent much of their lives within the boundaries of contemporary Romania – but *Miklos Banffy* (who straddled the worlds of Budapest and Cluj (which became part of Transylvania in 1919) wrote in Hungarian. And *Gregor von Rezzori's* childhood world was over the border in the Ukraine. Although his early adult years knew Bucharest as his capital he wrote mostly in German.

The amount of space I devote to these two authors will, however, be seen as little short of lese-majeste by my Romanian friends – and in no way reflecting the reality of Romanian writing – classical and contemporary. I can only plead the selectivity of translators as my excuse…

Miklos Banffy
The Transylvanian Trilogy gave us s living in the first couple of decades of the 20th century. Banffy's trilogy was originally published in Hungarian in the 1930s and has taken all of 75 years to become appreciated in the English-speaking world as the literary masterpiece it is. The three books are -

- They Were Counted
- They Were Found Wanting; and
- They Were Divided

The author was Count Miklos Banffy who had a huge ancestral estate in Transylvania, but was also a politician in the Austro-Hungarian empire and after WW I he became Hungary's Foreign Minister. The central character

in the trilogy is Count Balint Abady, and we follow his story through the ten years leading up to the outbreak of WW I. Abady is a voice of reason in the Austro-Hungarian government as the empire dithers and bickers its way into the dustbin of history. But politics is only one facet in this vastly entertaining trilogy.
Banffy is a great storyteller, and he stuffs the novels with colourful, vibrant characters. There are frustrated, doomed lovers, dissolute aristocrats, scheming estate overseers, gypsies, a barking mad count, and a couple of dozen other memorable characters – most living their lives just up the road from the Brasov area (where I live) in and around what is now Cluj but is identified in the book by its Hungarian name Kolozsvar. Add in duels, hunts, balls and sundry intrigues and you have 1,500 or so pages of addictive reading. Banffy wants to tell the often bitter truth about the world he knew and he wants to do it in the most vivacious way possible.

The second volume is called They Were Found Wanting and one reviewer caught the mood well
"This book is the saddest, most gracefully told, subtly portentous book I've read in years, and it's only the second book in the trilogy. The writing is poetic and altogether unbelievably exquisite in the execution.

The subject matter has two mirroring themes, constantly playing off against each other, the political obliviousness of aristocratic Hungary as it hurries unwittingly towards WWI, and, more shatteringly poignant to this reader, the slow, inexorable crumbling of the doomed love between Count Balint Abady and the married Adrienne. Here, for example, is the description of Abady's enchantment with the estate woodland, his love for which is only enhanced by his love for Adrienne": *"Everywhere there were only these three colours, silver, grey, and vivid green: and the more that Balint gazed around him the more improbable and ethereal did the forest seem until it was only those strands near at hand, which moved gently in the soft breeze, that seemed real while everything further off, the pale lilac shaded into violet, was like clouds of vapour in slight perpetual movement as if swaying to the rhythm of some unheard music."*

After WW II, Banffy, like a character in a tragic novel, ended up reduced to a landless nobody with a meaningless title in communist Romania. His Transylvanian home Banffy Castle at Bontida village was destroyed by retreating Germans in vengeance for his role in Romania changing sides in the second world war. He died in 1950
But the good news is that, under The Transylvanian Trust, the castle is being restored and is now a training centre for craft skills.

Gregor von Rezzori
is one of the most neglected of writers from this area which has been variously part of Austro-Hungary, Romania and now Ukraine. An Ermine in Czernopol (1958) ostensibly centred on the curious tragicomic fate of an Austrian officer of supreme ineffectuality gathers a host of unlikely characters and their unlikelier stories by way of engaging the reader in a kaleidoscopic experience of a city where nothing is as it appears-a city of discordant voices, of wild ugliness and sometimes heartbreaking disappointment. Rezzori "*summons the disorderly and unpredictable energies of a town where everything in the world is seemingly mixed up together, a multicultural society that existed long before the idea of multiculturalism*". This book is effectively part of a trilogy - with the other two books appearing in the "memoir" section which follows.

4.2 Contemporary writing

Two limitations make it difficult for me to say much about present-day writing – my understanding of Romanian; and my lack of interest in novels. Perhaps the best-known current writers are -

- Mircea Carterescu a prolific writer with a focus on the mundane and fantastic - see Nostalgia (2005 in English – 1993 Romanian) and Blinding
- Nobel prize- winner (but oh so depressive!) Hertha Mueller
- Norman Manea's "Compulsory Happiness" (published in 2012 – but written in the 1980s)

A flavor of local writing – both Romanian and foreign – can be got from an excellent little book Bucharest Tales (2011) - one of the annual "New Europe Writer" series. It contains both poems and prose - all of which can be viewed at the hyperlink in the title with the additional bonus of photographs adorning every page!
Good modern poets include –

- Nichita Stanescu
- Anna Blandiana

- Marin Sorescu - my favourite - "Asking too much" is one of my favourite poems, with its wry, almost scabrous humour

And two good (downloadable) anthologies which give a great sense, first of the work of poets born since 1937 and, second of novellists who have published in recent years, are -

- It Might Take Me Years (2013)
- 11 contemporary Romanian novelists

And, just at the last moment, I discovered on the internet a fascinating book (in English) which gives a sense of how both Romanian and English novels over the past 25 years have dealt with the question of identity. Corridors of Mirrors: The Spirit of Europe in Contemporary British and .Romanian Fiction by Pia Brinziu (2000) summarises the various English and Romanian novels of the period which deal with that theme in a manner which gives a quite unique "double take" .....

4.3 Commentators, essayists, academics etc – a potpourri

The dictatorship of 1947-1989 is referred to in various parts of the next three sections. It is hardly surprising that multifarious voices long repressed should articulate so vociferously - Andrei Plesu (philosopher) and the younger Horia Patapievici being the two most prominent voices and writers who enjoyed great prominence in the first 2 decades after the 1989 "revolution" but who have been the subject of attacks since then.

Carturescu is the most prominent writer to express concern about the tone of the discussion in recent years
Several books have appeared (in Romanian) about the venom of the mutual attacks
The historical role of Romanian intellectuals is briefly explored in the video in the hyperlink.

A sense of the focus of interests of Romanian political scientists can be obtained by looking at the (English) abstracts of the articles in Studia Politica

4.4 Foreigners using Romania as a location

The latter part of section 1.4 has remarked on the use of this part of the world as an exotic location for foreign writers. Bram Stoker remains the most (in)famous of foreign writers (see Dracula's Homepage) about Romania - although many journalists seem intent on emulating his imaginative exploits. Foreign novelists' works using Bucharest as a location include -

- Olivia Manning's Balkan trilogy focuses on life in Bucharest and Athens at the commencement of the Second World War and was produced in Britain in the early 1960s. It's well worth reading.
- The Dean's December; Saul Bellow (1982) whose plot unfolds simultaneously in Bucharest and Chicago. Bellow evokes all that is worst about both sides of the iron curtain - on the one hand, the totalitarian heavy-handedness of the Rumanian Communist regime, which refuses to forgive (Dean) Corde's mother-in-law, one of its former leaders, for becoming disenchanted with Stalinism and hence sending her brilliant daughter to the West; on the other hand, the failure of America to provide for its ''doomed peoples,'' its ''whirling souls'' - typically, the black underclass of Chicago,

- Rates of Exchange by Malcolm Bradbury (1982) follows a British linguistics lecturer, Dr. Angus Petworth, on his first ever visit behind the Iron Curtain, to Slaka.His arrival, the paranoia of his hosts, the changing moods of his ever-present interpreter and guide, the secret trysts with attractive female novelists, his increasingly desperate attempts to phone home and the fall-off-the-chair-laughing diversion into second-division British diplomatic circles are brilliantly written vignettes that can o nly be based on real events. These may or may not of course have happened in Romania – Slaka ultimately borrows a little from every country once behind the Iron Curtain – but anyone who visited before (or even immediately after) 1989's revolution will immediately recognise much of communist-era Romania in Bradbury's book. Especially good are the descriptions of the hotels: dark wood everywhere, omnipresent men in long coats reading newspapers, peroxide-blondes smoking at lobby bars, terrible service and Byzantine bureaucracy.
- "The Long Shadows"; Alan Brownjohn (1997) is almost a book within a book as it alternates between three narratives – that of the English biographer of a writer whose last work was a novel about a young Romanian woman who visits England in the 1980s. Her character is clearly that of the young translator who was assigned to the writer when he visited Romania in the 1980s on a British Council scheme. A good atmosphere of the period is established.
- Uncle Rudolf; Paul Bailey (2002); At the age of seventy, Andrew Peters looks back across the years to remember life with his doting Uncle Rudolf, who rescued him from fascist Romania as a child. Vivid, often hilarious, stories of Rudolf's brilliant but blighted singing career are intertwined with the slow unfolding of secrets that have shadowed Andrew's otherwise happy life. The novel captures a vanished epoch with exquisite tact and restraint
- Black Sea Twilight; (2007) Domnica Radulescu
- Train to Trieste (2009) ; Domnica Radulescu who is now an American Professor and writes novels with communist Romania as a focus
- The Last hundred Days; Patrick McGuinnes (2011) draws on his time in late 1980s Bucharest. Offered a job in a Romanian university, the unnamed narrator becomes enmeshed in the complicities of the doomed dictatorship. He falls in love with the daughter of a party apparatchik and falls in with a dissident group of people-smugglers. He gains two mentors: the seedy academic Leo (who moonlights as a pillar of the booming black market) and the elderly, debonair Sergiu Trofim, a sidelined luminary of the pre-Ceausescu days who is writing a secret memoir of party corruption.
- Painter of Silence by Georgina Harding (2012) is set in Romania; it is the early 1950s and a frail, almost skeletal young man is found collapsed on the steps of the city of Iasi's hospital. He has no papers on him and offers no information about himself - in fact he does not speak at all, and it is some days before it is realized that the man is a deaf mute. One of the nurses, a young woman named Safta knows the history of the young man, brings paper and drawing materials into the hospital so that they can communicate through the sketches they draw and, in this way, she hopes to encourage the man back to life with memories of their shared upbringing. The young man's name is Augustus; he was the son of the cook at Poiana, a grand rural estate which was Safta's family home and the place where both of them were born six months apart. However, as Safta grows into a beautiful young woman keen to embrace all that life has to offer and becomes very attracted to a young visitor to Poiana, she moves away from Augustus and he becomes the silent onlooker to her sexual awakening. And when Safta leaves Poiana, Augustus stays on, living his life in the way he has always done, until World War II rages through Europe and Romania is left in ruins only to be

followed by the Communist takeover. There are things that Augustus needs to tell Safta, but can they be conveyed through the medium of his pictures?

- "Whisper in Bucharest"; Kiki Skagen Munshi (2014) the author is a well-travelled member of the US Foreign Service who served as Director of the American Library in Bucharest from 1983-87 and has just written this novel evoking this period.

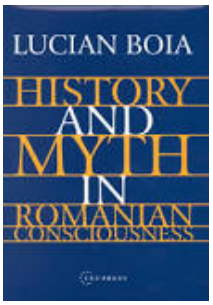
5. Contested lands and events

All history is contested – but particularly Romanian! Its lands have been invaded by Romans from the south, Turks and others from the East, Germans from the West and Russians from the north.

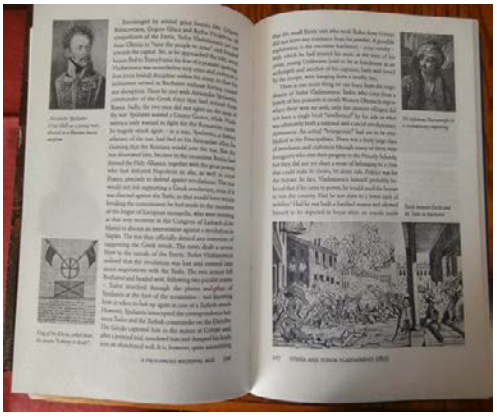
Bucharest and Ploiesti were bombed by both the Allies and Russians during the second world war – and territories which it had gained from Hungary, Ukraine and Bulgaria in 1920 were surrendered – briefly in the first case in the early 1940s, permanently after 1945 in the other two.

A foreign historian explores, in this short video, the question of Romanian identity

There are just four names for English speakers wanting to make historical sense of this complex country – Lucian Boia, Dennis Deletant, Keith Hitchins and Tom Gallagher.



- The first for the sheer courage and fluent coherence of his prolific writings (he is 70) on the history of the country – particularly his valiant and so necessary work on demystification and demythologising;
- Deletant for his focus on the communist period;
- Hitchins for his 2 volume history of the country (which I have never been able to find but which he has now reduced to a single book);
- Gallagher for the uncompromising critique of the corruption of the post-communist political class – in "Theft of a Nation" (2005); and "The EU and Romania; how the weak vanquished the Strong" (2010) – a good review of which you will find in the Annex.



Boia is a delight to read – and two of his key books can be read in full and in English online -

- Romania; borderland of Europe (2001) – reviewed here
- History and myth in Romanian Consciousness (published in Romanian in 2001)

Another recent book of his "Why is Romania different" is not yet available in English but the Bucharest Life blog reviewed it last year – the discussion thread had more than 100 participants

and gives a real insight into the emotions surrounding Romania's history. Here's a Hungarian take on him.
I said there were four names but I'm delighted to add a fifth - Neagu Djuvara is a Romanian intellectual with a striking history (he's 97 years old) and has just produced (in both Romanian and English) a Brief Illustrated History of Romanians which immediately goes into my short list of "beautiful books".
To qualify for this honour, a book has to fit standards none too easy to specify – such as paper type (thickish and rough), format, balance of text and illustrations, typeface, graphics and textual content.

I am no historian myself and am grateful for text on the early periods
to this Sibiu site

5.1 The Romans

Mention of the North-Thracians living in Transylvania was made by the Romans. They were called Dacians in Roman history sources.
The Dacians developed fortresses with embankments and stone walls in the 3rd to 1st centuries B.C. as defense against the Celts. ….Caesar's plan to eliminate the threat of the Dacians was not realized until after his murder. In the same year (44 B.C.) Burebista was also murdered and his empire fell apart.
However, the successors were able to hold Transylvania. Under Decebal (87-106 A.D.), the Dacian empire became more powerful again. He defeated a Roman legion shortly after he began to govern, but was defeated shortly thereafter near Tapae (88 A.D.). Decebal used the period of peace to expand the system of fortresses and to reorganize the army. He expanded his empire to the rivers Tisza/Tinza (Theiß) and Dnjestr without endangering the peace with the Romans.

Emperor Trajan recognized the potential danger created by this politically, economically and militarily strengthened neighbour. The gold riches were a further incentive for conquering. Although the Dacians were defeated during the first enormous attempt (101-102), they refused to be suppressed. The country was only systematically conquered (105-106) and the capital Sarmizegetusa captured after the building of a bridge across the Danube near Drobeta (Turnu Severin). The bridge was a creation of the Greco-Roman builder Appollodorus of Damascus. Decebal thrust himself on his sword to avoid the humiliating capture.

The victory and the Dacian submission to Roman authority was celebrated effusively. The most important events of the war were captured on a victory pillar. It is a reminder you can still see in Rome of Trajan's success. Dacia had become a Roman province.

A "Cartoon history of Dacians wars with the Romans" will tell you more. For several centuries after the Roman withdrawal, however, history lost sight of Romania. It re-appears in the chronicles only in the 12th century when Hungary and the Ottoman Empire were flexing their muscles

5.2 Austro-Hungarians, Saxons and Turks

It seems to have been a Hungarian king who first invited "Saxons" from Germany and the Netherlands to come to help colonise the lands.

These "Transylvanian Saxons" developed their assigned areas commercially over a short period. They not only made the soil arable, improved agricultural methods but also made accessible and exploited the areas containing precious metals in the West and East Carpathians (Ostkarpaten, Siebenbürgisches Erzgebirge, Rodenauer Berge) and the Transylvanian high country salt deposits, and advanced handicrafts and trade. Already in 1186, the Hungarian king was able to collect 15000 Silvermarks contributed by the "hospites regis de Ultrasylvas" .

The aspiring Transylvanian Saxons were like all people burdened by the Mongol invasion in 1241. The Tatar horsemen invaded almost simultaneously through several passes of the Carpathians, overcame the old border defense system almost effortlessly, defeated the Hungarian army of horsemen near Mohi and put entire regions to waste.

The Mongol invasion resulted in a new orientation of the Hungarian defense and economic policies. Cities were increasingly fortified and became catalysts of the economic development. New settlers were recruited for this purpose. Strategically and economically important towns were promoted and advanced through privileges and tax concessions. In addition to the then existing mountain cities Rodenau, Offenburg, Thorenburg and Großschlatten, a chain of German commerce and trade centres were developed along the Carpathian Arc, like Bistritz (Bistrita) , Kronstadt (Brasov), Hermannstadt (Sibiu), Mühlbach (Sebes) and Klausenburg (Cluj).

The German bookshop in Brasov offers a good selection of publications on the life of the German minority in Transylvania eg the beautifully-produced "Geschichte und Traditionen der deutschen Minderheit in Rumanien" (2009) which is actually a textbook for those learning German in the country.

For those wanting to know more about Transylvania, there is a ten-page bibliography of various books and writings about the place

At the turn of the eighteenth century, Peter the Great's Russia announced a policy of support for his coreligionists within the Ottoman Empire and Romanian princes in Walachia and Moldavia began looking to Russia to break the Turkish yoke. Peter's ill-fated attempt to seize Moldavia in 1711 had the support of both Romanian princes.
After the Turks expelled the Russian forces, the sultan moved to strengthen his hold on the principalities by appointing Greeks from Constantinople's Phanar, or "Lighthouse," district as princes.
These "Phanariot" princes, who purchased their positions and usually held them briefly until a higher bidder usurped them, were entirely dependent upon their Ottoman overlords. Within the principalities, however, their rule was absolute and the Porte expected them to

leech out as much wealth from their territories as possible in the least time.
Exploitation, corruption, and the Porte's policy of rapidly replacing Phanariot princes wreaked havoc on the principalities' social and economic conditions. The boyars became sycophants; severe exactions and heavy labour obligations forced the peasantry to the brink of starvation; and foreigners monopolized trade.

After the failed revolution of 1848, Moldova and Wallachia were united in 1858 under Cuza – with the Transylvanian princes opting to stay with Hungary, Cuza's attempted reforms were too much for the Boyars and he was ousted in 1866 to make way for a German Prince who became Carol the First. The country fought the 1877/78 war against Turkey with the Russians and gained its independence then.
From then until 1913, the country knew peace and prosperity; and managed to retain its neutrality until 1916 forced it to declare with the Allies and suffer almost invasion and occupation by the Germans.
The 1920 Treaty of Triainon then forced Hungary to cede Transylvania to Romania.

5.3 The inter-bellum period

The period of glory for Romania is considered by many to be the era between the two World Wars. After the unification of all its territories in 1918, Romania looked like a fairly large and prosperous state, going through a time of important reforms, a time of economic and cultural flourishing, development of its industrial sector, and it became one of the most important exporters of oil and wheat. Bucharest, nicknamed 'little Paris', as rumours have it, could stand next to any major European metropolis. .....A new artistic movement emerged, the Romanian avant-garde, which eventually conquered Europe and contributed to the birth of surrealism in visual art, literature and cinema.....Between the two World Wars, Romanian culture was for the first time in sync with the latest Western trends in Paris or London, becoming a strong participant in the international dialogue of values. Remarkable avant-garde and surrealist talents emerged in Romania, featuring a cosmopolitan cultural attitude.
In 1916, Tristan Tzara, a Romanian émigré to Zurich, invented Dadaism. There were three distinctive groups of artists: modernist – *focused on Western, urban and intellectual culture;* traditionalist – *oriented towards the religious orthodoxy of the rural world; and the* third, *proclaiming the birth of the national character, situated at the crossroads between tradition and modernity. But even this time of prosperity had its paradoxes: except for a few big cities and the wealthy elite, the rest of the country was still impoverished and illiterate and there was no time left for profound changes.*
"Surrealism and Survival in Romania" by Carmen Fimen

Useful References

- An ex- Us diplomat, Ernest Latham, wrote recently Timeless and Transitory - 20th century relations between Romania and the English-speaking world – which has some nice vignettes of people in the first half of the century. I have also included in this guide some of Latham's brief video interviews on various topics.
- Discover Transylvania is a website which articulates the frustrations with Hungarian irridentism
- Dennis Deletant's Hitler's Forgotten Ally – Ion Antonescu and his regime 1940-1944 (2006) is a departure from his books about the Communist period of the country.
- In Search of Lost Ones is a fascinating little book which follows the lives of Transylvanians who were forced by the Germans to go to the Eastern Front in the latter part of the War.

5.4 The Communist period

Fifty Years of Isolation **-** Romania entered the harshest dictatorship in Europe, weakened and humiliated by the Fascist regime and the Iron Guard that compromised the country's prestige during the Second World War. Years of terror followed. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Communist gulag continued the Fascist horrors. For almost 50 years, Romania experienced isolation and was cut off from the West. The local Communist leaders annihilated any trace of intellectual opposition.
Between 1948 and 1964, one Romanian out of nine (meaning about two million people) was sent into a Communist concentration camp. The official literature, or so-called socialist realism, glorified Stalin, his politics and the new proletarian class.

Despite all the official oppression, intellectuals gathered in informal discussion groups to keep their sanity and, slowly, a counterculture was born. Several groups of artists rejected the aggressive intrusion of the Communist propaganda, bringing along a fresh, nonconformist subversive voice, opposed to the official ideology. Although Romania didn't have an organised Samizdat, individual voices of courage made themselves heard, like the political dissident Paul Goma in 1977 or, later, the 'Blue Jeans generation of writers'.

Over the years, Romanians were perceived through various stereotypes, more or less warranted: a people hesitating between excessive praise and self-disparagement, between laments or victimisation and an ostentatious superiority; coming up with dark plots and conspiracies to explain historical events, but also with an interesting, rich culture and a lively artistic life, with sophisticated intellectuals; xenophobic, nationalistic, but still tolerant in many respects; hospitable, enthusiastic, genuine and warm; inclined towards constant ridicule, with a predisposition to mock everything.
"Surrealism and Survival in Romania" by Carmen Fimen

Important insights into the period are given in -

- Ceaucescu and the Securitate; coercion and dissent in Romania 1965-89 by Dennis Deletant (1996) who is a Brit who has given us most glimpses (as English speakers) of life in that period
- The Eighties in Bucharest is a powerful record of life in that decade published by Martor (Anthropological Review of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant) - Number 7 (2002). The link seems to give the entire text - structured alphabetically eg starting with "abortion". The Review (and the Museum) is to be congratulated for its website which allows access to the entire run of this worthwhile journal!
- Censorship in Romania ed by Lidia Vianu (1998) has a lot of powerful interviews with writers about their experiences – with excerpts of their work
- It was only in 2006 that the various archives were made (more or less) fully accessible to allow the researchers of the Presidential Commission for the Study of Communist Dictatorship in Romania to do their work.
- Another recent book which deals with a key but strangely neglected subject is Heroes and Victims – remembering war in 20th century Romania by Maria Bucur (2010)

We talk easily in the West about social history – Britain in particular seems well-endowed with voluminous accounts of how ordinary citizens lived their lives in the various decades from the 1940s But this genre is, for obvious reasons, virtually non-existent here in Romania.

Jokes reflected social realities under such horrific conditions of constraint and restraint. Ben Lewis is the author of a book - Hammer and Tickle – a history of communism through communist jokes and refers to Romania's most famous collector -

Between August 1979 and December 1989, through the darkest years of the Ceauşescu tyranny in that benighted land of Romania, an engineer spent his time collecting and annotating jokes. His analysis, **Ten Years of Black Humour in Romania**, published after the fall of Communism, is one of the most significant social studies performed behind the Iron Curtain, and provides intimate details of the creation of humour, its propagation, its coverage, and the official response to it.
What Stefanescu did may appear suicidal to those of us who lived more or less free lives outside Communism: he took notes in public of every joke he heard, where and when he heard it, who uttered it (socioeconomic class and age).
Working in Bucharest's public transport administration, he was able to travel widely, eavesdropping on conversations in Party conferences and at work and in the city, fishing out his notebook at the slightest pretext. Many times he only heard parts of the joke, and he had to reconstruct its build up or punch-line; he tried hard to maintain the tone of the narrator.
He estimated that he heard a new joke every 4.71 days across his horizon of observation. In his book, he provided more than 950 jokes, catalogued by themes - the Party, the standard of living, the secret service, culture, industry, the opposition...Most jokes would survive only a few days. Some of them were truly extraordinary, he said, and he could not allow them to fade away. More importantly, he said, he wanted to be able to face his children who might one day ask him what he did during the dark days of Communism. He could justify himself if they were to demand of him why he didn't protest and take to the streets against the dictatorship. The book became his outcry.
Jokes editorialised every facet of life in Romania. Fuel price hikes; Visits by foreign dignitaries; Abortion; Food shortages. In just one year, the number of new jokes jumped four-fold, many caused by state sponsored propaganda that Romanians required fewer calories than other peoples, which led to the terrible food rationalisation programmes of the early 1980s.

In the early 80s, most jokes were about the standard of living; Ceauşescu jokes remained pretty much constant in their rate of creation. Between 1986 and 1989, the population felt a change in the air, that things could possibly be improving, and the Ceauşescu jokes leapt in number, and the opposition became correspondingly important. Ben Lewis uses this fact to convince himself that Communist jokes were not the last resort of a cowed population, a *distraction from the struggle*. Instead, the jokes were quantitatively and qualitatively intensifying as the people's struggle grew: they were inspired and generated as part of the struggle.
Source; Jost a Mon blog

These camera shots give an idea of events in "The Last days of Ceaucescu"

5.5 Post-communism

The countries on which the Iron Curtain fell have had a difficult time since 1989 dealing with the record of repression, imprisonment, flight and death inflicted on millions of their citizens during that almost 50 year period.
A few countries passed laws banning those holding power at that time from any future positions of authority but most countries, including Romania, had a reluctant and confused response to such questions of responsibility and justice.

25 years on from the end of the Ceaucescu regime, for example, there are still almost 100 serving Romanian MPs who held senior positions in that regime

- Coming to terms with the communist past in Romania is a 2011 article which analyses the highly politicised way the Commission report was treated by politicians and the media.
- Romanian communism between commemoration, nostalgia and scientific debate (2011) widens the analysis.
- Transitional Justice in post-communist Romania (2012) is a recent book which assesses how such issues as property restitution and the rewriting of history books have been handled.

In 2005 Tom Gallagher gave us in Theft of a nation – Romania since Communism and followed it up in 2010 with an equally trenchant expose Romania and the European Union: How the Weak Vanquished the Strong
Interviews with ex-Presidents Iliescu (1990-1996; 2000-2004) and Constantinescu (1996-2000) can be read in the Annexes of an otherwise rather turgid academic thesis - "Inside the mechanisms of Romanian modernization" by Florin Grancea 2006

For an insight into current environmental concerns in the country, have a look at this paper on an interesting English-language site

A Vignette

My Romanian is not up to reading other accounts of developments since then but I did pick up, at the 2014 Bookfest here, an English version of "The Destiny of Europe" (2011) which is a rather heavy (in all senses) academic treatise which does the reputation of academia no favours. I have to be careful what I say about its author – Andrei Marga – since he moves in this strange territory of politics, administration and teaching. The book is "nonsense on stilts" – but the man behind it sadly typical of the Romanian elite.

6. Memoirs, biographies etc

Since the 1990s there has been an explosion of diaries (in Romanian) about life under communism. An English-language Sibiu cultural magazine has an article about the artefacts which figured in old households which lists the titles of some of these

La Blouse Roumaine is an amazing book which I've not yet been able to track down. Published a few years ago, it is a collection of biographical essays on 114 Romanian women, from antiquity, through the middle ages to the present-day, with the greater emphasis on modern and contemporary women.
Each entry is accompanied by a series of quotations and by a selected bibliography…..The slant of the biographical notes relates especially to the relationship between each individual woman and the Romanian society, but more so the relationship with the officialdom of the day; what achievements were made and how they were received, or acknowledged, what made these Romanian women turn into revolutionaries, political activists, underground resistant fighters, or political prisoners of concentration camps or take to the road of exile.
The social range from which these women come is very broad, from aristocrats to peasant farmers, from philosophers to scientists, from artists to lawyers, poets or academics. The different political or religious persuasions and ethnic extractions are also represented, offering a panoply of famous and infamous alike, some of a world

repute, but more often than not names limited to a national circulation, which would deserve a wider audience, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world.

The site mentioned above gives extensive excerpts from the book and about 100 of its pages can be read in this scribd download

Gregor von Rezzori is one of the most neglected of writers from lands which have been variously part of Austro-Hungary, CzechoSlovakia, Hungary, Romania and now Ukraine. Over thirty years he wrote marvellous prose about his early years in the town of Czernowitz when it lay in the northern redoubts of Romania. It is difficult to classify them – novels or memoirs? Memoirs of an Anti-Semite (1979) and Snows of Yesteryear (1989) generally appear as the former but to my mind can be read as "creative memoirs". I am indebted to The Nation journal for this book review -

For Gregor von Rezzori, who died in 1998, Europe "committed suicide" in 1914, the year he was born. Von Rezzori's whole oeuvre is a gay, merciless, tragic reflection on Europe's decomposition, a process in which World War II and the Holocaust are hardly more than an aftershock, following which the old continent's ways of life disintegrate into techno-abstract homogeneity. "We're a rotten people; our culture is rotten," he insisted in an interview. Von Rezzori began writing in earnest only in 1940, as if he thought that from then on there was little left to do but remember and reflect on the catastrophe.

Von Rezzori's great theme is the darkening world of Central Europe between the wars. The paradox is that as Europe's remains are gnawed away by fascism, the books' narrators, likewise born around 1914, are just starting out in life; these contrary arcs set vitality and decay to fizzing together like a cabaret cocktail.

The three volumes published by NYRB Classics—An Ermine in Czernopo (1958), Memoirs of an Anti-Semite (1979) and The Snows of Yesteryear (1989), the first having just appeared—are worth reading chronologically to sample different incarnations of the same fanciful boy and adolescent, and his later dilettante drift. To arrive at the last book, a straight family memoir divided into portraits, is like bumping into recurrent fictional characters in a factual, "real" space—only to find these people just as captivating as the fun-house-mirror reflections we'd met before.

Von Rezzori's father was an Italo-Austrian nobleman, proficient in chemistry and the arts, with a sinecure in Bukovina, where after 1919, when the region passed to Romania, he pretended to uphold a teetering bastion of civilization but really stayed on for the hunting. A "pathological" anti-Semite but too snobbish to be a Nazi, contemptuous of the Anschluss for being a vile Prussianization of the ideal of Greater Germany, he was also a rough-edged life force, more interesting and more loved than his fictional counterparts. Von Rezzori's mother was a period type: wan, over-refined, disenchanted. His older sister—tougher than the equally doomed Tanya in Ermine—was a rival for the affections of their father, who, in von Rezzori's opinion, died early from a terminal case of their mother's "princess in rags" complex. This fascinating but démodé clan was counterbalanced by a primeval nanny and a cultivated governess, whose portraits bookend Ermine. For von Rezzori, artistry, understanding and growth were the gifts of these outsiders.

Cassandra, the illiterate, dwarfish peasant from the Carpathians who was the young Gregor Arnulf Hilarius's wet nurse and nanny, raised him with the vigor and imagination his mother lacked. Even more important than Cassandra's cheerfulness and feel for earth, life and death, was her peculiar linguistic genius. "Each second or third word was either Ruthenian, Romanian, Polish, Russian, Armenian or Yiddish, not to forget Hungarian and Turkish."
When the boy outgrew Cassandra, his moral education continued under Bunchy, a paragon from Pomerania. Although she failed to persuade her charge to take his lessons seriously, she helped him and his sister endure the linked disintegration of imperial Austria and their parents' marriage. Bunchy also seeded a timely awareness of class and race, and alerted them to the existence of a wider world. With the candor free of coyness that enables him to write about the most uncomfortable subjects, von Rezzori concludes he owes to Bunchy "what little virtues I may possess," including "my lifelong striving to overcome a fatal indifference." Indeed, his marginal narrators recall Robert Musil's "man without qualities."

Low and high culture, disorder and measure, East and West: such polarities provide the author's alter egos the leeway to wonder who they are, and allow a sweeping stylistic range, from the satirical to the sublime, all the while cloaking a dispassionate core. Even in the memoir The Snows of Yesteryear, von Rezzori examines with great lyricism the same dynamics as in his fictions, between tribal identity and individual temperament, inheritance and chance, and depicts them as being compounded by history, time, the zeitgeist.

* * *

An Ermine in Czernopol dramatizes a 1920s childhood in a family similar to the von Rezzoris, marooned in a city identical to theirs: Czernopol is the newly Romanian Czernowitz, Ukrainian Chernivtsi today. In the 1920s, because of its position at the intersection of trading routes and migrant paths, the city was still a cauldron of peoples, religions and lingos, "all living in the cynical harmony that is built on mutual aversion and common business dealings." It was also an important hub of Jewish life. While the narrator provocatively recalls the city's cult of mockery as a sophisticated form of aesthetic intelligence, he is ambiguous about its brutality: "People laughed, cried, loved, robbed, and thrashed each other at the markets, coupled behind fences, died in the gutter…. The children of the street laughed with the raw, tinny laugh of meanness."

Against this picaresque backdrop, both an intensely remembered place and the model of a seething, explosive border, the novel explores the disarray of national identities and a child's loss of idealism in the jagged shadow of World War I……
There follows a delicious riff on German soldiers first as termites, then as terrifying metallic larvae, bereft of the "holy passion" that ennobles sacrifice. The anxious perusal of news photos turns Field Marshals Hindenburg and Ludendorff into hot-air balloons, lacking the levity to take off: "*Because as it was, when they stepped out of the train, harnessed by an iron sense of duty, shackled to the earth, they displayed a bombastic sullenness: their swollen and corseted bulges tugged against their moorings.*" …….Yes, the novel strays into lushness, but delectable writing and a positively Russian understanding of yearning and nostalgia balance the precise, Musil-like scrutiny of the absurd ex-empire.
…….Where social or ethnic groups are concerned, this sense of predetermination results in stereotyping. Von Rezzori's peasants are dim but crafty; his radicals, heartlessly cerebral. A catalog of conventional types always underwrites the operation of myths and fables, from primeval fireside tales to Aesop to Maghrebinia.
Thus the Jewish children and adults at the school confirm certain caricatures, and the narrator even remarks on it; yet the sudden human contact with this mystified otherness makes him question his family's anti-Semitism, an "educated" blend of disdain and burlesque. Besides, not only are the Jewish kids deeper and more worldly than he; they possess another—tellingly aristocratic—virtue: "the superiority of an older race." When the Jewish football team trounces the pro-German Romanian one, and the post-match brawl turns into a citywide pogrom, the narrator cheers on his new heroes:

Leaner and funnier than An Ermine in Czernopol—more Nabokov than Musil—***Memoirs of an Anti-Semite*** presents itself as "A Novel in Five Stories." All but the last are set in four successive periods, from about 1927 to 1938. Each narrator speaks in the voice of the familiar "I" who shares much of the author's background and biography, along with his feckless temperament and vacillating sense of identity. With slightly different trajectories and experiences, they remain callow despite growing older, indeed more suave and superficial, as calamity approaches. Each story revolves around an encounter with Jews that the protagonist experiences as averagely annoying, humiliating or good fun; only the reader knows how little time remains.

- Mihai Sebastian was a Jewish journalist in Romania whose Journal 1935-1944 The Fascist Years caused quite a stir when they were eventually produced here in Romania after 1989 – the English version in 2000.
- Norman Manea is Romania's most translated author and still writes in Romanian although he left the country almost 30 years ago. The Hooligan's Return (2005) is a powerful and bitter memoir and available in English but not his latest memoir.
- Local History, Transnational Memory in the Romanian Holocaust by V Glajar and J Teodorescu (2011) seems, from the glimpses available in the google book, to be a harrowing but exceedingly well-researched series of accounts of intellectual life in various parts of Romania in the decade leading up the brutal round-up of Jews….
- The education of a political animal IIB – Book III A Diary of Nine Months in the Peoples' Democracies 1959-60 by Arthur D Kahn (2009) gives us almost a hundred pages of fascinating insights from one political writer's three- week visit to Romania in 1959. It was entirely by accident I came across it on the internet yesterday. It does not figure on any list I have seen but deserves its place on this list
- Jessica Douglas-Home was one of a small group who spent a lot of time in the 1980s supporting dissidents in central europe and wrote it up in Once Upon another Time; (2000)
- The title of Carmen Bugan's Burying the Typewriter; childhood under the eyes of the secret police (2013) says it all.

7. Some Snapshots

7.1 Interlude

This is the point at which we leave the literary world and move into more sensory modes of experience – pictures, symbols, cinema, music etc – which might give us more of a "feel" for this country. This includes what you will forgive me for calling "experiential" methods of "knowing".

This section is the bridge between the two parts of the guide - dealing with more "anthropological" aspects….

I first started coming here in 1991 (an amazing 8 month assignment for the WHO in all of recently "liberated" countries).

My Romanian week took me in an ambulance to places such as Alba Iulia, Brasov and Iasi and meetings with University Heads, Church dignitaries and various types of politician. I returned a year later for a year's project in the Prime Minister's Office and bought my mountain house in 2000 - but it is only in the last 5 years that I have stayed for extensive periods of time.

After 7 years of working in Central Asia, I felt in 2007 that it was time to see how reform was dealing with central Europe and took an initial project in Bulgaria – designed to help develop the system of training for local professionals who were trying to implement the impenetrable requirements of EU membership which are placed on municipalities and business. I had come from 5 years of advising the Presidential Offices in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan and 2 years of working with municipalities in Kyrgyzstan – so I was curious to see what the new "Balkan intrigues" looked like. In Sofia it seemed to be a strange mixture of local power systems (money/crime); EC diktat; and Italian and Russian money….

Then, in 2009, I had the chance to experience Romanian systems for the first time for 20 years when I was offered a year's assignment with the National Institute of Administration (INA). I could take the poisonous mixture of Romanian and European systems for only one month!

Sorin Ionitsa is a Romanian policy analyst who has described the mix very well in his paper Poor Policy-Making. parts of which I have included in the Annexes. In that paper, he dryly comments – "*Even before Communism, to be an official, a state employee or a lawyer was much more common among the national bourgeoisie than to become an industrialist or merchant: because, as a reflection of pervasive rent-seeking, political entrepreneurship was much more lucrative than economic entrepreneurship*"

Let's start with a conversation with an American historian who was also a diplomat in Romania in the 1980s and an academic there in the 2000s.

In this clip Ernest Latham argues that the country lacks what he calls "an urban experience" – Bucharest being almost the only city founded by indigenous Romanians as distinct from Saxons, Hungarians and Jews (I'm always uneasy about attributing nationality to the latter)
This, obviously, is a pretty touchy subject so let's say – with British understatement – that this is an "interesting" take!

Carmen Fiman painted a good picture in her "Surrealism and Survival" essay - from which I quote in greater length below -

The symbol of Romania is the peasant. Looking old and wise, or just tired, dressed in a long fur coat, a shepherd scrutinizing the horizon, or just searching for his magical ewe or lamb, he represented the essence of this place – agrarian by excellence, resilient over time, the iconic image of stability and persistence.
One of the dramatic consequences of the Communist ideology in Romania was the destruction of the villages along with their traditions and customs, and the humiliation of the peasant torn from his natural surroundings, forced to leave his land, his church and his belief and to move to the outskirts of the big cities, in order to work in socialist mammoth factories, where he lost his ancestral identity, where he felt depersonalised and estranged from his native environment……..

Romania can be described as a country rich in ethnic diversity striving to preserve its uniqueness at the crossroads between the East and the West, between the Balkans and the Orient, with a people that displays a Mediterranean temper in the South combined with Balkan customs, a Slavic pace in the Northeast, or a rigorous diligence in Transylvania.

7.2 Surviving

One of the chapters of Inner Lives of Cultures, mentioned at the start of this briefing is "Surrealism and Survival in Romania" by Carmen Fimen (at pp 177-193), describes life under communism and is worth quoting at length –

Ways of Coping*….*

We lived under one of the toughest dictatorships in Europe, watched by the secret police, and isolated from the rest of the world. We did our best to survive within a closed society. One way was to get together in groups selected on the basis of affinities which had to do with art, literature, philosophy or simply a few common tastes.

Our lives were simple. We didn't care about cholesterol, pollution or the negative effects of smoking; nor did we worry about the dangers of obesity, drug addiction or violence. We didn't need anti-depressants, although we had good reasons to take Prozac. No one sought psychoanalysis, therapists or shrinks, although we had good reason to be depressed. When you live in a cave, with few choices, all sorts of self-defence mechanisms spring into action. One is interpersonal communication. In a society like ours, communication involved sincerity and spontaneity. People talked loudly, gesticulated profusely and even cursed often; they lived and hated passionately. They used to make grandiose plans in the evening, over many glasses of alcohol, only to discard them as impossible to achieve the next morning. And yet these people were authentic in their despair and passionate in their fantasies.

Paradoxically, in such an abnormal and repressive society, they were anything but alienated. In fact, they practiced a type of group therapy, unorganised and without clear goals. In that Balkan atmosphere, their conversations in the shadow of ruined 'little Paris' were delightful, a never-ending chatter, spectacular and useless, over full ashtrays and cheap alcohol, all-night-long discussions and hung-over mornings. They weren't in a hurry to get anywhere. They had no place to go.In the opaque world of Communism, time meant nothing. The dictatorship seemed permanent. To keep our sanity, we had only the refuge of books and an inner language of freedom, parallel to the official one. Words had no power to change our destiny, but they could keep us sane. And our soul? Nobody mentioned it, but it was there all along, in the arabesques of our lamentations, in the last cigarette butts crushed at sunrise against the background of a hideous smoking factory at the outskirts of the city.

People learned not to trust the official language in the press, in schools, and at work. Most of them doubted any official political speech and cultivated disbelief and irony as part of their self-defence mechanism. Everybody was aware of living in a 'make-believe' world, fully aware of its duplicity. As writers, the metaphor was our main weapon to evade political censorship.
Although biographies and memoirs were almost impossible to squeeze through the tight net of censorship, poetry and prose could be enveloped in a protective shell of metaphor and allegory, esoteric enough to get the forbidden truth out regardless of whether it was about political or social reality. Communism disregarded metaphors. It identified the soul as its main enemy. Demolishing churches and synagogues was not enough. That merely eliminated places of worship, but they also got to destroy the metaphors of spirituality, making them appear weak and misleading.
Another source of refuge was humour, carelessness or frivolity. In spite of our bad times, we managed to maintain our sense of humour. There was no shortage of jokes in those days, which acted like some sort of a safety valve. We seemed to be a surreal people who could not stop laughing, even while we were slowly dying! We were like patients in a militarised hospital, subjected to a utopian treatment for an imaginary disease, feeling both guilt and absolution. Guilt, because of the cowardice each one of us had to practice; absolution, because the collective farce so perfectly played on us.

After Communism.
.....After the fall of Communism, other clichés became associated with Romania, describing a country still haunted by the ghosts of the Communist nomenclature which was soon back in power, by stray dogs, orphans, AIDS victims infected by contaminated blood which they had received in hospitals, human traffic, impoverished Roma population, pickpockets and thieves making headlines in the Western media.
I'm not fighting against clichés. They are based, after all, on reality, however exaggerated or generalised it might be. But Romania, despite all its problems, continued to produce an intense cultural life. Even during the totalitarian era, culture had symbolised resistance within the Communist censorship, defence from the absurdity of the system and an underground form of freedom. In the late 1980s, a visitor from England remarked in awe: 'This country looks surreal to me. You have nothing to eat but wait in line for hours to buy theatre tickets and books…' It was our form of survival, sanity and refusal to submit to alienation.

7.3 How the Academics see Things

I suggested in the Introduction that all of us view other countries through various filters – and the biggest of these are our own (unquestioned) assumptions about how people (do and should) act and speak. This well-quoted table gives the general idea – with the columns indicating first what the Englishman says; the second, what he means; and the final one, the meaning that is taken by the listener.

There are quite a few academics who write profusely about such cultural matters – using complicated concepts such as "power-distance" to try to differentiate clusters of countries.

A Romanian academic (Prof Hutu) applies here the de Hofstede concepts.

Key aspects of Romanian national culture

- *Highly conservative culture, based on high context, myths, legends, heroes, superstitions, etc.;*
- *short term orientation;*
- *The belief that there must be someone —up there to make decisions, to control, and to judge what is Right or Wrong, combined with fear to stand for personal opinions and beliefs (high power distance), and strong dichotomy between formal and informal communication;*

The research identified several additional features specific to organizational culture in the geographic area represented in the studies:

- *The idea that —the people are lazy and willing to cheat, which leads to a lack of cooperation and openness and a need for strict survey systems;*
- *The idea that —the law is only for fools, determined by corruption at all levels and low trust in law enforcement systems (police, justice);*
- *Secretiveness as a residual of the former political system (fear to communicate information necessary for the development of a normal economic activity sometimes reaches extreme levels);*
- *Coexistence of conservatism, mainly manifested in relation with basic assumptions, traditions and rites, and inconsistency in dealing with more overt dimensions, such as norms, objectives, plans and procedures.*

The research data revealed that the cultural environment at the organizational level emphasizes a strong contradiction between the formal, declarative level and actual practice. Despite the fact that there are official sets of values recognized and recommended as important, other, hidden values are actually used in practice. This fact underlines once again that organizational culture in Romania still carries on the scares of communism, many of them stressing already existing traits of the national background with a negative impact against the demands of competition in times of global recession.

7.4 A contemporary Cultural Take

But this piece perhaps puts the issues most succinctly -

Everyone is an expert and is completely unwilling to admit, in front of the others, that they don't have a solution to any problem. A garage mechanic will not admit that your car's problem is beyond him until you retrieve it from him, not repaired, after three weeks.
The Prime Minister will tell everyone that the economic crisis will be resolved in a matter of weeks even when he knows that not one single person in the country believes him.
A potential business partner will confirm, while smiling, that your agreement will be signed in days even when he knows that his boss said 'no' weeks ago. This is not lying or the symptoms of an insatiable desire to give you good news, it is simply a function of not being able to admit ignorance or failure.

If you are fortunate enough to drive in Bucharest you will witness what is probably the clearest evidence of mass individualism in global human society. Romanian people, of all shapes, sizes, social and educational backgrounds and income brackets will do things in their cars that display a total disregard for sanity and other drivers.

Manoeuvres such as parking in the middle of the street, u-turning on highways without any warning and weaving between lanes in heavy traffic at 150 kilometers per hour are commonplace and point to an extreme lack of concern for the safety or even the simple existence of others.

The next time you are waiting to get on a plane at Henri Coandă airport, take a little time to observe how queuing in an orderly and effective manner is clearly regarded as an affront to the sovereignty of the Romanian individual. Enjoy the spectacle of the pushing, shoving and general intimidation that follows the arrival of the airport staff to supervise boarding.

Outside of their core social networks Romanians closely follow the rule stating that it is every man, woman and child for themselves. This is a contradiction that confuses many foreigners as they watch people that they know display complete respect, loyalty and extraordinary generosity to their family and friends while at the same time utterly disregarding and exuding contempt for everyone else. Foreigners tend to be more 'democratic' about their relationships, being more sceptical about the 'enforced' closeness of their families and often listening, with greater interest, to the opinions of complete strangers. I have often seen spouses loudly ignore each other while assigning the status of Einstein to someone they have never met before in their lives.
There is an opinion poll, published in early 2012, showing that around 90 percent of the Romanian population regards almost all of their compatriots as utterly untrustworthy and incompetent. At the same time 90 percent, possibly the same 90 percent, see themselves as being absolutely beyond reproach. This is clearly an extreme response no matter how you view it and provides evidence of an extraordinary and troubling imbalance within the generality of Romania's social relationships.

8. Romanian Painting

Having been so bowled over in recent years ago by Bulgarian realist painting of the first part of the 20th Century that I produced a booklet about it, events seemed to conspire against a similar appreciation of Romanian painters of the same period.
Bulgarian galleries and books, somehow, are just more evident and accessible in Sofia than their equivalents in Bucharest

I have, however, made some effort in the past year to track down the full beauty of the Romanian painting which were in such evidence a hundred years ago (it's amazing how many superb Romanian painters were born between 1870 and 1880!). Many were secreted in private collections during the Communist period – some even before then eg the Zambaccian collection.

And quite a few of the nouveaux riches after 1989 have developed their own private collections - which have been captured in a huge book in 2012 by painter Vasile Parizescu. The story of art collection in Romania over the ages is well told in the link.
One of the collectors is "businessman" Tiberiu Posteinica who was so brazen as to produce a sizeable book to glorify his ill-gotten collection. I was lucky enough to find a copy in a second-hand bookshop here.

The national art galleries here (and various publishing houses) have, of course, published various books on Romanian painters but making no concessions in recent years to those without the Romanian language and focusing on a favoured few such as Nicolae Grigorescu (1838-1907), Theodor Amman (1831-1891), Camil Ressu (1880-1962) and Theodor Pallady (1871-1956).

Things were actually better in the 1960s when the Meridian publishing house produced a great series of affordable booklets on Romanian painters (with attractive pasted prints).

From the second-hand bookshops here I have slowly acquired many of these – eg Nicolae Darescu (1883-1959), Stefan Popescu (1872-1948 one of my real favourites), Jean Steriadi (1881-1956) and Josef Iser (1881-1958).

Two great websites have allowed me to access the Romanian painting tradition – a personal one; and ArtIndex, a Romanian Art Review which has entries for 2,000 painters – arranged alphabetically.

With this assistance, I now have a list of 75 classic Romanian painters – in a printout of 400 plus pages. My initial selections have been posted here.
In addition, the Artmark Auction House sends me, at least every season, a large catalogue with reproductions and details of every painting they are offering….

Apart from the artists already mentioned, the following are also superb -

- Artachino Constantin (1870-1954). One of my real favourites!
- Baltatu Adam (1899-1979)
- Baltazar Abgar (1880-1909)
- Bassarab Louis/Ludovic (1866-1933)
- Dimitrescu Stefan 1886-1933
- Grant Nicolae (1868-1950) Born of a Scottish father who moved here
- Mutzner Samual (1884-1959)
- Popp Ludeosanu-Aurel (1879-1960). A great socialist from Satu Mare who got himself into some hot water during the Budapest Soviet!
- Strambu Hippolytus (1871-1934). Incredible painter!!
- Vermont Nicolae (1866-1932)
- Verona Arthur (1868-1946)

Balcik and Baie Mare were two very active artists' colonies in the inter-war period – the former only for a short period, until its absorption into Bulgaria; the latter since 1919 when it changed its name from Nagybany.

Bucharest hosts not only two very large national art galleries but several delightful smaller ones, housed in small palaces eg that of the Theodor Amman Museum
Sculptor Constantin Brancusi (1876-1959) rates with painter Grigorescu, poet Eminescu and composer Enescu as the four greats of Romanian culture

Caricatures and Cartoons

The picture Wikipedia paints of the art critic, collector, agitator and cartoonist Alexandru Bogdan-Pitesti (1870-1922) suggests an interesting era!
Steriadi was one of several painters who indulged in that same period what I consider to be the noble art of caricature.
In modern days Dan Perjovski is a good exponent of the line cartoon.
Tudor Banus has an international following – his complex, baroque creations remind us of Durer or Archimboldo.

Contemporary art

I am not a fan of contemporary art so do not go out of my way to look at the current scene in whatever country I find myself. There is so much hypocrisy, hype and rubbish involved. A Brit did a little book on the contemporary scene a few years back - "100 to Watch – Directory of Romanian Contemporary Artists" (2009)
And one blogger did a post on one modern painter to which she had been drawn here.

Two websites giving a sense of the contemporary scene are - here and here.

9. Photographs and Buildings

Photographs

are perhaps the most immediate and obvious way in which we gain impressions (true and false) of a country – whether facial types, clothes, geographical features, buildings or pastimes…. Just think of the classic portrayals of the rich and poor in mid 20th century Britain – the first with their suits and mansions; the second in their rags in streets…… Romanian photography is well-developed – Emanuel Tanjala is one of their ranks who published last year a delightful Diary with black and white photos – "Jurnalul unui Fotograf" - which expresses great humanity. The publication was celebrated by Humanitas at an event which is captured in this photographic blogpost.

Several well-known photographers have produced excellent albums on the various parts of the country eg Florin Andreescu , Georg Avanu and Dan Dinescu. I have already mentioned the latter's illustrations of the book Transylvania

The book's illustrations more than live up to the text: you get sweeping, panoramic images of mountains and shepherds, but also more unusual photos of daily life (for instance, a close-up of the shepherd in one of the panoramic views, in traditional shepherd dress, dialing a number on his mobile), picturesque images of mountains, trees, whole villages covered in snow or emerging from the fog, in the twilight of sun-set or dawn as well as, for example, a picture of a man trying to restrain his horses on a muddy village road. It is clear that the author and the photographer love the place, and I wouldn't be surprised if by the end of the book you too will love it……

…..here are subtly colored landscapes, touched with winter frost or first snow, with shepherds and flocks of sheep, old traditional wooden churches, Romanian peasants walking down muddy roads in traditional costume. A Saxon woman shows off her treasured keepsakes and wears traditional Saxon black frock and white blouse, black headscarf. A rosy-cheeked grandmother leads her horse through a field. Gypsies in colorful garb sell a copper distilling kettle for making plum brandy. Villagers engage in a parade-celebration of the "festival of the plough."
The author Bronwen Riley tells of her adventures traveling and visiting among the people of this region of Romania which she describes as one of the last bastions of a traditional way of life, which is quickly disappearing, in its demise since the

Romanian Revolution in 1989. "The culture that sustained this life for a thousand years, which survived the invaders, two world wars and Communism, has almost vanished in one generation."
Bronwen tells many interesting tales of her visits with villagers, and the stories they tell, such as of the Saxon woman who dressed her up in traditional Saxon dress, and wasn't satisfied until every wisp of her hair was tucked in. Or the tales of village witches who, when threatened by the tax collector to pay tax for their work, duly respond that they have now put lifelong curses on said tax collectors.
…….villages of Viscri and Meschendorf (where a sand clock on the pulpit in the Evangelical church keeps the length of the sermon in check), Boian with its wall paintings of impaled martyrs, and many more.
From Amazon reader comments

Encouraged by the images from an impressive book (which won the award for the most beautiful book of 2013) -*Demolished Bucharest 1985 - unofficial archive images* edited by Serban Bonciocat et al - we took a stroll recently in the area on the edge of the ginormous People's Palace where there are still, amazingly, buildings which survived the megolomaniac onslaught on this central area.
This post from the Bucharestian blog (see Blog section) documents the destruction Ceaucescu inflicted on the city in the 1980s

The Only Romania website has a collection of wonderful black and white photographs of Bucharest - including these of the 1970s before the demolitions – and some equally rare photos of the bustle of the city in 1985 and shots from a Swedish visitor in the mid 1970s
There is also a collection of amazing photos in Pandele - secretive shots of the 1980s. Taking pictures was simply forbidden in those days and Pandele risked prison by snapping street scenes secretly.

The images encouraged me to buy the 2012 book Bucharest's Photographer - Carol Popp de Szathmari (2012) De Szathmari was born in 1812 (died in 1887) and was one of the world's first photographers.

But my real find, just as I was completing this guide, was a website called Costica Acsinte Archive celebrating the work of a man born in 1897 who was a war photographer in the First World War and then set up shop in the town of Slobozia. The site is a marvelous record of life in those times – and encourages readers to write stories around particular photos!!

They are a great addition to the library I am slowly developing of images of both Bucharest and of Romania eg The Discreet charm of Bucharest by Dan Dinescu (2008); and Bucharest Architecture and Modernity – an annotated guide (2009) by Mariana Celac et al. I was also lucky to find recently a copy of photos taken of Romania in 1958 by a famous Austrian photographer – Inge Morath
And this dramatic photograph is taken a lovely book The Colour of Hay

Fascinating black and white photos can be found of Bucharest in the "olden days" and also at Bucharest Unknown

And this is a great collection of photographs of dowdy Bucharest
Finally some nice photographs celebrating Romania's landscape

Buildings

Architecture makes an impact here – from the wooden churches and painted Monasteries of Maramures to the fortified Churches and solid medieval Saxon farmhouses of Transylvania; and classic bourgeois townhouses of Wallachia. This is the site of a Romanian organization for Monuments.

The Forgotten Monument's project

This was started in 2008 at the Faculty of Architecture of the 'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urbanism, in Buchares. Its aim was to create an archive of images and information about the stately homes in Transylvania, Banat, Crișana și Maramureș – see for a recent update
More than 300 student volunteers contributed to the creation of this archive. After having identified these buildings and ensembles in the List of Historical Monuments, the students travelled the country in search of them. More than 350 such monuments were photographed and mapped in 4 campaigns, during 2008 and 2011.
I am indebted for this information to Sarah in Romania one of the great blogs about things Romanian

The first part of the 20th century saw a distinctive school of Romanian architects which made (and still make) Romanian provincial towns visually very interesting.
Toma Socolescu's work can be seen both in Ploiesti (where he was born in 1883 to a family of architects). A doctor who is passionate about things related to Prahova County has a marvellous page on him - and his works. Use the google translate facility and you will get the info - but the pics are great! During the communist period was persecuted by the Security (as other important families in Romania), family property being confiscated, was evicted from his home at PAULESTI, was forced to move to Bucharest, where he worked until the age of 74 years.

One of the great creators of Romanian architecture, Demetrius Berechet Ionescu (1896-1969). Chief architect of the Romanian Patriarchate between 1930-1963, he created numerous works of architecture in the country and abroad, The exhibition shows some of the approximately 80 public

buildings, private homes, and funeral memorials, designed or arranged by architect Berechet in his hometown Campulung Muscel between 1925-1960.

A lovely book about the vernacular architecture in one part of Romania entitled Stone. traditional houses in northern Oltenia was published recently by Luiza Zamora (design and text) and Serban Bonciocat (photo), prepared with the support of the Union of Architects of Romania impeccably printed and entitled It is the second of the series after "Wood. Churches in Northern Oltenia" published in 2010, conducted by the same team.
But the album is a cry of despair and a serious warning to do something as they can to save at least part of a heritage which is in danger of complete destruction.
"Never mind that old house with thick walls kept warm air in winter and cool in summer, it was a monument to functionality and natural living." The album is divided into two sections. "Outside" treat outside the house, with all his goods household or village to which it belongs. Chapters describe in detail the architecture and dwelling - house, gates, porch, outhouses and the hill. "Inside" the fireplace, beautiful living room and cellar.
The Eminescu Trust is perhaps the best-known organization trying to help restore the various building treasures – from palaces to rural houses – and also developing traditional building skills.

Historical Houses of Romania is an excellent site maintained by Valentin Mandache – who organises walks around the architectural jewels of Bucharest.

At a more mundane level, Made in Romania is actually a design site which has some great photos of modern Romanian buildings.

10. Cinema

A few months back I viewed a tough portrayal of contemporary Romania - Child's Pose which received the top award at this year's Berlin Film Festival but which we found a bit too close for comfort.

One cold evening in March, Barbu is tearing down the streets 50 kilometres per hour over the speed limit when he knocks down a child. The boy dies shortly after the accident. A prison sentence of between three and fifteen years awaits. High time for his mother, Cornelia, to intervene. A trained architect and member of Romania's upper class, who graces her bookshelves with unread Herta Müller novels and is fond of flashing her purse full of credit cards, she commences her campaign to save her lethargic, languishing son. Bribes, she hopes, will persuade the witnesses to give false statements. Even the parents of the dead child might be appeased by some cash.
Călin Peter Netzer, the film's director, portrays a mother consumed by self-love in her struggle to save her lost son and her own, long since riven family. In quasi-documentary style, the film meticulously reconstructs the events of one night and the days that follow, providing insights into the moral malaise of Romania's bourgeoisie and throwing into sharp relief the state of institutions such as the police and the judiciary.

A detailed review of the film can be read here. It is a good example of the strength of familial loyalty in the country (see Annexes for more on this theme)
The film represents the new wave of Romanian films which have been coming out in the past 5-6 years and have attracted a lot of attention eg this recent New York Times' piece.

The emptiness of authority is an unmistakable theme in the work of nearly all the younger Romanian filmmakers. Doctors, grandiose television hosts, swaggering bureaucrats - all display a self-importance that is both absurd and malignant. Their hold on power is mitigated sometimes by their own clumsiness but more often by unheralded, stubborn acts of ordinary decency. An ambulance technician decides to help out a suffering old man who is neither kin nor especially kind; a student stands stoically by her irresponsible friend; a militia officer, in the middle of a revolution, goes out of his way to find and protect an errant, idealistic young man under his command. There is almost no didacticism or point-making in these films, none of whose characters are easily sorted into good guys and bad guys. Instead, there is an almost palpable impulse to tell the truth, to present choices, conflicts and accidents without exaggeration or omission.

This is a form of realism, of course, but its motivation seems to be as much ethical as aesthetic, less a matter of verisimilitude than of honesty. There is an unmistakable political dimension to this kind of storytelling, even when the stories themselves seem to have no overt political content. During the Ceausescu era, which ended abruptly, violently and somewhat ambiguously in December 1989 — in the last and least velvety of the revolutions of that year — Romanian public life was dominated by fantasies, delusions and lies.
And the filmmakers who were able to work in such conditions resorted, like artists in other communist countries, to various forms of allegory and indirection. Both Cristi Puiu and Cristian Mungiu describe this earlier mode of Romanian cinema as "metaphorical," and both utter the word with a heavy inflection of disgust..... I can say, though, that every conversation I had in Bucharest, even the most casual, circled back to the old days, so that I sometimes felt that they ended much more recently than 18 years ago.

And the physical aspect of Bucharest confirms this impression. The busy shopping streets have the usual storefronts — Sephora, Hugo Boss, various cellphone carriers and European grocery chains — and the main north-south road out of town is jammed with Land Rovers and lined with big-box discount stores. Turn a corner, though, or glance behind one of the billboards mounted on the walls of old buildings, and you are thrown backward, from the shiny new age of the European Union into the rustiest days of the Iron Curtain.
The architecture is a jumble of late-19th-century Hapsburg-style villas and gray socialist apartment blocks, some showing

signs of renovation, others looking as if they had fallen under the protection of some mad Warsaw Pact preservation society……

"There is no Romanian film industry." This is not another one of Cristi Puiu's counterintuitive provocations but rather a statement I was to hear again and again in Bucharest as I visited the offices of film schools and production companies, a studio back lot and the headquarters of the National Center for Cinematography (C.N.C.). There was no shortage of industriousness, but Romania lacks the basic infrastructure that makes the cycle of production, distribution and exhibition viable in other countries. What is missing, above all, is movie theatres: there are around 80 cinemas serving a country of 22 million people, and 7 of the 42 largest municipalities have no movie screens at all. (In the United States there are almost 40,000 screens and millions of movie fans who still complain that there is nothing to see).

What Romania does have, in addition to a backlog of stories crying out to be told on screen, are traditions and institutions that give filmmakers at least some of the tools required to tell them. The "dinosaurs" at U.N.A.T.C. take their pupils through a rigorous program of instruction that includes courses in aesthetics and art history and requires them to make two 35-millimeter short films before graduating, one of them in black and white. This kind of old-school technical training, which extends to acting as well, surely accounts for some of the sophistication and self-assurance that Mungiu, Porumboiu and their colleagues display. Not that anything comes easily. The shortage of screens means that the potential for domestic commercial returns is small, and therefore it is hard to attract substantial private investment, either from within Romania or from outside the country.

The scarcity of theaters makes exhibition quotas — which other countries use to protect their film industries from being overwhelmed by Hollywood — untenable. But if there is no film industry, there is at least a Law of Cinematography (modeled on a French statute) that establishes a mechanism by which the state helps finance movie production. Taxes collected on television advertising revenue, DVD sales and other media-related transactions go into a fund, money from which is distributed in a twice-yearly competition. Winning projects are ranked, with the top selections receiving as much as 50 percent of their production costs from the fund.

Film costs tend to be modest — the budget of "4 Months" was around 700,000 euros — and the filmmakers have 10 years to pay back the state's investment, at which point they own the film outright. Many of the filmmakers I spoke to complained about the system. Corneliu Porumboiu, impatient with its slow pace and bureaucratic obstacles, financed "12:08" himself. Shortly before Cannes last year, Cristian Mungiu was involved in a public spat with the C.N.C. that made headlines in the local press. After a dispute with the centre, Puiu circulated a letter pledging never to participate in the system again.

The Annex contains a 20 page article on the Romanian New Wave which gives detailed treatment to the ten most important of the films. And a useful little book on the Romanian cinema is *A Short History of Romanian Cinema* by Marian Tutui (which can usually be found in the Humanitas bookshops).

11. Beliefs

Going by the frequency with which Romanians cross themselves (even when in the trams) as they pass a Church, they are great believers…..
I'm not so sure, however, about their priests. I'm not the only person who has been the subject of hostility from an Orthodox priest when it became clear that I was not of their faith….The "Sarah in Romania" blog tells of a typical encounter
It reminded me of a British journalist's trip around the lands of orthodoxy - Why Angels fell – a journey through orthodox Europe from Byzantism to Kosovo.
And when journalist, Michael Lewis, gave us his insights into the Greek crisis a few years back, he exposed the power and wealth of the Orthodox church there.

The role of religion in the country - is discussed in the link.
The dulcet tones of Daniel, the Patriarch, can be hear often on the radio (not least the church's own Trinitas station) – just one of a multiplicity of money-spinning ventures with which the Church here amasses huge sums of money.
In addition to gifts, the church receives huge subsidies from the state.
Little wonder that pastoral tastes in cars are so luxurious!!

The church's gigantic new cathedral in Bucharest was reported, according to one blog, in 2011 to be costing around 600 million euros
There are apparently a total of 18,300 churches in Romania compared to a derisory 4,700 primary schools. There are only 250 hospitals left after so-called "reforms" were made to be cost-effective rather than efficient. Stories in the press reveal the horrors of people dying on hospital steps and in car parks because hospital doors are firmly closed and ambulances don't turn up. Villagers must schlepp miles to a city hospital, many dying on the way… appalling doesn't quite cover it.
I've been told that it is a symbol of national identity, necessary for moral and spiritual strength. A symbol of national pride and identity? A cross stuck on its roof would perhaps solve the issue and be a lot cheaper, too. As for those who say it has positive public utility, this is doubtful, to say the least.

In the French Ambassador to Romania's newsletter of August 2011, he writes: "*the project is receiving more and more criticism and the Patriarchy's defense is less and less convincing.*" Other people say, "it's a symbol of how religious we are." Rubbish. A symbol of how religious one is is surely reflected in how one lives every-day life, how one relates and reacts to those around you. Corruption, turning a blind eye to the needy and blatant arrogance will not change by walking around this huge cathedral.

It is reported that the cathedral will be the tallest building in Bucharest, with a height of 120m and a width of 70m, dwarfing the Casa Poporului. Please see this VIDEO on the Matache Ultima Ora site - it has been removed from Youtube, incidentally. Take a look also at THIS VIDEO from Deutsche Welle. Who cares about the size? Does one need to have a massive space in which to be at one with God? This is NOT what Christianity teaches. Whatever happened to simplicity and humility? What is this 'fudulie' always having to strive for the biggest, the best, the most expensive and the first in the queue?? Arrogant and bombastic architecture (and it is truly a monstrosity judging from the many photos one can see of it just by goagaling) does NOT reflect the true religious sentiment of the Romanian people, though it DOES reflect the arrogance of the church and the government in general. Orthodox churches are normally small with beautiful, simple icons. One does not spend ages in an orthodox church except perhaps, at festivals or special feast-days. People come and go to pray at a favourite icon, spend a moment in peace and tranquility or light a candle for those loved and lost. It is not supposed to be a museum to feed megalomania and stroke arrogance *dans le bon sens*.
Over the last 20 years, around 4,000 churches have sprung up all over Romania (many of them still unfinished due to lack of funding). This corresponds to ONE church built EVERY TWO DAYS, most of them financed by public money along with donations from church-goers. Why should public money pay for this? Why should people who are against this, who are even agnostic or atheists, end up having to fork out via their taxes when things are tough enough as it is? Who asked them? No one. So much for democracy.

Monasteries such as Vacaresti stand longing for renovation. Do they get it? No. Instead, 600 million euros is thrown into this frankly absurd project that is neither necessary, nor required - at least, NOT RIGHT NOW!
The overwhelming expense of this eye-sore in the Casa Nebunului's back garden is nothing short of an insult in the midst of a serious economic recession where hundreds (though I have read thousands) of Romanians are hungry, cold, denied health care and cannot pay for medical treatment nor medication. It is simply outrageous. While the government continues to close down schools and hospitals due to lack of funds, construction work is progressing at lightening speed - we are told it will be finished in 2014.

Remus Cernea of the Green Party told Deutsche Welle, "We are witnessing a huge waste of tax payers' money. The Romanian Orthodox Church gets twice as much money than culture and research. This will seriously affect the state's budget." And when the state budget is affected, what happens to the people. A cathedral may be seen as feeding the spiritual needs but it doesn't put food in tummies, doesn't buy medication and doesn't keep schools open for the next generation... The message is that it's better to have a religious nation than an educated, intelligent and healthy one.
In a country where, even now in 2011, there are villages without electricity and sanitation, homeless children and dire conditions in orphanages, next to nothing for the mentally and physically handicapped, a necrotic health system, lamentable pensions and a seriously deteriorated education system, that 600 million euros could have been put to better use - a use that would have shown compassion, sense and caring for a nation - a people who deserve far, far better. I find it truly repugnant.

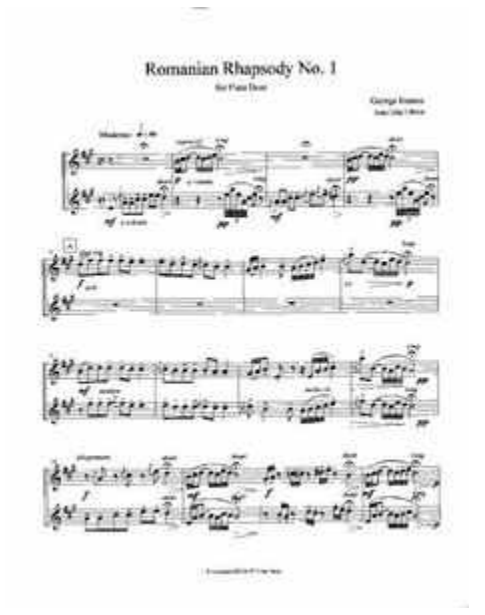
12. Music and Media

12.1 Music

Romania is a highly musical country. Maria Tanase and Angela Gheorghiu are the country's best-known singers – although Virginia Zeani is perhaps the better opera singer. Judge yourself - first from this clip of the latter and then Angela Gheorghiu. Georg Enescu its most famous composer – and the country has boasted many conductors and opera singers – eg Sergiu Celibidache conducting one of Enescu's most famous pieces;

I am particularly grateful to "Sarah in Romania" for her two blogposts about Romanian music – the first on the classical greats

There are few things more soothing than shutting one's eyes and drifting off, bewitched by the spells of Enescu, Dimitrescu, Porumbescu and Negrea, to the swirling mist-enveloped mountain peaks, endlessly rolling hills, babbling brooks, joyous waterfalls, villages trapped in time....
Of course, the most famous piece known by everybody (even those who don't like the classics) must surely be George Enescu's lovely Rapsodia Romana (op.11 in A major), Nr.1.
Enescu wrote two Romanian Rhapsodies (HERE'S the second) which are probably his most well-known and loved compositions. As Yehudi Menuhin said, they are the heart-beat of a country of unequalled beauty, of powerful roots and a noble soul... Even if one has never set foot in Romania, listening to either (or both) of these works is a far better introduction than a guide book. The first chords seem to rise up through your toes and take over your very being... Once you have begun, you cannot escape - you must hear it all the way through to the end, and then, when the last note has evaporated, you sigh an aggrieved sigh and long to hear it all over again.



The two rhapsodies were composed in Paris and premiered together in a concert at the Romanian Athenaeum, Bucharest, which also included the world premiere of Enescu's First Suite for Orchestra, Op. 9 (1903). The Rhapsody No. 1..... Enescu claimed that it was "*just a few tunes thrown together without thinking about it*", but his surviving sketches show that he carefully worked out the order in which the melodies should appear, and the best instrumental setting for each one. It was completed on 14 August 1901, when Enescu was still only 19 years old.
(Image source) This first rhapsody begins with the folk song "*Am un leu şi vreau să-l beau*" (basically translated selon moi as "*I've got a coin, so gimme a drink!*"). It is full of energy, full of exuberance - and soon replaced with a slower melody first introduced by the violins. As the work progresses, this theme grows faster and livelier to climax in a vibrant whirling folk dance.
Wikipedia notes: "*Enescu conducted the First Rhapsody at what proved to be his New York farewell concert with members of the New York Philharmonic on 21 January 1950. The concert was billed as a commemoration of his 60th year as an artist, and in it he appeared as violinist together with Yehudi Menuhin in Bach's Concerto for Two Violins, as pianist in his own Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Piano (also with Menuhin), and as conductor of his Suite No. 2 for Orchestra, Op. 20, and the Rhapsody, which concluded the programme.*"

The next work I'd like to share with you is Ciprian Porumbescu's (1853-1883) beautiful Balada (op.29). Born in Sipotele Sucevei in Bucovina (today in the Ukraine), he was among the most celebrated Romanian composers of his time. See THIS video of his house. His popular works include *Crai nou*, *Trei culori*, *Song for the 1st of May*, and *Serenada*. He also composed the music for *Pe-al nostru steag e scris Unire*, which was used for Albania's national anthem, *Hymni i Flamurit*.
Learning music from his father at an early age, Porumbescu was well prepared for the Vienna Conservatory where he studied under Krenn and Bruckner. He helped establish the Conservatory in Romania for instrumental and vocal music.

For political reasons, he was confined within a specific district and became a leading musical organiser and musician of the area. He conducted, composed and helped to establish a society for students. Subsequently, his music became the rallying cry for young Romanians. Popular music was Porumbescu's inspiration. He composed most of his works in his later years while in service at the church of St. Nicholas, Brasov. There are certainly worse places to be confined, for St Nicholas's is simply lovely and Brasov '*probably the best town in the world*' as it says on the parasols that today adorn str Republicii and Pta Sfatului - no '*probably*' about it, if you ask me!
Balada is Porumbescu's best-known work. Alone in seclusion at Stupca, he meditated, drafted and finished the piece in 1880. It is full of poetry and bitter nostalgia, a mixture of "doina", old dance and song, everything in the environment of serene melancholy.
He died at the age of only twenty-nine in Stupca which was renamed *Ciprian Porumbescu* in his honour.

Next, Constantin Dimitrescu's (1847-1928) Dans Taranesc (op.15) - best heard very loudly!
A superb 'cellist, remarkable pedagogue and a fine composer, Constantin Dimitrescu studied in Vienna, Paris and Bucharest. Born in Blejoi, Prahova County, he was both prolific and versatile, founding the first string quartet in Bucharest in 1880. He won an international prize for composition in Turin (1889) and wrote an impressively vast amount of incidental, symphonic and chamber music. He is especially known for this elegant, supple 'Rustic Dance' for 'cello and piano which he also transcribed for orchestra under the title Danse Villageoise. Constantin Dimitrescu was principal 'cellist in the Bucharest Philharmonic and the National Theatre Orchestra. Later, he conducted both.
This wonderful, light and yet profoundly colourful work transports you at once slap-bang into a Romanian village within the first few bars. The tempo and energy ebb and flow as the dances alter. One mood merges with yet another and then another until you're lost in a whirling haze of skirts, embroidered *iie*, headscarves and*opinci*... Although it is not heady like Porumbescu and Enescu, you have little time to catch your breath before you are whisked off for more.

Grigoras Dinicu (1889-1949) is next on my list. He was a composer and virtuoso violinist and is most famous for his Hora Staccato, as well as for making the Ciocarlia for "*nai*" (a Romanian pan flute) so popular, composed by his grandfather, Angelus Dinicu.
Jascha Heifetz once referred to Grigoraş Dinicu as the greatest violinist he had ever heard.
In the 1930s he was involved in the political movement of the Romanian Rroma and was made honorary president of the "General Union."
Of Grigoras Dinicu, Wikipedia says, "*He was born in Bucharest in a neighbourhood of the lăutari. Because his father was busy with his own activity as a lăutar, he handed him over to "moş Zamfir", an elderly violinist, who taught him his first pieces. He attended the Bucharest Conservatory, where he studied with Kiriac-Georgescu. The most famous of his teachers was Carl Flesch, the violin pedagogue, with whom he studied in 1902. He received a scholarship at the Vienna Conservatory, but was forbidden to attend because of his Rroma origins. This was an episode he never forgot.*"
The Hora Staccato is a short and lightening work for virtuoso violin which has become one of *the* favourites for showing off technical prowess. The piece requires an exceptional command of staccato whilst its very nature demands the pain-staking articulation of every single note. The listener is literally *bombarded* with the vibrance and spontaneity as it hurtles outwards and is, at last, set free. Just listen and you'll see exactly what I mean. Wow!
Dinicu wrote the Hora Staccato for his graduation from the Bucharest Conservatory in 1906, performing it at the ceremony himself.

Finally on my 'favourites' list (and it should have been up at the top rather than all the way down here), I can't possibly end without the Transylvanian born Martian Negrea (1893-1975) and his delightful Isbuc Tarantella from the '*Apuseni Mountains*' suite.
A composer, teacher and conductor from Valea Viilor, Sibiu, his works encompass a kaleidoscope of musical forms and genres with a very personal melodic style.
He studied in Vienna from 1918-1921 where he absorbed a generous amount of the great German masters.
On his return to Romania, he taught theory, counterpoint and chamber music at the Conservatory in Cluj (1921-1941) before moving to the Conservatory of Bucharest (1941-1963). He was awarded the Ordinul Muncii in 1963, which sounds rather ominous, but... just stick to the Tarantella!

The second of the Sarah in Romania blogs

is this very informative one about folk music

I had no idea that there was 'classical' *manele (manele lautaresti)* which has nothing whatsoever to do with its 'modern' counterpart……

How could a beautiful old, traditional style have changed so much that the name *manele*' has ended up as the noise today on the streets of Bucharest and beyond? And how come I had never heard of 'classical' *manele*? *Muzica populara* (Ioana Radu, Ileana Sa aroiu,Gica Petrescu Nelu Ploiesteanu, Mia Braia…) which also includes *muzica de pahar*, yes, I know that. It's what I call 'diddly-diddly' and I love it. It's sometimes rapid and breathless, sometimes sad and tragic, always with an air of melancholia and absolutely paints another world, another time – the *Bucuresti de altadata*. I know the *muzica lăutărească* (Romica Puceanu, for example) and folk music (Maria Tanase with marvellous rhythms that always remind me of a three-legged horse, but as already said, *manele* was *manele*, point barre! Never had I heard 'classic' *manele* mentioned anywhere. So, what exactly is it?

…..One major difference is that 'classical' *manele* are a Turkish-derived genre performed by bands of largely gypsy musicians on traditional instruments - often violin, accordion etc, while the 'modern' *manele* are a mixture of dance, hip-hop/rap, oriental, some Balkanic and strong gypsy influences mostly all electronically synthesised. These songs tell of love but also personal success, wealth, sex appeal and how to get on in the world…

"The first mention of the *lăutari*", says Wikipedia, "is from 1558 when Mircea Ciobanul, the Voivode of Wallachia, gave *Ruste lăutarul* (Ruste the lăutar) as a gift to the Vornic Dingă from Moldavia. In 1775 the first *lăutăreasca* guild (*breaslă*), was established in Wallachia. The *lăutari* were both slave Roma and free Romanians, but the Roma were the majority and preferred for their musical abilities. Over time there were also Jewish and Turkish *lăutari*.

Before the 19th century, Rroma musicians were often employed to provide entertainment in the courts of the princes and boyars. In the 19th century, most of these musicians settled in the rural areas where they sought new employment at weddings, funerals, and other traditional Romanian celebrations. They were called *ţigani vătra* and were Romanian mother-tongue, or sometimes Hungarian."

Wikipedia goes on to explain, "the music of the *lăutari* is called *lăutăreasca* music. There isn't one single musical style of the *lăutari*, the music style varies from region to region, the best known being that from southern Romania. The *lăutărească* music is complex and elaborated, with dense harmonies and refined ornamentations, and its execution requires good technique.

Lăutărească music should not be confused with Romanian *peasant music*. The *lăutari* drew inspiration from all music with which they had contact: the pastoral music of Romania, Byzantine church music and foreign music, most notably Turkish, but also Russian and Western European. While the *lăutar* drew inspiration from local music, they also influenced Romanian *peasant* music."

What Wiki terms '*peasant*' music is also known as 'folk' music and its inflections change depending on the region it is found. I am told that "*during communist times, there was an inflation of popular/folk music leading it to become kitch, such as the music sung by Ion Dolanescu, not too far from the kitch zone of today's "manele".*

We first read of *mane*(singular) and *manele* (plural) in Romanian texts dating back to the late In the 60's a type of *lautareasca manea* appeared by adding texts to the *geampara*, a Turkish *lautaresc*.

The modern *manele* we hear today originated in the '80s and early '90s as underground translations and imitations of Turkish and Arabic songs and were heard sung on the streets of Ferentari, a poor neighbourhood of Bucharest. One of the earliest known *manele* bands was *Azur from Brăila*. A well-known Romanian *manele* singer, Adrian Copilul Minune traces it to a genre known as "*turceasca*" (Turkish). It continued to develop in other parts of Romania (Oltenia and the Banat) from Serbian musical influences.
Singers of the modern style have been accused of plagiarism a number of times, adapting popular songs from Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey, without giving due credit. This has not done Romania's general image any favours.

For examples of 'classical' *manele*, please listen to this beautiful haunting piece by Anton Pann or this one by Tudor Gheorghe where he has the audience laughing. See also HERE.
Wikipedia lists the mid-century gypsy singers Gabi Lunca and Romica Puceanu's notable performers.
Please visit this wonderful site edicated to Romica Puceanu. I did not know that the music she sang was 'classical' *manele*.

Sofia Vicoveanca singer of genuine folk music of Bukovina (North of Moldova, part of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, now part of Ukraine) here. Also here.

The real gypsy music with nothing whatsoever to do with modern manele such as THIS and THIS Irina Loghin is a great singer from Prahova County Fratii Petreus from Maramures has a different sound, because of the instruments used (a "cetera",kind of violin with 2 strings). On the other hand, during communist tmes there was an inflation of popular/folk music and this became kitch too like the one sung by eg Ion Dolanescu.

The music sung by Gypsies is different from "manele" and you can say by the sound which has a certain beat and is very vivid (Goran Bregovici uses some) but you may find differences here and is related with the music sound by lautari as is the band "10 Prajini" coming from a romanian village …..Genuine Gypsy music is here and here.

12.2 Romanian Media

Newspapers
The country has hundreds of titles, as befits an intellectual nation – with many small literary magazines but of course you will be unable to read these since they are in a foreign language. It is, however, a romance language (like Italian) which does make it easier to make inspired guesses… It is, however, in trouble – as this article explains.
I personally like the weekly "Formula AS" - unique in its focus on the Romanian traditional ways eg of medicines and celebration of customs and people. Nothing about politics!

Radio
Romanian radio has some quite excellent programmes which attract faithful followings. Two channels are always in rooms of my mountain house -

- *Radio Romania Cultural* a serious programme with theatre, music and sustained interviews with people of culture of all ages.
- *Radio Romania Muzical;* a nice mixture of words and music – with the schedule in English!

Radio Trinitas; is the Orthodox Church's station – with lots of chanting!

Romanian Television
I try to avoid. There is no TV in the mountain house! Romanian TV state channels still show classic theatre pieces (the dramatist Ion Caragiale is an old favourite), old Romanian movies and profiles of literary and historical figures; and programmes which showcase music. In the 90s Iosif Sava was a favourite of mine – he was host to discussions with invited guests with interludes of live music.
The rest is like Italian television – with bad-mouthed programmes shaking skeletons out of domestic cupboards.

13. Exploring – places, food and wine

13.1 Walking and exploring

Bucharest

There are several excellent guides to the city – so you don't need my help. The best is Romania, Bucharest and Beyond – City Compass 2013 which is freely downloadable. It has become an annual event incorporating therefore the most up-to-date advice on what's worth seeing.
Bucharest in your pocket is also a useful booklet
Although Bucharest is not an attractive city for me – its buildings are pretentious if not aggressive in their opulence – it has (as section 9 mentions) fascinating architecture and many lovely galleries and parks. So it is worth wandering around – as these sites show –

- Bucuresti
- Bucharestian is an ambitious site which offers not only images but other goodies such as these crisp comments on Romanian mores
- Bucharest Tips
- Follow Nirvana;

My attention was also drawn recently to a young American photographer sometimes based here who has produced evocative shots of Bucharest and of Romania

And of, course, you must visit Vlad at The English bookshop!

The Romanian countryside

If you have the chance to travel outside Bucharest, you have to visit Maramures in the north - and Transylvania in the middle. And to stay in a village home – which you can track down on the ANTREC website
That's the way to fill your lungs with fresh air, eat traditional food (and drink) and see wonderful views. The places they have can be seen county-by-county

And if you want to break out into luxury, then don't go to an hotel – choose one of these places

One of several walking tours available actually includes my own village – but it is one which leaves from London..
But this excerpt the googlebook The Mountains of Romania gives a good sense of the area – the Piatra Craiaului is a dramatic range which I view from my rear terrace. "The most dramatic ridge-walk of Romania and one of the most enjoyable of Europe" is praise indeed from a British mountaineer! This site gives some nice pics.
But if you really must visit some cities – and don't know which (apart from Brasov) then have a look at these mini-guides

13.2 Food and Wine

Romanian Dishes, Wines and Customs by Radu Anton Roman is a delightful book.
There is also a nice blog about traditional cooking. And the Spotted by Locals blog gives some eating places eg here.

But nothing beats the home cooking in the mountains of my neighbours – particularly Martisa's cooked cabbage (Varsa Calita cu maliga) – with small portions of the cured pig meat they have been storing after its slaughter at Christmas – and slices of village cheese! Somehow the fresh air and atmosphere make it much tastier than anything else – particularly when drunk with Tuica fiert (the heated local fiery drink with a twist of pepper)
I normally try to avoid salamis these days – but cannot resist the local varieties from nearby Poiana Mereleui (meadow of the apples) which nestles in the foothills of the Piatra Craiului mountain range

A great book (in English) about Romanian wines is Romania; the land of wines (2008) by Valeriu Cotea with illustrations by Florin Andreescu
The Wine of Romania booklet is very informative about the location and types of Romanian wines – and this website good on the individual wines.

I am unusual in straddling Bulgaria and Romania in my living arrangements – at least for the past 5 years. Basically summer here and winter in Sofia – so that gives me a chance to make comparisons (always invidious if not dangerous). I do find the Bulgarian white wine more adventurous than the Romanian (their reds are too sulphurous) and their food much more delicious. But already I have gone too far! Some other dangerous thoughts are on the bloglink.

14. Just the Hors d'Oeuvre!

This has been quite a brisk trip – not much time to pause for a breather let alone make sense of the impressions offered in those links you've clicked on…..My role in these pages has been to act simply as a guide – pointing the way and generally trying not to make observations, let alone judgements (apart from a couple of caustic remarks on easy targets which I couldn't resist and which are easily spotted) . The Annexes offer more of an opportunity for these.

At the start of our little journey, I listed 16 ways of getting to know a country and its people – but seem so far to have covered only about a dozen of them. I also mentioned that I appeared to have forgotten an important way of entering a country's soul – simply walking around and chatting to people (although I did include "conversations" as one of the 16 methods!). The best of our travel writers use this method but my focus on bookshops and art galleries tends to limit such encounters…..
And I love my house in the Carpathian mountains so much – with its library of books, music and amazing views – that I am not tempted even into medieval Brasov all that often to explore - which is very reprehensible given that I have glorious Transylvania right on my doorstep.

Even if I wanted to, I could not really sum this country up. I have known it for 23 years; it has become my home-base – at least, in the past five years, for half of the time.
When you read the older material which can be accessed – text and photographs – you do get a profound sense of the richness of society between 1880 and 1940 – rich in both possessions and characters. The architecture gives a clear sense of it – grand in the cities and individualistic if not eccentric in the towns and villages. Romania has lost a lot since – so many of its writers lost to either persecution or migration; so many of the more recent younger generation seeking their professional rewards abroad….
Despite the almost American nature of the spirit which is evident in the Bucharest streets, on commercial television and in the fixation with flashy cars and speed, the past is still clearly evident – in both good and bad forms.
All countries which were in the area of Soviet influence experienced suffered deprivations and repression – in one degree or another. It would be a bit invidious to encourage a league table of suffering although Ceaucescu's invasion of women's intimacy and the scale of (illegal) abortions that led to must rank as one of the worst measures in post-war Europe – along with the digging of the Danube canal and wanton destruction of villages in the 1980s.
Equally, however, more of us who escaped the post-war communist repression should have the honesty to recognize the undoubted improvements to social life which such regimes generally brought to the life of peasants and workers.

I have learned a lot about the richness of Romanian culture in the few weeks I have been drafting what was originally about

10 pages of blogposts. And I keep on unearthing gems – such as the Slobozia photographer of the early part of the 20th century.
So many lists and hyperlinks can get confusing – so I decided to try to select a dozen or so of the references some of which you might have missed – to your loss. First two introductory freebies -

- "A Cultural Journey" with stunning photographs of Romanian monuments and useful material on prominent Romanians
- Romania, Bucharest and Beyond – City Compass 2013 is a well-produced and useful booklet (of more than 200 pages) for those visiting the country.

Two books from which tasty excerpts have been extracted -

- The Romanian Rhapsody; an overlooked corner of Europe; by D. Fernandez and F Ferranti (2000). A delightful mix of opinionated) text and black and white photographs
- Corridors of Mirrors: The Spirit of Europe in Contemporary British and .Romanian Fiction by Pia Brinziu (2000)

Three celebrations of photography

- The Color of Hay by Katherine McLaughlin (2003) is a photographic account of a two-year stay in the Maramures area
- Transylvania by writer Bronwen Riley and photographer Dan Dinescu 2007).
- Photo archives from the first half of the 20th century - Costica Acsinte Archive

A flavour of local writing – both Romanian and foreign – in

- Bucharest Tales (2011) It contains both poems and prose - all of which can be viewed at the hyperlink in the title with the additional bonus of photographs adorning every page!

and a powerful record of life in Romania is The Eighties in Bucharest published by Martor

Two blogposts about Romanian music – the first on the classical greats the second on folk music here.

Two of Lucian Boia (Romania's greatest contemporary historian)'s key books can be read in full and in English online - Romania; borderland of Europe (2001); and History and myth in Romanian Consciousness (published in Romanian in 2001)

These excerpts from The Mountains of Romania gives a good sense of the area – the Piatra Craiaului is a dramatic range which I view from my rear terrace.

And if you really must visit cities and don't know which (apart from Brasov) then have a look at these mini-guides.

That's just the hors d'oeuvre – now the meal start!!

ANNEXES

Le Monde visits Romanian farmers

The shadow of history – "Poor Policy-making" Sorin Ionitsa

„How the Weak Vanquished the Strong" - Review of T Gallagher 2010 book on Romania and the EU by Christopher Lawson

"Romania; bottom of the heap" – Tony Judt NYRB 2001

"Birth and Death in Romania – in the 1980s"; Pavel Campeanu NYRB

"Romania's Social Network"; Ronnie Smith

"When Cultures Collide"; RD Lewis
New Wave on the Black Sea; M Dawson

Le Monde visits Romanian farmers

"The National Rural Development Programme (NRDP) is coming to your village," announced a poster on the door of the town hall. In a tent at the football stadium six uniformed Europeanisation agents were giving a PowerPoint presentation on financing a dairy farm. Since 2007 Romania has been a beneficiary of the European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which is co-funding the initiative.

The plan is to convert the 3.5 million Romanians who farm less than a hectare of land into entrepreneurs. The number of peasant farmers in Romania has reached a European record — 30% of the economically active population, compared with 28% in 1989. The collapse of Communism and the contraction of the industrial sector sent people back to the land. Property is often divided up among family members, and the average holding is two hectares, compared with 55 in France.

"The farmer we just passed typifies Romanian agriculture. He is uncompetitive," said Garban. "How are you going to break into the European market with just five litres of milk?" His answer would be to attend the NRDP presentation, like the 30 Sercaia residents who had come along. "It's very important to convince opinion leaders. The priest and the primary school teacher have both come," said Garban's colleague, Catalina Musat.

The screen showed the financial operational targets that would allow a farmer to produce 24,000kg of tomatoes in five years in return for an investment of €23,754, of which €7,400 is a non-

repayable government grant. Musat added: "Small farmers are not the potential beneficiaries though. We are aiming this more at people who want to start a business."

'I couldn't care less'

People like agronomist Alexandru Strâmtu, 31, who showed us round his new organic blueberry farm. The EU provided half the funding — €300,000 — and he put up the other half. "I'm in debt but business is going well. I sell all the blueberries to a Portuguese company, which exports them to Germany, Chile. Sometimes I even see my fruit here." But transporting them around the world is surely not very ecological? "Honestly, I couldn't care less."

Just outside Bârla, in the south, Hadi Khoury, 30, the Lebanese managing director of the Haditon group, welcomed us to his farm. He asked us to wear white overalls to prevent contamination of the 120,000 chickens kept in four buildings of the former collective farm (1). In association with 12 other businessmen, mostly from the Middle East, he produces a quarter of all the eggs eaten in Romania. "If you don't have the stamp of the European Union, banks won't even look at you. But if you do, they'll come to you." The EAFRD contributed €1m to the renovation.
"Romania's fantastic," he said. "These ex-Communist buildings cost me next to nothing, I pay my 25 employees very little, and the EU loans are substantial. The only problem is the Poles." They are "unfair competition. They don't have the same hygiene standards, and they get more subsidies than we do. That's the problem with Europe — it's great on modernisation and money, but we are all competing with each other."

The local MP and former secretary of state at the ministry of justice, Theodor Nicolescu, said: "Hadi's success is an example to us all. Thanks to the European Union we are becoming competitive, and we are creating the conditions for the free market to operate and guide people's behaviour."

We spent the evening in a large room with a marble bathroom in a deserted tourist hotel set up with the support of the EAFRD. Garban and Musat said their parents had abandoned the family plot of land to work in the city, as physicists and fashion designers. Nonetheless, the *gospodarie* (house, courtyard, outbuildings and patch of land) remains a fundamental unit of social organisation. The ministry chauffeur, Ion Neagu, said he rented out his family's three hectares to a farmer who was cultivating them in a partnership (2). "I'd rather beg in Paris than work the land," he said, although he dreams of spending his retirement there.
The hotel's cook disagreed: "I farm my *gospodarie*. I have pigs, chickens and cows. How else would I manage on my seasonal wages?" The young waitress said she was glad to get the benefit of her family's plot, but wouldn't dream of picking up a spade herself: "I don't want to do my back in." Attitudes are changing. As families lose interest in working the land, the culture of self-sufficiency is being abandoned.

A struggle to survive

Three hundred kilometres away at Vintu de Jos, far from the NRDP publicity tour, we met Teodor Vingarzan and his son Lucian. They are subsistence farmers, even though they have 50 hectares. Lucian, 34, an engineer, said he would rather work the family farm than earn, at best, €300 a month in town. His youngest son had to emigrate to the US to find work. Lucian invited us into the barn where he milked the oldest cow and handed us a bowl of warm milk.

"There's modernisation for you," he said as he rinsed the bowl at the tap. "We only recently got running water." The Vingarzans use the animal manure to fertilise their cereal crops, which they feed to their cattle. "At the end of the year we have a pig for Christmas, milk and eggs."
It's a struggle to survive, and Teodor blames the EU: "Our local produce is excellent, it is all organic, but we are being crushed by produce from western Europe. They are much more subsidised and mechanised, and so their food is cheaper than ours. I produce everything here but I can't sell it. Go to the supermarket and you will see — the potatoes are German, Italian and French."
Vingarzan once believed in modernisation — immediately after Ceaușescu fell, he visited modern farms in Belgium, France and Austria. He was impressed, and decided to increase his family's land (as land was being redistributed), buy equipment, and prosper. But "I was betrayed."

When I met Achim Irimescu, secretary of state at the ministry of agriculture, in his office in Bucharest, I was surprised to hear him describe the merits of subsistence farming: "It plays a very important social role. This is a large number of people who are not unemployed, and who survive without asking the government for help." This leading member of the Conservative Party does however want to "reintegrate them into the market and make them competitive through EU aid programmes for small farmers ... those who do not take action will disappear, because most are elderly peasants without anyone to pass their land onto. It's the natural solution." But when he described government measures — increasing the minimum size of farm that can apply for funding, making investment conditional on the accumulation of land — and pointed out that these laws have already reduced the numbers claiming direct payments by 300,000, the process did not seem quite so natural.
Competition is the solution advocated in Romania, as it was in France in the 1960s, by agricultural scientists and managers. Cristina Pocol, who teaches rural economy at the University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Cluj-Napoca, listed what she describes as Romania's handicaps, such as small parcels of land, low productivity and low mechanisation. She pointed to an apple orchard seen on television: "The operation is enormous, everything is computerised, the product is competitive. That's the road we should take."

Our produce is too dear

Convinced by travels to China and Germany, Tiberiu Biris tried to go down that road. He set up an apiary cooperative in Blaj, bringing together 200 producers and the latest technology. They package around 400 tons of honey a year, most of which is exported. "Romanians can't buy Romanian honey," Teodor Parau, who owns 200 hives, said with regret. "Our product is too expensive. It is bought by big western importers." The middlemen keep the prices so low that Biris fears he may have to close down the cooperative. The honey is competitive though — around half the price of honey from western Europe.

One of the paradoxes of agrarian liberalism in Romania is that farmers are gaining market share abroad but cannot feed their own people: 70% of food is imported. Driven by the EU, distorted competition has favoured the rise of agriculture for export. In 10 years, almost 1m hectares, or 6.5% of usable agricultural land (3), has passed into the hands of foreign investors. EU subsidies, low property prices and cheap labour are concentrating the business into the hands of a few. In 2013 the government introduced a bill freeing up the sale of land. A year ago the agriculture minister, Daniel Constantin, had to explain why he owed one of the biggest industrial farm owners in

the country several hundred thousand euros (4). Two of Constantin's predecessors, Valeriu Tabără and Stelian Fuia, worked for the multinational Monsanto.

Conflicts of interest are obvious and the political policy clear: in return for agreements signed with the International Monetary Fund in 2009 and 2011, the Romanian government cut 200,000 public sector jobs, reduced public sector salaries by a quarter and raised VAT to 24%. Pay is low and social protection weak, driving Romanians to emigrate. In 2007 around 12% of Romanians worked abroad, mostly in low-skilled jobs.
As if nothing has been learnt, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has brought Romania the same policies adopted by western Europe in the 1960s. But at that time the issue of self-sufficiency had been settled, and the labour market was able to absorb unskilled workers from the countryside, who often did well in the city and moved up the social ladder. The contract the NRDP is proposing today in Romania — that peasants should apply to large institutions for funding — reinforces the established inequalities between small-scale and large-scale farms, and between subsistence farmers and industrial entrepreneurs better placed to get European funds.
This is not the first time rural Romania has seen prophets of "good practice" — from 1948 onwards the Communist Party's propaganda department organised cinema tours of the countryside showing Soviet and domestic films extolling collectivisation.

Grow your own

"It makes me so sad to kill them," said Cezara Fiţ, who teaches the history of music at Alba Iulia secondary school, as she contemplated 30 freshly killed chickens in her garden. Her husband, Iosif Fiţ, a member of the national union of composers, spread their home produce on the table: tomatoes, cucumbers, red wine and plum brandy. "The excellent local vegetables sold by the old ladies at the market are too expensive for us," said Cezara. "The vegetables in the big supermarkets are affordable, but they have come from far away and are full of chemicals."
The couple have been converted to the benefits of farming, which also helps one of their daughters, a teacher whose €180 a month earnings are not enough to pay her bills. Austerity measures imposed by international institutions encourage people to turn to self-sufficiency — in Greece, after the IMF's rescue packages, tens of thousands of city dwellers returned to the land. Composers and teachers work the fields. "Ceaușescu could never have dreamed of this," said Iosif. Disgusted by what he sees as a corrupt political class, he thinks only a Malthusian disaster will sort things out. "A big global catastrophe would kill two or three billion people. The survivors would rebuild the world on more moral principles." Vingarzan would like to see the return of royalty. Ramona Dominicioiu and Attila Szocs, activists with Eco Ruralis, the only Romanian organisation to defend small peasant farmers, try to raise funds to save tomato seeds and reject all politicians as corrupt.

Corruption, condemned by everyone, including President Traian Băsescu, who has made it one of his main concerns, makes it hard to see how the public authorities can find a solution; it also masks policies put in place for personal enrichment. The European Commission scolds Romania for how it uses EU funds, but does not question the course it is taking: "Membership of the European Union ... has been accompanied by extensive reforms which have contributed to the modernisation of the country, and Romanian citizens have been able to benefit from this," said the Commission's president José Manuel Barroso (5). The IMF believes the agreements it signed with Romania have been "crowned with success" (6).

Such brilliant political success was no doubt behind the appointment of Romania's former agriculture minister Dacian Cioloș to the post of European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development in 2009, where he has just renegotiated reform of the CAP. Romanian peasants do not see this as a reason to be proud.

(1) Collective farms were broken up following the 1991 land reform, mainly by liquidising their assets.
(2) Passed in 1991 to counteract the parcelling out of agricultural land following the end of collectivisation, the agricultural companies law allows several forms of partnership: commercial companies, family associations and agricultural companies — recognised legal entities with a variable number of partners.
(3) Judith Bouniol, "Scramble for land in Romania: Iron fist in a velvet glove" (PDF), Transnational Institute, January 2013.
(4) Attila Szocs, "Scandal hits Romania's newly appointed Minister for Agriculture", Arc2020, 6 February 2013.
(5) Communiqué from Romania's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bucharest, 2 December 2012.
(6) "La Roumanie redemande une cure de FMI", Le Monde.fr (with AFP), 16 July 2013.

Annex 2;

Romania's Social Networks

Unlike in the West where most people maintain very clear distinctions between their private and working lives, many Romanians closely combine their business, social and family time. They do business mostly with people in their social network – extended family, friends and those recommended to them by friends and children of friends who need help with their education and in the job market. So Romanian business networks are invariably made up of spouses, in-laws, brothers and sisters, cousins and best friends from school and faculty and their respective families. In this way strong bonds of trust are created within the network that are generally life-long

Business cold calling in Romania is, therefore, a complete waste of time. If you are seeking new business by trying to contact decision-makers in a Romanian company by phone or e-mail, you will fail. Subordinates will not forward your messages and your calls and e-mails will go unanswered.

You will have a far greater rate of success if you spend a lot of time thinking of how to meet your target either by attending events that you know will also be attended by him/her or getting close to people you know may already know him/her. Romania has a population of nearly 20 million but relatively few of them are business decision makers and because of the structure of social networks, you will be genuinely amazed by how relatively easy it is to meet someone who knows how to get in touch with your target.

So, don't waste time doing the things you may have done back home. Forget shiny brochures and carefully targeted proposals sent by e-mail. Take steps to be recommended to your target by someone whom he/she trusts and then meet him/her personally.

On the other hand all people set outside the social network are never trusted and where trust is broken within a network the consequences are also life-long. You must therefore understand that once you have disappointed or let down a customer or breached a friend's trust in Romania, you will never win them back. You will be expelled from their network.

Beyond the core social network, Romanian social and business behaviour can be described as intuitive, vivacious, romantic, destructively egotistical, hopelessly optimistic and often centred on money beyond all other considerations. None of these characteristics lend themselves easily to teamwork and Romanians are therefore incredibly individualistic.

You can easily observe this when you see a group of people gathered in your office discussing a project or a particular business problem. Everyone will be talking at the same time, absolutely no-one will be listening; because when switched onto individualistic mode, outside of their core social network, every Romanian is unwilling to give way to others that by definition cannot be trusted.

When you see this going on, it is best to go and make some coffee and get a summary when it's all over. If you try to join in, you won't be listened to either but you may be asked to be a referee; remember arguments in the school playground?

Everyone is an expert and is completely unwilling to admit, in front of the others, that they don't have a solution to any problem. A garage mechanic will not admit that your car's problem is beyond him until you retrieve it from him, not repaired, after three weeks.

The Prime Minister will tell everyone that the economic crisis will be resolved in a matter of weeks even when he knows that not one single person in the country believes him.

A potential business partner will confirm, while smiling, that your agreement will be signed in days even when he knows that his boss said 'no' weeks ago. This is not lying or the symptoms of an insatiable desire to give you good news, it is simply a function of not being able to admit ignorance or failure.

If you are fortunate enough to drive in Bucharest you will witness what is probably the clearest evidence of mass individualism in global human society. Romanian people, of all shapes, sizes, social and educational backgrounds and income brackets will do things in their cars that display a total disregard for sanity and other drivers.
Manoeuvres such as parking in the middle of the street, u-turning on highways without any warning and weaving between lanes in heavy traffic at 150 kilometers per hour are commonplace and point to an extreme lack of concern for the safety or even the simple existence of others.

The next time you are waiting to get on a plane at Henri Coandă airport, take a little time to observe how queuing in an orderly and effective manner is clearly regarded as an affront to the sovereignty of the Romanian individual. Enjoy the spectacle of the pushing, shoving and general intimidation that follows the arrival of the airport staff to supervise boarding. Even while watching an international rugby test match you will only occasionally see the same intense level of barely controlled aggression.

Outside of their core social networks Romanians closely follow the rule stating that it is every man, woman and child for themselves. This is a contradiction that confuses many foreigners as they watch people that they know display complete respect, loyalty and extraordinary generosity to their family and friends while at the same time utterly disregarding and exuding contempt for everyone else. Foreigners tend to be more 'democratic' about their relationships, being more skeptical about the 'enforced' closeness of their families and often listening, with greater interest, to the opinions of complete strangers. I have often seen spouses loudly ignore each other while assigning the status of Einstein to someone they have never met before in their lives.
There is an opinion poll, published in early 2012, showing that around 90 percent of the Romanian population regards almost all of their compatriots as utterly untrustworthy and incompetent. At the same time 90 percent, possibly the same 90 percent, see themselves as being absolutely beyond reproach. This is clearly an extreme response no matter how you view it and provides evidence of an extraordinary and troubling imbalance within the generality of Romania's social relationships.
There is a well-known prayer in Romania, which roughly goes: "Dear God, if my goat is so ill that it will die, please make sure that my neighbor's goat dies too."
Think about that. Indeed there is a lot to think about because if you come to Romania to live and work you will have to come to terms with the general population's massive range of contradictions in their combined social and business relationships. It's worth the effort because being cast adrift as a permanent outsider will make your stay in Romania a relatively blank period in your life. That would be a huge pity and a missed opportunity. Let me add that I hope haven't given offence to my many wonderful relatives

Ronnie Smith (in Romania; Bucharest and Beyond; Compass Guides 2013)

Annex 3

Poor management – Why and What to do about it; Sorin Ionitsa

In 2006 Sorin Ionita published a very insightful paper called Poor policy-making and how to improve it in states with weak institutions.

His focus was on Romania but the explanations he offers for the poor governance in that country has resonance for many other ex-communist countries which also experienced Ottoman rule -

- The focus of the political parties in that country on winning and retaining power to the exclusion of any interest in policy – or implementation process
- The failure of political figures to recognise and build on the programmes of previous regimes
- Lack of understanding of the need for "trade-offs" in government; the (technocratic/academic) belief that perfect solutions exist; and that failure to achieve them is due to incompetence or bad intent.
- The belief that policymaking is something being centered mainly in the drafting and passing of legislation.

"*A policy is good or legitimate when it follows the letter of the law – and vice versa. Judgments in terms of social costs and benefits are very rare. This legalistic view leaves little room for feasibility assessments in terms of social outcomes, collecting feedback or making a study of implementation mechanisms. What little memory exists regarding past policy experiences is never made explicit (in the form of books, working papers, public lectures, university courses, etc): it survives as a tacit knowledge had by public servants who happened to be involved in the process at some point or other. And as central government agencies are notably numerous and unstable – i.e. appearing, changing their structure and falling into oblivion every few years - institutional memory is not something that can be perpetuated*"

Ionita adds other "pre-modern" aspects of the civil service – such as unwillingness to share information and experiences across various organisational boundaries.

And the existence of a "dual system" of poorly paid lower and middle level people in frustrating jobs headed by younger, Western-educated elite which talks the language of reform but treats its position as a temporary placement on the way to better things.

The shadow of history

He also adds a useful historical perspective. "*Entrenched bureaucracies have learned from experience that they can always prevail in the long run by paying lip service to reforms while resisting them in a tacit way. They do not like coherent strategies, transparent regulations and written laws – they prefer the status quo, and daily instructions received by phone from above. This was how the communist regime worked; and after its collapse the old chain of command fell apart, though a deep contempt for law and transparency of action remained a 'constant' in involved persons' daily activities. Such an institutional culture is self-perpetuating in the civil service, the political class and in society at large.*

A change of generations is not going to alter the rules of the game as long as recruitment and socialization follow the same old pattern: graduates from universities with low standards are hired through clientelistic mechanisms; performance when on the job is not measured; tenure and promotion are gained via power struggles.

In general, the average Romanian minister has little understanding of the difficulty and complexity of the tasks he or she faces, or he/she simply judges them impossible to accomplish. Thus they focus less on getting things done, and more on developing supportive networks, because having collaborators one can trust with absolute loyalty is the obsession of all local politicians - and this is the reason why they avoid formal institutional cooperation or independent expertise. In other words, policymaking is reduced to nothing more than politics by other means. And when politics becomes very personalized or personality-based, fragmented and pre-modern, turf wars becomes the rule all across the public sector."

Things are not what they seem!

Pre-modern attitudes towards public affairs do not necessarily mean that one has to be poorly educated or anti-Western. Actually, the correlation is weak between clannish behavior and membership to the old regime's ruling class.

The new, post '89 elites, who speak the language of modernity when put in an official setting, can still be discretionary and clannish in private. Indeed, such a disconnection between official, Westernized discourse abroad and actual behavior at home in all things that really matter has a long history in Romania. 19th century boyars sent their sons to French and German universities and adopted Western customs in order to be able to preserve their power of patronage in new circumstances – anticipating the idea of the Sicilian writer di Lampedusa that "everything has to change in order to stay the same".

Social theorists have even explained along these lines why, before Communism, to be an official, a state employee or a lawyer was much more common among the national bourgeoisie than to become an industrialist or merchant: because, as a reflection of pervasive rent-seeking, political entrepreneurship was much more lucrative than economic entrepreneurship.

This also shows why foreign assistance is many times ineffective in these states, and is seldom able to alter
the ways of the locals.

- Identifying "bad guys" or culprits with regard to non- or simulated reforms ignores the structural faults of these societies – and also personalizes forces that are deeply entrenched in society.
- pumping resources through assistance programs without prior analysis of local conditions and networks of influence often ends up not by changing the rules of the local game but, on the contrary, raising the stakes and consolidating existent power groups.

How all this affects current-day processes

Communism has left behind a tradition of policy-making which does not encourage broad or open consultations, the considering and costing-out of alternative courses of action, or a balancing up of trade-offs. Instead, the agenda is set within a close circle of technocrats and is approved by key

political players (who may or may not be the same as those making up the official political hierarchy).

Formal policy laid out at the top is merely a basis for perpetual negotiations – vertical and horizontal – undertaken by public administration and the political system occurring during the implementation stage. Substantial deviations from the original goals are tolerated depending on the informal degree of power of each actor involved. Formal policies do exist, as do other official norms and regulations - but they tend to be more or less fictional, with, many times, public institutions being the first to ignore them.

When such a system is well-entrenched, policies are (i) numerous and volatile, and (ii) designed without regard to feasibility of implementation, as they are not meant to be consistently implemented anyway but to be used instrumentally, that is, as weapons in power struggles among groups.
As already said, interests are balanced out not during the process of persons' reaching a decision, but in the implementation process - and the most valuable asset in this process is a person's control over enforcement mechanisms.
Horizontal accountability bodies – nominally independent institutions, such as the administrative judicial system/public auditors – are thus weak and politicized. This situation comes close to what has been described in development literature as weak governance, and it is arguably an entrenched reality in many transition countries, particularly in those of South-Eastern Europe.

Currently existing, formal and informal public administrative institutions support ongoing corruption.

Public sector corruption in Romania not only consists in using public position for personal gain - it encompasses the widespread infringing of the norms of non-personal involvement and fairness (which should be characteristic of a modern, public service) to the advantage of more powerful groups. Institutional reforms during the transition period did not target this discretion specifically, as civil service reform acts prompted by the European Commission include practically no reward or punishment system to thereby promote a change in administrative culture. However, building transparent institutions and a balanced political system in which no group is able to 'privatize' the administration is the only solution for a problem of poor governance.

Also, incentives to strengthen good public management are generally weak and/or distorted. As in any country, line ministers and other senior political appointees do not appear receptive to new technical approaches that might serve to undermine their own objectives.
Romania lacks a strategic framework for programming and budgeting. The links between policymaking, planning and budgeting remain weak, and there is a weak capacity at the center (for example, in the Ministry of Finance) to assess the appropriateness of proposals coming from line ministries against overall strategic policy objectives. There appears to be an ad hoc rather than cohesive and comprehensive approach to management.

Monitoring, whether for consistency with policy or on actual outcomes and outputs vis a vis targeted outcome and outputs, is also deficient.

There is no functional institutional platform to aggregate different sector-based policy measures, although this has been identified many times as a priority - and a lot of technical assistance was devoted to its creation. The inter-ministerial committees of the cabinet function erratically, failing to address cross-sectoral issues in a systematic way.

Because they are very numerous and fluid, they are not perceived as important by their supposed institutional members, so, many times, junior staff with no decision-making power are delegated to take part.

The sheer amount of the foreign assistance available in the last decade – which has steadily increased, and will increase even more after 2007 – was, in a way, a strain on the capacities of the public sector. The limited strategic capacity that existed in institutions was fully absorbed into the process of programming and running EU projects, and the same happened with the limited financial resources not consumed in current operations.

Authorities struggle constantly with their own limited capacities and budgets in order to be able to consume everything that is allocated, this being a process that is not easy to manage - and which is bound to become even more difficult as the size of Romanian assistance increases over time.

A divide is appearing between public institutions as a result of these developments: on one hand, those performing regular tasks which consume a lot of resources but are not eligible for foreign funding (social assistance, education, health, but also "routine" jobs in other sectors); and, on the other, "innovative" tasks (mainly investments, in eligible sectors) which qualify for extra funding.

What Is To Be Done?

The fundamental point of this report is that constraints on improving of policy management are to be found firstly in terms of low acceptance (of the legitimacy of new, objective criteria and transparency); secondly, in terms of low authority (meaning that nobody knows who exactly is in charge of prioritization across sectors, for example) and only thirdly in terms of low technical ability in institutions

A **demand for good policy identification and evaluation capabilities is more important than the supply of people trained in technical skills such as cost-benefit analyses or budgeting skills**. *If a strong requirement is present – and the first openings must be made at the political level – the supply can be generated fairly rapidly, especially in ex-communist countries, with their well-educated manpower. But if the demand is lacking, then the supply will be irrelevant.*

This is an important thing to note for reformers in this region - measuring the effects of policies is crucial for accountability and for strengthening the weakest link of the policy cycle in the region: getting feedback from implementation and using it to adjust programs.

Nothing focuses the attention more of public players than someone 'keeping the score' on what they do. In other words, what is not measured does not improve.

Governments should -

- Admit that it has a problem with the policy process and recognize its real nature (skewed rules of the game, opacity and a lack of incentives, a dual bureaucracy); with some help from outside, this can be done;
- Be willing to spend some political capital on a crucial task that cannot be fixed by merely throwing (donors') money at it, and when it cannot be delegated to junior ministers or technical advisors; the top political level must be involved, and be seen to be involved;
- accept to open up its own internal processes, wherever possible, in order to create incentives for change and a real drive for action in the administration;

Independent actors (think tanks, NGOs, media) should:

- Regard themselves not only as sources of expertise but, more importantly, as enablers – agents working to change the political environment in which public officials operate, by measuring the effects of policies, making results public, and unleashing the natural pressure of the public to support change; this may at times mean confrontation - not only friendly advice;
- Identifying good performers and poor performers, and morally rewarding the first; across-the-board criticism ("nothing works") is not going to change the situation but only encourage the adverse selection of poor performers in the public sector;
- Ultimately, the public should be able to distinguish among poor policy performances - and penalize them politically, as this is the only thing that elected officials are likely to see and understand.

International partners should:

- Dedicate a small portion of their efforts to building up transparency and accountability mechanisms so as to assess what is going on in key areas of government (i.e. not "information offices" funded by specific donors and attached to institutions but, rather, tools via which to make transparent the inner functioning of the public sector, primarily in decision-making and resource allocation processes);
- Avoid strengthening the existing tendency of government to keep important or controversial decisions away from the public eye by adding their own layer of rules dealing with confidentiality; and all programs evaluations should be made public by definition.
- Avoid worsening the dual-bureaucracy problem, where a few adept and well-paid civil servants are absorbed into running government programs and projects financed with foreign funds (primarily, EU funds) while important policy areas that are not assisted (social welfare, pensions, education, and health to some extent) will gradually drop as regards importance.

Practical instruments with which to implement such an accountability agenda via transparency could be:

- The adopting of Freedom of Information Acts and Decisional Transparency Acts ("sunshine laws"), whilst making reasonable efforts to enforce them. Engaging social partners in a sincere effort to monitor just how these rules are implemented; and rewarding the performers - and punishing the laggards.

- As a rule, all public procurement contracts and their annexes, once they have been signed, will be published. There is no better (or cheaper) way of monitoring the integrity of a procurement system, which is a major source of problems at all levels of government.
- Registering and publishing (on a website) the votes of all individual MPs with regard to each bill submitted to the Parliament for debate. Without such a thing, all discussions about regulating lobbying groups, reforming parties or the electoral system will be pointless.
- Publishing ex officio all declarations of assets and the interests of dignitaries and top civil servants; and creating such declaration forms where they do not exist, whilst also making them mandatory.
- Institutionalizing the ex-ante budget auditors, and making such audits public for all relevant public institutions during a budget preparation time cycle.
- Informing the public and opening up the budgetary process to outsiders, with no restrictions; of course, very few people will really participate here - though some will, and these are likely to be from among the xpert public", which will guarantee the dissemination of information considered relevant; moreover, openness in itself will act as a deterrent on irregular practices.
- Financial transfers for local governments: using automatic, formula-based allocation rules as much as possible to increase predictability and avoid clientelism at the local level; supplementing this with competitions for grants overseen by outside boards.

This paper (and research project) has argued that the most powerful instrument for reforming policy-making processes and improving governance is accountability through transparency. Reformers, whether inside or outside government, should identify a number of important policy domains where problems are obvious, and try to find the best ways to intervene by prompting public interest and access, which can then create moral pressure for change – which, in turn, is the only thing that top officials will pay attention to.

If we agree that politicians and civil servants are rational individuals who respond to challenges and incentives they face, accountability via transparency is the only workable way of increasing the political costs of poor performance - and of rewarding the good – in societies possessing weak institutions.

Annex 4

Romania and the European Union: How the Weak Vanquished the Strong

By Tom Gallagher (2010)

Reviewed by Christopher Lawson

What are the key events in Romania over the last 20 years? This is a much abbreviated version. For 10 of those years, the former minor functionary and Ceausescu lieutenant Ion Iliescu held power. Communism was superficially transformed. Several political parties emerged even if elections were tainted, there was a free press which criticized those in power, travel abroad was permitted, and foreigners were allowed to reside in the country. But, in general, democratic institutions failed to take root and economic growth was minimal.

Romania only gained the title of market economy in the early 2004. Iliescu's blood-stained hands are all over the June 1990 mineriada, the third of five, in which rampaging miners wreaked death and destruction in the capital. Official figures say that there were a thousand injured and six or seven dead, but some NGOs and other sources claim that many more protesters and bystanders were killed.

At the beginning of the Basescu government in December 2004, the crusading Monica Macovei was appointed Minister of Justice, only to be dismissed early in 2007 by Prime Minister Calin Popescu Tariceanu as soon as EU membership was ensured.

Shortly afterwards there was a failed attempt to overthrow the democratically elected President Traian Basescu, whose chief historical legacy may well be the somewhat controversial Commission on Communism, which reported to Parliament in December 2006. Some adjustments to the Commission's condemnation of Communism were made in January 2007.

And what impression of the country might a tourist take away in 2010?

Western sales engineers descend from planes and gather for breakfast in Romania's international hotels. Shiny high-rise buildings rise in city centres. Well-fed Romanian businessmen attend backslapping Rotary meetings and travel from the provinces by train to the capital in comfortable sleeping compartments, or in sleek new cars which clog the overcrowded roads.

The wares on sale in the supermarkets compare with those they are used to in the West. Fresh fish from the Atlantic and the Mediterranean is delivered daily to the French hypermarket chain Carrefour. Young people clad in the latest fashions patronize chic restaurants and cafes, leaving in glossy cars or on Kawasaki motorbikes. Top names come to give concerts in the capital. The nouveaux riches flock to the stadiums and concert halls. Ambitious students seeking their fortunes

opt for business or law, and graduate with a good knowledge of English and the Internet. A ruthless win-lose attitude prevails in business.

Meanwhile tens of thousands of peasants live in grinding poverty, with no electricity or running water, while employees of the State, notably teachers and doctors, struggle from month to month. The same kleptocrats, generally Securitate officers who once informed on their fellow-citizens, inheritors of the Stalinist system which once prevailed, sabotage numerous projects to improve the villages. I live on the university hill in Romania's second city. Nearly every time I visit my rubbish dump, I meet poorer residents picking through plastic bottles and discarded clothes. Corruption holds sway, especially in justice, education, medicine and tenders for road construction.

Whatever a "normal" post-Communist country may be, Romania does not count as one, despite appearances to the contrary. Tom Gallagher tells us why.

His new book analyzes those 20 years, especially the more recent ones. Meticulously researched, written with the pace of a thriller, and in the final analysis endlessly depressing, *Romania and the European Union* confirms Gallagher's position in the front rank of historians of, and commentators on, post-Communist Romania.

The book, Gallagher's third on Romania, and his sixth with the Balkans as Schwerpunkt, documents how old-guard, predatory kleptocrats have continued to enrich themselves, trousering millions, much of it cash from EU funds, while consistently blocking substantial reforms in key ministries. Meanwhile EU officials at all levels, alternatively complacent, deluded, indecisive or just plain feckless and lacking willpower, have, with a few praiseworthy exceptions, allowed Romania into the world's most successful economic and political grouping without having made these vitally necessary reforms. Brussels was deceived.

So-called European Social Democrat leaders share the blame. Many praised Romanian leaders whose corrupt behaviour shrieked to the skies. In particular, it is clear that the acceptance of the PSD, the former Communists, into the international centre-left family of the Socialist International was a catastrophic error.

The Romanian ex-Communist elite deployed the full panoply of Balkan wiles to outwit the European negotiators. They bestowed honorary doctorates on visiting or resident Eurocrats. Following ancient Phanariot tradition, they even provided bedmates for high-level EU representatives. They prevaricated, protected their own and pretended to implement reforms while preventing them from biting. From the pages heroes, heroines and villains arise. The villains, all of whom are well-known, outnumber the heroes and heroines. Not a single corrupt politician has been successfully prosecuted or served a full custodial sentence. The EU's wish to have a number of heads on a plate, dripping with blood, has not been granted. Experts say the real progress in the fight against corruption and organized crime is measured not by the number of arrests, but by simple indicators: convictions by a court in a fair trial, the amount of dirty money confiscated, or the number of illegally acquired properties taken away. And such efforts have not yet been seen. (1)

I have three comments.

While the Orthodox Church and religion do not feature in the book at all, there are 13 references to the powerful intelligence services. I would like future editions to add to, check and expand these references to form an additional chapter with an in-depth analysis of Romania's intelligence services, which Gallagher describes as sprawling and bloated. In the Appendix, Jonathan Scheele cannot have made the speech at Cuza University, Iasi, as transcribed, because the text is in Romanian English. The speech does not appear in the Romanian translation of the book, which I expect to sell as well in Romania as the author's *Theft of a nation: Romania since communism*.

Its $4 billion fortune makes the Orthodox Church the country's sixth-biggest enterprise. On the burning moral issues of today, such as integrity in politics, public-spiritedness, honesty about history and compassion for the unfortunate, the church seems to have little to say. Its recent past has been marked by cowardice, compliance with the regime in power, and, no doubt, corruption, although I have no evidence for this. Despite its ineffectiveness, the Church enjoys high public trust. About 19.5 million Romanians out of a total population of 21.5 million – 90% – declared themselves as Orthodox believers in the latest census. A recent study shows about 4,000 churches have been built in Romania since the fall of communism in 1989, while the number of schools has been more than halved.

During the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999, Romania's sympathies quite clearly lay with Serbia, for at least three reasons. After the concession of the Serbian Banat after World War One, Serbia had no territorial claims against Romania. There was a certain sympathy for the underdog, but the main reason for the solidarity probably lay deeper in the psyche: both countries are Orthodox. (Orthodox-Christian solidarity with Serbia, coupled with domestic secessionist issues and a strong line on territorial integrity, also lies behind Romania's refusal to recognize Kosovo.) Of course Bulgaria and Ukraine are
Orthodox countries too, but the same sympathies are not in evidence here. I would hesitate to say exactly why.

When the government overrode national sentiment and nevertheless sided with NATO, notably by granting overflying rights, this proved to be an important step in Romania's admission both to NATO and the EU. Leading Western politicians, especially Tony Blair, used Romania's support as a clinching argument in Romania's EU application.

Mention of the role of the Orthodox Church would have helped clarify this episode.

Twenty years ago, the much dreaded Securitate metamorphosed into a "modern, professional and efficient" Romanian Information Service (SRI).

But the 'new Securitate' continued to function in an opaque manner. Its presence and activities were felt throughout the political turmoil that led up to Romania's EU accession in January 2007.

The first SRI director was Virgil Magureanu, a "professor" at the Communist Party's elite Academy who had made his first public appearance on a film showing the "trial" and execution of Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. He now runs a consulting company.

In 2010, the institution is still mistrusted by most Romanians. Public suspicion of its role lingers. The refurbished Romanian secret services never explained in which way they were reformed or how it was possible that Magureanu remained at the top until 1997, during Iliescu's first presidency and half way through the mandate of his follower, the Conservative Emil Constantinescu.

One of its divisions used to be involved in "combating hooliganism, delinquency and parasitism" (pure Ceausescu-era language), and economic crimes. (2) Similarly, the early wish of the SRI to control "Romanians living and studying abroad, those of dual nationality, employees of foreign companies and foreign residents" harked back to the Communist era.

The SRI's rebirth coincided with violent ethnic clashes between Romanians and members of the Hungarian minority in the Transylvanian city of Targu-Mures, in March 1990, which left six people dead and hundreds wounded, an event widely believed to have been staged as a pretext for the rehabilitation of an institution still dominated by Ceausescu's henchmen.

What was the role of the SRI in the descent on Bucharest of the Jiu coal miners, in June of the same year, to crush opposition demonstrations? The miners benefited from support by the public transport system and the police, which would not have been possible without the SRI's approval.

The surveillance of the opposition to Iliescu's Social Democrat party and the illegal tapping of phone conversations continued until at least 1996, when a whistle-blowing SRI officer exposed them. He was fired from the SRI, and sentenced by a military court to a suspended two years in jail for "misuse of secret documents." However, as Gallagher shows, both Baroness Emma Nicholson and EU Commissioner Scheele had cause to notice surveillance and phone-tapping.

After the period of "privatization", when large chunks of the country's economy went to shady characters who in the past had kept close relations with the Securitate, the SRI initially opposed Romania's bid for NATO membership. Very quickly though, the benefits of both NATO and EU accession became obvious and the "services", as they are known, fully embraced the nation's rediscovered European identity.

Today, people close to the "services" belong to every political party in Romania, effectively making the SRI the most efficient cross-party network. Until now, the SRI has refused to allow the National Council for the Study of the Archives of the Securitate (CNSAS) full access to the archives of the Communist era, arguing this could harm national security.

In 2006, President Traian Basescu nominated the new SRI director, George Maior, a former Social-Democrat senator known for his consensus-building skills. But Mr Maior has failed to distance himself from the old regime's heritage or express regret for crimes committed by the "services".

The SRI and the SIE (the internal and external services, respectively) have at least seven separate agencies, a personal security service for the President, at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in the Police Inspectorate, Foreign Intelligence, the Army Directorate within the Ministry of Defence, yet another service within the prison service, and a Special Telecommunications Service for communications security, another military body. All these agencies answer to different people and

in no way to the SRI. The SRI and SIE answer to the President directly, Military Intelligence to the Defense Minister, the services of the Interior Ministry to the Minister of the Interior, and so on. Moreover, there are also diverging factions within these organizations. Much in-fighting results.

When, within the auspices of the DGA (the General Anti-Corruption Directorate), tough, resolute prosecutor Marian Sintion tried to clean up the Ministry of Administration and the Interior, which employed 150, 000 staff , among them many generals and colonels, he was forced to resign after two years. Sintion wrote a report on the reasons for his resignation, which Minister Vasile Blaga had classified.

Cotroceni, the Palace in which the President resides, controls the SPP service (*Serviciul de Paza si Protocol*). Originally the service did indeed protect officials, and set diplomatic rules of courtesy and etiquette. Now its use is wider and more nefarious.

Under Iliescu and Constantinescu there were 600 to 700 employees. Now there are 2,000. Its employees, involved in electoral campaigns, also follow people, including journalists considered hostile to the President, and provide disinformation to the media.

Too often the Intelligence Services themselves are entangled and entwined with corruption, quite apart from their more sinister involvements. They require further investigation in the next edition.

I borrow my conclusion from the late and much-missed Tony Judt. In his excoriating chapter on Romania (3) On *Reappraisals*, now entitled Romania between history and Europe, he quotes from a British friend of Romania and from a former Iron Guardist. In his *History of the Roumanians* (1934) R.W. Seton-Watson wrote:

Two generations of peace and clean government might make of Roumania an earthly paradise, for she has great natural resources and all that is necessary to a well ordered economy.

At the other extreme E.M. Cioran, a cosmic pessimist with whom even Samuel Beckett lost sympathy, wrote:

Some countries are blessed with a sort of grace: everything works for them, even their misfortunes and their catastrophes. There are others for whom nothing succeeds and whose very triumphs are but failures. When they try to assert themselves and take a step forward, some external fate intervenes to break their momentum and returns them to their starting point.

Annex 5

Romania: Bottom of the Heap

By Tony Judt

The New York Review of Books
NOVEMBER 1, 2001

The February 2000 issue of the Bucharest men's magazine *Plai cu Boi* features one Princess Brianna Caradja. Variously clad in leather or nothing much at all, she is spread across the center pages in a cluster of soft-focus poses, abusing subservient half-naked (male) serfs. The smock-clad underlings chop wood, haul sleighs, and strain against a rusting steam tractor, chained to their tasks, while Princess Brianna (the real thing, apparently) leans lasciviously into her furs, whip in hand, glaring contemptuously at men and camera alike, in a rural setting reminiscent of Woody Allen's *Love and Death*.

An acquired taste, perhaps. But then Mircea Dinescu, editor of *Plai cu Boi* and a well-known writer and critic, is no Hugh Hefner. His centerfold spread has a knowing, sardonic undertone: it plays mockingly off Romanian nationalism's obsession with peasants, land, and foreign exploitation. Princess Brianna is a fantastical, camp evocation of aristocratic hauteur and indulgence, *Venus in Furs* for a nation that has suffered serial historical humiliation. The ironic juxtaposition of pleasure, cruelty, and a rusting tractor adds a distinctive local flourish. You wouldn't find this on a newsstand elsewhere in Europe. Not in Prague, much less Vienna. You wouldn't even find it in Warsaw. Romania is different.[1]

In December 2000, Romanians went to the polls. In a nightmare of post-Communist political meltdown, they faced a choice for president between Ion Iliescu, a former Communist apparatchik, and Corneliu Vadim Tudor, a fanatical nationalist. All the other candidates had been eliminated in a preliminary round of voting. The parties of the center, who had governed in uneasy coalition since 1996, had collapsed in a welter of incompetence, corruption, and recrimination (their leader, the former university rector Emil Constantinescu, did not even bother to stand for a second presidential term). Romanians elected Iliescu by a margin of two-to-one; that is, one in three of those who voted preferred Tudor. Tudor's platform combines irredentist nostalgia with attacks on the Hungarian minority—some 2 million people out of a population of 22 million —and openly espouses anti-Semitism. The magazines that support him carry cartoons with slanderous and scatological depictions of Hungarians, Jews, and gypsies. They would be banned in some Western democracies.[2]

Both Tudor and Iliescu have deep roots in pre-1989 Romanian politics. Tudor was Nicolae Ceausescu's best- known literary sycophant, writing odes to his leader's glory before making the easy switch from national communism to ultranationalism and founding his Greater Romania Party in 1991 with émigré cash. Ion Iliescu is one of a number of senior Communists who turned against Ceausescu and manipulated a suspiciously stage-managed revolution to their own advantage. President of Romania between 1990 and 1996 before winning again in 2000, he is popular

throughout the countryside, especially in his native region of Moldavia, where his picture is everywhere. Even urban liberals voted for him, holding their noses (and with Tudor as the alternative). There are men like these in every East European country, but only in Romania have they done so well. Why?

By every measure, Romania is at the bottom of the European heap. The Romanian economy, defined by per capita gross domestic product, ranked eighty-seventh in the world in 1998, below Namibia and just above Paraguay (Hungary ranked fifty-eighth). Life expectancy is lower in Romania than anywhere else in Central or Southeastern Europe: for men it is just sixty-six years, less than it was in 1989 and ten years short of the EU average. It is estimated that two out of five Romanians live on less than $30 per month (contrast, e.g., Peru, where the minimum monthly wage today is $40). By all conventional measures, Romania is now best compared to regions of the former Soviet Union (except the Baltics, which are well ahead) and has even been overtaken by Bulgaria. According to *The Economist*'s survey for the year 2000, the "quality of life" in Romania ranks somewhere between Libya and Lebanon. The European Union has tacitly acknowledged as much: the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament lists Romania as last among the EU-candidate countries, and slipping fast.[3]

It wasn't always thus. It is not just that Romania once had a flourishing oil industry and a rich and diverse agriculture. It was a country with cosmopolitan aspirations. Even today the visitor to Bucharest can catch glimpses of a better past. Between the 1870s and the First World War the city more than doubled in size, and some of the great boulevards laid down then and between the wars, notably the Calea Victoria at its very center, once stood comparison with the French originals on which they were modeled. Bucharest's much-advertised claim to be "the Paris of the East" was not wholly spurious. Romania's capital had oil-fired street lamps before Vienna and got its first electric street lighting in 1882, well before many Western European cities. In the capital and in certain provincial towns—Ias¸i, Timis¸oara —the dilapidated charm of older residences and the public parks has survived the depredations of communism, albeit barely.[4]

One could speak in a comparable vein of Prague or Budapest. But the Czech Republic and Hungary, like Poland, Slovenia, and the Baltic lands, are recovering unexpectedly well from a century of war, occupation, and dictatorship. Why is Romania different? One's first thought is that it isn't different; it is the same—only much worse. Every post-Communist society saw deep divisions and resentments; only in Romania did this lead to serious violence. First in the uprising against Ceausescu, in which hundreds died; then in interethnic street-fighting in Târgu-Mures¸ in March 1990, where eight people were killed and some three hundred wounded in orchestrated attacks on the local Hungarian minority. Later in Bucharest, in June 1990, miners from the Jiu Valley pits were bussed in by President Ion Iliescu (the same) to beat up student protesters: there were twenty-one deaths and 650 people were injured.

In every post-Communist society some of the old nomenklatura maneuvered themselves back into positions of influence. In Romania they made the transition much more fluently than elsewhere. As a former Central Committee secretary, Iliescu oversaw the removal of the Ceausescus (whose trial and execution on Christmas Day 1989 were not shown on television until three

months later); he formed a "National Salvation Front" that took power under his own direction; he re-cycled himself as a "good" Communist (to contrast with the "bad" Ceausescu); and he encouraged collective inattention to recent history. By comparison with Poland, Hungary, or Russia there has been little public investigation of the Communist past—efforts to set up a Romanian "Gauck Commission" (modeled on the German examination of the Stasi archives) to look into the activities of the Securitate have run up against interference and opposition from the highest levels of government.

Transforming a dysfunctional state-run economy into something resembling normal human exchange has proven complicated everywhere. In Romania it was made harder. Whereas other late-era Communist rulers tried to buy off their subjects with consumer goods obtained through foreign loans, under Ceausescu the "shock therapy" advocated after 1989 in Poland and elsewhere had already been applied for a decade, for perverse ends. Romanians were so poor they had no belts left to tighten; and they could hardly be tempted by the reward of long-term improvement. Instead, like Albania and Russia, Romania fell prey to instant market gratification in the form of pyramid schemes, promising huge short-term gains without risk. At its peak one such operation, the "Caritas" scam which ran from April 1992 to August 1994, had perhaps four million participants—nearly one in five of the population. Like "legitimate" privatization, these pyramid schemes mostly functioned to channel private cash into mafias based in old Party networks and the former security services.

Communism was an ecological disaster everywhere, but in Romania its mess has proven harder to clean up. In the industrial towns of Transylvania— in places like Hunedoara or Baia Mare, where a recent leak from the Aural gold mine into the Tisza River poisoned part of the mid-Danubian ecosystem—you can taste the poison in the air you breathe, as I found on a recent visit there. The environmental catastrophe is probably comparable in degree to parts of eastern Germany or northern Bohemia, but its *extent* is greater: whole tracts of the country are infested with bloated, rusting steel mills, abandoned petrochemical refineries, and decaying cement works. Privatization of uneconomic state enterprises is made much harder in Romania in part because the old Communist rulers have succeeded in selling the best businesses to themselves, but also because the cost of cleaning up polluted water and contaminated soil is prohibitive and off-putting to the few foreign companies who express an initial interest.

The end of communism has brought with it nearly everywhere a beginning of memory. In most places this started with the compensatory glorification of a pre-Communist age but gave way in time to more thoughtful discussion of politically sensitive topics from the national past, subjects on which Communists were typically as silent as nationalists. Of these the most painful has been the experience of World War II and local collaboration with the Germans—notably in their project to exterminate the Jews. Open debate on such matters has come furthest in Poland; in Romania it has hardly begun.

Romania was formally neutral in the early stages of World War II; but under the military dictator Marshal Ion Antonescu the country aligned itself with Hitler in November 1940 and joined enthusiastically in the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, contributing and losing more

troops than any of Germany's other European allies. In May 1946, with Romania firmly under Soviet tutelage, Antonescu was tried and executed as a war criminal. He has now been resurrected in some circles in post-Communist Romania as a national hero: statues have been erected and memorial plaques inaugurated in his honor. Many people feel uneasy about this, but few pay much attention to what would, almost anywhere else, be Antonescu's most embarrassing claim to fame: his contribution to the Final Solution of the Jewish Question.[5]

The conventional Romanian position has long been that, whatever his other sins, Antonescu saved Romania's Jews. And it is true that of the 441,000 Jews listed in the April 1942 census, the overwhelming majority survived, thanks to Antonescu's belated realization that Hitler would lose the war and his consequent rescinding of plans to deport them to extermination camps. But that does not include the hundreds of thousands of Jews living in Bessarabia and Bukovina, Romanian territories humiliatingly ceded to Stalin in June 1940 and triumphantly reoccupied by Romanian (and German) troops after June 22, 1941. Here the Romanians collaborated with the Germans and outdid them in deporting, torturing, and murdering all Jews under their control. It was Romanian soldiers who burned alive 19,000 Jews in Odessa, in October 1941; who shot a further 16,000 in ditches at nearby Dalnick; and who so sadistically mistreated Jews being transported east across the Dniester River that even the Germans complained.[6]

By the end of the war the Romanian state had killed or deported over half the total Jewish population under its jurisdiction. This was deliberate policy. In March 1943 Antonescu declared: "The operation should be continued. However difficult this might be under present circumstances, we have to achieve total Romanianization. We will have to complete this by the time the war ends." It was Antonescu who permitted the pogrom in Ias¸i (the capital of Moldavia, in the country's north-east) on June 29 and 30, 1941, where at least seven thousand Jews were murdered. It was Antonescu who ordered in July 1941 that fifty "Jewish Communists" be exterminated for every Romanian soldier killed by partisans. And it was unoccupied Romania that alone matched the Nazis step for step in the Final Solution, from legal definitions through extortion and deportation to mass extermination.[7]

If Romania has hardly begun to think about its role in the Holocaust, this is not just because the country is a few years behind the rest of Europe in confronting the past. It is also because it really is a little bit different. The project to get rid of the Jews was intimately tied to the longstanding urge to "Romanianize" the country in a way that was not true of anti-Semitism anywhere else in the region. For many Romanians the Jews were the key to the country's all-consuming identity problem, for which history and geography were equally to blame.

2.

Peasants speaking Romanian have lived in and around the territories of present-day Romania for many centuries. But the Romanian state is comparatively new. Romanians were for many centuries ruled variously by the three great empires of Eastern Europe: the Russian, the Austro-Hungarian, and the Ottoman. The Turks exercised suzerainty over Wallachia (where Bucharest sits) and Moldavia to its northeast. The Hungarians and latterly the Habsburgs ruled Transylvania to the northwest and acquired the neighboring Bukovina (hitherto in Moldavia) from the Turks in 1775.

The Russians for their part pressed the declining Ottoman rulers to turn over to them effective control of this strategic region. In 1812, at the Treaty of Bucharest, Tsar Alexander I compelled Sultan Mahmud II to cede Bessarabia, then part of eastern Moldavia. "Romania" at this point was not yet even a geographical expression. But in 1859, taking advantage of continuing Turkish decline and Russia's recent defeat in the Crimean War, Moldavia and Wallachia came together to form the United Principalities (renamed Romania in 1861), although it was not until 1878, follow-ing a Turkish defeat at Russian hands, that the country declared full inde-pendence, and only in 1881 was its existence recognized by the Great Powers.

From then until the Treaty of Versailles, the Romanian Old Kingdom, or *Regat*, was thus confined to Wallachia and Moldavia. But following the defeat of all three East European empires in World War I, Romania in 1920 acquired Bessarabia, Bukovina, and Transylvania, as well as part of northern Bulgaria. As a result the country grew from 138,000 square kilome-ters to 295,000 square kilometers, and doubled its population. The dream of Greater Romania—"from the Dniester to the Tisza" (i.e., from Russia to Hungary) in the words of its national poet Mihai Eminescu—had been fulfilled.

Romania had become one of the larger countries of the region. But the Versailles treaties, in granting the nationalists their dream, had also bequeathed them vengeful irredentist neighbors on all sides and a large minority population (grown overnight from 8 to 27 percent) of Hungarians, Germans, Ukrainians, Russians, Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians, Gypsies, and Jews —some of whom had been torn from their homelands by frontier changes, others who had no other home to go to. Like the newly formed Yugoslavia, Romania was at least as ethnically mixed as any of the preceding empires. But Romanian nationalist leaders insisted on defining it as an ethnically homogeneous nation-state. Resident non-Romanians—two people out of seven—were "foreigners."

The result has been a characteristically Romanian obsession with identity.[8] Because so many of the minorities lived in towns and pursued commerce or the professions, nationalists associated Romanian-ness with the peasantry. Because there was a close relationship between language, ethnicity, and religion among each of the minorities (Yiddish-speaking Jews, Catholic and Lutheran Hungarians, Lutheran Germans, etc.), nationalists insisted upon the (Orthodox) Christian quality of true Romanian-ness. And because Greater Romania's most prized acquisition, Transylvania, had long been settled by Hungarians and Romanians alike, nationalists (and not only they) made great play with the ancient "Dacian" origins.[9]

Today the Jewish "question" has been largely resolved—there were about 760,000 Jews in Greater Romania in 1930; today only a few thousand are left.[10] The German minority was sold to West Germany by Ceausescu for between 4,000 and 10,000 deutschmarks per person, depending on age and qualification; between 1967 and 1989 200,000 ethnic Germans left Romania this way. Only the two million Hungarians (the largest official minority in Europe) and an uncounted number of Gypsies remain.[11] But the bitter legacies of "Greater Romania" between the World Wars stubbornly persist.

In a recent contribution to *Le Monde*, revealingly titled "*Europe: la plus-value roumaine*," the current prime minister, Adrian Nastase, makes much of all the famous Romanians who have contributed to European and especially French culture over the years: Eugène Ionescu, Tristan Tzara, E.M. Cioran, Mircea Eliade...[12] But Cioran and, especially, Eliade were prominent intellectual representatives of the Romanian far right in the 1930s, active supporters of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu's Iron Guard. Eliade at least, in his mendaciously selective memoirs, never even hinted at any regrets. This would hardly seem a propitious moment to invoke him as part of Romania's claim to international respect.

Nastase is not defending Eliade. He is just trying, clumsily, to remind his Western readers how very European Romania really is. But it is revealing that he feels no hesitation in enlisting Eliade in his cause. Eliade, like the Jewish diarist Mihail Sebastian, was an admirer and follower of Nae Ionescu, the most influential of the many interwar thinkers who were drawn to the revivalist mysticism of Romania's fascists.[13] It was Ionescu, in March 1935, who neatly encapsulated contemporary Romanian cultural paranoia: "A nation is defined by the friend-foe equation." Another follower was Constantin Noica, a reclusive thinker who survived in Romania well into the Ceausescu era and has admirers among contemporary Romania's best-known scholars and writers. Noica, too, suppressed evidence of his membership in the Iron Guard during the Thirties.[14]

This legacy of dissimulation has left many educated Romanians more than a little unclear about the propriety of their cultural heritage: If Eliade is a European cultural icon, what can be so wrong with his views on the un-Christian threat to a harmonious national community? In March 2001 I spoke about "Europe" in Ias¸i to a cultivated audience of students, professors, and writers. One elderly gentleman, who asked if he might put his question in Italian (the discussion was taking place in English and French), wondered whether I didn't agree that the only future for Europe was for it to be confined to "persons who believe in Jesus Christ." It is not, I think, a question one would get in most other parts of Europe today.

3.

The experience of communism did not change the Romanian problem so much as it compounded it. Just as Romanian politicians and intellectuals were insecure and paranoid and resentful about their country's place in the scheme of things—sure that the Jews or the Hungarians or the Russians were its sworn enemies and out to destroy it—so the Romanian Communist Party was insecure and paranoid, even by the standards of Communist parties throughout Eastern Europe.

In this case it was the Communists themselves who were overwhelmingly Hungarian or Russian or/and Jewish.[15] It was not until 1944 that the Party got an ethnic Romanian leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej—and one of the compensatory strategies of the Romanian Communists once installed in power was to wrap themselves in the mantle of nationalism. Dej began this in the late Fifties by taking his distance from the Soviets in the name of Romanian interests, and Ceausescu, who succeeded him in 1965, merely went further still.[16]

This led to an outcome for which the West must take some responsibility. Communism in Romania, even more under Dej than Ceausescu, was vicious and repressive—the prisons at

Pites¸ti and Sighet, the penal colonies in the Danube delta, and the forced labor on the Danube–Black Sea Canal were worse than anything seen in Poland or even Czechoslovakia, for example.[17] But far from condemning the Romanian dictators, Western governments gave them every encouragement, seeing in Bucharest's anti-Russian autocrats the germs of a new Tito.

Richard Nixon became the first US president to visit a Communist state when he came to Bucharest in August 1969. Charmed by Nicolae Ceausescu during a visit to Romania in 1978, Senator George McGovern praised him as "among the world's leading proponents of arms control"; the British government invited the Ceausescus on a state visit in the same year; and as late as September 1983, when the awful truth about Ceausescu's regime was already widely known, Vice President George Bush described him as "one of Europe's good Communists."[18]

National communism ("He may be a Commie but he's our Commie") paid off for Ceausescu and not just because he hobnobbed with Richard Nixon and the Queen of England. Romania was the first Warsaw Pact state to enter GATT (in 1971), the World Bank and the IMF (1972), to get European Community trading preferences (1973) and US Most-Favored-Nation status (1975). Western approval undercut Romanian domestic opposition, such as it was. No US president demanded that Ceausescu "let Romania be Romania."

Even if a Romanian Solidarity movement had arisen, it is unlikely that it would have received any Western support. Because the Romanian leader was happy to criticize the Russians and send his gymnasts to the Los Angeles Olympics, the Americans and others said nothing about his domestic crimes (at least until the rise of Mikhail Gorbachev, after which the West had no use for an anti-Soviet maverick dictator). Indeed, when in the early Eighties Ceausescu decided to pay down Romania's huge foreign debts by squeezing domestic consumption, the IMF could not praise him enough.

The Romanians, however, paid a terrible price for Ceausescu's freedom of maneuver. To increase the population—a traditional Romanianist obsession—in 1966 he prohibited abortion for women under forty with fewer than four children (in 1986 the age barrier was raised to forty-five). In 1984 the minimum marriage age for women was reduced to fifteen. Compulsory monthly medical examinations for all women of childbearing age were introduced to prevent abortions, which were permitted, if at all, only in the presence of a Party representative.[19] Doctors in districts with a declining birth rate had their salaries cut.

The population did not increase, but the death rate from abortions far exceeded that of any other European country: as the only available form of birth control, illegal abortions were widely performed, often under the most appalling and dangerous conditions. In twenty-three years the 1966 law resulted in the death of at least ten thousand women. The real infant mortality rate was so high that after 1985 births were not officially recorded until a child had survived to its fourth week—the apotheosis of Communist control of knowledge. By the time Ceausescu was overthrown the death rate of new-born babies was twenty-five per thousand and there were upward of 100,000 institutionalized children—a figure that has remained steady to the present.

In the eastern department of Constanta, abandoned, malnourished, diseased children absorb 25 percent of the budget today.[20]

The setting for this national tragedy was an economy that was deliberately turned backward into destitution. To pay off Western creditors, Ceausescu obliged his subjects to export every available domestically produced commodity. Romanians were forced to use 40-watt bulbs at home so that energy could be exported to Italy and Germany. Meat, sugar, flour, butter, eggs, and much more were rationed. Fixed quotas were introduced for obligatory public labor on Sundays and holidays (the *corvée*, as it was known in *ancien régime* France). Gasoline usage was cut to the minimum and a program of horse-breeding to substitute for motorized vehicles was introduced in 1986.

Traveling in Moldavia or in rural Transylvania today, fifteen years later, one sees the consequences: horse-drawn carts are the main means of transport and the harvest is brought in by scythe and sickle. All socialist systems depended upon the centralized control of systemically induced shortages. In Romania an economy based on overinvestment in unwanted industrial hardware switched overnight into one based on preindustrial agrarian subsistence. The return journey will be long.

Nicolae Ceausescu's economic policies had a certain vicious logic—Romania, after all, did pay off its international creditors—and were not without mild local precedent from pre-Communist times. But his urbanization projects were simply criminal. The proposed "systematization" of half of Romania's 13,000 villages (disproportionately selected from minority communities) into 558 agro-towns would have destroyed what remained of the country's social fabric. His actual destruction of a section of Bucharest the size of Venice ruined the face of the city. Forty thousand buildings were razed to make space for the "House of the People" and the five-kilometer-long, 150-meter-wide Victory of Socialism Boulevard. The former, designed as Ceausescu's personal palace by a twenty-five-year-old architect, Anca Petrescu, is beyond kitsch. Fronted by a formless, hemicycle space that can hold half a million people, the building is so big (its reception area is the size of a soccer field), so ugly, so heavy and cruel and tasteless, that its only possible value is metaphorical.

Here at least it is of some interest, a grotesque Romanian contribution to totalitarian urbanism—a genre in which Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Trujillo, Kim Il Sung, and now Ceausescu have all excelled.[21] The style is neither native nor foreign—in any case, it is all façade. Behind the gleaming white frontages of the Victory of Socialism Boulevard there is the usual dirty gray, pre-cast concrete, just as a few hundred yards away there are the pitiful apartment blocks and potholed streets. But the façade is aggressively, humiliatingly, unrelentingly uniform, a reminder that totalitarianism is always about sameness; which is perhaps why it had a special appeal to a monomaniacal dictator in a land where sameness and "harmony"—and the contrast with "foreign" difference—were a longstanding political preoccupation.

Where, then, does Romania fit in the European scheme of things? It is not Central European in the geographical sense (Bucharest is closer to Istanbul than it is to any Central European capital). Nor is it part of Milan Kundera's "Central Europe": former Habsburg territories (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Galicia)—a "kidnapped West"—subsumed into the Soviet imperium. The traveler in Transylvania even today can tell himself that he is in Central Europe—domestic and religious architecture, the presence of linguistic minorities, even a certain (highly relative) prosperity all evoke the region of which it was once a part. But south and east of the Carpathian Mountains it is another story. Except in former imperial cities like Timis¸oara, at the country's western edge, even the idea of "Central Europe" lacks appeal for Romanians.[22]

If educated Romanians from the Old Kingdom looked west, it was to France. As Rosa Waldeck observed in 1942, "The Romanian horizon had always been filled with France; there had been no place in it for anyone else, even England."[23] The Romanian language is Latinate; the administration was modeled on that of Napoleon; even the Romanian fascists took their cue from France, with an emphasis on unsullied peasants, ethnic harmony, and an instrumentalized Christianity that echoes Charles Maurras and the Action Française.

The identification with Paris was genuine—Mihail Sebastian's horror at the news of France's defeat in 1940 was widely shared. But it was also a palpable overcompensation for Romania's situation on Europe's outer circumference, what the Romanian scholar Sorin Antohi calls "geocultural Bovaryism"—a disposition to leapfrog into some better place. The deepest Romanian fear seems to be that the country could so easily fall right off the edge into another continent altogether, if it hasn't already done so. E.M. Cioran in 1972, looking back at Romania's grim history, captured the point: "What depressed me most was a map of the Ottoman Empire. Looking at it, I understood our past and everything else."

An open letter to Ceausescu from a group of dissident senior Communists in March 1989 reveals comparable anxieties: "Romania is and remains a European country.... You have begun to change the geography of the rural areas, but you cannot move Romania into Africa." In the same year the playwright Eugène Ionescu described the country of his birth as "about to leave Europe for good, which means leaving history."[24]

The Ottoman Empire is gone—it was not perhaps such a bad thing and anyway left less direct an imprint on Romania than it did elsewhere in the Balkans. But the country's future remains cloudy and, as always, humiliatingly dependent upon the kindness of strangers. About the only traditional international initiative Romania could undertake would be to seek the return of Bessarabia (since 1991 the independent state of Moldova), and today only C.V. Tudor is demanding it.[25] Otherwise politically active people in Bucharest have staked everything on the European Union. Romania first applied to join in 1995 and was rejected two years later (a humiliation which, together with a cold shoulder from NATO, probably sealed the fate of the center-right government). In December 1999 the EU at last invited Romania (along with Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Malta, and Turkey) to begin negotiations to join.

Romania will be a hard pill for Brussels to swallow, and most Eurocrats privately hope it won't join for a long time. The difficulties faced by the German Federal Republic in absorbing the former GDR would be dwarfed by the cost to the EU of accommodating and modernizing a country of 22 million people starting from a far worse condition. Romanian membership in the EU would bring little but headaches. Western investors will surely continue to look to Budapest, Warsaw, or Prague, especially once these are firmly within the EU. Who will pour money into Bucharest? Today, only Italy has significant trade with Romania; the Germans have much less, and the French—oh irony!—trail far behind.

Romania today, Mr. Nastase's best efforts notwithstanding, brings little to Europe. Unlike Budapest or Prague, Bucharest is not part of some once-integrated Central Europe torn asunder by history; unlike Warsaw or Lju-bljana, it is not an outpost of Catholic Europe. Romania is peripheral and the rest of Europe stands to gain little from its presence in the union. Left outside it would be an embarrassment, but hardly a threat. But for just this reason Romania is the EU's true test case.

Hitherto, membership in the EEC/ EC/EU has been extended to countries already perceived as fully European. In the case of Finland or Austria, membership in the union was merely confirmation of their natural place. The same will be true of Hungary and Slovenia. But if the European Union wishes to go further, to help *make* "European" countries that are not—and this is implicit in its international agenda and its criteria for membership—then it must address the hard cases.

Romania is perhaps the hardest: a place that can only overcome its past by becoming "European," which means joining the European Union as soon as possible. But Romania has scant prospect of meeting EU criteria for membership in advance of joining. Thus Brussels would need to set aside its present insistence that applicant countries conform to "European" norms before being invited into the club. But there is no alternative in Romania's case. Romanian membership will cost West Europeans a lot of money; it will do nothing for the euro; it will expose the union to all the ills of far-eastern Europe. In short, it would be an act of apparent collective altruism, or at least unusually enlightened self-interest.

But without such a willingness to extend its benefits to those who actually need them, the union is a mockery—of itself and of those who place such faith in it. Already the mere prospect of joining, however dim, has improved the situation of the Hungarian minority in Transylvania and has strengthened the hand of reformers—without pressure from Brussels, the government in Bucharest would never, for example, have overcome Orthodox Church objections last year and reformed the humiliating laws against homosexuality. As in the past, international leverage has prompted Romanian good behavior.[26] And as in the past, international disappointment would almost certainly carry a price at home.

In 1934 the English historian of Southeastern Europe R.W. Seton-Watson wrote, "Two generations of peace and clean government might make of Roumania an earthly paradise."[27] That is perhaps a lot to ask (though it shows how far the country has fallen). But Romania needs a break. The fear of being "shipwrecked at the periphery of history in a Balkanized democracy" (as Eliade put it) is real, however perverse the directions that fear has taken in the past.

"Some countries," according to E.M. Cioran, looking back across Romania's twentieth century, "are blessed with a sort of grace: everything works for them, even their misfortunes and their catastrophes. There are others for whom nothing succeeds and whose very triumphs are but failures. When they try to assert themselves and take a step forward, some external fate intervenes to break their momentum and return them to their starting point."[28]

The last Romanian elections, with a third of the vote going to Tudor, were a warning shot. What keeps Ion Iliescu and his prime minister out of the hands of their erstwhile nationalist allies is the promise of Europe. If Romania is not to fall back into a slough of resentful despond, or worse, that promise must be fulfilled.

Notes

[1]I am deeply grateful to Professor Mircea Mihâies for bringing *Plai cu Boi* to my attention.

[2] For an excellent discussion of Tudor's politics and a selection of cartoons from *Politica* and *România Mare*, see Iris Urban, "Le Parti de la Grande Roumanie, doctrine et rapport au passé: le nationalisme dans la transition post-communiste," in *Cahiers d'études*, No. 1 (2001) (Bucharest: Institut Roumain d'Histoire Récente). See also Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, "The Return of Populism—The 2000 Romanian Elections," in *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 230–252.

[3] For data see *The Economist*, *World in Figures*, 2001 edition.

[4] For an evocative account of life in interwar Bukovina after its reunion with Moldavia in 1920, see Gregor von Rezzori, *The Snows of Yesteryear* (Vintage, 1989).

[5] The infamous prison at Sighet, in the Maramures¸ region on Romania's northern border with Ukraine, has been transformed into a memorial and museum. There is full coverage of the suffering of Communist Romania's many political prisoners, rather less reference to Sighet's even more notorious role as a holding pen for Transylvanian Jews on their way to Auschwitz. This was not the work of Romanians— the region had been returned to Hungary by Hitler in August 1940—but the silence is eloquent.

[6] "The behavior of certain representatives of the Rumanian army, which have been indicated in the report, will diminish the respect of both the Rumanian and German armies in the eyes of public [*sic*] here and all over the world." Chief of Staff, XI German Army, July 14, 1941, quoted in Matatias Carp, *Holocaust in Romania: Facts and Documents on the Annihilation of Romania's Jews, 1940–1944* (Bucharest: Atelierele Grafice, 1946; reprinted by Simon Publications, 2000), p. 23, note 8. There is a moving account of the deportation of the Jews of Bukovina and Bessarabia, the pogrom in Ias¸i, and the behavior of Romanian soldiers in Curzio Malaparte, *Kaputt* (Northwestern University Press, 1999; first published 1946).

[7] See Carp, *Holocaust in Romania*, p. 42, note 34, and pp. 108–109. Radu Ioanid accepts the figure of 13,266 victims of the Ias¸i pogrom, based on contemporary estimates. See his careful and informative *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940–1944* (Ivan R. Dee, 2000), p. 86.

[8] See Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Poli-tics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Cornell University Press, 1995), an important book.

[9] The reference is to the Imperial Roman province of Dacia. Romanian antiquarians claim that Dacian tribes survived the Roman occupation and maintained unbroken settlement in Transylvania; Hungarians insist that when the Magyars arrived from the east in the tenth century the place was essentially empty, with Romanians coming later. For what it is worth, both sides are probably in error. Meanwhile the Dacia motorworks still manufactures a Romanian car—the Dacia 1300—familiar to middle-aged Frenchmen as the Renault 12 (first appearance: 1969). The Hungarians have nothing remotely so ancient with which to compete.

[10] Whatever the Jewish "problem" was about, it had little to do with real or imagined Jewish economic power. The accession of Bessarabia and Bukovina in 1920 added hundreds of thousands of Jews to Romania's population. Most of them were poor. The Bessarabian-born writer Paul Goma describes his father's response to the fascists' cry of "Down with the Jews!": "But how much further down could our little Jew get than the village shopkeeper?" See Paul Goma, *My Childhood at the Gate of Unrest* (Readers International, 1990), p. 64. Nevertheless, according to Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, founder in 1927 of the League of the Archangel Michael (later the Iron Guard), "The historic mission of our generation is the solution of the Jewish problem." Codreanu is quoted by Leon Volovici in *Nationalist Ideology and AntiSemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Pergamon, 1991), p. 63. Codreanu was homicidal and more than a little mad. But his views were widely shared.

[11] Just this year the Hungarian government passed a status law giving certain national rights and privileges to Hungarians living beyond the state's borders. This has understandably aroused Romanian ire at what some see as renewed irredentist ambition in Budapest; from the point of view of the Hungarians of Transylvania, however, the new law simply offers them some guarantees of protection and a right to maintain their distinctive identity. For a sharp dissection of identity debates and their political instrumentalization after communism, see Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1998), notably Chapter 3, "Vindictive and Messianic Mythologies," pp. 65–88.

[12] Adrian Nastase, "*Europe: la plus-value roumaine*," *Le Monde*, July 23, 2001.

[13] On Sebastian, Eliade, and the anti-Semitic obsessions of Bucharest's interwar literati, see Peter Gay's review of Sebastian's *Journal, 1935–1944: The Fascist Years* (Ivan R. Dee, 2000) in *The New York Review*, October 4, 2001. For a representative instance of Eliade's views on Jews, see for example Sebastian's diary entry for September 20, 1939, where he recounts a conversation with Eliade in which the latter is as obsessed as ever with the risk of "a Romania again invaded by kikes" (p. 238). Sebastian's diary should be read alongside that of another Bucharest Jew, Emil Dorian: *The Quality of Witness: A Romanian Diary, 1937–1944* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982).

[14] On Noica see Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania* (University of California Press, 1991), Chapter 7, "The 'School' of Constantin Noica." Ionescu is quoted by Sebastian, *Journal*, p. 9.

[15] Among the most important leaders of the Romanian Party, first in exile in Moscow and then in Bucharest, until she was purged in 1952 was Ana Pauker, daughter of a Moldavian rabbi. See Robert Levy, *Ana Pauker: The Rise and Fall of a Jewish Communist* (University of California Press, 2000).

[16] See the comprehensive analysis by Vladimir Tismaneanu, "The Tragicomedy of Romanian Communism," in *Eastern European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Spring 1989), pp. 329–376. Khrushchev, who had little time for Romanians, sought to confine them to an agricultural role in the international Communist distribution of labor; Dej and Ceausescu preferred to secure national independence via a neo-Stalinist industrialization drive.

[17] On the peculiar sadism of prisons in Communist Romania, see Matei Cazacu, "L'Expérience de Pites¸ti," *Nouvelle Alternative*, No. 10 (June 1988); and Lena Constante, *The Silent Escape: Three Thousand Days in Romanian Prisons* (University of California Press, 1995; first published in French by Éditions La Découverte, Paris, 1990).

[18] For the American story, see Joseph F. Harrington and Bruce J. Courtney, *Tweaking the Nose of the Russians: Fifty Years of American–Romanian Relations, 1940–1950* (East European Monographs/Columbia University Press, 1991). Even *The Economist*, in August 1966, called Ceausescu "the De Gaulle of Eastern Europe." As for De Gaulle himself, on a visit to Bucharest in May 1968 he observed that while Ceausescu's communism would not be appropriate for the West, it was probably well suited to Romania: "*Chez vous un tel régime est utile, car il fait marcher les gens et fait avancer les choses*." ("For you such a regime is useful, it gets people moving and gets things done.") President François Mitterrand, to his credit, canceled a visit to Romania in 1982 when his secret service informed him of Romanian plans to murder Paul Goma and Virgil Tanase, Romanian exiles in Paris.

[19] "The foetus is the socialist property of the whole society" (Nicolae Ceausescu). See Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton University Press, 1996); Ceausescu is quoted on p. 65.

[20] Even today, Romania's abortion rate is 1,107 abortions per 1,000 live births. In the EU the rate is 193 per thousand, in the US 387 per thousand.

[21] And Le Corbusier.

[22] From a Transylvanian perspective, Bucharest is a "Balkan," even "Byzantine," city. I am deeply grateful to Professor Mircea Mihaies, Adriana Babeti, and the "Third Europe" group at the University of Timis¸oara for the opportunity of an extended discussion on these themes in October 1998. Our conversation was transcribed and published last year, with a generous introduction by Professor Vladimir Tismaneanu, as *Europa Iluziilor* (Ias¸i: Editura Polirom, 2000), notably pp. 15–131.

[23] R.G. Waldeck, *Athene Palace* (Robert McBride, 1942; reprinted by the Center for Romanian Studies, Ias¸i, 1998). The quote is from the reprint edition, p. 10.

[24] For Cioran see E.M. Cioran, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), p. 1779: "*Ce qui m'a le plus déprimé, c'est une carte de l'Empire ottoman. C'est en la regardant que j'ai compris notre passé et le reste.*" The letter to Ceausescu is cited by Kathleen Verdery in *National Ideology Under Socialism*, p. 133. For Ionescu's bleak prophecy, see Radu Boruzescu, "Mémoire du Mal—Bucarest: Fragments," in *Martor: Revue d'Anthropologie du Musée du Paysan Roumain*, No. 5 (2000), pp. 182–207.

[25] Note, though, that in 1991 the present prime minister (then foreign minister) committed himself to an eventual reunification "on the German model." Likewise President Ion Iliescu, in December 1990, denounced the "injuries committed against the Romanian people" (in 1940) and promised that "history will find a way to put things completely back on their normal track." See Charles King, *The Moldovans: Romania, Russia, and the Politics of Culture* (Stanford University/Hoover Institution Press, 2000), pp. 149–150. The Romanian-speaking population of destitute Moldova would like nothing better. But Romania just now does not need to annex a country with large Russian and Ukrainian minorities, an average monthly wage of around $25 (when paid), and whose best-known export is the criminal trade in women.

[26] Repeal of anti-Jewish laws was the price of international recognition for the newly independent Romanian state in 1881. In 1920 the Versailles powers made citizenship rights for Jews and other non-Romanians a condition of the Trianon settlement. In both cases the Romanian state avoided compliance with the spirit of the agreement, but nonetheless made concessions and improvements that would not have been forthcoming without foreign pressure.

[27] R.W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Roumanians* (Cambridge University Press, 1934), p. 554; also cited in King, *The Moldovans*, p. 36.

[28] E.M. Cioran, "Petite Théorie du Destin" (from *La Tentation d'Exister*), *Oeuvres*, p. 850. The French original reads: "*Il y a des pays qui jouissent d'une espèce de bénédiction, de grâce: tout leur réussit, même leurs malheurs, même leurs catastrophes; il y en a d'autres qui ne peuvent aboutir, et dont les triomphes équivalent à des échecs. Quand ils veulent s'affirmer, et qu'ils font un bond en avant, une fatalité extérieure intervient pour briser leur ressort et pour les ramener à leur point de départ.*"

November 1, 2001

An election flyer for Corneliu Vadim Tudor's Romania Mare (Greater Romania) Party, listing twelve famous Romanians—"*Apostles of the Nation*"—who died violent deaths "on the Altar of the Fatherland." In addition to Vlad Tepe¸s (Dracula) and Nicolae Ceau¸sescu, note the presence of Ion Antonescu, the wartime dictator and ally of Hitler.

Annex 6

BIRTH AND DEATH IN ROMANIA – IN THE 1980S

In the last years of the regime, Pavel Câmpeanu, a prominent sociologist and a lifelong leftist and former prison cellmate of Nicoale Ceauşescu during World War II managed to smuggle out this article, which was published in The New York Review of Books. For his safety, the editors did not publish his name since it was known that the Romanian secret service was quick to punish, even assassinate dissidents, sometimes after they had fled the country. They suggested that the author was a visitor to Romania, rather than one of the country's own citizens.
Instead of theorizing the origins and future of "real existing socialism," which Câmpeanu did in his many books and articles, this piece is inundated by details of the mundane: the severe shortage of food and basic goods, the dysfunctional management of the economy from top to bottom, the almost omnipresent police and secret services spying on the citizens they were supposed to serve, down to the most intimate places of women's bodies. The dismal reality of everyday life in Ceauşescu's Romania is recorded faithfully here, and thus speaks for itself.

Source
NYRB Volume 33, Number 16 · October 23, 1986

By Name Withheld (The following is by a writer who frequently travels in Eastern Europe and whose name must be withheld).

1.

It was May in Transylvania. The days had been mild, the evenings cold, and the Romanian people, as much obsessed with their situation as anxious to forget it, were watching for Halley's Comet with childlike anticipation. Their gaze was suddenly, brutally brought back to earth by the events in Chernobyl (a name somewhat avoided by the local press). Faced as they were with a danger unknown, inexorable, and impossible to defend against, the special quality of imagination that seems endemic to the Romanian people was less an asset than a liability. Stores of tinned goods that had lain about unsold for years disappeared overnight and when the crop of spring vegetables that had been dreamed of through a worse than austere winter was finally harvested, few were willing to eat it. Everyone had his own theory about the effects of radiation, a subject on which official discretion served only to make the panic more acute. Then the public mood shifted. Late into the night everyone stayed up, neighbors from time to time relaying this or that impression from one window to the next, until finally an excited group of people converged in Bucharest, shouting at the top of their lungs. Fallout was forgotten (at least for a night), and there was a positively Mediterranean sense of joy: for the first time a Romanian soccer team had won a game in the competition for the European Cup!

Two old friends of mine stayed on the sidelines. After three years I had found them visibly changed, each in his own way. The more unbending of the two was becoming more rigid in his views, the more flexible seemed at times incoherent. Romania itself had changed considerably, it too in its own way: the three years seemed to have been the culmination of a much longer social ordeal that had left its mark on the country.

One of my friends said that to understand the recent developments I must first consult a decree by the Council of State of the Romanian Socialist Republic issued on October 10, 1981. The exact text ran as follows:
It shall constitute illegal trading activities and, in accordance with the terms set down in the Penal Code, shall be punishable by six months to five years in prison, to purchase from any state commercial center or cooperative store, either with a view to hoarding or in any quantity that exceeds the requirements of a family for a period of a month, oil, sugar, wheat or corn flour, rice, coffee and all other foodstuffs the hoarding of which might affect the interests of other consumers and proper provisioning of the population.

Since then, he said, the situation has changed drastically. Coffee can no longer be bought by private citizens and has been replaced by an ersatz substance disapproved of by physicians, which the public, guessing at the ingredients, has nicknamed "henna." Meat, buttermilk, and bread are rationed in most districts, sugar and cooking oil throughout the country—and the ration is much more generous than the shops charged with distributing them can supply.

Since 1968, it should be explained, Romania has been divided into more than forty districts, each with a Party secretary, who is its supreme head. He is responsible for delivering a quota of food from his district to the central government—a task that must give him bad dreams. For it poses an insoluble problem: if he distributes locally less food than is called for by the plan—as he is virtually obliged to do—he will be popular with the authorities but held in contempt by the people of the district; and if he tries to help the population get more food, he will be unpopular with the authorities. Everyone has a different approach to the same dilemma—for even in the CP no district secretary is quite like another—and this psychological diversity makes for diversity in the distribution of food shortages throughout the country. In Cluj or Pitesti the situation, I was told, is frankly horrible; in Sibiu or Vilcea it is merely wretched. Thousands go from district to district on shopping excursions from which they often return empty-handed.

Romania seems unique in many ways. It is the only European country in which one can be sentenced to five years in prison for buying excessive quantities of food that is generally unavailable to the public. It is also, in my experience, the only such country in which the legal work week is forty-six hours and the urban population often spends three to four hours a day shopping for groceries. In Romania President Ceausescu takes upon himself to compose lyrics for a new national anthem, rather than entrusting the task to a poet. And in spite of a republican form of government of which he is the constitutional head, the president carries a scepter and is grooming his son as his successor.

Workers often spend entire days waiting for raw materials that their factory cannot obtain. If they leave the premises without permission or bring alcoholic beverages, or cigarettes, or lighters, or matches onto the shop floor, they are regarded as having broken the law and can receive prison sentences from three months up to two years (Decree 400 of December 29, 1981, Article 18).

The average wage, according to experts I talked to, is less than one fifth of the average Common Market wage, while the minimum wage is ignored. The state each month withholds a percentage of

wages that can be returned at the end of the year only if the government's economic goals have been met—something that rarely happens.

Virtually every business establishment has (in addition to spies) a member of the Secret Police with a permanent desk, who reports to his superiors on the proper running of the business. All typewriters must be registered and presented for inspection at the police station every year to show that the keys have not been tampered with.
Perhaps this list is enough to suggest that the special quality of daily life in Romania bears little resemblance to Western perceptions of it. When Americans think of Romania they think of the 1984 Summer Olympics and the gymnastics team—even the US secretary of state on the occasion of his visit this spring mentioned this; about less heroic activities he said nothing. Some Westerners (those with good memories) tend to remember that, under President Ceausescu, Romania refused to take part in the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. They forget that what made the act possible was something that happened in 1958, before Ceausescu, when Soviet troops withdrew from Romania's borders. This was an obscure event at the time but one that laid the foundation for Romania's military independence. From that moment Romania's foreign policy changed radically. It was not under Ceausescu, but under his predecessor that Romania refused to subordinate the nation's economy to the Soviet bloc's COMECON. The regime refused to break relations with China and the Romanian Central Committee adopted a declaration of openly denying the Soviet Union's right to control other countries.

Before he died in 1965, Gheorghiu-Dej appointed Ceausescu as the new head of the Party. In spite of the accepted impression in the West, the new leader was not the father of Romania's independence but its beneficiary and heir. His job was to preserve and cherish it for the good of the Romanian people. Twenty years were all he needed to transform it into a disaster.
2.
Rumania, with an area and a population twice as large as Bulgaria, and a much greater wealth of resources, seems to have been able to mould an economy that is more successful and prosperous than that of its smaller ally.

—H. Gordon Skilling,
Communism, National and International (University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. 65.
GNP per capita in 1980, in US dollars:
Romania 2,300
Bulgaria 3,690
(Source: World Bank)

Among the innumerable projects that Khrushchev set in motion, one that was never fully abandoned by his various successors was that of so-called "economic integration." Soviet "integration" called for reorganizing the Soviet-controlled territories into coherent "economic regions," without respect to their national borders. It hinged on a system of economic specialization, and "international division of labor between brother nations." "Specialization" meant favoring the development of those economic activities in which a country already excelled—a reasonable idea from the standpoint of the new economic community; but from the standpoint of long-term national strategy, one that meant serious problems for some of the countries involved. For Bulgaria and Romania, for instance, it meant specialization in agricultural production at the risk of slowing down

their already slow industrial development; both countries were to have the status of an agrarian hinterland for the more industrially advanced members of COMECON.

The Bulgarians bowed to Khrushchev and risked perpetuating their country's economic backwardness; this left Romania the sole opponent of economic integration. Profiting from the general confusion in the Kremlin during the early 1960s, Romania managed to resist the Soviet project. It was during the years when the Romanians were fighting this battle in COMECON that the first articles openly critical of the USSR appeared in Romania.

First set up in the USSR under Stalin, the overall model established in the countries of Eastern Europe relied on centralization under Party control not only to shape their political systems but also their social structures.

Centralization exists in all those countries to varying degrees. During the last twenty years, when most of the Eastern European countries have been making attempts to relax internal centralization, Romania has taken a diametrically opposite path and has used its relative political independence from the USSR to reproduce an exaggerated version of the Soviet social model. The other states of the regions—Bulgaria, Hungary, etc.—have accepted that they are politically dependent on the USSR while managing to put distance between themselves and its social model. As a result, Romania today is the Eastern European country that is both the most independent with regard to foreign policy and the most Stalinist in its political and social structures; indeed, it could be called the most eloquent embodiment of anti-Soviet Stalinism. The country's bankrupt economy is not the result of its political independence, but rather of its own extreme form of Stalinism.

In effect, autocratic Romania has refused to allow the Soviets to impose their social model on it, but it has voluntarily imitated that model, and in a markedly more retrogressive form. In doing so the regime apparently decided that the best way to avoid unfavorable specialization in the national economy was to avoid any specialization at all. Ignoring the economic cost, Romania set out to diversify its industrial production to the point where it would be virtually an autarchy. Autarchy, untenable for world powers, was thought to be perfect for small countries.

The government also seems to have decided that the best way to avoid the country's being turned into an agricultural hinterland is to destroy agriculture. A permanent reduction in farm income, flagrant production shortages in chemical fertilizers, the spasmodic fluctuations in the size of individual private allotments, the coercive control of trade between village and city—all have contributed to dissuade the farmers not only from producing and selling, but even from preserving their social identity. The farmers have more and more abandoned agriculture. In such circumstances an increasingly important share of agricultural labor is being performed through forced labor by the army, by university and secondary school students, and even by thousands of laborers and trained experts who are obliged to leave the factories in order to work in the fields abandoned by those who had always tended them in the past.

The regime is now making efforts to reverse this trend. Today, young people are no longer being allowed to leave their villages—following historic practice—and the adults transplanted to urban areas are being urged to return to the villages from which they were in many cases forcibly evicted. But the new measures being taken seem aimed not at alleviating but at worsening the situation of

the rural population. The decree of January 24, 1982, which contains eighty-nine articles and which is purported to represent "a new agricultural revolution," provided inter alia for the compulsory participation of the entire rural population, independent of profession, in agricultural labour, special mention being made of old people, invalids, and children from the age of ten (articles 10 and 11), and there are penal and economic sanctions—including the confiscation of individual land allotments—against those who do not put in the minimum number of work days, etc.

To supplement their meagre rations, farmers have turned en masse to stealing corn, wheat, and potatoes out of the fields. A number have been tried and found guilty. I heard of a female farmer in the Prahova district who was caught carrying a sack of stolen corn by the rural militia. At her trial her lawyer read out the statement issued by the district Party committee announcing the end of the harvest. since the offense had been committed a week after the date on which the statement was issued, it was obvious that the woman could not have been stealing corn; officially there was no longer any corn left in the fields to be stolen. She was acquitted.

Others were not so lucky—which has led the farmers to change their tactics: now they send their children to steal for them, since it is much more difficult for the authorities to take legal action against them. Teaching children to steal in order to obtain food is an act of desperation on the part of a farmer class that has traditionally adored children and prided itself on an exalted sense of personal honor. This entire battle over food can only serve to stabilize the weird state of affairs in which responsibility for agricultural production, now removed from the farmer class, has become the burdensome monopoly of those in power.

During the past decade the country has thrown itself into frantic industrial growth at an average annual rate of over 12 percent. This rate, the highest in Europe, is stressed in the official propaganda being issued to lend credence to the regime's economic strategy. The Romanians are told that production—which represents the basic raw material of independence—is more virtuous than consumption, which creates so many problems for the nations that mistakenly extol it.
When translated into drastic restriction of consumer goods in favor of stockpiling industrial goods, this ethical principle quickly had visible technological results. Two peaks rose above the monotonous landscape of autarchy: the production of steel and of high-octane fuel. In a very short time, the country found itself equipped with oil refineries that had a capacity three times greater than the level of domestic production (considerable, according to European standards: over 11 million tons per year). That these refineries would be kept busy was made possible by an agreement with Iran. Iran undertook to provide the oil; in return Romania would furnish Iran with a percentage of the refined product, the remainder to be set aside either for Romania's own energy requirements or for sale for hard currency on the international market. Labeled "Energy Independence," the plan did indeed strengthen the country's independence from the USSR, but not, of course, from Iran.

Heavy foreign debts were contracted to carry out the plan, but no sooner had it got underway than two adverse events occurred, as disastrous as they were unpredictable: the oil crisis and the fall of the Shah. The Shah's sorry end is a familiar story; few are aware of the irreparable consequence his fate posed to the Romanian leadership, and particularly for the Romanian oil refineries. With limited water and coal resources and no access to the output of Soviet nuclear power stations—Romania had thus tied up enormous funds, relying on an oil arrangement that hardly outlived the ceremonies organized to celebrate its signing.

While Romania can only make partial use of these refineries, it must nevertheless pay off the foreign debts it contracted to construct them. Instead of amassing currency from gasoline sold to the West, the country must bleed itself to repay the 12 billion dollars, plus very high interest, that Western countries claim, notwithstanding Romania's policy of independence from the USSR. Obviously, the only way the government can cover its losses is to crack down on domestic mass consumption.

3.

When it comes to political independence, the Romanians find out about it through rumors. They can judge the country's energy independence from what they see. When darkness falls, the cities are plunged into shadow—paradise for burglars—and in the daytime, in some cities, buses run only between 6 and 8 AM and 3 and 5 PM. Electric energy and water services are interrupted daily, at irregular intervals and for periods that can exceed four hours. As a result, refrigerators defrost in the summer and in every season residents of Bucharest avoid using elevators so they won't be caught between floors: elderly people laden with packages and grandmothers carrying babies prepare for the return to their homes on the tenth or eleventh floors as though for a mountain climb. The strongest light bulb sold is forty watts, and it is illegal to use more than one lamp per room; television programming has been cut back to two hours during the working day; each official organization is allowed to use only a limited number of the cars assigned to it (of course, there are exceptions, but not in favor of emergency hospital ambulances).

The private use of cars is now banned for the winter months and during the remaining nine months the lines to buy limited amounts of gasoline can last from twenty-four to forty-eight hours. The procession that crosses the city four times a day as the president moves between the residential palace and the one in which he works is made up of nine cars, not to mention the unknown number of automobiles not officially part of the retinue but assigned to protect it. (A doctor I talked to said that if the presidential cortege were to be cut back to four automobiles and the gasoline thereby saved turned over to ambulances, dozens of people might be spared death each week.)

Some bolder citizens, I was told, began to complain and to say that the vaunted energy independence had gone far enough. They were wrong. The proof came with the polar temperatures of the winter of 1984–1985, when heat was virtually cut off in every city. At twenty below zero people were freezing at home and in theaters, and, most of all, in hospitals. Schools were closed; women who had to go to work in the morning learned to do their cooking after midnight, when the power would occasionally be turned back on for one or two hours, on forbidden electric plates: the fine for doing so is five thousand lei, equivalent to the average salary for two months.
The regime tried to alleviate the situation. By the late 1970s it had become clear that the replacement of the easy-going Shah by the inflexible Ayatollah in Iran would require, in Romania, the replacement of the easy flow of Iranian oil by something more dependable. Here the president's philosophy—that history cannot really be changed without also changing geography—came into play. Ceausescu had earlier ordered construction of the canal from the Danube to the Black Sea, which soaked up immense sums of money but which foreign ships still refuse to use. He ordered the demolition of a third of Bucharest in order to build a new presidential palace flanked by a triumphal boulevard cutting across the entire city (2.5 million inhabitants). Now, in the same

intrepid spirit, he issued the order that Romania was to become a great coal producer. In the country's principal coal-producing region more than thirty thousand miners went on strike.

A new decree announced that hence-forth the principal coal-producing regions would be elsewhere, nearer the president's native village, where the local coal, according to experts I talked to, had a caloric-energy content below the economically or technologically tolerable limits. Although they did not go out on strike, the new miners did not prove to be up to the tasks assigned them. Thus the first version of the plan had called for a production level of 86 million tons of coal by 1985, its second version set a goal of 64 million, whereas the reported actual production was 44 million. In the end, energy independence based on Romanian coal turned out to be not all that different from energy independence based on Iranian oil.

One might think that the Romanian energy shortage is the worst on the Continent. Nothing could be more erroneous. During the late 1970s, when they were still obtainable, official statistical data showed that at that time Romania's electrical energy output—2,764 kilowatt hours—was nearly equal to that of Italy, greater than that of Hungary (2,196 kilowatt hours), Spain, and Yugoslavia, twice that of Portugal, etc. If, notwithstanding, such signs of extreme energy shortage were not being observed in Lisbon, but were all-too-evident in Bucharest, this is because Romania, instead of squandering its electrical energy on the needs of its people, was allocating it to industries that consume large amounts of energy.

Given its mineral resources, Romania's iron and steel industry had never been very efficient. In 1965, when Ceausescu came to power, it already had the remarkable steel-production rate of 180 kilos per capita, each year. Under the new leader, that figure in fifteen years took a jump that few economies have ever managed to duplicate: over 600 kilos of steel per capita in 1980—in other words, more than France, Great Britain, East Germany, or the United States.

Unfortunately, however, the rapid expansion of the Romanian steel industry occurred at a time when established Western iron and steel industries were sharply cutting their production and the international steel market was collapsing. As a result, today Romania is suffering from an imbalance between its capacity to produce steel and its ability to make use of it. A newcomer has a hard time finding out a place for itself on the market when even old-timers are over-producing. To do so successfully, there is not much choice: one either relies on technology to improve the quality of the product or one relies on economic measures to bring about a substantial reduction in price. Thus it was hardly surprising to see Romanian producers being accused of dumping steel on the market, and the American market at that. The Romanian iron and steel industry went right on producing mountains of steel that its domestic industries were unable to digest and that the international market did not seem keen to acquire.

4.

When one speaks of civil rights in the West, one is usually thinking of freedom of speech or freedom of assembly, and not the right to keep oneself warm. Nevertheless, particularly during the winter, the right to keep warm becomes the obsession of most Romanians—the point where all the other rights invoked during the rest of the year tend to become forgotten. Thousands of people deprived of the right of free expression seem utterly indifferent to the fact. Very few remain indifferent about losing their right to keep warm.

Romania has a longstanding tradition of urban landscaping and Romanians have always taken pride in their public spaces. On winter nights, however, under the cover of darkness, people have taken to attacking the large trees that line the cities' streets, cutting off huge branches, and dragging them back to their icy homes on their children's sleds. Such behavior suggests they actually have some means for burning the wood—a store or furnace—which is more than most people have.

The story I was told about Grigore Hagiu, a prominent poet, and his wife Gabriela Cressin, a well-known statistician, is illuminating here. Both were in their forties. They were at home on one of the unbearable January days in the winter of 1985 when the temperature sank to minus thirty degrees centigrade by the window thermometers and minus twenty degrees by the radio. After midnight a thin stream of gas appeared in the kitchen. The couple sat down by the stove and tried to get warm. They fell asleep.
Some time in the night as they slept the gas went off and came back on again. The couple went on sleeping. They never woke up.

The director of the Museum of Romanian literature, Alexandru Oprea, also died in this way—and so, I am told, did many others. "No Gulag, no death squads, no torture or arrests," one of my friends said. "They died in a state of liberty and in peace, dreaming of a summer they would never see. The human rights organizations remain frozen on the issue of warmth: it isn't the right itself but its suppression that turns death into a political act."

The story of Gheorghe Emil Ursu was quite different. The descendant of one of the leaders of the peasant revolts in the eighteenth century in Transylvania, a friend of many poets, he was also an engineer, and he was nearing sixty when, during the heatless winter of 1985, he was called in by the police for questioning about his writings. It was a strange interrogation. The first phase lasted from January to August. Every evening he would show up for questioning; the rest of the time he was at liberty, making his living by day. Then, at the beginning of August, the authorities let him go; whereupon he resumed his former habit of returning home at night and going to bed. On September 21 this idyll came to an end when Ursu disappeared mysteriously. The telephone call informing his family that Ursu was ill and in prison arrived in November. A second, announcing his death, came that same day.

To be thrown in prison for what one has put on paper and die there mysteriously has become a banal fate in many parts of the world today. Ursu's story had an unexpected twist. When the police, on January 3, 1985, confiscated something he had written, it was not a manifesto inciting the people to revolt, or an iconoclastic roman à clef, but a private journal. Can one, in this case, still say that Ursu died for expressing his opinions? Ursu's crime apparently consisted not of having expressed his opinions but simply of having had them.

5.
More than anything else my friends wanted me to write about birth and death. In 1966 the new regime in Romania adopted somewhat Draconian methods for bringing about a sharp and sudden increase in a birthrate that, by European standards, was already reasonably high.

Before long virtually all measures for birth control were banned. At their workplace many women have to submit to a monthly examination to see if they are pregnant or not. If they are, they know they must have a baby within nine months or risk prosecution.
Such measures were the first sign that the scope of Romania's new policies for preserving its independence and standing up to the USSR had widened so as to include the most intimate experiences of private life. The clear and persuasive rhetoric of the new program did its job; equally effective was the minute description of the heavy penalties reserved for those who refused to take part in it.

According to the statistics, the number of infants rose from 273,687 in 1966 to 527,764 in 1967. (Under Romanian law, incidentally, no abortion can be performed unless an official from the ministry of justice is present to certify that the abortion was spontaneous and not induced. The word of the doctor is not enough. But the official, not trusting his own competence, may not show up. Even if the woman is having a hemoerrhage the doctor may not act alone and in some cases the woman may die. This even happened, I was told, to the assistant of the man responsible for the law, the minister of health.)

That such policies were not a response to any demographic crisis in Romania is suggested by the available statistics. In 1965, the natural rate of increase in population per one thousand people was 6 in Romania, as opposed to 2.4 in Hungary, for example, and 3 in East Germany. It took nine months to double the number of newborn babies: but more than six years to double the number of gynaecologists, obstetricians, pediatricians, and wet-nurses to care for them (leaving aside the availability of maternity wards, day-care centres, and pediatric hospitals, housing, and schools; or the production of powdered milk, baby clothes, and medical supplies.) In the ten years before the program was started the number of babies born each year rarely rose above 250,000. Some people I talked to believed—and of course there is no way of confirming their view—that of the 500,000 women who became mothers in 1967, over half did so against their will. But beyond such statistical questions, it seems that a kind of underground battle between the regime and the female population has been going on.

The government recently opened a new offensive in this battle. In order to prevent statistics on the subject from being used to stir up trouble, such data are no longer being released. It is understandable that Romania should designate as state secrets the number of women who have died, been made invalids for life, or been thrown into prison because they have had abortions, usually performed by quacks. The following poem, however, which may be puzzling to Westerners, has been widely circulated:

THE CHILDREN'S CRUSADE
An entire people not yet on earth
Condemned to march along from birth
Foetuses from left to right
Devoid of hearing and of sight,
Foetuses on every hand
Who cannot even understand.
All march towards the tomb
Torn from some suffering mother's womb

Condemned to bear, condemned to die,
And not allowed to question why.

Published in the student magazine *Amfiteatrul* in December 1984, along with two other poems in a similar vein, this depressing verse was signed by Ana Blandiana, a highly admired female poet. Within a very short time, thousands of copies of the poems, either Xeroxed or copied out by hand, were available everywhere—the work of a curious and widespread popular samizdat, according to the official press—and were in the hands of a good many families.

They could have been expected to understand what was being said. The offices that issue birth certificates, for example, ask parents of newborn children to return in a month. One might say that the infants find themselves face to face with a state that, after having forced them to be born, now refuses to accept them. Notwithstanding the fact that the child cries or behaves well, clamors for food or rejects it, gains weight rapidly or too slowly—despite, that is, the fact that it becomes the center of its family's life—for the state, it continues to be nonexistent for a month. Why does the state consign the infant population to oblivion, creating a clandestine army of perhaps 400,000 newborn babies every year?

The answer, so I was told, is to be found in the officially published statistics for 1966 and 1967, which show unequivocally that the explosive rise in the number of births (up 92.8 percent) was surpassed by the infant mortality rate (145.6 percent). One can force women to bring unwanted children into the world; one cannot force those children to stay there. Too many of the new arrivals depart: hence the secrecy. Without a birth certificate, no birth has officially taken place. And where no birth has officially taken place, technically there can be no death. Thus, by not issuing the certificate for the period of a month, the state avoids recognizing any deaths that have occurred in that month. The infant who has never been born in the sight of the law cannot die.
Still, while the official infant mortality rate continues to increase, the mortality rate among old people continues to become lower, as it does throughout the rest of Europe.
The authorities see this as putting a heavy burden on the economy, since most old people receive pensions from the state. To relieve this burden (without modifying the law) certain adjustments have been made: the value of the average pension, for instance, was substantially reduced. That helped a bit, since it reduced the overall amount of money paid out, in pensions each month. It did not, however, lessen the number of months those reduced pensions had to be paid out, and from a budgetary standpoint, the average number of monthly checks cashed by pensioners was far too high. The only solution was to try to curtail the average period of a person's retirement—by either delaying its start or hastening its end.

The amount allocated as pensions to each district was greatly reduced. But there was no suggestion of changing or breaking the law. Someone who had attained the specified age was legally eligible to retire, and this remained true: at sixty he could apply for permission to retire. Within five years' time he might well have obtained it. That shortened the length of time a pension had to be paid for those beginning retirement; but there was still something to be done about those who were coming to the end of it. Medical assistance, for instance. Let's say some member of the family suffers a heart attack. At once a call is put through to the local health center or to a hospital. Either way, one of the questions on the other end of the phone will invariably concern the patient's age. For someone over seventy, an ambulance or a doctor will seldom be available. Physicians, I was told, have

strict instructions to cut down on prescription drugs in general but especially among the aged. In each health center, doctors are watched closely to see that in prescribing a treatment they take due account of a patient's age.

Another suggestion for how to deal with the problem of older people recently came from the president himself. In his 1985 speech to the Congress of Popular Counsels he showed himself willing to offer whatever assistance might be necessary to enable older members of the urban population to move to the country with a view to taking up "some form of work conducive to physical and spiritual health." To my friends, this seemed a project designed to tear families apart and they feared it would amount to deportation and forced labour.

Before we parted, the tougher-minded of my two companions (who has a tendency to dramatize) said to me by way of farewell: "The bitter fact is that you have no need of us while we have need of you. When you are back in your own country, you might keep us in mind. Don't just screen out the hideous reality of the women and children we have been talking about, and the old and infirm who every day are peaceably being done away with. Repression isn't what you think it is. It's not the Gulag now, and it's not people being thrown in prison: it is the condition of ordinary life. So much for the lesson of present-day Romania."

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Annex 7

When Cultures collide -

This an excerpt from a book of that name by RD Lewis. Take it with the usual pinch of salt…….

Values

Romanian values are largely forged in the crucible of an invasion-prone territory—the Ottoman Turks, Czarist (and later Soviet) Russia and the Austro–Hungarian Empire. Opportunism and maverick behaviour have enabled Romania to survive as a state, its territory expanding and contracting periodically, depending on the success of its alliances.

Such historical conditions and exigencies have led to anomalous positions on foreign policy. The enduring concept of *Romania Mare* (Greater Romania) may be less notorious than Milosevic's concept of *Great Serbia,* but it exists in Romanian minds nevertheless.

Such a kaleidoscopic, complex historical background has led to Romanian values such as:

- obsession to survive; pride in being a Balkan anomaly
- opportunism; social corruption
- apostasy; nepotism
- volatility; self-importance
- unpredictability; sense of the ridiculous
- tendency to blame others; black humor
- evasive techniques of action

Concepts

Leadership and Status

Romania is situated in the part of Europe that was inhabited by peasant masses, ruled for centuries by sovereign lords, clan leaders and autocrats. In the post-Ceausescu period, modern leadership styles are hampered in their development, since the government is still run by former communist leaders, who function under other labels. Business leaders are also affected by the continuing influence of the political apparatus. Romanian managers are gradually developing a style of their own that resembles that of Italian managers: autocratic but paternalistic and using emotion as a manipulative tool.

Space and Time

Romanians, though not on the Mediterranean, have the Mediterranean sense of space; that is to say, they like rubbing shoulders with people and are comfortable in groups or crowded conditions. They stand closer than Slavs, who require occasional moments of solitude.

Romanians are not punctual in general, especially with each other. Meetings usually start 30–45 minutes late. If you are invited to a Romanian home, it is best not to arrive early or on time, as the hosts will not be ready.

Cultural Factors in Communication

Communication Pattern

Romanians are oratorical by nature (neighbours say "long-winded") and are proud of their sophistication in discourse. They rarely answer questions with yes or no, so it is not advisable to ask direct questions requiring affirmative or negative answers. It is better to hint at what you want and then be prepared to read between the lines of their reply. Their answers are in any case long and complex and may to some extent reflect what you want to hear. Their delicacy is Italian in nature, as is their capacity for flexible truth when questioned aggressively. Their style of address is personal, and they seek your own opinion or support rather than that of your organization.

Listening Habits

Romanians are attentive but suspicious listeners, who may interrupt you if anything you say seems contradictory. They are used to lengthy presentations and arguments, so if you are too brief you will not make much impact.

Behavior at Meetings and Negotiations

Several decades of communism and repressive centralized rule have bequeathed Romania with a poor commercial infrastructure riddled with bureaucracy and corruption. The Westerner, consequently, must be wary of the possibility of being cheated—a common occurrence in a region with a hybrid Balkan and
Turkish historical background.

Romanians are skilled diplomats and negotiators, and hard bargaining faces any foreigners who wish to do business with them. You will have to be careful to distinguish between apparent prospects and factual reality. Deals are rarely a straight transaction between two parties. Others are likely to be involved on a
commission basis, exacting bribes or demanding "facilitation" payments. When you sense this is happening, bring in a Romanian go-between. Such "transaction costs" are generally laid at your door as the foreigner, unless you maintain vigilance.

It is important to establish parameters at the outset of any business discussion, fixing procedures, limits and ultimate positions. Romanians will not be deterred from attempting to gain advantage, but once they have understood your position, they can behave in a constructive, creative and charming manner.

At meetings, extensive small talk is a necessary preamble. Be wary of painting yourself into a corner at this stage. When the Romanians get down to business, their statements must be taken with a pinch of salt. If you disagree with them, show this obliquely, as they hate being snubbed in any way. Never tell them what to do—it would upset their superiority complex. In general Romanians are risk takers (Turkish influence), and they will work hard to close a deal once everyone is on the same track. They are actually more open with foreigners than with each other, often showing reticence in front of their compatriots (a legacy of decades of spying, informing and eavesdropping). With foreigners they show their desire to please, but watch out for their frequent defense: "But that won't work in Romania."

When things get bogged down, Romanians often come out with spontaneous (and apparently new) ideas. Although they are skilled negotiators, they often show little knowledge of Western exigencies, particularly with regard to speed, urgency or integrity.
Follow-through is not a Romanian strong point. When a deal is concluded, everything should be put in writing, witnessed by decision makers and the competent experts. After that, it is advisable to get further approval (in writing) from a very senior person in the organization. Romanians are often comfortable with ambiguity, whereas the Westerner wants final clarity.

The communist legacy has left them with a poor sense of accountability, responsibility and best routes to the bottom line. There may be attempts to alter conditions or clauses after the agreement has been signed. Such steps must be resisted unequivocally.

Manners and Taboos
Given its incredible ethnic diversity, Romania has an impressive storehouse of manners, customs, traditions, folklore and folk art. Romanians have the reputation of being excessively or embarrassingly hospitable. One Romanian writer describes this as "aggressive hospitality." You have to be, for example, very careful not to "under-indulge" at a meal in a Romanian home or to refuse anything being offered. The only defense against Romanian hospitality is to reciprocate their generosity. Items from your own country are often most appropriate. Well illustrated books, prints, quality pens, attractive stationery, ties, scarves and packaged foods (delicatessen) are appreciated. Some Romanians like good whisky or cognac.

Taboos include impolite or brusque behaviour; blunt, direct remarks showing disagreement; and inquisitiveness as to personal details.

How to Empathize with Romanians
Romanians get on well with people who are happy to converse at length, especially about poetry, philosophy, history and the arts. Qualities they admire are erudition, delicacy of expression, intuition and compassion. Exchanges can be on a close personal basis, especially when you have attained a certain familiarity.
Though more circumspect than Italians, Romanians resemble them in their desire for spiritual closeness, confidences and exploration of human feelings.
The development of such relationships will make subsequent business dealings much easier to carry out, and, moreover, will lessen the likelihood of your being cheated.
Always keep the Romanians' animosity toward Hungarians in mind, but Romanians suffer from a national persecution complex as a result of centuries of mistreatment by foreign conquerors. Suspicion is a national habit.
Finally, remember that at heart they are epicureans and want to have a good time with you.

Motivating Factors
- Acknowledge Romania's special historical and linguistic position.
- Speak a few words of Romanian.
- Admire the beauty of their language, scenery, churches and monasteries.
- Show you are willing to help them in their difficulties.
- Read between the lines to divine their wishes and aspirations.
- Elicit information indirectly.

- Indulge in small talk and politics, but do not "intervene."
- Accept their lavish hospitality and reciprocate soon.
- Understand that business and social life are intertwined.

Avoid

- Praising Hungarians and their qualities.
- Aggressive questioning.
- Brusque behaviour.
- Causing anybody to lose face (they are very sensitive).
- Any reference to the country's backwardness, inefficiency and corruption

The Romanian New Wave

Part One - Introduction

Over the past seven years, something extraordinary has been happening in Romania. This south-eastern European nation on the Black Sea, which only twenty-two years ago suffered through a bloody revolution ending close to half a century of communist rule; has been swept up by a confluence of like-minded, frighteningly talented and vibrant directors, writers and actors. Romania has become a breeding-ground for an unparalleled series of critically successful, award winning, iconoclastic and socially conscious films. So consistently excellent has this sustained run of films been, they are categorised in some circles as "The Romanian New Wave". But excellence and sustainability alone have not earned the current crop of thirty-something filmmakers their high international esteem; there is a broad unity of focus, power, purity, style and boldness, across all of the various titles associated - despite the wide range of creative personnel involved.
In this four-part article I shall be examining **ten feature films from the Romanian New Wave**,

Part One will introduce the wave with special consideration to Cristi Puiu's The Death of Mr Lazarescu (2005) the first feature film in this movement.

Part Two will focus on comedy and politics in relation Corneliu Porumboiu's 12:08 East of Bucharest (2006); his recent follow-up Police, Adjective (2009) and Tales From the Golden Age (2009) a collaborative feature film written and produced by Cristian Mungiu.

Part Three will examine three films by Radu Muntean: The Paper Will Be Blue (2006), Boogie (2008) and Tuesday After Christmas (2010) and take a closer look at how the films of the Romanian New Wave explore relationships, as well as the performances of its varied actors.

Part Four will focus on aesthetics and metaphysics in relation to Cristian Nemescu's California Dreamin' (2007); Catalin Mitulescu's The Way I Spent the End of the World (2006) and Mungiu's 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days (2007) which is often credited as the point the wave broke in international terms, famously winning the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival.

There are of course other films that can be included in this torrent of quality, later examples such as Adrian Sitaru's Hooked (2008), Florin Serban's If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle (2010) and Puiu's follow-up to The Death of Mr Lazarescu, Aurora (2010). These films have yet to be made widely available for viewing, however the ten films selected demonstrate in no uncertain terms how exciting and boundary defying modern Romanian cinema can be, that they have all been produced within such a relatively short space of time is nothing short of remarkable; historically even the French, British and German New Waves cannot boast such startling rapidity or consistency of quality.

The parallels with the Italian neorealists are obvious, unlike many European nations; Romania has never been through a realist stage in its cinematic development – until now. Britain, Italy and France went through their realist stages in the 1940's, 50's and 60's; all three nations never recaptured the fleeting subversive spirit which produced films like Lindsay Anderson's This Sporting Life (1963), Vittorio De Sica's Bicycle Thieves (1948) or François Truffaut The 400 Blows (1959). Romanian filmmakers were oppressed and tightly controlled for decades, as a result, previous generations could rarely produce films to challenge the status quo, or to follow in the footsteps of their continental neighbours from the 1940's through to the 1980's; unlike other communist states in the same time period like Russia or Poland, Romania was virtually a nonentity in world cinema, only ever producing communist propaganda pieces at the behest of the state, films that would almost universally remain locked inside Romania's tightly controlled borders.

Cristian Mungiu described the films Romania produced in this period as displaying: "a huge gap between the way people really talked and the kinds of things that happened on screen." Ion Popescu Gopo's Palme d'Or winning short film, Short History (1956), is a notable exception in six decades of cinematic isolationism. There were challenging films being made in Romania, some directors were forced into exile, others had their films banned from public screenings and were shelved throughout those painful years of Nicolae Ceauşescu's rule.
There were no Romanian equivalents of Andrei Tarkovsky, Krzysztof Kieslowski or Andrzej Wajda; talented filmmakers who managed to smuggle challenging films through the oppressive net of dictatorship.

Post-1989 and like most of the former communist and soviet states, Romania took time to acclimatise to its new social, political and economic environment. Twelve years after the revolution, which resulted in Ceauşescu's execution, signs of what was to come began to emerge; first came Puiu's Stuff and Dough (2001), then Mungiu's Occident (2002) and Muntean's Fury (2002), which although more conventional films than what the New Wave would later offer, laid the groundwork and introduced the world to three of the key players. In 2004 the real change began and it did so in the form of five short films which took a flurry of awards on the international film festival circuit. Puiu's Cigarettes and Coffee; Popescu's The Apartment; Porumboiu's Liviu's Dream; Nemescu's C-Block Story and most famously Mitulescu's Trafic. Each opening the eyes of the international community to a collective voice emerging from the ashes of Romania's dark and bloody past.

It is telling that the Romanian New Wave began a decade and a half after the revolution, a comparable time-gap can is measured between the end of World War II and the beginnings of the aforementioned nation's realist influenced cinematic movements. It then follows that there is a delayed reaction to national trauma, whether artists feel compelled not to examine national scars until after an adequate period of reflection, or whether there's simply no initial appetite in terms of audience is up for debate. I would favour the former; whilst many are set in the 1980's and directly depict the struggle of ordinary people under communist rule (something which might not appeal to the modern Romanian cinema-goer eager to leave the past behind), an equal number are set in the present and have no ties to Ceauşescu's regime and as such do not risk alienating those who wish to escape reality when they buy their cinema ticket; but whether set in the past or the present all films are looking inward with varying degrees of subtlety. Is the New Wave for the people of Romania or for the world cinema community?

The most popular of recent Romanian films in Romania have not been widely distributed abroad and do not belong to the New Wave, whilst films that the international film community have adored have not been met with an equivalent level of excitement at home (The Way I Spent the End of the World premiered on DVD in Romania despite winning awards in Cannes Film Festival).
It is a familiar story from all over Europe and Asia, the sort of challenging, testing and austere films that appeal to the art-house crowd do not appeal to the escapist crowd seeking light entertainment. There then emerge additional questions about the relevance of these films, particularly the historical films, if their reflections on the past only appeal to but a small percentage of the Romanian cinema-going community then what purpose do their inward self-analysis serve? Just to educate the West and the East on the history of this country? If so, then perhaps films which focus on historical detail would be more appropriate than the sort of character orientated pictures that have thus far made the biggest impact.

But of all the former communist nations in Europe, Romania is currently the most reflective on their dark past, while the Estonian attitude, for example, is indicative of the vast majority of these nations; in general Estonians want to move on from their time of oppression, not make films about pre-1991 life but rather focus on life today and put some artistic distance between them and the past. The crucial difference between Estonia and Romania however is that Estonia was annexed by the Soviet Union against their will, they were oppressed and thousands of men, women and children were shipped off to distant Siberian gulags to do hard labour until the day they died.
Effectively the Russians inflicted their tyranny upon Estonia, while Romania inflicted their tyranny upon themselves. Romania was a satellite communist state through the three decades that lead to the revolution; western democracies waited and tolerated the despotic activities of Ceauşescu because he'd stood up to Moscow and refused to involve his nation in the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Because it was Romanians that had caused the problems of Romania during that time, examining this part of their history is perhaps less painful or embarrassing; in contrast Estonian's are increasingly frustrated with their continued association with the Soviet Union, in any Western news article written about an incident in Estonia (be it their recently joining the Euro, or the tragic death of ten orphans in an accidental fire) there is mention of their former soviet status, as if this period in their history will forever define them. Do we talk about France as the formerly Nazi occupied nation? Of course not, yet for Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia this is all we in the west seem to know or be interested in.

Do the films of Romania appeal because they're the only nation willing to embrace their history? Or do the films only appeal abroad because of their distinctive aesthetics; does their appeal lie exclusively in their uncompromising unconventionality? Do they serve as nothing more than interesting experiments in film form and narrative delivery, arguably the sort of irrelevancies that would later pre-occupy so many of the French New Wave's navel gazing patron saints? If these were the only goals of the Romanian New Wave then this sort of questioning would be entirely valid. But the Romanian New Wave is not as insular as it might first appear, while many of the specific issues involved in each film are hermetically sealed within Romania's social structures and recent past, there is a universality to the questions they pose, from the woman's right to abortion to the criminal prosecution of personal marijuana use, societies responsibility to the sick to the moral choices one faces after infidelity.

The themes of each of these films are as applicable to the average Romanian as they are to the average Briton or the average American – this is where their appeal truly lies and this is why their legacy will stand the test of time. At the beginning of the last decade only the most dedicated of cinephile would have seen a Romanian film, now The Death of Mr Lazarescu and 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days are mandatory viewing in world cinema circles. Only South Korea can offer a comparable insurgence of quality in the past ten years. But from Seoul to Bucharest there are significant differences; South Korea's most internationally successful directors have little in common in terms of style, pace, tone or commentary – there is no over-arching theme to link them. The only common values between Chan-wook Park's Oldboy and Ki-duk Kim's Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring, is that they were both released in 2003 and they are both of exceptionally high quality. The same is not true of the equivalent Romanian directors, take two international successes from any given year and you'll find commonality, you may have to search in the darkest of thematic recesses, but it is there to be found.

With this in mind we move to **The Death of Mr Lazarescu**, a film which did not set any dogmatic rules for the subsequent films, but most certainly set the trends that the rest of the gang would follow. Dante Remus Lazarescu (Ion Fiscuteanu in his final film role before his own death in 2005 after a close to fifty-year film career) is an aging resident of Bucharest who lives alone, save for his three cats, he lost most of his family to death, divorce and migration years earlier. One night he becomes ensnared in a grotesque, Kafkaesque nightmare when he falls seriously ill and is in urgent need of medical care, an ambulance eventually arrives at his apartment block and a nurse, Mioara (Mirela Cioaba) suspects he has colon cancer and takes him to get medical care, through the night he is moved or transferred from one hospital to the next for a variety of reasons, some outside of the doctors control such as the hospital being full with injured passengers after a bus accident, other reasons are direct or indirect negligence on the part of the medical practitioners. As a treatise on medical ethics, The Death of Mr Lazarescu should be screened to doctors and nurses the world over as an example of how not to treat patients, cynicism, complacency and boredom impair their judgement, Mr Lazarescu's health doesn't mean anything to them; in some cases it is the conveyor belt nature of medical practice that is at fault, once one person has done their bit they disregard all responsibility for the patient; in other cases it is the social prejudice that stands in the way,

Mr Lazarescu is an old drunkard, why treat him when there are more deserving waiting in line, why treat the blood clot in his brain just so the liver neoplasm can kill him later? Mr Lazarescu slowly wastes away as the night wears onwards, his ability to communicate disintegrates and he becomes increasingly helpless. Only Mioara stays with him until she is satisfied he's going to be treated, suffering the abusive doctors and their condescension until eventually even she abandons Mr Lazarescu to the will of the Gods.

The systemic failure of health care institutions to seriously address Mr Lazarescu's condition, until perhaps it's too late, are infuriating to watch and deeply upsetting, evoking a restless impatience within the audience. The film was inspired by an actual case in 1997 when a fifty-two year old man

was turned away from a number of hospitals and was eventually left by his paramedics to die alone in the streets, so there is a direct link to a specific and dark chapter in Romania's recent past.
On the surface the hermetic shelf that the story rests upon could be open to criticism, the incident clearly being severe, but not necessarily indicative of Romania's healthcare system - let alone the rest of the worlds.
However, taken as an extreme example of what can happen within the existing culture of age and social discrimination, it remains a powerful morality tale. There is no health care system in the world that is truly perfect; even Sweden's often idealised welfare state isn't without its flaws, the systems in place within all hospitals are designed in a manner that prohibits the patient from being looked after by a single practitioner and in this intense often life or death environment who can blame doctors, nurses and paramedics for not getting to close to their patients.
The counter argument is that distance facilitates objectivity which improves medical treatment, in the case of Mr Lazarescu the film seems to be arguing that distance is eroding the principles of the Hippocratic Oath, the most important of which being "I will never do harm". If we were to take The Death of Mr Lazarescu out of its socio-political setting for a moment then we see a wider message at its humanist core, ironically enough, its moral judgment is on moral judgments. Be it, not taking a colleague seriously because they're beneath your pay grade, or discriminating on the basis of a persons life style (if we're not to treat alcoholics or cigarette smokers because it was their choice to damage their bodies should we then not treat firefighters with critical burns or soldiers with bullet wounds? After all, it was their choice to do those jobs.) These moral questions are applicable to any country in the world; the modern Romanian Hospital setting does not act to the determent of the films reading or the power of its moral message.
Another reading of the film is as a damning commentary on the changing economic and political landscape of Romania, whose swift transition to capitalism and democracy changed the way many individuals lived their lives, changed the way individuals treated others. Like other nations who've entered the free market after the collapse of communism in Europe, Romania had a lot to adjust to. The Death of Mr Lazarescu is not necessarily preoccupied with the change so much as the status quo, these new Romanian capitalists are a different breed of people and Mr Lazarescu is left behind, the emphasis on individualism meaning that the plight of one man, and in particular a man who offers no foreseeable benefit to anyone, is none of their concern. Society is dead - the individual reigns supreme.

The Death of Mr Lazarescu is exceptional within the Romanian New Wave because it did better business at home and was the most the popular domestic film in 2005, compared to abroad where it did not fare as well despite widespread critical acclaim. This might in part be due to differences in the international and domestic marketing campaigns; internationally the film was advertised as it has been described here, as a precise, convincing and harrowing film with a pertinent moral message; domestically it was advertised as a comedy which at first might seem a rather bizarre choice (particularly given the films matter-of-fact/documentary inspired aesthetics). But on further reflection it makes increasing sense to view The Death of Mr Lazarescu as a comedy rather than a tragedy.
The British film critic Peter Bradshaw described the film as a "blacker-than-black, deader-than-deadpan comedy"; black comedy is often prevalent within the Romanian New Wave, particularly the films of Corneliu Porumboiu (which we'll examine in greater detail later in this article). As with all Kafkaesque nightmares there is comedy to be found in the many levels absurdity and grotesquery, Mr Lazarescu spends the majority of the film in one hospital or another, he is delivered to these

institutions with relative ease yet can't get the treatment he requires because of pettiness and triviality; like a starving man who stumbles into a banquet but all the guests refuse to feed him; this dramatic irony is central to the films narrative and will elicit different reactions depending on each individuals disposition: The Death of Mr Lazarescu will either have you howling with laughter, screaming with rage, crying in pity, or all three, which speaking frankly - is what makes the film so extraordinary.

Part Two – Politics and Comedy

Continuing with the theme of comedy and we move onto the films of Corneliu Porumboiu, whose short film **Liviu's Dream** made a big impression at Berlin Film Festival in 2006. Later that year his independently financed feature film debut arrived in Cannes, **12:08 East of Bucharest** where it won the Camera d'Or Prize; three years later and Porumboiu would again enjoy success in Cannes with his sophomore feature **Police, Adjective**. Porumboiu's films are widely considered to be both the funniest and most satirical of the Romanian New Wave, unlike The Death of Mr Lazarescu, there maybe no mistaking the comedy in Porumboiu's films - although it must be pointed out that one has to wait a while for the laughs to begin in Police, Adjective.

Less of a wait is required for 12:08 East of Bucharest which wears its dry humour on its sleeve from the outset. It's a film of two halves, separated by a clear change in style and content approximately half way through the film, but a change that entirely suits its narrative predispositions. Through the first half of the film our three central characters, a school teacher, a TV journalist and an old eccentric now relegated to playing Santa Clause, go about their daily routines in the town of Vaslui on the sixteenth anniversary of the 1989 revolution. Each of them have their vices, the teacher Manescu (Ion Sapdaru) is a functioning alcoholic who seems more pre-occupied with paying his debts, making more debts and finding a bottle of booze than he is with educating the teenagers in his class; the journalist Jderescu (Teador Corban) is an egotist, a philanderer and a bully; the Santa Clause impersonator Piscoci (Mircea Andreescu) is a nervous wreck on account of local children who set firecrackers off in his hallway, actions for which he takes petty revenge on the children in one of the films funnier moments. The scenes in the first half resemble with work Swedish director Roy Andersson more than Porumboiu's Romanian contemporaries, although with naturalistic leanings and minus Andersson's surrealist edge. Porumboiu runs his scenes in the first half from static wide angles without cutting to close-ups or alternate angles, there is also a peculiar randomness to the proceedings which remind of Andersson: a child wonders through the street attempting to play the clarinet all by himself, only later do we see the rest of his band playing a Latino number for the local TV station before they're interrupted by Jderescu who complains it's Christmas and they should be playing a Romanian tune and then proceeds to castigate his youthful cameraman for filming handheld and demands he uses a tripod (perhaps an ironic nod to the style employed by the Porumboiu for this film).
Were 12:08 East of Bucharest to play out entirely in this vain then in all likelihood it would not have garnered such substantial critical acclaim. However at the films midpoint the action switches as our

three protagonists are brought together to present a live television show to debate whether their town, had any part in the revolution; the three men recall and debate the events, the crucial question being whether or not there was a revolt in the town before 12:08 when Nicolae Ceauşescu fled and the dictatorship effectively collapsed.
The answer to this question hinges on the teacher Manescu's account of that day; he claims to have been involved in a fight with members of the Securitate before 12:08, and effectively began the revolution in Vaslui, throughout the subsequent forty-five minutes Manescu attempts to defend himself against viewers who phone in and make counterclaims, testifying that Manescu was never there at all, one even threatens to sue the show if they continue to spread lies.
The three hosts of the show turn on each other, bickering about petty details, and then making equally petty recriminations. The literal translation of the original Romanian title is "Were you there or weren't you there?" referring in part to Manescu's disputed claims, but also referring to the wider Romanian nation - the challenges of historical record keeping, the fluidity of memory, the difficulties of transition; an equally pertinent question being "where were we then and where are we now?"
The second half of the film plays out in one continuous section, never leaving the confines of the television studio and taken entirely from the perspective of the studio cameras which wobble and miss-frame the three hosts with an accurate level of incompetence from local television amateurs. A bold choice on the part of Porumboiu who'd always intended the second half of the film to play out from objective camera angles, relentlessly resting on the faces of three hosts and offering no escape for the audience by cutting to outside viewers or the control room etc. It's the sort of dangerous aesthetic choice we now expect from the Romanian New Wave and is all the better for it.

Porumboiu was around thirteen years old in 1989, a sensitive age, the event doubtlessly had a massive impact on his psyche. Like many of his filmmaking generation the 1989 revolution is the single most significant national event in their lives and so it is understandable that so many wish to return to it in one form or another, to examine the past in relation to their present. He was inspired by a real TV show which played out in a similar manner to the one portrayed in the film, it's about transition rather than revolution "about memory and history and how we change memory" as the director put it.
Transition is put into very personal terms when the former Securitate agent calls the show and points out that he now owns several factories and is filthy rich, Jderescu makes a point about his journalistic integrity and then is mocked by Manescu "you were in Textiles!" he bites "I should have been an astronaut!"
The most astute observation comes from the Chinese shopkeeper who calls to defend Manescu despite Manescu's drunkenly racist remarks to him the previous night, the shopkeeper says he doesn't like the way Romanian's treat each other. There is a lack of civility in their discourse, always ready to attack each other, always ready to throw mud on one and other.

The emergence from communism and the beginning of Individualism - everyone has their own perspective, everyone can freely express their views but as a society they've not truly adapted to this new freedom, they've not learnt to respect the views of others. As the film draws to a close, a woman whose son was killed in revolution calls the show, an eerie echo on the line lends extra dramatic weight to her words: "it's snowing outside, enjoy it, for tomorrow it will be mud". A summary perhaps of Romanian freedom, enjoy it while it lasts because soon enough it will descend into selfishness and narcissism.

The very question at the heart of the TV show is completely self centred and a matter for local pride rather than historical vigilance, Piscoci points out that the revolution was like the street lights in their town, they turn on or off in the centre and then work their way out (something shown visually at the start and end of the film), it doesn't matter where the revolution started, it doesn't matter if their own revolution was born in their own town. It started and the rest of the country followed – that's all that matters.

Police, Adjective, like 12:08 East of Bucharest is set in a small town; it's worth noting that cartographically the Romanian New Wave is spread far and wide across the nation's varied landscape, not content to tell stories from the capital, indeed *it's surprising how infrequently Bucharest has been depicted in these films*.

Police, Adjective follows Cristi (Dragos Bucur) a plain clothes undercover police detective who investigates a young man accused of smoking marijuana and offering it to his classmates. Cristi's slow investigation eventually renders enough evidence to arrest his quarry, but at a crucial juncture he is plagued by his conscience, knowing that arresting this teenager will no-doubt destroy his future, incurring a relatively severe custodial sentence for what most would perceive to be a minor crime; (Romania remains one of the toughest nations in Europe on the issue of marijuana). Cristi suspects that the accuser, a fellow classmate, has ulterior motives and doesn't trust or entirely understand why he would inform on his friend. Using this as an excuse for inaction, Cristi wrestles with the dilemma; can he live with himself if he does arrest this man?
When he eventually takes the decision not to make the arrest he informs his superior officer, resulting in a cruelly hilarious final scene as he is argued into a corner. Porumboiu manages the inherent ironies of the story with a subtle grace and extreme patience (indeed the film demands a great deal of patience from the audience and is possibly the most extreme example of slow pace in Romanian New Wave).
The triviality of the case lends to both Cristi and the audiences frustration, so many man hours so much of the Romanian tax money spent on pursuing the perpetrator of a crime which only really harms the individual criminal in question.
On the surface, like The Death of Mr Lazarescu, Police, Adjective has an entirely different reading, a unashamedly glacially paced exposure of the everyday mundanity of police procedure; of course in any film there is editing involved and we don't witness the entirety of Cristi's investigation (it is after all a two-hour film), but unlike even the most serious minded of police procedurals from the rest of the world, so much of the boredom, waiting and paperwork is left intact, the crime is minor it wouldn't even warrant more than a few minutes on an episode a police procedural soap opera.
Any excitement in Cristi's work is deliberately left on the cutting room floor. We begin with Cristi shadowing the young man and much of the film is spent like this, following our protagonist following his suspect, a suspect who does little of interest the majority of the time.

The scenes in the police station offer a further dimension, as an absurdist deconstruction of bureaucracy and the rule of law. Porumboiu seems fond of exploring pettiness, small mindedness and

rudeness; Cristi must battle with all three as he stalls for time, having to bow down to patronising or incompetent colleagues who litter the process with their self-centredness.

In Dennis Deletant's fascinating book Ceausescu and Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania 1965-1989 he details in his preface the arduous process he, a British citizen, had to go through to get his Romanian wife a passport, some people were incredibly helpful, but many were not and their reasons for being unhelpful ranged from fear of the Securitate and a culture of envy, if his wife had a passport then she would be able to travel abroad and seek a better life while the woman in charge of administering the passport could not, thus she made life as difficult as possible, made Deletant's wife work for her passport.
Porumboiu, and other directors in the New Wave, keep this bureaucratic pettiness alive in the present day in their films. Cristi's battle to keep this man out of prison is easily compared to Mioara's battle to keep Mr. Lazarescu alive, facing ignorance and arrogance at every turn. The difference here is that Cristi is almost completely abstracted from the man he's trying to save; who is completely unaware that his fate potentially rests in this officer's hands.

If we look deeper then the film has much more to say about the nature of language and the nature of conscience. Cristi believes that he should be ruled by his conscience, but his job is to uphold the law, he believes that arresting this young man is morally incorrect even if his suspect is breaking the law – the law is an ass in this instance.
Like The Death of Mr Lazarescu much of the films charm is in its humour, unlike The Death of Mr Lazarescu the humour lies in the character exchanges and the often hilarious deconstruction of the use of language in modern society, the ever changing nature of definitions, how the dictionary defines the word is not necessarily the spirit of the definition, similarly the law can be interpreted in a manner that defies the spirit of the law. In the climatic scene (and I use the word 'climatic' in the loosest sense) Cristi engages in a battle of wits with his superior and finds himself increasingly cornered by his superiors unemotional logical deconstruction of his motives. As with 12:08 East of Bucharest the final section of the film is an extended dialogue scene between three men, both climaxes are sharply written and deeply funny. Police, Adjective is a more mature film than 12:08 East of Bucharest, gone are the Andersson styling's, replaced with colder, more covertly comic form of naturalism which is more akin to the subtlety The Death of Mr Lazarescu, rejecting all the classical formalism in favour of bolder uncompromising realism.

A more obvious example of comedy can be found in **Tales from the Golden Age** an episodic collection of five short films, written and produced by Cristian Mungiu and directed by Mungiu, Constantin Popescu, Ioana Uricaru, Razvan Marculescu and Hanno Höfer.

Each episode tells a unique story, but all are united by the time setting of the so-called "golden age" a period of fifteen years in Ceauşescu's rule. Each story or "tale" is based on an urban legend from that period, usually centred on an act of idiocy or a foolish error on the part of the protagonist, usually motivated by self-improvement or greed.

The first tale is entitled *The Legend of the Official Visit*, which details the preparations being made for Ceauşescu's official visit to a small village, the residents of which run amuck attempting to clean up their home for presentation, mending fences, clearing roadsides, getting the children dressed up in their best clothes, even erecting a fairground. It's what people in the Soviet Union described as a "Potemkin village", cosmetic alterations providing a false veneer of shining prosperity. Fear motivating these people, who are under so much pressure to get it exactly right that they can not enjoy themselves.

This is followed by *The Legend of the Party Photographer* where the photo lab and the officials for propaganda debate what to do about a photo of their leader who appears to be shorter than another head of state, and the rather clumsy mistakes they make to doctor the photo to correct the originals potentially embarrassing composition. Both of the first episodes are notably funny, with amusing punch lines, their central pre-occupation is in the superficial alterations which provide an illusion of superiority where actually incompetence and foolishness lie.

The third story, *The Legend of the Chicken Driver* is a soberer affair as the titular character decides to scam his employer so that a woman he's infatuated with can sell more chicken eggs on the run up to Easter. Everyone stole from the state because there was nothing in the shops, the penalties when caught were particularly harsh, but these sorts of activities were common place because there simply weren't enough goods to go around.

Similarly in the fourth story, *The Legend of the Greedy Policeman*, we see an ordinary family going to extraordinary lengths to harvest a pig without the neighbours hearing it scream as it is butchered, the eventual solution is to gas the pig with hilarious results. The clandestine approach is brought about by their desire to keep the animal a secret and not have to share or get in trouble for having it in the first place as the acquiring of said pig wasn't legal.

The Legend of the Air Sellers concludes the film and is easily the most interesting of the five films both directorially and thematically, in this film a teenage girl who is fast approaching womanhood wants to buy a car and so becomes embroiled in a scheme to scam people out of their spare glass

bottles by posing as an official who's come to sample the water or the air of residences using glass bottles, she and her older tutor then go on to sell the bottles and make more money in a day than her father makes with a proper job. This final instalment being of particular interest as the motives are not simply greed but the increasingly westernised values of the younger generation who watch movies like Bonnie and Clyde and have house parties in secret. These values encroaching on the communist ideology they've been brought up with, capitalism is seen to be taking hold of the youngsters before the fall of the regime.

Unlike other films in the Romanian New Wave, Tales From the Golden age is set entirely in summer and boasts a distinct vivacity the other films discussed do not. This significantly contrasts the colder harsher autumnal films that are more commonly produced and critically adored. There is unfortunately something one-note and airy about even the more serious minded legends portrayed here, and it is, for the most part, unapologetically and overtly comedic in a way that Porumboiu's 12:08 East to Bucharest and Police, Adjective are not.

It is the weakest of the ten films examined here, weaker for its episodic structure, for it simplified historical pretentions and its lightness of touch. That it remains an excellent film despite it being the poorest example of the Romanian New Wave to date, is a testimony to the strength of this movement and its continued success.

Part Three – Relationships and Performances

Moving away from comedy and we have the work of director Radu Muntean, an altogether more serious minded filmmaker - not a comedian but not strictly a tragedian either. With three of his films belonging to the Romanian New Wave to date, he is the most prolific of their number; Corneliu Porumboiu, Cristian Mungiu and Cristi Puiu have only made two films each.

But despite his greater output, he is probably the least recognised of the four. None of his films have gone on to win as prestigious awards as the aforementioned, none of his films have been showered with the kind of wide spread critical acclaim that Police, Adjective, 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days, or The Death of Mr. Lazarescu have received.

Yet he is arguably the strongest of these filmmakers, producing more personal, powerful, relationship centric dramas, with less overt an emphasis on socio-political contexts or endemic failings within social-infrastructure – to the point that some of his films could be viewed as apolitical.

In this respect his first film, **The Paper Will Be Blue**, is his most conventional film, if "conventional" is a word we dare to use in relation to the Romanian New Wave. Set over the course of one night, a popular structural devise used in 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days, The Death of Mr. Lazarescu, 12:08 East to Bucharest and would again be seen in Muntean's next feature film, Boogie (2008). The film follows a Militia member Costi (Paul Ipate) on the cold December night of the 1989 revolution, he abandons his team after hearing details of the uprising on the radio and heads into the night to support the freedom fighters, his superior officer fails to prevent Costi from leaving because rioters see his attempts at detention and attack the Militia's armoured vehicle. Fleeing into the grainy darkness of the night, Costi soon finds a group of rebels and tries to make his way to the TV station where a pitch battle is being fought for control of the airwaves. During the collapse of the Soviet Union TV stations made for tempting targets, TV stations were state run and he who

controlled the airwaves effectively controlled the nation, if the revolutionaries seized it then it would provide them with their most effective tool for spreading the uprising across the nation; in Estonia in 1991, there was a famous incident where two Estonian-nationals fought and protected the TV tower from the control of Russian troops an incident that is credited as a pivotal event in the downfall of the Soviet Union as Estonia became the first nation to recede from the Union, one day before Russia followed suit.

Heading to the TV station, Costi's superior officer and the rest of his team search high and low for him, knowing that there will be a court marshal if he's not found. But Costi doesn't get as far as the TV station, instead he joins what he believes is a group of rebels fighting in a high rise building, things go badly wrong when Costi is mistaken for a foreigner and is held hostage. Meanwhile other members of the Militia meet resistance from the patronising and self-satisfied military (a separate organisation to the Militia in Romania at the time) and decide to wait for Costi at his family home.
There is a palatable sense of chaos as neither side knows who to trust, jurisdictional confusion creates conflict and the violence escalates in this seemingly endless night.

The Romanian New Wave has yet to tackle head-on the dictatorship of Ceauşescu or indeed the highly charged events which lead to his downfall, an unconscious but collective decision which benefits the films in question. Here the revolution is depicted from a very limited perspective, but it says more about the conflicting allegiances of the people and the energy of said revolution than a more direct Ceauşescu biopic ever could.
These are the ordinary men who would later grow old and become the three TV hosts in 12:08 East to Bucharest, their memories distorted by time, not helped by the uncertainty of actual events. Who was right and who was wrong becomes that much harder when you don't know which side each individual was on. The Paper Will Be Blue lacks the power the aforementioned films, perhaps because its relatively short runtime is split between the two storylines and an editorial mistake sees the film open with the slaughter of Militia members at the break of dawn by a confused military, after the opening titles the story flashes back to the beginning of the film and continues towards this tragic event.
Where some dramatists might be able to sustain tension even though the ending has already been revealed, Muntean is unable to do so here; Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet makes the star-crossed lovers demise explicit in the opening monologue, the great play maintains tension via dramatic and situational irony, showing us how every mistake leads the young couple to their fatal conclusion – The Paper Will Be Blue is not structured in such a manner, there is no obvious causal linkage between the events of the night and the resultant tragedy – it simply occurs out of the blue.
The Paper Will Be Blue is Muntean's most directly political film, the most interesting facet of which is the sense of confusion, we initially root for Costi as he abandons his brothers in arms, he enthusiastically throws himself into the rebellion, the dismissive attitude of his superior officers and other members of his team only amplifies our sympathy for him, but as the night continues it becomes apparent that the team genuinely care about him and a respectful visit to his worried

mother's house shows a capacity for forgiveness from most of the men and crucially Costi's commander.

Meanwhile the revolutionaries that Costi finds himself embroiled with are anything but forgiving, their paranoia and suspicion of all new members overrides any good their attempting to do and Costi learns this at the barrel of a gun. *The lack of a simple adversarial line is an effective portrayal of a nation at war with itself; Muntean blurs the boundaries between good or bad and right or wrong. During his subsequent films he would continue this trend until there is no line at all.*

With **Boogie** audiences witnessed a change in Muntean's approach and setting whilst covertly maintaining similar themes. Set in the present day, the titular Boogie (Dragos Bucur), a thirty-something husband and father of one takes his family to a sea-side resort for spring break. After a day on the beach, he, his wife Smaranda (Anamaria Marinca) and his son go for a drink where they run into two of Boogie's old friends Penscu (Mimi Branescu) and Iordache (Adrian Vancica) both of whom seem to be enjoying a free and easy single life away from any potential spouses.

Boogie sees them with envious eyes, his desire to return to this older way of life is only increased by Smaranda's acerbic attitude towards them and him when she realises she is being dumped with their child so Boogie can go out drinking. Tensions increase after Boogie returns home from the night early only to find Smaranda in bed after implying she was still waiting up for him, the couple have an intense and realistic row, which is neatly contrasted with Boogie's earlier flirtation with a night club promotion girl, Smaranda nagging and belittling him for what Boogie views to be a trivial offence whilst the younger more attractive promotions girl whispers seductive words in Boogie's ear, much to the annoyance of his two less attractive friends who are out looking for a one-night stand. Angered by his wife's attitude, Boogie decides to leave her and rejoin his friends on their night out. The trio pick up a high class prostitute from a local night club and arrange for a night of sex in their hotel room – they decide to take turns having intercourse with the teenage hooker Roxana (Geanina Varga) and the dramatic question is raised – will Boogie cheat on his wife?

Tuesday, After Christmas is the natural narrative successor to Boogie, again there is a middle-class family of three, Paul (Branescu), his wife Adriana (Mirela Oprisor) and their young child. The difference in age between the two families mirrors the development of the patriarch's indiscretion. Here Paul is in the midst of a full blown six month affair with dental nurse Raluca (Maria Popistasu) and has resolved to either leave his wife or his mistress before Christmas, this resolution coming as a result of an accidental meeting of the two women at the dental clinic, an incident which forces Raluca to question her position as Paul's mistress. Actors Branescu and Bucur here switch places from their roles in Boogie, Bucur playing best friend Cristi, whose free and easy life style and younger girlfriend are hinted to have inspired Paul's infidelity. Paul, Adriana and Raluca are what could quite easily become of Boogie, Smaranda and Roxana - Tuesday, After Christmas extends and develops the conflict. In contrast to Boogie's wife, Adriana is not unpleasant to Paul, in fact the couple seem to have a fairly ordinary marriage, untroubled by turbulent bickering or marital strains. Paul also contrasts Boogie, his motives for conducting the affair maybe just as fickle as Boogie's motives for cheating on Smaranda, but there is an extra emotional dimension to Tuesday, After Christmas, Paul seems to be genuinely in love with Raluca, and most significantly, not out of love with his wife yet either. While the central characters of both films are all flawed, the characters of Boogie are all unsympathetic, Boogie is selfish and hypocritical, Smaranda is inconsiderate and domineering.

By contrast, the characters in Tuesday, After Christmas are all sympathetic, Paul is confused but genuine, Adriana is perfectly accommodating and at ease with her adulterous husband, blissfully unaware that the relationship is rotting away under her feet. This key distinction between the films indicates a maturing of Muntean as a filmmaker; in Boogie, Muntean makes a judgement on these individuals, they lack moral courage, whereas in Tuesday, After Christmas the characters are neither bad nor good - they're just people. Boogie and Tuesday, After Christmas share a similar style, long scenes often covered by a single shot, Boogie, like The Paper Will Be Blue, uses handheld photography often following characters around the varied locations; Tuesday, After Christmas employs a stately and static approach, observing the films subjects for long stretches from a singular position.

Both films have stripped their narratives bare, the stories, as you can probably tell from the plot summaries, are minimalist. The unfussy approach to story offers Muntean greater scope for characterisation not in what people do, but in what they say and how they say it. So many scenes from all three of his films seem on the surface to be unconcerned with narrative causality; they linger on seemingly insignificant details, small-talk, reminiscences or innocuous tasks. That they amass such dramatic power through their prismatic realism is a testament both to Muntean's power as director and his trope of re-occurring actor's abilities to bring these men and women to life on screen. There is something very theatrical about Muntean's style of filmmaking, in particular Tuesday, After Christmas, by "theatrical" I do not mean that the performances tend towards overacting or that the sets feel stagy (far from it as the Romanian New Wave tend to avoid sets

and use real locations), but rather that Muntean's real skill is in allowing the drama to unfold with limited interference from the usual dramatic devises of cinema: edits, close-ups, cutaways, music etc.
Our position as observer is set from the first frame of each scene and it remains almost constant until a new scene begins much in the same way as an audience watching a play wouldn't have their perspectives changed mid scene.

In this sense there is a natural comparison to Ingmar Bergman's Scenes from a Marriage, which also used longer scenes often photographed with an uncharacteristically sober lens and followed a married couple who are split apart by infidelity. Comparing Bergman with Muntean seems natural enough, both made more conventional dramas in their formative years, both moved on to relationship centred pieces that re-worked the same themes from different perspectives – although with three films it might be a tad early to seriously make this comparison, but it is the highest praise I can offer Muntean that with Tuesday, After Christmas he is operating on the same level as Bergman was at his peak.
But where Bergman offered us esoteric dialogue and sexual dispositions, Muntean's work has a universality that Bergman lacked. Bergman's films, in general, begin with Bergman and end with Bergman; they are films about the director himself. Muntean's films are about any couple in the same position.

Like Bergman, Muntean has built up a regular cast of superior performers, the Romanian New Wave is populated by re-occurring faces, some of the best actors in modern Europe can be found here and Muntean has worked with most of them, Dragos Bucur being the most prolific, recently making the transition to Hollywood with Peter Weir's The Way Back (2010) but previously staring in Tuesday, After Christmas, Police, Adjective, The Paper Will Be Blue, The Death of Mr Lazarescu and Liviu's Dream, he is a performer of great skill and agility, playing a wide range of roles with total assuredness, like his contemporaries he refrains from emoting and knows how to balance the characters he adopts.
Mimi Branescu shares similar credits for Tuesday, After Christmas, The Paper Will Be Blue and The Death of Mr Lazarescu;
Anamaria Marinca is most notable for her leading role in 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days but can also be seen in Boogie. Marinca was first seen in the leading role of David Yates' Sex Traffic (2004) along with Maria Popistasu.
Whilst these are all relatively young actors it's perhaps not surprising, considering Romania's history, that most of their filmographies begin in the early 2000's. Together like the numerous directors and writers, this generation of performers they have formed an unofficial acting style; one based on extreme naturalism and relaxed unselfconsciousness. There is an honesty in everything they do from their appearances to their manner and body language, they look and act like real people which is of course completely appropriate to the unwritten doctrine of the Romanian New Wave.

Muntean has said that each of his protagonists are searching for something new and tragically decide to look to the past in order to find it. In The Paper Will Be Blue, Costi abandons his new life, returning to his family and his fellow Militia members; he pays for this return with his life - he doesn't have the courage of his convictions. Boogie will find nothing but disappointment with his friends, as it becomes clear that Penscu and Iordache are miserable and lonely, both looking for

love themselves, although neither reciprocate Boogie's envy, they are both searching for an equivalent love.
The cold hard reality is that we're all getting older and behaving like teenagers when you're closing in on your forties is no longer a viable way to live your life. They must pay for sex with a young beautiful woman and the undignified circumstances of their four-way fuck party exposes their failure to accept the reality that their days of being wild are long since behind them.
In Tuesday, After Christmas there is however a different resolution, Paul's final decision about whether to commit to his mistress or stay with his wife offers him an uncertain future, one full of potential disappointments and delights. We never find out how this decision affects Paul's life as the films focus is the decision itself rather than the long term consequences. Boogie and Costi both retreat into their pasts to escape the present - Paul however does not retreat. If Muntean remains true to form then perhaps we'll find out what happens to Paul with a new set of characters in his next film.

While on the surface Boogie and Tuesday, After Christmas are both refreshingly middle-class, contemporary relationship dramas with no direct connection to Ceauşescu, "the Golden Age" or the 1989 revolution; there is an indirect thematic connection: Boogie's searching in the past can be interpreted as the nation's uncertainty with a free-market economy, looking to the past for security and stability, no matter how dark that past may be – forgetting for a moment that there is a reason he's married with a child and that there's no easy way to go back. Paul's family problems and adulterous ways can be read as an extension of national freedom, with modern democratic principles and a capitalist economic system come choices and options that weren't previously available – that Paul has the option to restart his life is indicative of the new freedom he enjoys. When individualism reigns supreme over collectivism, the price is choice. There is no longer right and wrong, there is just a choice.

Part Four – *Aesthetics and Metaphysics*
Beyond the political commentary, the comedic undertones and the penetrating insights into modern relationships; the one area that the Romanian New Wave is universally adored and admired by critics is their consistently naturalistic aesthetic sensibility. From The Death of Mr. Lazarescu to Tuesday, After Christmas, the filmmakers involved have remained faithful to an unspoken aesthetic procedure, unblighted by "cinematic" temptations - yet not dogmatic in the application of said procedure.
Across the Romanian New Wave there are slight yet distinctive variations on these loosely applied rules, from director to director and indeed film to film there are gentle shifts in tone and image - but speaking broadly they follow each other in their iconoclastic methods. The Death of Mr. Lazarescu paved the way in many respects, very long shots through mainly static camera angles, observing the proceedings with stylistic detachment - amplifying the naturalistic performances as a result. As already described, Tuesday, After Christmas follows a similar format, although Muntean prefers to remain closer to his subjects than Puiu; he would rather let his actors wonder out of frame and back in again than set the camera far enough back to contain the action with minimal movement.
Both of Porumboiu's films employ the same technique; detaching us from the action to the point of abstraction to let the drama unfold with limited interference from the director, editor, director of photography etc. The Paper Will Be Blue, Boogie, and Mungiu's 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days opt

for a handheld approach, maintaining the longer takes but adding predation to the visual mix, relentlessly stalking their protagonists, never letting them out of sight for a moment.
Muted, cold and monochromatic colour pallets with grainy and highly textured imagery are part and parcel of this particular strain. Deliberately sloppy optical focus and miss-framing are also common; the static approach gives the view point a quasi-documentary feel by virtue of the cameras relative objectivity – a fly-on-the-wall perspective - the handheld approach creates a similar result via different means, the lens struggling to keep up with the action rather than dictating what occurs within its view.
In both cases the view point is abstracted from the action, creating the illusion that the camera is documenting the proceedings. You won't find any crane, dolly or steadycam shots here, no dutch tilts or quirky angles – everything is shot at eye level.

The documentary inflected nature of these films extends to the sound design; it must be hard life being a Romanian film composer as almost none of the films explored in this article have a traditional film score, any music present is diegetic or incidental, playing in the background on radios and televisions, in nightclubs or bars.
If there is original music it is usually limited to the opening titles and the end credits. Only Tales From the Golden Age breaks this rule with a brief scene covered by score; Tales From the Golden Age representing the most commercially and artistically safe of all of the Romanian New Wave and as such it is also the least adventurous and or minimalist in its visuals. Most of these films use real locations, dressed if necessary for period accuracy, most employ natural light where possible and style any additional lighting to appear as realistic as possible – the realist ethos runs through every element of these films.

Of course this style is not without precedents, the Danish Dogma movement for example follows similar aesthetic rules, although their abhorrence towards any kind of "cinematic" constructs is taken to the furthest extremes demanding that productions be shot on video and in the 4x3 aspect ratio, with entirely improvised scenarios. In many ways they are much bolder than anything the Romanian New Wave has thus far produced, boldness does not always guarantee success; not that the concepts are mutually exclusive, but the number of failures in the dogma movement far outstrip their successes – the same is most certainly not the case with the Romanian New Wave.

Although there are no unqualified failures in this movement, there are several films that are tame by comparison; Cristian Nemescu's **California Dreamin**' (2007) for example, embodies in rather less obvious ways all of the praise worthy assets of the Romanian New Wave and as a consequence spreads itself a little thin, it's too much of everything and not enough of anything.

Its 1999, a NATO train manned by Romanian and American troops is carrying special equipment to the front to assist in the Kosovo war, they are delayed in a small village when a cantankerously stubborn old station master Doiaru (Razvan Vasilescu) refuses to let them pass without appropriate paper work. The Commanding Officer, Captain Doug Jones (Armand Assante) tries all means at his

disposal to get the train moving: he attempts to threaten, bribe, manipulate and befriend the station master – all of his tactics fail and Doiaru remains resolute in his absolute stubbornness even after it is made abundantly clear by his superiors that the train has the right to pass and he'll be fired if he does not - he still refuses to let it through.

Meanwhile the American troops have been invited by the unpopular village mayor to participate in a local party to celebrate the village centenary; a "We'll Meet Again" scenario ensues as the young Romanian women are seduced by the charms of these exciting foreign soldiers much to the discomfort of the local men who see them as a threat to their community. The station masters daughter falls in love with one of the sergeants even though neither of them can speak each others language, her male best friend translates for them even though he harbours a secret love for this young woman. The mixture of an ideological battle between two older men and the teenage love triangle would on paper feel uneasy but in actuality it is entirely watchable.
California Dreamin' has two overt flaws: firstly its length, unlike the agonisingly long The Death of Mr. Lazarescu, there seems to be no legitimate justification for the films bloated two and a half hour runtime; this flaw can be overlooked on account of the tragic death of director Nemescu and his sound engineer Andrei Toncu in a car accident. The film remains as it was at that point in post-production and had Nemescu lived on the film would doubtlessly have been shorter.
It must be pointed out that California Dreamin' remains an impressive debut, particularly for a director who was just twenty-seven years old at the time and might well have gone on to bigger and better films in the future.

The second problem is the films erratic shift in tone during the last act, a violent final confrontation feels out of place and shows a lack of maturity in Nemescu, maturity he may have gained in later years. Visually the film has a wider range than most of the Romanian New Wave, flashback sequences to the station master's childhood during the bombing of Bucharest at the end of World War II are presented in Black and White, the largely handheld photography is in keeping, but the rapid editing is not, nor is the use of high shutter speeds for the clashes of violence. California Dreamin' is a mess; it does not conform to the monolithic rejection of classical form found in the other films described. However, Nemescu's piecemeal approach, use American character actors, visual/tonal inconsistencies as well as a macabre fascination with the director's demise before the film was completed, make California Dreamin' as enticing a mess as you're ever likely to find. It is made up of everything you're likely to find in other Romanian New Wave classics, gut wrenching, laugh-out-loud funny and politically insightful; the basic argument of the film is that where ever the American military goes trouble follows, to get their way they will inspire civil conflicts - divide and conquer being the oldest trick in the military book. Captain Jones' mendacious attitude being an extension of U.S foreign policy, his histrionics being a classic example of America's ability to rouse foreign nationals to their feet only to abandon them at the first sign of conflict.

The one area California Dreamin' significantly deviates from the other films discussed is in the use of metaphysics, static shocks between the various characters indicating sexual chemistry and the heartbeat of the young lovers shown visually by the throbbing of a window view of the town, exist outside of the films otherwise realistic parameters. California Dreamin' is not the only film to shy away from observational naturalism, a last minute breaking of the fourth wall at the conclusion of 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days is another notable example as the one of the central characters turns

and looks directly into the camera. Tradition dictates that if you're going to break from your own conventions then you do it at the end of the film, California Dreamin' breaks with its own conventions at random intervals. The song "California Dreamin" from which the film takes its English Language title, features lyrics that connect to the themes and plots of the film:
"All the leaves are brown and the sky is gray.
I've been for a walk, on a winter's day.
I'd be safe and warm if I was in L.A.
California dreamin' on such a winter's day.
Stopped in to a church I passed along the way.
Well I got down on my knees and I pretend to pray.
You know the preacher likes the cold. He knows I'm gonna stay.
If I didn't tell her I could leave today."

The individuals aspirations for a better life away from the hardships of their current location, contrasted with an authority figure content to stay put and enjoy what they have, the fake performance of faith more loosely linked to the Captain Jones' fake aspiration for the people of the village when actually all he wants is to move on.

Catalin Mitulescu's **The Way I Spent the End of the World** (2006) is another example of relative timidity and metaphysics (perhaps the two go hand in hand?) This rite-de-passage film tells the story of a seventeen year old girl Eva (Doroteea Petre), her younger pre-adolescent brother Lali (Timotei Duma) and the events in their personal lives during the six months leading to the revolution – both of them growing and changing in different ways as the stress of the dictatorship slowly fractures the nation.
Eva is sent to a school for troubled students after being falsely accused of breaking a statue of Ceauşescu, she is implicated for it by her own boyfriend who is actually guilty of the crime she's convicted of.

At her new school she meets a peculiar young man who wants to escape Romania and together they train for the arduous task before embarking on their mission. Meanwhile Eva is pressured by her parents to give her ex-boyfriend a second chance on account of what his family can do for them. Lali's story is a little less organised; he escapes into a world of fantasies and imagination – it is the only film of the ten discussed that features any sort of overt dream-sequences, sequences that are accompanied by a childish score as well as crane shots and fish-eye lenses breaking all of the unofficial rules of the New Wave as outlined above and one of the rare examples of an effervescent photography in a movement known for its dour aesthetics.
Both the stories are charming in their own right and gently linking together when necessary. The drama lacks the weight of the other films discussed, like California Dreamin' the films visual style is all too familiar, with only a particularly greeny blue colour grade distinguishing it from the others, but a rapidity in the films editing pushes it closer to conventionality. The films most successful endeavor is in paralleling the growth of Eva as a person, standing up against inequality and searching

for a better life, with the growth of Romania as a nation, standing up against Ceauşescu and searching for a new way to govern. As with The Paper Will be Blue and 12:08 East of Bucharest which directly examine the events of that fateful winter day, the action is abstracted from the exact details of the revolution, favoring a commentary from afar and presented through the prism of individualism.

Finally, at the opposite end of the quality spectrum, we have Cristian Mungiu's **4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days** (2007); at this point one would assume that there is very little left to write about the Romanian New Wave, indeed this film has been covered in this article to a large extent already.
Without even considering the plethora of awards and nominations as well as glowing to exceptional critical approval upon the films release – is there anything left to write about 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days? Are there any adjectives remaining to adequately present the films uniqueness?
As mentioned already, it is practically required viewing for anyone with an interest in world cinema; on Left Field Cinema alone it has been covered in a listener review by Ben Conway, was rated at number three in the Top Ten of 2007 and at number fifteen in the Top Twenty Films of the decade.

What is it about this film that so solidifies its position as the best of the Romanian New Wave along with The Death of Mr. Lazarescu? Both place an ordinary and innocent protagonist in a nightmarish position and then watch them suffer at the hands of the morally reprehensible individuals that come their way. These films haunt their audiences; the gut wrenching relationship dramas of Muntean and the dry comedies of Porumboiu, simply put, have not captured the hearts and minds of international audiences in the way that 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days has.
There are two factors which can easily be attributed to the films unparalleled success: firstly, the boldness of the films aesthetics and secondly, the universality of the issues raised by the film. Originally intended as a satire of Ceauşescu's regime more inkeeping with Mungiu's follow-up Tales From the Golden Age (this films working title), it details the plight of student Otilla (Anamaria Marinca) who arranges an illegal abortion for her friend Gabriela (Laura Vasiliu).

The story is minimal, Otilla barters and bargains for soap and cigarettes from her fellow students and must deal with impolite hotel clerks for the room where the abortion is to be performed, she is torn between visiting her boyfriends family because it's his mothers birthday and staying with her friend, and is pressurised by her boyfriend to join the party because he is unaware of the circumstances Otilla has found herself in. While in a more pernicious turn of events the abortionist Mr. Bebe (Vlad Ivanov) rapes both women when they can't pay his full fee. Leaving Otilla to wonder if she too will have to endure the same dreadful process in a few month's time. The sober and matter-of-fact approach draws the audience into the film, there is a purity in Mungiu's story telling; his ear for believable performances (Mungiu's technique involves him turning away from the performers and listening out for false notes) and his ability to write naturalistic dialogue; is here unmatched by any of his contemporaries. Mungiu draws together almost all of the various facets of

the Romanian New Wave that have been discussed in this article (with the possible exception of comedy, although the film is riddled with rather more tragic ironies).
Visually the film is amongst the starkest and bleakest of recent cinema, the natural lighting, long takes, sloppy focus, hand-held camera and grainy darkness is unflinching in its purity; forgoing any kind of traditional stylisation in favour of uncompromisingly unembellished visuals.

Beyond the performances, the style and the narrative are the films themes: in this area the film has different readings domestically and internationally. At home this is one of the only films of the Romanian New Wave to really dig into the oppression and misery that was suffered under Ceauşescu; after the birth rate dropped to fourteen per thousand people and thus threatened to slow the pace of the nations industralisation, abortion was made illegal in Romania for all but special cases, contraception was difficult to come by and abortion had previously become a popular method of birth control.

Over 10,000 women died over a twenty-three year period because of back street and self-induced abortions, it was a tragic irony that by attempting to increase the population and thus the work force, the anti-abortion policy simply created more death. 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days acts as painful reminder of how their freedoms were curtailed, how ordinary people were driven to extraordinary lengths to secure their future and unlike Tales From the Golden Age, there is no lightness of touch in 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days, no satire or slapstick to smooth out the rough edges of the past.

Abroad and the film has a somewhat wider reading, although still centered on the issue of abortion, it becomes a film about libertarianism and a woman's right to choose. Abortion is of course a contentious issue even in the most liberal of states and there are controls in place in almost every nation on earth (at what stage in the pregnancy you can abort etc), in liberal nations these controls are mainly for the woman's safety, in more conservative nations they're usually in place for social, religious or political reasons. There is a wide variance in what is and is not permissible across the globe, and like euthanasia and capital punishment there is no right answer as such, just different social and religious sensibilities and dispositions. 4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days makes a firm case for the legalisation of abortion, we're not talking about degrees of legality but just that the option should be available for the women who want it.

Ultimately it comes down to human desire, promoting abstinence has been proved time and time again not to work as it is hard-wired into our DNA to procreate and relying on human will power to fight against our natural desires is probably the least reliable form of birth control. Prophylactics and birth control medication are not 100% reliable and in a nation where there is no mandatory sex education mistakes are bound to happen. In a patriarchal state, an unwanted pregnancy can destroy a woman's chances of a career or of finding a partner they truly love – it can ruin lives and sometimes an abortion is the only option available to them.

The lengths our protagonists go to in order secure an abortion demonstrate that it is impossible to legislate against abortion, it will just go underground, as prohibition on drugs, alcohol or prostitution have proven – human desire will always trump any governments attempts at legal condemnation. It forces the activity into the hands of criminals, filling the pockets of gangsters and putting innocent people at risk. The social argument for legal abortions that I've laid out here is not overtly apparent

in the film, the characters do not discuss the ins and outs of the procedure or accredit blame for their predicament, instead we are forced to watch as the scenario unfolds and forced to ask ourselves how the lives of these two women would differ were abortion legal. In this sense the film resonates in nations across the globe, particularly in those states where the issue is still hotly debated. This is the films legacy and the primary reason it is so critically adored.

So now the wave has broken, what's next? What comes after the wave? If previous waves in cinema have proven anything, it's that they tend to peter out rather than end with big crash. British cinema fell into camp send-ups and pastiches from 1967-1979 and never regained the class decimating force those angry young men once attained. French and German cinema also became increasingly tepid as the audience for Goddard style end-of-narrative and the guilt-ridden my-father-was-a-Nazi cinema, shrank substantially.
The Romanian New Wave will also eventually peter out. If audiences don't get bored with these films then the filmmakers who produce them will, for any writer or director capable to creating such original works is always striving for the next big challenge - all we can hope is that when the Romanian New Wave does end it is replaced by something equally inspired. Be that within its own borders or further a field in one of the many other nations rising from the ashes of communism and the trauma of despotism.
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