

“a propagandistic comedy about [the Four-Year Parliament] portraying its procedures” and a play that “enjoyed tremendous success” when it opened in 1791 (94). Apart from the fact that *Powrót pośła*, set in a rural area, does not actually depict parliamentary proceedings, it is reductive to present the play solely as a vehicle in the service of the Four-Year Parliament. Niemcewicz’s work on this political comedy in November 1790 coincided with the publication in London, also in November 1790, of Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and Mary Wollstonecraft’s rebuttal to Burke, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. While Burke denounced the upheavals taking place in France and depicted revolutionists as violators of royalty and womanhood, Niemcewicz, like Wollstonecraft, declared sympathy for the French Revolution. Deemed inflammatory by many, his play proved to be a bombshell with immediate and far-reaching political repercussions. None of this contextual information appears in the volume under review, even though it aims “to theorize broader historical trends” (2).

My second example has to do with Franciszek Dionizy Kniaźnin’s *Matka Spartanka* (The Spartan Mother, 1786). Unlike Niemcewicz’s canonical drama, Kniaźnin’s play, now forgotten, gets a whole paragraph to itself. And yet, despite the editors’ commitment to recovering contributions made by women theater artists, the paragraph makes no mention that the play was commissioned by Izabela Czartoryska, that she collaborated with Kniaźnin on researching and drafting the play, that she staged it in her theater at Puławy, and that she starred in the title role. Her production became a major event, politically as well as artistically. For my third example, I turn to a subchapter on Adam Mickiewicz that introduces him as “an avid reader” of the greats such as William Shakespeare, J.W. Goethe, and Lord Byron, but fails to mention that he also immersed himself in popular French Romantic plays that were flooding European theaters and bookstores at the time (113). One of those plays, by Edmond Ludovic Auguste Cavé and Adolphe Dittmer, provided a template for Mickiewicz’s *Dziady* (Forefathers’ Eve, 1823–32).

It is almost unavoidable that a multi-authored volume that attempts to cover so much ground is bound to have its stronger and weaker sections. In the introduction, the editors announce their ambition to bring new material and new conceptualizations into view, but *A History of Polish Theatre* does not always deliver on this promise. Although it breaks with nationalist frameworks, the volume leans heavily toward highbrow theater, ignoring most of the middlebrow repertoire that has been the bread and butter of the theater in Poland and inspired some of the acknowledged masterworks.

Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă. *Creolizing the Modern: Transylvania across Empires.*

Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2022. vii, 261 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. Figures. £88.60, hard bound. £27.29, paperback.

Arleen Ionescu

West University of Timișoara
Email: anionescu@sjtu.edu.cn

doi: 10.1017/slr.2024.359

Little had I imagined when I was studying Liviu Rebreanu’s novel *Ion* (1920) that three decades later a world literature scholar would join a sociologist specialized in world-systems analysis to write a timely book on what modernity meant in a small rural village in Transylvania.

First, through its highly innovative method, *Creolizing the Modern* has the merit of bringing a “virtually nonexistent” novel to “global audiences,” hence, the authors’ sustained effort to make it a world literature novel for those “unfamiliar with Transylvania and its literary traditions” (12). Second, it challenges Romanian readers to rediscover *Ion*, where modernity, coloniality, and inter-imperiality are subtly entangled. If in Nicolae Ceaușescu’s time *Ion* was interpreted through a highly ideological and nationalistic lens as a rural and an anti-capitalist novel about Romanians fighting for their rights in occupied Transylvania mainly via its protagonist Ion, a peasant who loves his land, and his intellectual counterpart, Titu Herdelea, in postcommunism, critics have not discussed at large issues such as Transylvania’s capitalism, postcolonialism, nationalism, gender, racism (especially antisemitism and Roma enslavement), multilingualism, and religion in their analyses.

The book proposes a comparative method, bridging the humanities and social sciences. Taking their cue from Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato, the authors expand the meaning of creolization: “a mode of transformation premised on the unequal power relations that characterize modernity/coloniality—dispossession, colonization, and enslavement” (4) and put it in relation with inter-imperiality, which they consider the key to decipher creolized modernity in a region at the intersection of the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russia empires.

Ch. 1, “The Face of Land: Peasants, Property, and the Land Question,” demonstrates that “the global history of land overlaps with coloniality” (40); Ch. 2, “Transylvania in the World-System: Capitalist Integration, Peripheralization, Antisemitism,” shows how “Transylvania’s turn-of-the-century economy” can be “integrated into the modern/colonial world-system” (49). Rebreanu’s narrator pays lip service to racializing credit, showing no compassion for Avrum, the Jewish pub owner, who offers drinks and tobacco on credit and loses his wealth after a financial transaction with another Jewish character who tricks him (63). Thus, Avrum’s death “seems to imply that he deserved to die on account of his thirst for labor-free financial gain” (64), a racial stereotype not much different from those presented in Ch. 3, “The *Longue Duree* of Enslavement: Extracting Labor from Romani Music,” which examines “the imbrication of material histories and textual strategies that place Romani labor, especially as aesthetic performance, outside the purview of labor histories” (68). Romani musicians who were hired to perform at a rural dance (*hora*) were aware that they may not be paid for their service. The authors analyze the scene abounding in “stereotypes pertaining to the body” (see 81–83) that they find “crucial to the construction of the novel’s narrative arc and, more broadly, to a particular configuration of Transylvanian Romanian nationalism in an inter-imperial framework,” because its topic is slavery (*robie*), “practiced in what is now Romania for more than five hundred years as part of a labor regime with an elaborate infrastructure” (69–70). Ch. 4, “Counting and Discounting Languages: Transylvanian Interglottism between Hugó Meltzl and Liviu Rebreanu” reads Meltzl’s apparent defense of polyglotism to elevate Hungarian as “superior to other Austro-Hungarian Empire minority languages, especially Romanian” (101–104). Ch. 5 and 6, “The Inter-Imperial Dowry Plot: Nationalism, Women’s Labor, Violence against Women,” and “Feminist Whims: Women’s Education in an Inter-Imperial Framework,” present the cases of women; the peasant-victim, Ana, and Laura Herdelea, who could have become a New Woman, yet turned into the perfect housewife.

The last chapter, “God Is the New Church: The Ethnicization of Religion,” whose title alludes to the sentence pointing to “Transylvania’s relation to secularity” (263) demonstrates who the real winner of all the conflicts in *Ion* actually is. It is Father Belciug, whose gesture of manipulating “inheritance law to convince the peasants negotiating Ana’s dowry to donate their land to the church” stands for power: “the humble wooden church the reader encountered at the beginning of Rebreanu’s novel” has become an imposing building (177).

As the numerous prizes the book was awarded in 2023—among which the René Wellek Prize for best monograph from the American Comparative Literature Association and the Barrington Moore Award from the Comparative and Historical Sociology Section of the ASA—attest, the monograph is a remarkable achievement that is likely to open the door to future studies co-written by sociologists and literature scholars.