

## VICTORIA S.-M. (2025). *RODICA BRAGA – ÎNTRE CONFESIUNE ȘI AUTOFICTIUNE* [RODICA BRAGA – BETWEEN CONFESSION AND AUTOFICTION]<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This book review examines Sorina-Maria Victoria's critical study, *Rodica Braga – Între Confesiune și Autoficțiune* [Rodica Braga – Between confession and autofiction]. The volume proposes a sustained rethinking of how literary identity can be approached in literature. Focusing on a study grounded in interdisciplinary hermeneutics, the review foregrounds the author's methodological choices, theoretical innovations, and contribution to current debates on self-writing. Sorina-Maria Victoria approaches Rodica Braga's literature through an identity-centered hermeneutics that foregrounds the dynamic interplay between confession and autofiction. The review highlights the volume's central contribution: a coherent interdisciplinary interpretive framework that reads Rodica Braga's poetry and prose as a unified project of self-writing.

**Keywords:** Romanian literature; interdisciplinary criticism; autofiction; identity; self-writing.

Sorina-Maria Victoria, in the volume *Rodica Braga — Between Confession and Autofiction* (2025) offers an ambitious critical study which proposes a coherent and persuasive interpretive key for reading Rodica Braga's poetry and prose<sup>2</sup>. Appearing at a symbolic moment that marks more than half a century of Rodica Braga's continuous literary activity, the study responds to a genuine critical necessity. The volume derives from a doctoral research project whose scope extends well beyond the conventional frameworks of literary history. Its guiding premise is both corrective and reconstructive: although Rodica Braga's literature has been acknowledged by Romanian critics, it has never benefited from a sustained, methodologically unified critical analysis. Sorina-Maria Victoria's study directly addresses this gap, offering the first comprehensive attempt to read Rodica Braga's literature.

The volume is organized according to a clear and well-defined structure, and the author explicitly rejects monographic ambitions in favor of a thematic and conceptual investigation centered on identity and self-representation. This methodological choice is effective, allowing the analysis to move fluidly between poetry and prose while maintaining a coherent theoretical framework. At the core of the study lies a compelling interpretive thesis: Rodica Braga's writing cannot be adequately understood without acknowledging the connection between life and literature that shapes her literary activity. In Rodica Braga's literature, writing functions

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<sup>2</sup> Rodica Braga was a prolific writer born in 1938 in Alba Iulia. Known for her significant contributions in the literary field, she was a member of the Writers' Union of Romania, Sibiu subsidiary, and earned various distinctions, such as the Debut Prize for the novel *The Sand of Memory* (1978), the National Prize for Children's literature in 1986, the OPERA OMNIA prize in 2005, and the Book of the Year Prize for the novel *Adagio* (2007). Her writing style is best recognized for the innovative perspectives it expresses through autofiction.

not as representation, but as self-constitution. Literature does not reflect a pre-existing identity; it actively produces, interrogates, and reshapes it. Drawing extensively on Rodica Braga's own interviews, essays, and poetic statements, the author foregrounds the writer's artistic credo: writing as a form of self-creation, where the self is fragmented and reconstructed. This perspective allows Victoria to reconceptualize the relationship between confession and autofiction. Rather than treating them as opposites, the study frames them as interdependent strategies within a unified poetics of self-writing. The study convincingly argues that Rodica Braga does not merely write about herself, nor does she simply transpose autobiographical facts into fiction. Instead, she engages in a complex process of self-writing that oscillates between confession and autofiction, a practice that becomes the defining feature of her literary style.

One of the study's major strengths lies in its careful conceptual work. The author does not take terms such as *autobiography*, *confession*, or *autofiction* for granted. Instead, she reconstructs their theoretical genealogies, situating them within both international literary theory and Romanian critical discourse.

The theoretical architecture of the volume is deliberately interdisciplinary. The author constructs her analytical framework at the intersection of literary theory, philosophy, linguistics, phenomenology, and the theory of the imaginary. Canonical reflections on narrative identity, selfhood, and authorship are mobilized not as abstract references but as functional interpretive tools. Notably, the study avoids allegiance to a single theoretical paradigm. Instead, it advances a layered methodology in which concepts such as self-referentiality, biography, and symbolic identity interact dynamically. References to scholars such as Dominique Combe, Käte Hamburger, Susan S. Lanser, Michael Riffaterre, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, James Olney, and Leonor Arfuch are integrated meaningfully into the analytical framework.

The study is divided into three major sections, preceded by a theoretically oriented introductory chapter. This structure reflects the author's commitment to methodological transparency. The reader is guided step by step from conceptual clarification to *close reading* analysis, ensuring that interpretive claims are consistently grounded in both theory and textual evidence. The first chapter provides a necessary contextual framework, outlines key moments in Rodica Braga's literary evolution, and situates her within the broader Romanian cultural landscape. Particularly valuable is the discussion of Braga's deliberate refusal to affiliate herself with literary groups, movements, or generational labels. The book persuasively argues that this stance is not merely a biographical curiosity but a reflection of a deeper aesthetic and ethical position: the writer's belief in creative autonomy and resistance to externally imposed classifications. Rather than emphasizing socio-political contexts, the chapter focuses on recurring autobiographical motifs and existential concerns that cut across Braga's work. This approach reinforces the central thesis that her writing is governed more by an ongoing process of interior exploration than by historical moments.

The second part of the chapter investigates central theoretical concepts, providing a foundation for the analyses that follow. Here, the author addresses the problem of the literary self, the instability of the narrative subject, and the interpretive challenges posed by texts that blur the boundaries between reality and fiction. The discussion of autofiction is particularly nuanced, highlighting its hybrid status and its capacity to generate interpretive ambiguity.

One of the most original contributions of the volume is its reconceptualization of poetry as a legitimate space of autofictional practice. Challenging the critical tendency to restrict autofiction to prose, Victoria demonstrates that Braga's poetry operates through comparable mechanisms of identity construction. To describe this mode of writing, the author introduces the concept of *egographic discourse*: a form of lyric expression in which the poetic "I" is pragmatically aligned with the authorial self. The analysis begins from Braga's own assertion

that, in poetry, she exposes herself entirely, presenting the poem as a space of radical interiority. The author concludes: Rodica Braga succeeds in creating a type of poetry that interrogates the self, a unifying thread present throughout all her volumes. The recurring metaphor of her poetic creation is this lucid contemplation of the spectacle of her own interiority<sup>3</sup> (Victoria, 2025, p. 20 – my translation).

The third chapter shifts the focus to Rodica Braga's prose, described as fundamentally autoreferential. Through a diachronic approach, the author traces the evolution of the writer's narrative strategies, identifying persistent patterns and significant changes in the representation of selfhood. One of the most compelling aspects of this chapter is the analysis of Braga's preference for homodiegetic narration, interior monologue, and introspective discourse. Plot-driven narration is consistently subordinated to psychological and existential exploration. Events are less important for their factual sequence than for their capacity to generate reflection and self-analysis. The book offers particularly insightful readings of Braga's short prose, emphasizing the role of space and time as identity-shaping categories. These elements are shown to function not merely as narrative settings but as symbolic coordinates through which the self is constructed and interrogated. Characters emerge as fictional doubles of the author, embodying alternative versions of the same existential core. The interpretation of *Anul 2000: Simple Exerciții de Sinceritate* [The year 2000: Simple exercises of sincerity] is especially noteworthy. Analyzed as a pseudo-journal, the text becomes a testing ground for autofictional strategies, where linguistic choices reveal the connections between confession and fictionalization. The interdisciplinary turn toward linguistic analysis enriches the study, demonstrating the author's methodological versatility, drawing on concepts from linguistics and the work of linguists and philosophers such as David Kaplan, Charles Sanders Peirce, Bertrand Russell, Hans Reichenbach, Thomas Nagel, and John McDowell.

The study *Rodica Braga — Between Confession and Autofiction* represents a substantial contribution to Romanian literary studies and to broader discussions of self-writing in contemporary literature. Its most outstanding achievement lies in its ability to synthesize theoretical framework with textual analysis. The study succeeds in demonstrating that Rodica Braga's literature constitutes a coherent identity project, a sustained exploration of the self through literary means, as the author states:

Rodica Braga's works oscillate between two poles — confession and autofiction. This is precisely what we set out to demonstrate. The title and central hypothesis of this study initially emerged from the writer's own confessions and reflections. The phrase *between confession and autofiction* finds its justification in the countless statements she has made across various forms — interviews, essays, poems, and novels<sup>4</sup> (Victoria, 2025, p. 274 – my translation).

By framing her work as a continuous oscillation between confession and autofiction, the study provides a conceptual model that can be extended beyond Braga's writing to other authors engaged in similar practices of self-representation.

If one were to suggest a limitation, it might be that the study's strong focus on identity occasionally overshadows other possible interpretive angles, such as ethical, feminist, or intertextual perspectives. However, this is less a shortcoming than a reflection of the author's

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<sup>3</sup> Original text: "Rodica Braga reușește să creeze o poezie de interogare a sinelui, urmărind acest fir unificator în toate volumele sale, metafora obsedantă a creației sale în versuri fiind acea lucidă contemplare a spectacolului propriei interiorități."

<sup>4</sup> Original text: "Creațiile scriitoarei Rodica Braga pendulează între doi poli – confesiune și autoficțiune. Este ceea ce ne-am propus să demonstrăm. Ideea titlului și ipoteza acestei lucrări au decurs, într-o primă fază a cercetării, din mărturisirile și opiniile scriitoarei. Sintagma între confesiune și autoficțiune își află explicația în nenumărate opinii exprimate în diverse intruchipări – interviuri, eseuri, poezii, romane."

deliberate critical choice. The study does not claim to be comprehensive; on the contrary, it explicitly presents itself as one possible reading key among others, as Victoria explains:

Rodica Braga (re-)writes herself. From one end to the other of her creative output, oscillating between self-revelation and self-camouflage, between confession and autofiction, the writer Rodica Braga identifies with the very act of writing. This is the central thesis of the present study and what we set out to demonstrate; yet, fully aware of the complexity of the subject and the wide range of possible interpretive approaches, we consider this study an open-ended effort, an attempt to formulate working hypotheses that may inspire further avenues of research<sup>5</sup> (Victoria, 2025, p. 23 – my translation).

In this sense, the study functions not only as a critical interpretation but also as an invitation to read Rodica Braga's texts with renewed attention and to pursue further research inspired by the questions it raises.

In a nutshell, through its conceptual and methodological framework and interpretive coherence, the study *Rodica Braga — Between Confession and Autofiction* stands as an achievement that redefines the critical reception of the Romanian writer Rodica Braga and advances innovative perspectives on literary self-representation. By rethinking the connections between confession and fiction, subject and discourse, life and text, this study establishes itself as an essential reference for scholars interested in autofiction, identity, and the dynamics of self-writing in modern and contemporary literature.

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<sup>5</sup> Original source text: “Rodica Braga se (de-/ re-)scrie pe sine. De la un capăt la celălalt al creației sale, pendulând între autodezvăluire și auto-camuflare, între confesiune și autoficțiune, scriitoarea Rodica Braga se identifică cu actul scriptural. Aceasta este teza prezentei lucrări și ceea ce ne propunem să demonstrăm, însă, conștientizând complexitatea subiectului și gama variată a registrelor interpretative, considerăm prezentul studiu un demers perfectibil și o încercare de a formula ipoteze de lucru deschise unor noi direcții de cercetare.”