



Call me Tony

MONICA SUMA SPEAKS TO VLAD NICULESCU, THE MAN BEHIND THE PEERLESS ANTHONY FROST BOOKSHOP, NOW PART OF CARTUREȘTI & FRIENDS

Who would have thought that in 1990 a truck driver from Accrington, England who voluntarily led shipments with aid for Romania's orphans, would become such a close friend to his then Romanian interpreters, that 17 years later his name would be given to an English-language bookshop on Bucharest's Calea Victoriei, Anthony Frost? Vlad Niculescu, one of those translators and co-founder of Anthony Frost alongside Dan Nicolaescu and Nicolae Ion, certainly didn't.

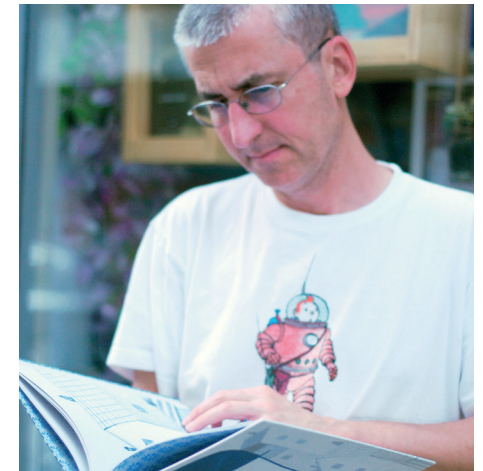
"It touches me to the core when people address me as Tony and not Vlad," Niculescu says, "as they identify me with the book shop and remind me of Tony at the same time." The now defunct bookshop operated for almost 10 years until its closure in March 2017. For Niculescu, the sole anchor that remained unwavering in managing the bookshop, it both made him and broke him. "I discovered this calling I have, this love for books."

"Arguably the best English-language bookshop in Eastern Europe," the Lonely Planet guidebook called Anthony Frost in its 2013 and 2017 editions, the store became a fixture for tourists and expats alike. In 2016, the TLS wrote about it, and illustrator Bob Eckstein, the famed The New Yorker cartoonist, included it in an exclusive list of 75 book shops around the world in Footnotes from the World Greatest Bookstores. Niculescu is proud of all the accolades. Until it all came crashing down, and the store announced its closure.

But as happens so often, when one door closes, another opens, and Niculescu's sorrow wouldn't last for long. A few months later, Cărturești bookstore, Romania's most revered book chain, reached out and offered to help. To bring the Anthony Frost bookstore back, under a new format and in a new location.

November 2017 marked the opening of Cărturești & friends at Str. Edgar Quinet 9 (K-13), in the same location where Cărturești had its first bookstore; a hybrid cultural space including the Anthony Frost English-language bookshop and the Studio Receptor micro-gallery. Comics decorate the ceiling, reminiscent of Fandom, which ran in this location for two years, while illustrated poems and artwork of Romanian illustrators adorning the space are renewed every month, curated by Ramona Chirica of Studio Receptor. "Cărturești offered a new life for Anthony Frost, that taps into the community of both the bookstore and Receptor's art fans," Niculescu says. "For us, the most important thing is that people participate, come talk to us or visit when we have guests."

Just take a look at their Instagram account ([instagram.com/carturestiafriends](https://www.instagram.com/carturestiafriends/)), and you'll see what he means. With readings in front of the shop and long weekend afternoons shared between friends propped up on stools, the Cărturești & friends storefront seems the most inviting in town. It's cosy, full of art and diversity. Whether it's ambassadors dropping by for a good new book, tourists visiting Bucharest or expats based here, the store is never idle. The stock is constantly updated with interesting titles, new authors that are less known on the mainstream market, using the English language as a bridge between Romanian culture and others. A good example of that



is Matei Călinescu's new translated novel *The Life and Opinions of Zacharias Lichter*, originally published in 1969. Given its 45 square metres of space, the shop maintains a highly curated offering on its shelves that range from academic books to comics and children's books. Comics decorate the ceiling, reminiscent of Fandom, which ran in this location for two years, while illustrated poems and artwork of Romanian illustrators adorning the space are renewed every month. All illustrations exhibited will be soon be up for sale. The shop also hosts monthly events.

In a world of fast, digital consumerism, Cărturești & friends aims to be the antidote. "We are inviting people to be curious, to be swept away by our alternative, curated selection of books," says Niculescu. And it seems to be working. This past summer, the Cărturești & friends bookstore was picked as Indie of the Month by the New York Review of Books, the first bookstore outside of the United States to be featured. An honour that's hard to ignore.

As for Bucharest, the born and raised local Niculescu admits to having a love/hate relationship with his city. Don't we all? But despite the noise pollution and erratic expansion that's taken place in the last decades, Niculescu still basks in the unique mix of styles only Bucharest can display. Mansions of French or German style with an expansive oriental style courtyard. "Casa Melik on Strada Spatarul, the oldest house in Bucharest, has one such courtyard, or the Frederic and Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck house, both of them now open as museums." The old *mahala* (neighborhood or community in Arabic, marked by the existence of a church) charm may have disappeared, Niculescu claims, but in neighborhoods such as Icoanei or Armenească, Art Nouveau or Art Deco gems appear from every corner. We couldn't agree more.

The same goes for Calea Victoriei, the undisputed historic main artery of Belle Époque Bucharest, in the radius in which Anthony Frost has always been located, even in its new location. And this time around, Vlad and his English-language books are here to stay.

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